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Weird Western Quarterly
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1859:

Jonah and Cassie managed to keep their little affair a secret for over three months before anyone found out. In that short period of time, the young couple had made the most of every moment spent together, be it a quick kiss when no one was looking or a late-night rendezvous full of passion and heated embraces. Both of them were aware that, if Colonel Wainwright discovered what they were up to, the consequences could be dire, but their need for each other ran too deep for them to consider putting an end to the relationship. So they tried their best to be cautious and quiet, but it was only a matter of time before her father got wind of the situation — Marcus Wainwright was no fool, and he certainly wouldn't take kindly to being played for one.

Things finally came to a head one cold January night as Jonah snuck across the compound to one of the supply rooms — he'd asked Cassie to meet him there at midnight, saying only that he had a surprise for her. As it turned out, he was the one who got the surprise, for it was the colonel he found standing in the dim lamplight once he stepped through the door. "Whut the Hell..." Jonah started to say, then snapped to attention as fast as he could. "Sir!"

"I think you had it right the first time," he answered, and walked abruptly up to the scout, anger in his eyes. "What the Hell do you think you're doing with my daughter? I caught her slipping out of her room a half-hour ago, and when I pressed her about it, she confessed to the whole thing." He leaned in close. "I won't have you treating her like some common tramp you can tease along and then abandon when you get bored."

Had the colonel been any other man, Hex would have punched him in the mouth for talking to him like that. But he wasn't any other man, he was the father of the woman he loved, so Jonah held his temper in check as best he could. "Beggin' yer pardon, sir, but Cassie's old enough tuh make her own decisions 'bout who she sees an' who she don't," he said evenly, "an' Ah'd sooner die muhself than do anything tuh hurt her."

Wainwright scoffed. "Do you think you're the first man to tell me such? I swear, there's a dozen just like you at every fort I've ever passed through, all drooling at the sight of fresh game."

"Sir, yuh got this all wrong... "

"No, *you're* the one who's wrong here!" Spittle flew out from under his bristly white moustache as he yelled. "This is my *daughter* we're talking about here, dammit! If you were regular Army, I'd throw you in the stockade... " He grabbed the front of Jonah's shirt and began shaking him, then abruptly stopped when something fell out of the young man's coat. "What is that?" he asked, but didn't bother to wait for an answer. The colonel bent down and picked up a tiny box tied with ribbon. "Trying to buy her affections with cheap trinkets?"

"Please, sir, if'n yuh just... " But it was no use, the man wasn't interested in whatever explanation Hex offered, and he could only stand there as Wainwright untied the ribbon and opened the box. After doing so, the colonel stared mutely at him, then back at the contents of the box. "Are yuh willin' tuh listen now?" Jonah ventured.

"You can't be serious," he answered, still looking at the box.

"Ain't never been more serious in muh life." He gently took the box from the colonel, saying, "When Ah was a mite younger, Ah loved another girl, but Ah never really got the chance tuh tell her how Ah felt. Reckon Ah figured there was time enough fer that later... but by the time later came 'round, she was gone. Thet hurt, an' it still does, but the love Ah feel fer Cassie... thet makes it hurt a mite less." Jonah upended the contents of the box into his palm: two plain gold rings, one slightly larger than the other. "Ah ain't about tuh make the same mistake twice, sir."

Wainwright regarded Hex for a moment, peering deep into his eyes for

any hint of deceit. Since coming to Fort Andrews, he'd found Jonah Hex to be quite a capable scout, but somewhat of a cipher in his off-hours — he rarely spoke, and socialized even less — rather odd behavior for such a young man. But now, as he talked about Cassie, something came to light in Jonah's eyes that said more than any words could. Either he was an incredible actor, or he was genuinely, deeply in love with the girl... perhaps even more than her own father loved her. "You know," the colonel said, "it's customary to speak with a lady's father before asking for her hand in marriage."

"Ah know that, sir," he said, the look in his eyes never faltering, "but Ah... well, frankly, sir, Ah wanted tuh be sure she'd say 'Yes' afore Ah stuck muh head in that particular noose."

The older man struggled to hide his smile. "I'd say you must have been pretty sure of the answer beforehand — those rings probably cost you at least a month's salary."

"Give or take." Now his gaze finally moved away, focusing on the floor. "Sir, if'n yuh don't mind... is there any way we could continue this here conversation in yer office? Preferably with a fire goin'? This storeroom ain't exactly the warmest place in the middle of the night."

"Don't complain to me, young man, you're the one that chose this location." He then gestured to the door, and the two of them filed out into the chill evening air.

Spring drew near, and the two of them were acting as husband and wife in all but name. Jonah slept very little in the scouts' barracks, spending his nights in the company of his beloved instead, usually all the way up 'til morning reveille. The colonel wasn't too pleased with that, but Jonah couldn't help himself — after so many years of heartache, he couldn't get over the fact that he had a girl as wonderful as Cassie, and he never wanted to leave her side.

Early one morning, he awoke in her bed to find her already up and dressed for the day. "Whut's all this about, sugar?" he asked with a yawn. "Sun ain't even all the way up yet."

"Captain Shelly's heading into Portersville to collect the payroll." She primped her hair in the mirror. "I asked him yesterday if I could come along to see if my dress arrived yet."

Jonah rolled his eyes — it had been nearly two months since Cassie wrote the letter. "Tuh Hell with thet dress already," he said and hopped out of bed himself, coming up behind her and wrapping his arms around her waist — they made an odd pairing, he in his longjohns and she with her petticoats. "Ah say yuh forget all thet fuss an' head on down the aisle naked, whut yuh think 'bout thet?"

She gasped, her eyes fixed on their mutual reflection in the mirror, but she was smiling. "You're awful!" she told him.

"Next thing yuh know, yo're gonna tell me Ah'll have tuh take a bath aforehand, too," he continued. "Bad enough yuh talked me into cuttin' muh hair... "

"You look good with short hair." To emphasize, Cassie reached up and ran her fingers through his newly-shorn locks, now just long enough to cover the back of his neck.

Jonah gazed upon his image in the glass and mused, "Maybe Ah do... or maybe yo're just tryin' tuh civilize me." He turned her around to face him, smiling himself now. "Yuh wouldn't go an' do a durn fool thing like thet tuh me, would yuh, little girl?"

"Never." She gave him a kiss, and he did her one better by picking her up and giving her a whirl around the room. "Stop it!" she squealed. "They're going to leave without me!"

Jonah did as she asked and let her finish getting ready, but not before getting another kiss out of her. He got dressed himself, and accompanied Cassie as she went to meet the captain, who was already saddled up and ready to go along with three other soldiers. Two of Hex's fellow scouts, Croy and Barstow, were waiting on horseback as well, and Daniels was in the driver's seat of the supply wagon, reins in hand. "M-Miss Wainwright... I didn't know you was taggin' along today," the man stuttered as Jonah helped her onto the wagon.

"You don't mind a little company, do you?" she asked Daniels, smoothing out her skirt.

"No... no ma'am, I don't, but... " His eyes darted over to Croy and Barstow.

"Yuh just keep in mind that it's only *temporary* company," Jonah added, "an' thet Ah expect y'all tuh remember who put thet there ring on her finger." He then turned to Cassie and said in a much gentler voice, "Yuh be careful now, sugar. If'n there's any trouble, yuh listen close tuh whutever these boys tell yuh."

"You know I will, Jonah. Do you want me to check with the postmaster and see if Windy sent you another letter yet?"

"Thet'd be fine." His mentor Windy Taylor had left Fort Andrews a few weeks before Christmas — he'd received word that his wife Bess had become gravely ill, and had taken off for home almost immediately. From the notes Windy had sent Hex so far, it looked like he wouldn't be returning to the fort any time soon. A couple years ago, Jonah would have shown more concern over that, but now that Cassie was in his life, the majority of his thoughts were on her.

Colonel Wainwright stood beside Captain Shelly's mount, saying, "Make sure you don't dawdle too long in town. These men have been waiting over three months for their wages, and are mighty eager to finally get some coin back in their pockets." Delays in payroll were common in the military, with some soldiers waiting as long as half-a-year for their measly pay.

Shelly nodded, then called out, "All right, men, let's get underway before the whole day's gone." He took the lead in line, the others stationing themselves around the wagon — Jonah barely had time to steal one last kiss from Cassie before Daniels lurched their ride into motion. Hex took off his hat and used it to wave farewell to his sweetheart as she passed through the gates, though the dust kicked up by the wagon mostly obscured him from her view.

"Well now," the colonel said, sidling up beside him, "with luck, the two of you will be Mister and Missus quite soon." He laid a hand Hex's

shoulder. "In which case, I believe you and I should have a bit of a talk, man to man."

"Sir?" Jonah stiffened inside — he thought Wainwright was all talked out on the matter.

"At ease, son, I'm not going to court-martial you." He began to steer Jonah towards his office. "Tell me: have you ever had genuine Kentucky bourbon?"

"Why'd that damn calico pick today of all days to ride in with us?" Barstow growled to his fellow tracker. "This throws the whole thing out of whack!"

"Simmer down, Walt. It ain't like the whole damn company tagged along." Croy looked about from the corner of his eye, making sure no one was lurking nearby. "We go through it same as we planned. Reckon we'll just have to drag her along for a bit, then dump her somewheres."

"An' leave a witness? Are you mad?"

"When we ain't among the bodies, they'll figure it out soon enough anyhow." He flashed a wolfish grin. "Besides, maybe we can make a little extra off'n her."

"What? Now you want to move into ransom?" Barstow said, glaring at the man. "I know you're a gamblin' man, Croy, but these stakes is gettin' too high for..." He suddenly bit off the rest of his sentence as the bank door opened, the captain stepping back outside and the soldiers following, the pair carrying the strongbox between them.

