



A COMMON MAN

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*To Tricia, Jessica, Melissa and Emily, the strong  
women in my life who have kept me grounded.*



# A COMMON MAN

A NOVEL

The extraordinary tale of an ordinary  
21st Century businessman from South Carolina  
who attempts to stop the assassination  
of Abraham Lincoln

DANNY J. BRADBURY

HELLGATE PRESS



ASHLAND, OREGON



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**T**HE INTENSE PAIN CAME OUT of nowhere. It emanated up his left arm like a shot from a gun and centered in the middle of his stomach. Feeling like someone had sucker punched him even though he was by himself, he doubled over with extreme nausea. The world began to spin and he lost all concept of where he was. He had an unshakeable sense of something being wrong, and his survival instincts kicked in.

Stopping, he slowed his breathing and stood upright. He stalled for time while his mind raced at a dizzying pace trying to identify the threat.

Sweating profusely, he wrapped his arms tightly around himself in an attempt to regain his equilibrium. There wasn't any of that "life passing before his eyes" nonsense, but as his vision blurred the reality hit him, this could be life or death.

Struggling to gather all the strength he could muster; the pain began to ease. A little at first, and as his vision cleared, he tried to determine where he was. The merry-go-round that he was trapped on slowed ever so slightly, and it gave him hope that the threat was all behind him. He managed to take a few more steps and then everything went blank.

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William wasn't sure how long he had blacked out or where he

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was. The world slowly came back into focus, and the fog gradually lifted enough for him to become aware of his surroundings. Blinking his eyes, he looked around and noticed a crowd of people standing over him. Turning his head side to side, his eyebrows raised in disbelief. Something was not right about what he saw.

The crowd of people were dressed in strange clothing, like they were actors in a period play from the nineteenth century. The men were overdressed, in suits and topped with all manner of hats. The women were modestly adorned, wearing dresses of varying degrees of value. Sitting up, he looked down at the clothes he put on that morning (khaki pants and a button-down shirt) and he felt out of place. A young boy caught William's attention. The lad gestured with his hands and loudly asked, "Mister, are you okay?"

"Where am I?"

Strong arms grasped under his arms and around his legs. A sensation of being lifted overtook him, and he heard murmurs from the crowd. "Let's take him over to Doc Adams, he will know what to do."

The two men who had picked him up carried him through the street and over to a house that he vaguely recognized. It was set off from the street, was two stories tall, painted white, and had a beautiful, wraparound porch. It looked like one of the older houses in Blyth that he remembered was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Hearing shouts from the crowd calling out to the doctor to come quickly, an elderly, somewhat portly man, pushed his way through the crowd in William's direction.

"What's all the fuss about?"

Someone told the doctor that this man was found lying in the street and needed his help. The doctor looked around at the gathered mass and asked if anyone knew who he was. Someone from the crowd said, "He must be one of the soldiers running from the Yanks."

Another voice said, "He don't look like no soldier, the way he's dressed."

"Let's get him to my office so I can see what this is all about."



The two men continued to carry William into the doctor's house and placed him on a couch in the sitting room. "Everyone out of my way," the doctor instructed.

The onlookers backed away as ordered, and the doctor began his physical examination. "Who are you?" the doctor asked as he removed the jacket and shirt William was wearing. His eyes widened and jerked from side to side. There was a tight grip of his wrist and nimble fingers probed his ribs and stomach. The doctor grabbed the mysterious man's head and felt for any abrasions while looking into his patient's eyes. William mind raced with all the possibilities of what he was experiencing while the doctor continued to examine him.

"My name is William Campbell. Where am I?"

"You are in my house; it seems you were found out on the street."

"I must have passed out; but I'm still not sure where I am."

"You are in a town called Blyth. How are you feeling?"

Taking a deep breath and clamping his eyes shut, William responded. "I feel a little woozy. I don't know what happened."

"William, I can't seem to find anything obviously wrong with you."

Opening his eyes and sitting up, William gazed around the room. It didn't look like any doctor's office he had ever been in. There wasn't a waiting room lined with chairs occupied by other patients. Electric lights were replaced by oil lamps. No receptionist or nurse could be seen. What is happening to me? The doctor handed his shirt back to him.

"Why are you dressed the way you are?"

Rubbing the back of his head, William stared incoherently at the elderly man.

Doc pointed to William's tan jacket, button-down shirt, khaki pants, and sneakers. "Sir, where did you get these clothes that you are wearing?"

"What do you mean?"

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William could see the scowl on the doctor's face.