"Where are the others? They done with their own errands yet?" Shelly asked as the soldiers loaded the payroll into the wagon. Before the scouts could reply, they saw Cassie coming down the street, a bright smile on her face and a large, flat package wrapped in brown paper in her arms. The captain swept off his hat and gave her a bow. "Glad to see you again, Miss Wainwright... or should I say 'Mrs. Hex'?" he asked, gesturing to

the package.

"Not yet, but soon." The girl was positively beaming. "I knew it would be here today!"

Barstow looked over to his partner and mouthed, "High stakes." Croy didn't reply.

Daniels and the other soldier showed up not long after, each of them carrying a box of sundries. Once their items were secured along with the strongbox and Cassie's dress, the men saddled up again and proceeded back to the fort. They rode in silence until about halfway to their destination, when Barstow rode up beside the captain and said, "I think we can shave off some time if we head over that rise." He pointed off to the south.

"That'll take us away from the fort," Shelly replied.

"Not too far off. Besides, it's less hilly once you get past that... be a smoother ride all around." After a moment of consideration, Shelly agreed, and shouted new orders to his men. As they crested the rise, Shelly saw that the land did indeed flatten out into a bowl shape beyond it, dotted with trees as far as the eye could see. They headed down into it, Barstow taking the lead and directing them along a path through the trees. Gradually, he began to slow down his mount, causing the rest of the convoy to match his pace.

After a few minutes, the captain brought his horse up in line with the scout's, saying, "What the Devil's the problem, man? You've almost drove us to a dead stop."

"I don't think we're alone here, sir." Barstow drew his revolver and glanced around them. "There's definitely trouble about."

"Where? I don't see anything."

"Right here, jackass." He quickly brought his gun up to Shelly's head and pulled the trigger, blood and gray matter spraying everywhere. The soldiers reached for their own weapons, but Croy fired his rifle first, downing one of them. Just then, their fellow scouts Webster, Kincaid, and

White Claw swooped out of a thick stand of trees behind the party, surrounding the wagon.

Cassie screamed, "What's happening? What are you doing?" She clutched at Daniels seated beside her on the wagon.

"Shut her up!" Croy barked at him.

Daniels hesitated, his hand on his revolver, then said quietly, "I'm sorry, Miss Wainwright." He drew his gun and clubbed her over the back of the head, knocking her off the wagon.

Despite being outnumbered, the two remaining soldiers opened fire on the scouts. Webster was knocked from his horse, a bullet embedded in his shoulder. Despite that, he still managed to clip one of them, and the other scouts finished to the job in quick order. "The Army should be more picky about who they induct," White Claw muttered as he dismounted. "These men were barely trying."

"Big words from somebody who *didn't* get shot!" Webster snapped. Barstow knelt beside him to wrap a bandana around the wound. "Christ, Walt, what took you guys so long?"

"Looks like he was spendin' his cut early." Kincaid had ripped open Cassie's package and was holding up her wedding dress. "This is bee-yoo-tee-ful, son!" he said with a laugh.

"Leave that be an' get crackin' on the strongbox." Barstow tossed him a ring of keys he'd found on the captain. "The key should be one of these." As he and Croy worked on that, Barstow pulled Webster to his feet — the man wobbled, but he would be fine once he was on horseback.

Daniels came around to the back of the wagon, his pistol dangling limply from his hand. "You didn't say we was gonna kill all of 'em," he said to Croy.

"What did you think we was gonna do, invite 'em to be partners?" Croy flipped through the keyring to try another, and finally found the right one. He lifted the lid, and Kincaid let out a low whistle beside him. Inside the box were sacks of coins, both gold and silver, all U.S.

government issue. "Boys, we ain't gonna have to worry 'bout payday for the rest of our lives." He hefted a sack of double eagles, then tossed it at Daniels, saying, "There, does that make you feel better?"

The man sank to his knees from the weight of the sack, and his partners had a good laugh at that, Webster included. "Come on, let's round up the horses and start filling the saddlebags," Barstow said, bringing them back to the task at hand. "Once we're all well away from here, we'll worry about divvying up the money."

The others began collecting the dead soldiers' mounts. White Claw moved to the front of the wagon to unhitch the team there, then suddenly called out, "Hey, where'd the girl go?"

"She fell," Daniels replied, "she's beside the wagon."

"Like Hell she is!" Croy had come over to where White Claw stood to check it out himself. He turned to Daniels, yelling, "I told you to take care of her!"

"You said shut her up, so I did, but I couldn't..." He cast his eyes to the ground.

Kincaid pointed to the northeast, shouting, "There she is!" Sure enough, Cassie was heading slowly across the open land, stumbling every few steps. At the rate she was moving, it would be hours before she reached Fort Andrews, but she had to try.

"Somebody go round her up," Croy said, but Barstow had other ideas. He'd picked up one of the soldier's rifles and reloaded it, and before anyone realized it, he took aim at the girl and fired. She dropped like a stone. "What the Hell was that for?" Croy snapped. "I had plans..."

"So did we," Barstow replied. "No witnesses, no dead weight... an' she was both. You want to ply your hand at ransom, Croy, you do it on your own damn time. Now, let's get the money an' get the Hell outta here."

"... so Ah rode straight into the Paiute camp, all hell-bent fer leather an' guns blazin', an' Ah managed tuh pull Samson up into the saddle behind me. We lit outta there afore they knew whut hit 'em, an' didn't stop 'til we was back inside Fort Winona." Jonah settled back in his chair, shaking his head. "They'd worked the poor fella over pretty good, but he recovered... though he ended up bein' shy a few digits." The young man waggled his own intact fingers for emphasis.

"With all you've been through, it seems remarkable that you're still around to talk about it." Wainwright picked up the bottle of bourbon and poured a little more into each of their glasses sitting on the desk. They'd gone through more than half the bottle so far while regaling one another with various tales of past experiences. The things Jonah spoke of sometimes left the colonel speechless just due to the sheer brutality of them — the young man's usual distant, closemouthed behavior suddenly made more sense. "I'm also surprised that those experiences haven't driven you to seek out a... shall we say, more mundane lifestyle."

"If'n yo're implyin' thet Ah look fer trouble, thet certainly ain't the case." He paused to take a drag off his smoke — in addition to the liquor, Wainwright had offered up a box of fine cigars. "Trouble finds me, fer good or fer ill, an' Ah've learned tuh just roll with it an' hope thet Ah come out on top in the end." A wry smile came to his lips as he said, "Considerin' thet Ah kin look forward tuh spendin' the rest of muh life with Cassie, Ah'd say everything's right as rain lately."

"And that is the crux of why I wanted to speak with you," the older man replied. "What sort of plans do you have in mind for the future?" Jonah simply gave him a puzzled look, so he continued, "Do you think that you can support yourself and Cassie on an Army scout's salary?"

"Tuh be perfectly honest, the thought hadn't crossed muh mind. Reckon scoutin' is all Ah know how tuh do... ain't got the foggiest notion 'bout farmin', so thet's right out... "

Wainwright waved a hand. "I didn't mean that you need a new profession, I meant have you ever considered being *more* than a scout? A man of your talents could go far in the military."

"Me? In the Army, with a commission an' all thet?" Jonah was sitting bolt

upright in his chair, his eyes wide in disbelief. "Hell, Ah never even finished muh schoolin'!"

"That may be so, but you know how to read and write, which means you already have a leg up on the majority of soldiers in this fort alone. Plus you have knowledge of things that can't be taught in any schoolhouse, by which I mean all your years amongst the Apache." He let out a small laugh. "I'm sure you could teach some of the Army's so-called 'experts' a thing or three."

The young man took a drink, mulling it over — he tried to picture himself clad in Union blue, brass buttons shining in the sun. "This is... this is awful big, sir," he said finally, "Ah reckon Ah might need some time tuh think this through."

"I understand, son. Though I must admit, it would be quite a sight at the wedding: you in uniform and Cassie in her..." He stopped abruptly when he heard a knock at the office door, and Corporal Louis poked his head in, a look of concern on his face.

"Sorry to interrupt, sir," he said, "but Captain Shelly an' the others is long overdue."

Wainwright pulled out his watch and muttered, "Good Lord, have we really been sitting here this long?" He then said to the corporal, "Send the other scouts out to check on them."

"I can't, sir, they've been gone all day, too."

"Well, where the Hell are they?" When Louis professed ignorance, the colonel snapped, "Are you telling me that every damn scout we've got is unaccounted for?"

"Except for Mr. Hex a-sittin' there... yessir, they is."

"This smells rotten," Jonah said, then turned to Wainwright. "Sir, how much money is supposed tuh be in the payroll we's gettin'?"

"Close to a hundred thousand..." He suddenly grew pale. "You're not suggesting..."

"Ah'm doin' a mite more'n suggestin'," Hex replied, then stood up. "Ah'll admit Ah've been spendin' most of muh off-duty time with Cassie, but lately when Ah've been in the barracks, them boys have seemed a bit cagey... an' yuh all but said it yerself, sir: bein' an Army scout don't pay too well." He moved to the door, pausing only to tell Louis, "Go round up Parker, Hays, an' Randolph. Ah want all four of yuh saddled up an' at the front gate in five minutes."

The corporal stared at the departing scout, then at Wainwright, who barked at him, "You heard the man, now *move!*" Louis ran out of the office like his ass was on fire.

Hex didn't really want to bring along all those soldiers — they were merely backup in case his suspicions about the other scouts was true — the real work of tracking the party and finding where they'd gotten to all fell on him. He'd tracked men before, usually Indians, but never like this. If they'd truly stolen the payroll, then they were now outlaws, with no home camp or territory for him to zero in on. They could head anywhere, in any number, and Cassie... no, he couldn't let those sort of thoughts distract him now. Keeping his eyes glued to the plain before him, Jonah led the soldiers towards Portersville. He found fresh wheel tracks and horse prints leading towards town, but none coming back. When they reached the midpoint, he suddenly saw the return tracks. "Hold up now," he told the others, and dismounted. Jonah walked back the way they'd come about twenty feet, then turned about — with no true road to follow, the two sets of tracks didn't overlap, but they were close enough for him to compare. "They came this far on the return trip," he explained, "but that was it. They must've turned around or something." He hunkered down in between the tracks, staring at the muddled message they spelled out — in his mind, he could see the wagon wheels backing up, the horses trampling the grass, but where...

"South... they done went south!" he called out to the soldiers, then ran to his mount, the other men already riding in the direction he indicated. The group headed up over the rise, and as soon as they gained the high ground, they saw the abandoned wagon. Without any thought of the possible danger, Jonah drove his horse forward as fast as it would go, flying across the open land and not stopping until he saw the first dead soldier. He dismounted and knelt beside the body. The bullet wounds

were close-range — whoever did it was right on top of him.

Randolph was the first to catch up. "I only count four bodies... where's the others?"

"Long gone. They took the money an' horses, then..." Jonah fell silent as he caught sight of something white fluttering in the back of the wagon: Cassie's wedding dress. He walked over and picked it up with numb hands. *They took her, too*, he thought. *The bastards must've...*

"There's another one!" Louis shouted. "Looks like... oh, sweet Jesus... Hex..."

He jerked his head up and looked in Louis' direction. Sure enough, there was another body splayed out in the grass. Dropping the dress, he started walking towards it. The corporal tried to stop him, but Jonah shoved him to the ground and he continued on. Someone told him not to look, but he had to make sure, he had to know. His whole body was numb now, save for a hard, clawing sensation in his throat, like something was lodged in there, choking him. He could hear nothing but the pounding of his heart, see nothing but Cassie's form laying face-down before him, a bloom of red between her shoulderblades. Falling to his knees, he reached out and turned her over — the front of her dress was soaked in blood, a look of shock frozen on her face. His own face twisting into a grimace of pain, Jonah pulled her into his arms, feeling the weight of her body against his, remembering how she felt this morning when he swung her around the bedroom, how warm and alive she was, not cold and still and silent. His breath hissed in and out between his clenched teeth, the choking sensation growing, until finally a scream broke loose from Hex's throat, a tortured howl that didn't even convey a tenth of the agony in his soul.

1860:

All was quiet in the Turnbull household, save for the occasional rustle of newsprint coming from the sitting room. Quentin Turnbull was a firm believer in Sunday being the day of rest, and preferred to spend it

perusing the local papers. He sat with his back to one of the large windows overlooking the Virginia plantation so as to take advantage of the afternoon light, the small table beside him holding the papers yet unread. On the other side of the table in an identical chair sat his son Jeb, a newsheet in his hands as well. Though a gulf of over thirty years lay between the two men in age, it was easy to see the family resemblance in the younger man's face, right down to the worrisome crease that developed above his eyes as he looked over the political bulletins. "Those Republicans up north have decided to have a go at the Presidency," he said to his father.

"Good Lord," Turnbull muttered. "Are they backing anyone of note?"

Jeb squinted at the small type. "A fellow named Lincoln."

"The same Lincoln that Douglas trounced two years ago?" His son concurred, and the elder man shook his graying head, saying, "Those people must be desperate. My opinion of the 'Little Giant' may have gone down in the past few months, but I'd rather see him in office than that damned rail-splitter." He lowered his own paper and tapped a finger against the front page. "Now Breckinridge here... *this* is the man to back up." As he said so, the bell pull in the front hall rang out. "Who in the world could that be?" he muttered. After a few minutes their colored houseboy, himself going gray, came to the sitting room door.

"Pardon me, Mastuh Turnbull... Mastuh Jeb," he said, nodding to each in turn, "there's a man named Jonah Hex here, askin' tuh speak with Mastuh Jeb."

"Hex? I don't know any... " He stopped, his eyes growing wide. "My God, that was Cassie's beau!" He nearly leapt out of his chair, saying, "Of course I'll see him! Let him in, Solomon." The servant left to do so, and Jeb followed him into the front hall. Opening the front door, Solomon ushered into the foyer a young man about Jeb's age. He looked rather out-of-place in these refined surroundings, dressed as he was in a patched buckskin coat and homespun clothes, a battered slouch hat clutched in his hands. Despite the disparity between them, Jeb approached him and said, "It's a pleasure to finally meet you, Mr. Hex. Cassie... God rest her soul... she spoke so lovingly of you in her letters."

"An' she did the same 'bout yerself, sir," Jonah said, his gruff Texas drawl sounding strange compared to Jeb's soft Virginia lilt. "Reckon Ah wouldn't be here if'n she hadn't."

"And what exactly does bring you here, Mr. Hex?" the elder Turnbull asked, leaning on a cane as he entered the foyer himself.

Jeb stepped aside, saying, "Oh, forgive me... this is my father, Quentin Turnbull." The two men shook hands, then Jeb gestured back to the other room. "Please, come sit and talk awhile."

Jonah hesitated, but soon let them lead him further into the house. Solomon moved a chair over to where the two gentleman sat only moments before. "Would you care for a drink, Mr. Hex?" Turnbull offered, then told the servant to pour some brandy before the Jonah could reply.

"Yuh don't need tuh go tuh all this trouble," Hex said as he sat down, "Ah was just... Hell, Ah ain't rightly sure just *whut* Ah'm doin' here." He crumpled the brim of his hat in a nervous gesture. "Ah should be out there, lookin' fer them murderin' sons of bitches... forgive me, sirs, but there ain't no better word fer 'em."

"That... that's quite all right," Turnbull said after a moment, "though I don't know who exactly you're referring to."

"The sons of... the *men* that killed Cassie." He then explained to them about the robbery. "They took from me the only good thing Ah had in muh life," Jonah said when he was done, "an' they drove her poor father tuh the brink as well. Ah don't know whut the Army may've told y'all, but the Colonel blamed himself fer her death, kept sayin' she'd still be alive if'n he hadn't taken her away from Virginia. So the night after she died, he took his pistol an'... " Jonah pressed a finger to his temple and mimed pulling a trigger. "It's godawful, Ah know, but it's the truth... an' Ah swore on their graves that Ah'd hunt down those bastards an' kill every last one of 'em fer it."

"My God," Jeb breathed, sinking into his chair. There had been a report sent to them by Major Franklin, but it had been rather barren of detail beyond the death of his Uncle Marcus and his cousin. Solomon chose that moment to bring over the drinks, and Jeb took his with barely a

thought. "So these men, have you... " He let the question hang there unspoken.

Jonah downed his whole glass of brandy before replying, "No... not a damn one. An' it ain't fer lack of tryin': Ah've done little else this past year but look high an' low fer 'em. Trouble is, a hunnert thousand dollars goes a long way towards coverin' yer tracks." He held the empty glass in his left hand, and his wedding band clinked against it — though Cassie was over a year in her grave, he refused to take it off. "Ah ran down every lead Ah could find, spent every last cent Ah had, but Ah never gave up. Then one night, Ah ended up in some rathole border town in Missouri. Ah was dead broke, no leads left tuh follow, an' tuh be perfectly honest with y'all, Ah felt tired. Just dead-dog, down-in-muh-bones tired, an' Ah was missin' Cassie something fierce... " Hex fell silent for a time, staring at the floor, then said, "She used tuh tell me 'bout growin' up here, how dif'rent it was from muh end of it all, an' Ah got tuh thinkin' 'bout how Ah was right on top of the Mississippi, so Ah thought, 'Well, maybe Ah should get on a boat an' cross it, just tuh say Ah'd been on the other side.' So Ah did, an' when Ah got off in Kentucky, Ah thought, 'Well, Ah done come this far east, maybe Ah should go a mite further.' So Ah did... an' the next thing Ah knew, Ah was a-standin' on yer front porch." He raised his head finally and looked at the two men before him — they were struck by the exhaustion showing in Jonah's eyes, like he'd relived every step of his journey while talking about it. "Ah ain't lookin' fer no handouts or nothin'. Ah just wanted tuh pay muh respects, maybe spend a few days in Richmond, then head on back the way Ah came."

"My boy," Turnbull said, "you will do nothing of the sort." He stood up and laid a hand on Jonah's shoulder. "After all you've been through, you deserve to rest."

"Ah cain't rest, sir. They's still out there, an' Ah made a promise... "

"And it will be fulfilled: we'll hire some detectives to pick up where you left off, contact as many lawmen out West as we can — I know quite a few people of influence, son," he said with a measure of pride. "Those men will be found and brought to justice, I assure you. In the meantime... " Turnbull looked over to Solomon, who was standing silently off to one side of the room. "Prepare one of the guest rooms for Mr. Hex,

and have one of the stable boys... " He stopped and glanced at Jonah. "I presume you rode to our house today?"

Jonah began to object, but Jeb chimed in with, "There's no point in arguing with my father. Once he's made his mind up about something, it would take nothing short of an act of God to get him to change it." He came over to stand on the other side of Jonah's chair, flanking him neatly. "Besides, I'm sure Cassie would have been pleased to know that we're looking after you."

He glanced from one man to the next, then nodded, saying, "Alright, Ah'll stay a spell... but just long enough tuh get things goin' with these contacts yuh mentioned, Mr. Turnbull. Like Ah said afore, Ah ain't lookin' fer a handout from y'all."

"The thought was the furthest thing from my mind," Turnbull replied with a smile. "As far as I'm concerned, you're practically family."