Doc asked, "Where are you from?"

Struggling to find the right words, William looked at the doctor and said, "I'm from Blyth. I was walking down the street, and that's the last thing I remember."

Doc Adams looked around the room at the dozen or so people crammed into the small space, "Does anyone know this man?"

The crowd looked at each other and they all shook their heads no.

The doctor's tone was biting and agitated. *Why were these people treating me like a criminal? What did I do?*

Doc continued with his questioning. "We need answers! Why are you dressed the way you are? Are you a soldier trying to get away from Sherman's army?"

William turned his head to the side and let out a muted laugh. What could he possibly mean by that statement? "What do you mean, Sherman's army?"

He saw the doctor shake his head.

"Where have you been? The Yanks are down in Georgia creating a panic—and burning everything in their path."

Waving both hands in the air, William snorted loudly. "You people are crazy! How is that possible? That happened over a hundred fifty years ago!"

Fidgeting in his seat, he looked around the room at each person. Everyone was wide eyed and quietly stared at him.

After a few minutes of awkward silence, all of them started to mumble incoherently.

"You must have hit your head harder than you think," Doc said.

"What's today's date?"

The doctor raised an eyebrow. "It's the twelfth of January."

"What year?"

"Well, it's 1865. Why do you ask?" Doc Adams demanded flatly.

William's face drained of color. Running his fingers through his hair, he recounted his day. It started with finding himself lying in

the middle of the street, and now he was told that it was 1865. That, along with the way everyone was dressed and how different the town looked . . . there had to be some logical explanation for what was going on.

Scanning all the faces in the room, his shoulders slumped dejectedly. Not wanting to make the situation any worse than it already was, he decided to play along with this absurdity until he could figure it out and mumbled, "I'm sorry, I must have been confused by whatever happened to me."

Doc Adams continued to look his patient with a leery eye. "It still doesn't answer the question as to who you are and why you are in my house."

Avoiding eye contact, William told the doctor that he still wasn't feeling well and asked if there was somewhere he could rest. He needed to buy some time to figure out what was going on.

"There is a spare bedroom I guess you can use. I'm not done asking you questions!"

William's attention was drawn to a stout woman with graying hair and a sympathetic smile entering the room. This was the doctor's wife Nell. Taking William gently by the arm, "you all need to let this poor man get some rest." She directed him to a winding staircase located in the center of the home. He stared deeply into the older woman's eyes as they climbed the stairs. It was the first time today William felt that anyone actually cared about him.

Nell opened the door to the guest room and asked, "Can I get you anything?"

Taking her hands in his, William replied, "No, thank you for your hospitality."

"Let me know if you change your mind." She said closing the door.

Narrowing his eyes, he looked around the room. He beheld something out of a Victorian museum. The room was spacious with a dresser along the wall opposite the bed that had a porcelain wash basin and pitcher on it. He ran his fingers over the finely

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crafted dresser which was well-designed, and he would consider it to be a very expensive antique. His wife had dragged him to a number of antique shops in the area and he had seen pieces like this one that were too pricey for them to afford. Continuing his inspection, the wallpaper was brightly colored in a garish style and there were paintings showing outdoor scenes of trees and mountains.

Shuffling over to the lone window in the bedroom, he saw the sun was setting so it had to be late afternoon. William's body tensed and his mouth fell open. The street in front of the doctor's house was a dirt road. On that road there were a number of people moving around, but there were no cars, just horses and carriages. Everyone was dressed in the same period clothing he saw when he was lying on the street. The people were walking around without a care in the world, just like any other day.

Struck by a sudden epiphany, William started patting his pockets. He found his cell phone, which, as he feared, did not have a signal. Considering this fact, and that everyone here thought they lived in 1865, he determined that it might be hard for him to explain if he was searched and they found the cell phone and his wallet, which had his driver's license, credit cards, and cash. Gritting his teeth, he looked around the room for a good place to hide these items where he could retrieve them at a later date.

There was a loose floorboard near the base of the window. Taking some effort for him to pry open the board with only his hands, he placed the cell phone, wallet, and his wristwatch in the opening and carefully replaced the board. Confident the items would not be found, he decided it was time to get some sleep. When he woke up, maybe it would have all been a bad dream.

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While William hid his personal items, there was a lively conversation going on downstairs as to what to do with this stranger who had mysteriously been dropped into the town's life. The doc-

tor had dismissed everyone in the room except three of the town's elders. There were arguments from the group about being sent away, but they all left the house as they were told to.