After speaking with the detectives, Hex decided he should be moving on — he meant what he said about not being a freeloader, and didn't want to burden these near-strangers with his presence any longer than necessary. Despite this, Jonah found himself dragging his feet when it came to actually departing. He'd make ready for bed each night, thinking of how he should get down to the train station in the morning and check the schedules, then spend the entirety of the next day with Jeb, the two of them touring the Virginia countryside on horseback or sitting in the parlor and reminiscing about Cassie. The latter was difficult for Jonah at first — the mere thought of her was enough to make him tremble with grief sometimes — but he soon realized how much the girl's death had wounded Jeb as well. They had both loved her deeply, though not in the same way, and together they found a small amount of solace in their mutual pain.

Deep down, Hex knew the real reason why he kept putting off his departure: once he crossed the Mississippi again and returned to the West, he'd be alone, even more so than before he met Cassie, and he couldn't bear the thought of that just yet. So he lingered on, days turning into

weeks, weeks into months. Fortunately for him, the Turnbells didn't seem to mind Jonah staying longer than he'd originally planned, and treated him like he truly was part of their family, though Jonah was certainly not used to traveling in the same circles as they did. For three generations, the Turnbells had made a fine living off tobacco, and was one of the richest families in Virginia because of it. As such, Quentin and his son attended many social events in Richmond where they regularly rubbed elbows with both politicians and other plantation owners. Jonah often found himself being pulled along to these high-society functions, dressed in fancy duds borrowed from Jeb — the well-worn clothes of a former frontier scout would not do in this setting. No amount of sprucing up, however, could hide the fact that Hex was not of their ilk: all it took was one look at his rough, callused hands to reveal that he was a man who had toiled long and hard at physical labor his entire life, not a member of the idle rich.

As was common at these social gatherings, the subject of politics came up often. Jonah had no interest in such things, but Quentin could talk about it for hours, and as the presidential elections quickly approached, one particular sore point kept surfacing that many of his fellow Southerners agreed upon: if Lincoln and his anti-slavery Republicans took office, there would be Hell to pay. "It's all well and good for those people to sit about and talk of abolition," Turnbull said at one party, a glass of liquor in one hand and his ever-present cane in the other, "for they know that it wouldn't affect them one damn bit. It's quite easy to do away with an institution that you do not participate in yourself... at least not in name. The Republicans make such a noise about how inhumane and degrading the practice of slavery is, yet they turn a blind eye to their own factories in the North, full of Irishmen and other filthy immigrants, toiling away for pennies and living in squalor. We care for our Negroes, see that they're properly clothed and fed, and they let their workers die in the streets! Who is inhumane now?" he asked, daring anyone to oppose him.

The men gathered around him murmured assent, one of them saying, "How do they expect us to make a living if we turn them all loose? Takes thirty Negroes to bring in my crop, plus all the others I've got taking care of my property. They gonna ship down some of them Irish to help out?" A laugh rippled through the group at that.

"I highly doubt it. The consequences of their proposed action matter not to them, just that they get their way." He spoke fervently on the matter, for he had much to lose himself: the Turnbull plantation utilized close to eighty slaves, from the fields to the stables to the house itself. "All of the North looks down upon us, just as England once looked down upon the whole of America before the Revolution. 'Do as we say, or we will discipline you,' they say, but not with words: they say it with their laws, with their 'free states'... they act as if making a new state open to slavery would force all citizens to buy a Negro. Better to eliminate the option, they think, and thereby force those who do participate in our peculiar institution to stay out of the West." He stopped and turned to Jonah, standing at the edge of the group. "Your home state of Texas allows slaves... tell me, my boy, how do you think it will fare if the Republicans rule the land?"

Hex balked at being put on the spot, and took a long moment to finish his drink before answering, "Tuh be honest, Ah ain't never known any folk whut owned slaves... *colored* slaves." He hoped no one noticed the way he amended his words. "Most of the folk Ah knew was too poor tuh afford that sort of thing... but the choice was there, like yuh said. If'n they wanted tuh buy a slave, they could, an' if'n they didn't want tuh, they didn't have tuh. That's the whole idea of America, ain't it? Freedom of choice. Ain't right tuh try an' take that away from somebody just 'cause yuh don't agree with 'em."

"Well put, young man," Turnbull said, smiling, then turned back to the rest of the group. "That is exactly what this comes down to: freedom of choice, and the North wanting to take away our ability to make any other choice but their own. Should Lincoln win the day come November, I do believe we shall have to take drastic action to preserve our freedom." The men gathered knew he was referring to secession — talk like that had been bubbling for months all across the South, and some states were already putting legislation in motion to do just that should the Republicans win. It was a bold move, but many were beginning to see it as necessary if they were to preserve their individual rights. For Jonah, the point was moot: as he said, he looked upon slave-owning as a choice, and his own choice was to not participate, so whether it existed or not, or *where* it existed, affected him not in the least...

But in the grand scheme of things, the indifference of a man like Jonah

Hex meant little compared to the feelings of the rest of his countrymen — the cracks between North and South had been forming for decades, and it was only a matter of time before the entire Union split in half under the strain.

1861:

By mid-April, the world seemed to change literally overnight: on the evening of the 11th, Jonah had gone to sleep in a land that lay precariously between the United States and the newly-formed Confederate States of America — after Lincoln's election, seven states had made good on their threats to secede. Virginia existed in a strange limbo area, part of the Union but an ardent supporter of slavery. On the morning of the 12th, however, he awoke to news that Confederate guns in South Carolina had opened fire on Fort Sumter, a Federal outpost within the Southern border — the reviled Mr. Lincoln had dared to send his troops supplies, and the South didn't approve in the least. All through Richmond, people were calling it an act of war, and before the week was out, Virginia had become the eighth member of the Confederacy. Jonah was now an expatriate, and he hadn't moved an inch.

The business of committing to one side or the other done, talk around Richmond quickly turned to raising an army to defend their blessed homeland from "foreign invaders". The thought of marching out to war was not one Hex found pleasing, and he felt no shame in saying so when the subject came up one night at dinner in the Turnbull household. "Y'all got tuh understand, Ah've been in more'n one battle afore, out on the frontier. Ah've seen men get killed, an' Ah've done some killin' muhself...it ain't exactly a cakewalk, all-around."

"Are you telling me that you're willing to stand by while those people come marching across our borders?" Quentin asked. "You've never struck me as the sort of person to back down from a fight."

"Ah ain't backin' down from nothin'... an' Ah ain't seen one Yankee soldier set foot 'round here yet, neither."

"But they *will*: as we speak, the North is gathering troops to put down our little 'insurrection', as they call it." He said the word with obvious distaste. "You can't just sit around and wait until they're knocking on the door before taking action. You know it's coming, my dear boy, and for someone with your experience to bow out before the first shot is fired... "

"Ah kin think of a place where that experience is needed: back West, findin' them fellas whut killed Cassie... an' that yer lauded 'professionals' ain't found hide nor hair of." The lack of progress Turnbull's investigators were making on the case made him wonder (not for the first time) if handing it over to strangers was really the best thing.

"I told you, these things take time — you recall how much difficulty you were having, and I'm sure the men on the case are running into the same problems. Trust me, the moment they turn up anything, you'll be the first to know."

"Jonah, I understand that you want justice for Cassie and Uncle Marcus, but as much as I hate to say it, we've got bigger concerns than that right now," Jeb added. "The Confederate Army needs men like you, and besides, it's not like you'd be going it alone... I'm signing up, with or without you."

"Yuh lost yer mind, Jeb? Yuh may be a good horseman, but yuh don't know a lick 'bout fightin'." Hex jabbed a finger at him. "This ain't like chasin' game out in the woods — if'n yuh go up against a well-trained soldier, he'll cut yuh down afore yuh even have a chance tuh raise yer gun."

"Then come with me and show me how to be *better* than those other soldiers," he said. "You've said before that you don't agree with what the North is trying to do to us... aren't you willing to fight for those beliefs?"

A silence fell over the dining room as Jonah considered their words. To pick up a gun again, after all these months... something inside him did miss the rush of danger, the knowledge that your life depended on your skill versus that of the man before you. He also thought of what Colonel Wainwright had told him on that last sane day, sipping bourbon in his office: a military career would suit a man of Hex's background very well. To be sure, the colonel could never have envisioned the situation before

Jonah at the moment, but had he still been alive, he very likely would have resigned his U.S. Army commission, as many other Southern-born military men had done in the past few months, and returned to Virginia for the purpose of defending his home state... and he very likely would have brought Jonah along to fight beside him.

He picked up his napkin from his lap, balled it up, and tossed the linen next to his dinner plate. "So... where we gotta go tuh sign up fer this party?"

The two young men had to wait nearly three months after their initial induction into the Army to see any action. Due to their mutual experience on horseback, they signed up for cavalry duty, and were assigned to the 4th Virginia. The regiment was a mix of raw recruits and seasoned men, and in the interim, they prepared themselves as best they could for the fighting ahead, drilling until the ragged lines of men tightened up and formed something bordering on military. No one had any idea what to expect, even Hex — his background was based on plains warfare, where there may not be a town for miles. In the skirmishes to come, they could possibly be fighting within rifle range of people's houses and farms. Some of these soldiers might be defending their home soil in a very literal sense.

When the word finally came in July, the regiment headed north, sometimes by rail, sometimes on the march, until they reached the town of Manassas, a scant thirty miles from the Potomac River and, consequently, Washington D.C. — a rumor spread amongst the men that they were going to barrel headlong across the water and wipe out the city just to spite the Yankees. Jonah doubted very much about that, but the significance of their location wasn't lost on him, and he knew the Union would fight like Hell to keep the Confederates far from their capital. "There's gonna be a lot of blood spilled here," Hex told Jeb that evening around the campfire. "If'n we live through this, it'll be a damn miracle."

"You've got to have faith, cousin." The younger Turnbull pulled off his forage cap and ran a hand through his dark blonde hair. "Them Northern

boys are more than likely as green as we are. Besides, we have the upper hand: they have to try and puncture our lines to get anywhere in this war, while we merely have to hold them back." He slapped the kepi back on his head and gave Jonah a lopsided smile. Hex wondered if he'd still be so cocky after he'd been shot at a few times.

The battle began at dawn the next day, with Union troops marching in a line across a small stream the locals called Bull Run, some using the bridge, others wading through the water. Waiting for them in an open field was the 4th Cavalry, along with thousands of other soldiers from other regiments, both mounted and on foot. For the first time in over a year, Jonah could feel that old sensation returning to his body, the sharpening of senses that tightened his focus on the battle ahead. When the charge was sounded and he drove his horse forward, all thoughts of danger left his mind — even Jeb riding beside him on his own mount was forgotten. Hand and eye and target, that was all that remained. For hours the cannons roared and gunshots rang out until it became nothing but a wall of noise, and all the while Jonah tore through the Union men, firing off shots from his Enfield that rarely missed their mark. While many of his fellow cavalrymen had to pause to reload their rifles, he could do the same on horseback with an efficiency that came from years spent out West, sometimes resorting to holding the reins in his teeth and gripping the horse with his legs. When his ammunition ran out, he sank his bayonet into soldiers as he passed, and when one Yankee grabbed hold of it as he fell dying, Jonah called it a loss and pulled out his revolvers. All around him was chaos, but he paid it no mind — so long as he could ride, he refused to stop.

At one point in the battle, long after midday, an unusual thing happened: Hex saw a line of the Union soldiers begin to retreat, a few even dropping their guns as they ran. Removing his kepi and waving it at some cavalrymen behind him, he called out, "C'mon, them sons of bitches have done lost their nerve!" He then set his mount after the enemy, letting loose with an Apache war cry that unsettled the retreating Yankees even more — they dove for cover along the banks of the stream, trying to scramble to the other side before they were trampled by the horses. Quite a few were, while others were ambushed by infantrymen and taken prisoner. Not long after, other Northerners started to turn tail, until it seemed their entire army had given up the fight and decided that things would be safer back in Washington. The Confederates didn't let

up on them, however, herding the men across the water like cattle or cutting down those who refused to yield. By nightfall, the battle was all but over, and the South clearly stood as the victor — all across the ruin of the battlefield, men raised their voices in a Rebel yell that could be heard for miles. They had sustained losses as heavy as their opponent, but they still held their ground while the North had nothing to show for it but wounds to both their men and their pride.

The bragging seemed to start almost immediately, even as they collected up the dead and wounded. A good many soldiers spoke of General Thomas Jackson's defensive stance during the battle, likening it to a stone wall. One private, a transplanted Texan like Hex by the name of Smith, told anyone who would listen about the Yankee who shot off two of his toes, and how Smith returned the favor by gutting the man and stealing his saber and hat — oddly enough, the Yankee's rank seemed to increase with each telling. Jonah himself did no bragging, feeling that the Federals gave as good as they got, though a few men were willing to brag for him, including Jeb. "In all my days, I've never seen a man ride like you, Jonah," he said when they finally caught up with one another again — by a stroke of luck, both of them had come through the battle with only minor injuries. "I swear, I could hardly tell where the horse ended and you began."

"Just doin' whut comes natural," he replied with a shrug. "Weren't nothin' special."

"Nothin' special'? Well, I can't wait to see what you're like when you really get going!" Jeb clapped the former scout on the back, the smile from the night before on his face again. "Didn't I tell you this was going to work in our favor?"

Hex allowed himself a small smile — he had to admit, he'd never expected the North to fold in so easily. "Reckon yuh did... maybe this'll all be over sooner than we thought."

When December came around, the regiment moved into winter quarters not far from Richmond. Some of the other soldiers in the unit were from

the area, and were eager to steal away for just a while to visit their loved ones, but Jeb and Jonah landed the best time for furlough: three days falling right on the Christmas holiday. The other men cursed them out repeatedly for their good luck, right up until the two young men saddled up for the ride home — they responded with aw-shucks grins and boasts of how wonderful home cooking would taste after months of salt pork and hardtack, and it was a cryin' shame the other fellas would miss it.

The plantation looked the same as ever when they arrived, only now there were holly boughs and candles decorating the windows. Solomon saw them approach and called out to his master, who met the weary soldiers at the door. "It's so wonderful to see you again after all these months," Turnbull said as he embraced his son. "When you sent word that you were coming home, I could hardly believe it."

"We can hardly believe our luck ourselves," Jeb replied, "but I think they knew that if we didn't get furlough, we were liable to run off on 'em." As Solomon and one of the other servants took care of their mounts and gear, the three men moved to the sitting room and settled into the plush chairs, a welcome change from the furnishings found back at camp. "Lord, I'd almost forgotten how normal people live," he sighed as he propped his feet up.

"There yuh go again, bellyachin'," Jonah said with a grin. "Ah knew yuh wasn't suited fer Army life." In truth, he was also glad to be spending Christmas Eve someplace other than a leaking tent — he'd gotten quite used to life on the plantation himself.

"And how have things been out in the field?" Turnbull asked. "It's one thing to read about it in the papers, but you boys have been in the thick of it. I'm sure you have a few wild tales to tell."

Jonah and Jeb then spent the next hour regaling him with stories that ran the gamut from horrifying to mundane. While in the midst of telling him about raiding a Union encampment, Jeb stopped and jumped up from his chair. "That reminds me... be back in a moment," he said, then left the room. He returned a few minutes later carrying a long, slender object carefully wrapped in canvas. "After we ransacked the camp, I found this in what was left of the Yankee general's tent, and you were the first person I thought of." He unwrapped it with a flourish, revealing a polished

mahogany cane, topped with a brass eagle's-head handle. "Just a little something to show off in town," he said as he handed it to his father.

"This is beautiful. Just having you here for Christmas is gift enough, but this... " The elder Turnbull's eyes misted over. "You boys certainly know how to move an old man." He stood, leaning on his new cane, and gestured over to the Christmas tree set up in the corner of the room. "And since we're all in the giving mood, it seems appropriate that you open your gifts now, as well."

The young men did as Turnbull asked. Underneath the decorated branches were two hatboxes — they glanced at each other, puzzled, then pulled the ribbons and opened them, each revealing a gray, broad-brimmed slouch hat, with gold braid and a pair of tassels around the band. "Beggin' yer pardon, sir," Jonah said, "but these is officer's hats. We cain't wear these."

"Well, I will admit, the gift is a bit premature, but I believe by the time you get back to your regiment, everything will be in order."

"What do you mean?" Jeb asked.

"A few weeks ago, I learned that Colonel Ashby, of the 7th Cavalry, was given permission to add some more companies on to his regiment. Now when I heard that, the first thing I thought was, 'I suppose he'll need some officers to head those new companies.' So I talked to some folks I know, pulled a few favors... " The man gave them a grin. "In short, by the New Year, you two will be lieutenants under the dear colonel."

"Lieutenants? We're gonna be *lieutenants*?" Jeb looked like he was about to faint — the two of them had only just reached sergeant. To suddenly jump rank like that without some spectacular feat of bravery being involved was unheard of. He started laughing, saying to Hex, "Can you believe this? The two of us are going to be officers!"

Jonah pulled his hat out of the box and held it before him for a moment, then slipped it on. It was a good fit. *Well, Colonel Wainwright, he thought, looks like Ah got that commission after all.*

The next evening, a Christmas party was held in Richmond in honor of

those soldiers home on leave. Despite still being weary from their journey, Turnbull insisted that they all attend — he knew that there would be some high-ranking officers there, and he thought the young men should be properly introduced to them. So with Solomon at the reins of the carriage, Hex and the Turnbulls set off for town.

The party itself was lavish. Though the war had made many staple goods scarce, no expense had been spared on the feast laid out for the revelers: flocks of roast chickens and countless smoked hams, tables groaning under the weight of the pies and cakes piled upon them, and endlessly-flowing liquor of every sort. And then there were the ladies, all decked out in their finest, all willing to wait upon these brave men in uniform who would soon have to face the roar of the cannon once again. More than a few made their way to Jonah's side, and he even took a turn on the floor with a lovely girl as the band played a gentle ballad, but in his heart, he didn't feel it was right to take it any further — though he'd taken off his wedding ring months ago so as to not attract attention on the battlefield, his thoughts would still linger from time to time on Cassie. It was going to take more than a friendly smile from a passing stranger to make him forget her.

A few hours into the festivities, a man set up a tripod near a Confederate flag hanging on the wall and began taking photographs for the soldiers. Upon seeing this, Jeb tugged at Jonah's elbow, saying, "Come on, let's give my father something to remember us by once we're gone." They took their place in front of the flag as they waited for the photographer to change plates — Jeb removed his new hat, tucked it beneath his arm, and tried to look every inch an officer, while Jonah simply wore the same unreadable expression on his face that he always had.

"Come on, fella," the photographer said to Hex, "You've got to try a little harder than that... act like you just won the whole damn war single-handed."

Jeb reached over as if to shake hands with his friend and said in a mock-serious tone, "Congratulations, son, the Confederacy is in your debt... you may now have a free run at the cathouse of your choice." That got Jonah to loosen up a little.

"That's perfect! Don't move a muscle, now." He raised the tray of flash

powder, and after a moment it went up with a *paff*! The two men tried not to turn away at the sudden flare. "So, what regiment am I gonna send this to?"

"You can send it to Mister Quentin Turnbull of Richmond," Jeb replied, "compliments of Lieutenants Turnbull and Hex." He couldn't help but smile as he said it.

Around eleven, the party began to wind down, and they decided to head home. Jonah did his best to sit up straight in the carriage — he'd imbibed just a little too much that night — while Quentin and his son talked on and on about what this captain or that general had said. To Jonah, it was just the same sort of posturing that Turnbull had done at all those fancy parties before the war, and paid it no mind. As they neared the plantation, however, something else caught his attention: a man riding fast towards them, almost invisible in the dark. Hex bade Solomon to stop, and the servant pulled up short just as the rider reached them — it was Lucas, one of the white overseers.

"I was just comin' to find you, Mr. Turnbull," he said breathlessly. "The Nigras... they've gone plain crazy, up an' started attackin' my men with pitchforks an' what-have-you."

"Then what the Hell are you doing out here, then?" Turnbull snapped. "Take care of it, that's what I pay you for!"

"We're tryin', sir, but they've already killed one of my men, and a bunch of 'em set fire to the barn... it's a damn mess, sir."

"And it looks like we're gonna have to clean it up for you," Jeb said, and hopped out of the carriage, already drawing his sidearm. "You'd best stay back here while me and Hex handle this," he told his father, then turned to Lucas. "And you stay here too... try not to run off."

The young men made their way up the road until they were within sight of the house, and soon saw firsthand what the man was talking about. Flames were licking up one wall of the barn over on the south end of the property, and in the light of it they could see slaves running about, igniting torches and doing their best to set the house ablaze as well. Some of the white farmhands stood on the front porch and the balcony above it,

firing at them with shotguns, but they were badly outnumbered. "Hmph... some furlough this turned out to be," Jeb said, and cocked his pistol. "Head for the porch, it seems the most defensible position."

Hex nodded, and the two of them broke from cover and ran across the yard. Some of the slaves nearby attacked them, but bits of firewood and farm implements were no match for cold iron — almost in unison, Jonah and Jeb's guns went off, cutting the slaves down mid-stride. Others tried their luck and met the same fate, until the two men reached the porch. Jonah grabbed hold of one of the workers there and yelled, "Take care that fire right now afore it kin do any more damage!" The man refused to budge, so Jonah shoved him off the porch. He then picked up a spare rifle and began picking off any slaves that barred the man's path. "Whut in tarnation started all this?" he asked another man.

"Some of the coloreds got it in their heads that the Yankees was gonna swoop down here an' free 'em all," he said. "Guess they figured they'd help 'em along."

Jonah stopped shooting, going so far as to lower his rifle. "They think the Yankees is fightin' fer *them*?"

"With Lincoln sitting up there in Washington, they may as well be," Jeb replied as he reloaded. "What's gotten into you, Jonah? Keep at 'em before they swarm us!"

After another moment of hesitation, Hex began shooting again. Eventually, the situation came under control, and most of the slaves were rounded up — in the commotion, eight had disappeared, and nearly twice as many lay dead all around the property. Two of the white farmhands were killed as well, and the barn was a loss, but luckily the house itself received only superficial damage. When Turnbull finally saw the results of the uprising, the look of anger on his face was almost painful. "Find out which one of them started this mess," he told Lucas and his men through gritted teeth, "and when you do, I want him whipped within an inch of his life in front of the whole lot of them. They will remember, damn them, what their proper place is." The men went off to do as he ordered, then Turnbull looked to his son and Hex, the anger suddenly replaced by weariness. "I'm truly sorry, boys. I wanted to give you a fine Christmas to remember before you had to go back, but I certainly hadn't

expected this."

"That's quite all right, it's not your fault in the least. It's this damn war, it's turned the whole world upside-down." Jeb put an arm around his father's shoulders. "Pretty soon, it'll all be over, and life can get back to normal around here... right, Jonah?" He looked over at his fellow soldier.

"Right as rain," Hex replied, but his attention wasn't on the Turnbulls, it was on the overseer far behind them, knocking one of the slaves to the ground with a blow to the head as he tried to wring a confession out of him.

1862:

Just as Turnbull had promised, Jeb and Jonah were transferred to the 7th Virginia Cavalry as lieutenants not long after New Year's. The increased rank also meant increased responsibility, and the two of them did their best to set an example for the enlisted men under them. The new year also brought a new challenges for the Confederates, for the Federals were gaining footholds throughout the South. For months, the two armies clashed, losing ground one day and reclaiming it not long after. The 7th Cavalry seemed unable to get a respite through it all, but they pressed on at the behest of their commanding officers, even as their comrades fell around them on the battlefield. The worst blow came in mid-September as General Lee's forces invaded Maryland, hoping to give the North a taste of the suffering they'd endured on their side of the border. After assisting General Jackson in the taking of Harpers Ferry, the 7th Cavalry followed him to Sharpsburg, near Antietam Creek, and joined the thousands of Confederate troops already gathered there. They locked horns with the Union men in an all-out bloodbath until, regretfully, Lee had to concede that his losses were too great — the Rebels had no choice but to retreat back to Virginia.

It was a horrific blow to Southern morale, with over nine thousand dead or wounded and not an inch of Northern ground in their possession to show for it. Like many other soldiers, the men under Hex and Turnbull's command were rather sullen for days — they'd lost nearly a third of

their company in that one conflict. Unfortunately, the war was not about to stop on their account, and the two lieutenants faced the unenvied task of keeping them focused on the battles to come and not the one behind them.

A week after Sharpsburg, Hex took out a platoon to scout for possible Yankee activity near the border. By their second day out, they'd found nothing but a family of runaway slaves. Standing orders were for all Negroes to be put back into bondage, so they took the blacks prisoner and brought them along as they made their way back the regiment. Though he held his tongue, the situation gave Jonah an ill feeling in his stomach — ever since the incident at the Turnbull plantation, the sight of slaves unsettled him in a way it never had before. He tried to dismiss it, reasoning that it was due to having to shoot so many of them, while the slaves had been armed with nothing more than improvised clubs at best. *It was either yerself or them, an' yuh know they wouldn't have hesitated tuh do yuh in*, he told himself. But the feeling persisted, especially when he caught sight of the way the recaptured slaves looked at him in his gray uniform.

When they made camp for the night, Hex found himself tossing and turning in his bedroll. He eventually gave up and sat in his tent, rolling one smoke after another as he stared at the canvas walls. *This is ridiculous*, he thought. *Whut's done is done, Jonah boy, so why yuh keep lettin' whut happened last Christmas eat at yuh?* He didn't know, and that didn't help matters much. "Hell with it," he muttered, and left his tent. The rest of the camp was sound asleep, the only light being a small fire near where they'd tied up the horses — a guard sat watch over there with the slaves, who were bound hand and foot to prevent trouble. Jonah walked over that way, figuring that, if he wasn't going to sleep, the least he could do was take watch for a while and let the other man catch some shuteye. When he got close, however, he noticed that the soldier was leaning strangely against an old stump. *Fella's done nodded off already*, Hex thought, then saw that the slaves were missing, the ropes they'd been bound with cut and cast aside. Cursing under his breath, he checked the guard and found the man had only been knocked out, then he cast his eyes about the ground looking for tracks. What he saw was not to his liking: in addition to the footprints left by the departing slaves, there was an unknown set of prints, large and possibly clad in moccasins.

Good Lord... it might be that Scalphunter. There had been talk winding through the regiments about a huge, crazy Indian that had been massacring Confederates and spiriting away any Negroes in their possession — a few claimed that they'd seen him make trophies from the dead men's bodies, and had dubbed him "Scalphunter" because of it. Jonah had dismissed it as just stories, but now he wasn't so sure. Though he was wearing nothing more than his longjohns and a pair of trousers, Hex grabbed the unconscious soldier's pistol and followed the tracks off towards the woods, hoping that they weren't too far ahead of him. Sure enough, he soon spotted the group as they passed through a break in the trees, a tall, dark-haired man in buckskin leading the way. "Halt or Ah'll shoot!" Jonah ordered. The blacks froze in place, but the other man simply turned and urged them forward. "Ah mean it, dammit!" Jonah said to them. "Don't test me!" Again, the other man ignored his threats, and this time managed to get the runaways moving again before coming at Jonah with surprising speed.

As the Indian barreled towards him, Hex let off a shot but missed, and was knocked flat before he had a chance to fire again. Sitting on top of him, the man wrenched the gun from Jonah's hand and tossed it away, nearly snapping off his trigger finger in the process. *The big fella plays rough,* he thought, *good thing Ah do, too.* Jonah chopped the flat of his other hand against the Indian's throat, causing him to gag and loosen his grip for a moment. He then pulled himself free, tucked in his legs, and kicked the man square in the chest — the Indian fell backward, and Jonah tried to reach for the gun. Unfortunately, it wasn't going to be that easy, as the Indian was on him again in seconds, wrapping his arms around the Rebel's chest in a bear hug. His arms locked at his sides, Hex groped for anything to give him an advantage, and found it in a knife hanging from the Indian's belt — he managed to unsheathe it and jabbed it into his opponent's thigh. Once again, the Indian let go, but not in the way he'd expected: with a growl, his opponent threw Hex against a nearby tree, temporarily dazing him. Before he could reach his feet, the Indian's hand was around his throat, the knife he'd just used now inches from his face.

"You shouldn't have followed us," his opponent said, leaning in close. "I didn't do your fellow soldier any permanent harm, but you just couldn't bear the thought of those innocent people finding their way to freedom, could you?" Jonah gasped for air as the man tightened his grip. "You

disgust me... but at least I'll have the satisfaction of knowing you won't live long enough to enslave anyone else." Their eyes were locked together as the man moved the knife down to Hex's belly. In what seemed like a moment of lunacy, Hex thought those eyes looked somewhat familiar — he knew he'd seen that face somewhere before, but it was hard to peer beneath the streak of red warpaint covering it. Then, in the moonlight, he saw an odd strawberry-colored mark on the side of the man's neck.

It cain't be... Jonah thought, but considering he was seconds away from being gutted, he was willing to try anything. Drawing in as much breath as he could, he said in the common language used by most Indians on the plains, "Why is it... that we always... end up fighting each other?" His opponent stared at him, shocked to hear a white man speaking in that tongue. "I hope you are not mad at me... for almost breaking your arm... all those years ago," Jonah continued, the words coming out in strangled gasps.

Slowly, the man's fingers eased up and he backed away, the look of shock growing on his face. "You... you're the Apache slave I fought in Kansas, at the meeting of chiefs," he said in English. "Of all the people to run into out here... "

"Funny, Ah was thinkin' the same," Hex croaked as he rubbed his throat. "Reckon yuh ain't a slave no more."

"No, I won my freedom years ago... as you did, obviously." He shook his head. "I'm sorry to see that you didn't learn anything from the experience."

"Whut the Hell's thet supposed tuh mean?"

"Look at you: fighting to keep people in bondage after you've suffered the same. How can you side with *them*?"

"Ah'm fightin' with them 'cause Ah believe thet the North should mind its own goddam business instead of nosin' around in ours. All we want is tuh be left alone, an' they won't oblige us."

"Do you honestly believe that's all this war is about?"

Jonah glared at the man for a moment, then his eyes dropped away. "Thet's the only part Ah care about. Slavery don't matter tuh me one way or another."

"How can you ignore the problem after what we went through? Have you forgotten how our Indian masters treated us, humiliated us? Don't you think that the Negroes suffer just as much as we did, if not more? Don't you think that they have just as much right to escape that as we did?"

Hex gave no answer, his mind going back to the uprising at the Turnbull plantation, to the ill feeling that had taken hold of him ever since then. Though he had been set free by High Cloud nearly ten years ago, he could still remember what it was like to be nothing more than property to someone, and he could see an echo of those days in the eyes of every slave he passed... and yet he kept crowing about how white Southerners should have the freedom to live as they please while he forced coloreds back into a life that he'd despised. "But this is the way things are," he said quietly, knowing how weak and stupid it sounded the moment the words left his mouth. "In the South, colored folk are slaves... yuh cain't just wave yer hand an' make it disappear."

"Then I guess you haven't heard... " the Kiowa warrior began to say, then stopped as a shout carried through the wood from the direction of camp.

"Reckon thet gunshot woke the boys up," Jonah muttered, then turned to the other man. "Ah cain't believe Ah'm sayin' this, but yuh'd best get tuh steppin' afore they see yuh."

"What about you? Don't tell me you're going back to them."

"Yuh've given me some things tuh think about, but Ah've still got responsibilities. Just let me work this out in muh own time."

"All right, I just hope you've gotten it worked out by the next time we meet, because if you haven't..." He let the sentence trail off.

"Ah understand, an' Ah hope it don't come tuh thet." The man turned to leave, but Hex stopped him, saying, "Wait, afore yuh go... hit me."

When he just stared at him, Hex explained, "If'n Ah'm conscious when they find me, they's gonna wonder why, so..." He picked up his gun, handed it over, then turned around and tapped the back of his head. "Consider it payback fer yankin' yer arm outta joint. Just try not tuh crack muh skull open, okay?"

After a long pause, the man known as Scalphunter clubbed Jonah just behind his right ear, and he crumpled to the ground. He then threw the gun aside and ran as fast as he could in the direction he'd sent the runaways. He could hear voices in the clearing behind him, but to his relief, they didn't appear to be pursuing. Despite that, he didn't slow down until he reached the narrow dirt road bordering the wood, where a horse-drawn wagon waited — a lanky young man in a white slouch hat and duster was fastening down a canvas tarp on the back of the wagon, and he nearly jumped out of his skin when Scalphunter emerged from the trees. "What took you so long? Between the gunshot and your lollygagging, I'd just about written you off as dead," the young man said.

"I'll explain later. Everything all right here?"

"Ask 'em yourself, if you like." He tugged at the canvas and revealed the runaways laying huddled beneath it. "How you folks enjoyin' your accommodations so far?"

"We's fine in here, Mistuh Lash," one of the black men answered, "but we'd feel a lot better if'n we was movin' away from them Rebs."

"Have no fear, now that my partner has stopped draggin' his feet, we can get this show on the road." Bartholomew Aloysius Lash tipped his hat to them, the daisy stuck in the hatband bobbing as he did so, then turned to Scalphunter. "By the by, you know your leg's bleedin'?"

"It'll keep." They checked the canvas one last time before climbing on board the wagon, Lash taking the reins. "If you really thought the soldiers had gotten me, why didn't you take off?"

"Well, there is the slight matter of you not payin' me yet for this little expedition." He snapped the reins to set the horses in motion. "If I'm gonna risk bein' hanged by my fellow Southerners, I'd like to do it with some money in my pockets."

"What happened to that 'better nature' of yours, Bat?"

"It's better when I ain't broke," he quipped. "But enough about me... what happened back there that you ain't dead?"

"I sort of ran into someone I know," Scalphunter said as he wrapped a bandana around his leg wound.

His partner did a double-take. "You're joshin' me! The great Ke-Woh-No-Tay, scourge of the Confederacy, is consortin' with the enemy! Just wait 'til I tell your brother, he'll die of shame."

"Button it, Lash, and keep your eyes on the road."

1863:

... on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free...

The dim light given off by the camp lantern made reading difficult, but Jonah made do — he'd read over the scrap of paper at least ten times now, and had virtually memorized the contents. The repetition helped make what it said a bit more concrete to him.

... the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom...

He'd first heard about it not long after his platoon rejoined the rest of the 7th Cavalry. Apparently, President Lincoln had made a proclamation a few days after the battle at Sharpsburg that, if the Confederacy didn't lay down their arms and return to the Union by the New Year, he'd declare

every slave in their possession free men and women. Most Southerners laughed it off, saying that he didn't have an ounce of authority over them. But when the grace period expired, the rail-splitter went and done it anyways. Copies of it were printed in most of the Southern papers, along with editorials declaring it to be nothing more than a abolitionist ploy to win sympathy from the governments overseas.

... And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense; and I recommend to them that, in all cases where allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages...

He wondered if the proclamation had been what Scalphunter tried to tell him about that night in the woods. More than likely, he figured, though he wasn't sure what he would have done at the time if the man had told him — then as now, Hex was a lieutenant, with soldiers in his care. What Lincoln had done didn't change that fact... but it did make justifying his personal feelings with his military career a mite harder.

... And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God...

Jonah had spent many a night since then mulling over the predicament — he believed in a man's right to live the sort of life he wanted, but not at the expense of depriving others of that same right. In siding with the South and its tradition of slavery, he'd become a hypocrite. And now that the North had stated so clearly that it was fighting for both the preservation of the Union and the freedom of every Negro within the Confederacy, his continued opposition of them complicated matters even more. In the two weeks since the proclamation had gone into effect, Hex had gone about his duties same as before, leading his men from one battle to the next as if nothing had changed. Just that afternoon, their company had gone up against Federal forces — their ranks had been split in the fight, and the platoons led by himself and Jeb had become separated from the rest of the troops. They'd made camp together for the night near a marsh not far from the battlefield, rationing out their mutual supplies and getting some much-needed rest. For Hex, however, there seemed to be no rest, not so long as the problem lay before him. So he sat in his tent, straining his eyes to read the words on the paper though he already knew what they said.

Footsteps outside the tent, then a rustling of the flap, and Jeb's head poked inside. "Evening," he said, "you get anything to eat yet?"

"Kind of slipped muh mind," Jonah answered.

"Thought so... here you go." He ducked into the tent proper and handed his friend a tin plate of beans and cornbread, an identical plate in his other hand. Jonah tucked the paper beneath his bedroll and started eating as Jeb sat down across from him. "Did a head count: we've got thirty-five men out there, with seven of them injured but nothing urgent. Ammunition looks good, and food..." He smirked and hoisted a forkful of beans. "Well, it's edible, but that's about it."

"Ain't nothin' new there. How's the lay of the land?"

"Free and clear. No Yankees about, but none of our guys either. Maybe things will look different in the morning." Hex nodded, and they ate in silence for a while. When Jeb finished his meal, he set aside his plate, rolled a smoke, and said, "So, what's on that paper you keep sneaking by me?" Jonah didn't answer right away, just kept mashing the remains of his cornbread into his beans, then finally pulled out the paper in question and handed it over. After giving it a glance, Jeb cocked an eyebrow and said, "I don't understand."

"Ain't an easy thing tuh understand... leastways it ain't an easy thing fer me tuh talk about."

"Well, give it a go, because you've really got me puzzled."

"Lend me some tobaccy," he said. Jeb passed the pouch over, and Jonah took his time fixing up a cigarette before answering his friend. "When Ah got into this war, it was with the best of intentions. Ah felt the cause was right, but Ah also felt the cause only involved us an' the Yankees. It don't, an' Ah feel a damn fool thet it took me so long tuh see things fer whut they is." He took a long drag on his smoke. "Afore Ah met yuh... Hell, afore Ah met Cassie, even... Ah went through some rough times, livin' with the Apache an' bein' looked upon as nothin' more than somebody's property. Ah spent two miserable years on muh knees, an' Ah got me a healthy amount of scars tuh go with it. Ah wouldn't wish

thet sort of life on nobody, white or colored or whutever... but if'n Ah go on fightin' fer the Confederacy, thet's whut Ah'm doin', an' Ah cain't in good conscience do thet."

Jeb stared at him. "Jonah, you make it sound like you were a slave or something..."

"Don't have tuh be a Negro tuh be a slave."

"This is a joke, and a damn sick one, at that."

"Yuh know Ah ain't one fer makin' jokes, Jeb. It's the truth, every word of it. Ah've been a slave, an' Ah've been a free man, an' Ah kin rightly say thet Ah prefer the latter. Reckon all them Negroes down here would probably prefer the same as muhself, so am Ah tuh keep 'em from it?"

"But they're *supposed* to be slaves, that's what Negroes are *for*... you keep talking about them like they're regular folks like us."

Just like that, Jonah felt a gulf open up between the two of them. He thought the difficult part of the conversation would be telling Jeb about the abuses he'd suffered all those years ago — he'd never imagined that his friend wouldn't be able to comprehend the notion of free blacks. In retrospect, it made sense: unlike Jonah, Jeb had spent his entire life lord-ing over a plantation full of slaves, judging them in the same fashion as he would cattle or horses. They were never people to him, just property. "Ah wish Ah could make yuh see things from muh end, Jeb," Jonah told his friend, "just fer a minute."

"And I wish you'd quit talking so foolishly. You're beginning to sound like an abolitionist."

"Maybe they're right, though: maybe we've been fightin' tuh preserve a life down here that's better off dead an' gone." Jeb paled at the words, but Jonah went on anyways. "Ah've been wrestling with this fer longer than yuh know, an' it ain't been easy. Ah cain't keep on fightin' fer something Ah don't believe in, but Ah cain't turn 'round an' fight against muh fellow Southerners neither. Ah've thought 'bout just tossin' muh guns away an' headin' back West, but the war's creepin' up out there too, an' if'n Ah get caught, they could hang me fer desertion. The only

compromise Ah kin see is tuh surrender muhself tuh the Yankees an' wait out the whole mess as a prisoner of war."

"There's got to be another way. Let me write to my father, maybe he can get you transferred to a position off the front lines... *anything* has to be better than this."

Jonah shook his head. "Ah don't want any more part in this, Jeb. Please, don't make it any harder on me than it already is."

"All right... all right, I'll let you go, but where are you going? There's no Yankees nearby... "

"There's a Federal camp 'bout thirty miles north of here, a place called Fort Charlotte. Reckon once it's dark, Ah'll mount up an' ride on out there. Probably won't stay there, but it's the first step." Hex flicked the butt of his smoke onto his plate. "When daylight comes, yuh take the boys an' find the rest of the regiment. When they ask where Ah am, tell 'em Ah went scoutin' or something an' never came back."

"All right," Jeb repeated, then covered his face with his hands. "Good Lord, I can't believe this is happening... one of the best damn soldiers we've got is up and quitting!"

"Don't sell yerself short like thet, Jeb, 'specially now. These boys is gonna need yuh."

Jeb agreed, but that still didn't make it easy. When full dark came, he tried one last time to talk Jonah out of it, but the man wouldn't budge. "Can you at least promise me that when this is all over, you'll come back to Richmond?" Jeb asked as they stood at the edge of camp, Hex checking the saddle on his horse. "I don't fully understand why you're doing this, but I still consider you a good friend."

"Ah consider yuh the same, an' Ah will." The two of them shook hands, Jonah saying, "Y'all treated me like a brother, an' Ah ain't never gonna forget thet." He mounted his horse and tipped his hat to Jeb. "Good luck, Lieutenant Turnbull."

Jeb returned the gesture. "Same to you, Lieutenant Hex." He stood

beneath a winter-bare tree as his friend rode away into the night, wondering how long he'd have to wait before they crossed paths once again.

If you enjoyed this story, more like it as well as your favorite DC superheroes can be found at DC2 Universe.

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Jonah Hex: Death & Gunsmoke, Prologue

Weird Western Quarterly #1 (2006)

Jonah Hex: Death & Gunsmoke, Part 1 (of 4): Once Upon a Time in Texas.

The origin of Jonah Hex begins here! Before he could become the most feared bounty hunter in the Old West, he had to survive childhood. You're guaranteed to never look at the man the same way again!

Weird Western Quarterly #2 (2006)

Jonah Hex: Death & Gunsmoke, Part 2 (of 4): Into the Wilderness.

The origin of Jonah Hex continues! Just when it seems things can't get any worse, Jonah's father makes a fateful decision, and the path of the boy's life takes an unexpected turn. It's frontier action at its finest as Hex moves closer to his destiny!

Weird Western Quarterly #4 (2006)

Jonah Hex: Death & Gunsmoke, Part 4 (of 4): When Jonah Comes Marching Home.

The final chapter in the origin of Jonah Hex! As the Civil War ends, Hex's new life begins, but first he faces an old enemy for the last time. It's the moment you've all been waiting for, and it ain't pretty! Don't say we didn't warn you!

Weird Western Quarterly #5 (2007)

Nighthawk: 'Til Things Are Brighter.

The soul of the Egyptian prince known as Khufu has passed through many lives, and, in each one, he's been a force for good... or has he? For the first time anywhere, it's the untold origin of Nighthawk!

Weird Western Quarterly #6 (2007)

The Vigilante: A Lonely Soldier Away From Home

Weird Western Quarterly #7 (2007)

Bat Lash: In for a Penny, In for a Pounding

Weird Western Quarterly #8 (2007)

Windrunner: Inherit the Wind, Part 1 (of 2) - Secrets.

Before Barry Allen, before Jay Garrick, another man had been granted the power of the Speed Force. But who he was before he'd obtained those powers has always been a mystery...until now. A young man's quest for answers becomes entangled in magic and riddles in the first half of this 2-part tale!

Weird Western Quarterly #12 (2008)

It's the first annual Christmas issue of Weird Western Quarterly featuring a holiday tale with the Old West speedster, Windrunner as well as a Jonah Hex vignette, "Prelude to a Reckoning."

Weird Western Quarterly #9 (2008)

Windrunner: Inherit the Wind Part 2 (of 2) - Revelations.

Special extra-large issue! Torn between civilization and the wilderness, Chris Maxwell tries to find out where he fits...but when a strange old Indian shaman enters his life, he finds himself thrust into a power struggle beyond anything he can imagine, and a new legend of the West is born in a flash!

Justice League #15 (2008)

Lead Us Not Into Desecration, Part 1 (of 3).

What starts as a typical day for a group of Leaguers turns deadly as they are attacked by an unknown enemy. Who is the Lord of Time, and what diabolical scheme does he have that threatens both the past and the present with destruction? You won't want to miss what happens at the end of this issue!

Weird Western Quarterly #10 (2008)

Lead Us Not Into Desecration, Part 2 (of 3).

It's 1878: Do you know where your heroes are? Lost in time, their memories gone, four members of the Justice League have been marked for death by the Lord of Time. And if they want to make it out of this one alive, they're gonna have to rely on the kindness of strangers...namely Jonah Hex, Scalphunter, Bat Lash, and making her DC2 debut, Cinnamon!

Justice League #16 (2008)

Lead Us Not Into Desecration, Part 3 (of 3).

It's past and present versus the future as the Justice League teams up with some of the greatest heroes of the Old West to take down the Lord of Time! Can they stop his scheme before it's too late, or will Arizona be blown right off the map?

Weird Western Quarterly #13 (2009)

Jonah Hex: Children of Heaven

When Jonah Hex gets caught up in a fight between Chinese railroad workers and their white bosses, he thinks it's a pretty straightforward affair. But after meeting a young Chinese woman named Mei Ling, his life gets more complicated than he likes.

Weird Western Quarterly #16 (2009)

Weird Western Quarterly: The Better Part of Valor.

Rogues Gallery #17 (2009)

Rogues Gallery: El Diablo.

Legends of the Old West still resonate even today. One of the most persistent legends is of El Diablo and Lazarus Lane.

Journey with us back in time to the yesteryear of the Old West... as Rogues Gallery continues to put its spotlight on our guest writers...

This time by the acclaimed Susan Hillwig.

Weird Western Quarterly #20 (2010)

Weird Western Quarterly: The Reckoning.

Driven to the brink by the events of the previous issue, Jonah Hex goes on the warpath...but at what cost?

Weird Western Quarterly #19 (2010)

Weird Western Quarterly: Domestic Disturbance.

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray #1 (2010)

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray: The First Day of the Rest of Your Life.

The Blackest Night is over, and the Brightest Day has begun for twelve newly-resurrected people...but unbeknownst to all, there's a thirteenth person that got brought back as well. A hero to some, a villain to others, Jonah Hex once again walks amongst the living, and Death itself is a closer companion than ever!

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray #2 (2010)

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray: Back In Black.

Wait a minute, how in blazes can we have a second issue if Hex was killed in the first? Well, y'see, that's the funny thing...

What, you think we're gonna spoil the surprise here? Go read the issue and find out for yourself!

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray #3 (2010)

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray.

What started out as a quiet visit to Paradise Corners has turned into a big mess, and now Jonah has to decide between running for his life or making up for past mistakes.

Weird Western Quarterly #21 (2011)

Weird Western Quarterly: Brothers in Arms.

In the midst of the Civil War, Scalphunter and Matt Savage try to help a mysterious black woman ferrying slaves out of the South, while circumstances beyond their control threaten to drive the brothers apart.

Weird Western Quarterly #22 (2011)

Weird Western Quarterly: How Can I Miss You If You Won't Go Away?

Bat Lash once again crosses paths with Penny "Dreadful" Drea-ney. Has the gambler learned his lesson from their last encounter? Yeah, I don't think so either.

Weird Western Quarterly #23 (2012)

Weird Western Quarterly: At War With the Devil, Part One.

As the North and the South begin to clash, Windrunner finds himself on the front lines of a different, more personal war. When the smoke clears at the end of this issue, you'll know this is only the beginning of a battle that's been a long time coming.



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