The four men discussed what should be done next. Pacing the floor, Doc Adams shared his nagging suspicions about who this man could be, and wasn't sure what to do next. The men spoke in hushed voices so as not to be heard by the stranger. The consensus among the group was the man spied for the Yanks, trying to scout ahead for Sherman. Why was he dressed in those clothes, and what about the hundred fifty years response? They all agreed that the man shouldn't be allowed to leave the doctor's house until everyone was sure he was not a threat.

They would get the sheriff involved and then it would be his problem. Doc Adams went out to his porch and saw George, the boy who had first talked to the man, and told him to go fetch the sheriff.

George ran to collect Sheriff McCall. He entered the jail yelling for the sheriff, "Come quick, there is an emergency at Doc Adams's!"

The sheriff was middle-aged and a no-nonsense, by-the-book lawman. He was a large, imposing figure with a long, fluffy beard that hid his facial features. He told young George, "Calm down and tell me what's going on."

George caught his breath. "There was a man found on the street. He's at Doc Adams's place. Doc sent me here to get you because the man is acting very strange, and everyone thinks he's a Yankee spy."

"This is all I need right now," McCall said to no one in particular. He put on his hat and followed George back to Doc's house.

When they got there, he was greeted by Doc at his door. He directed the sheriff into his sitting area and had him sit down on his couch. The doctor remained standing.

"What's all this about, Doc?" asked the sheriff.

The doctor and sheriff went back a number of years and were

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close friends. “Chester, we have an interesting problem on our hands. We found a strange man out on the street in front of my home today. He appeared to have suffered an injury and was brought to my office.”

Sheriff McCall leaned closer as the doctor continued.

“The man was in a confused state and wore strange clothing. I asked him questions about who he was and what he was doing here. He told me that his name is William Campbell and he lives here in Blyth. No one else could identify him, and he didn’t know what the date was. I have no proof, but we wondered if he was spying for the Yankees or running away from something.” Doc was out of breath and stopped talking and looked at the sheriff.

“Where is he now?”

“He’s upstairs staying in my guest bedroom for the night. I thought we should keep an eye on him.”

“Do you think he is a threat to anyone?”

“I suppose not, but none of this makes any sense to me.”

“All right, Doc. We’ll let him get some rest tonight and I’ll be back in the morning with that local Home Guard captain to get more answers.”

The Home Guard had been formed early in the war by the authority of the Confederate government. It was intended to act as an agent for the government for home defense, and also to capture any deserters from the army. It manifested into a disorganized militia at best, and as the war raged on, it took less and less direction from the central government. For the most part, each local unit was made up of the more privileged members of the town who did not take up the call to arms and fight in the war. Most didn’t answer to anyone and were free to enact their duties as they saw fit. This usually entailed intimidating the local citizens and imposing their form of justice with impunity. This often led to the apprehension of anyone they deemed to be undesirable or unsupportive of the war effort. It was just another sad reality the people on the home front had to face.

**T**HAT NIGHT WILLIAM HAD A troubled sleep, mixed with dreams of his family, and how he could possibly find himself back in 1865. Waking early, he restlessly paced around the room. What would this day have in store for him? He wasn't sure what time it was, but judging by how light it was outside, it must be early in the morning.

Not wanting to wake anyone, he slowly crept downstairs. When he got to the bottom of the stairs, he was stopped in his tracks by the sight of Doc Adams and two other men sitting in the same room where he was initially brought. Doc stood up and faced William. "Good morning. I have two gentlemen to whom I want to introduce you."

Pointing first to the elderly sheriff. "This is our town sheriff, Chester McCall."

The sheriff stood up and nodded to William.

Doc Adams then pointed to the other man, who was dressed in a uniform and appeared to be in his late twenties, with flowing, blond hair and wearing a small goatee. The man had the arrogant look of someone who is very sure of themselves. "This is Captain Thomas Akers, commander of the local Home Guard."

William's muscles suddenly stiffened. From his reading about the Civil War, he knew how ruthless the Home Guard could be if they considered him to be a spy or deserter from the Confederate

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army. Tightening his grip on the handrail, he knew he would need to come up with a cover story as to who he was and why he was there. In his previous life he was a businessman. He often improvised in stressful situations, and this is where he excelled.

Sheriff McCall started his line of questioning with, “Who are you, and why are you in Blyth?”

There was no turning back now. What started as a game turned into a serious matter that could affect his freedom. Taking a deep breath, William answered in a higher pitched voice than he wanted.

“My name is William Campbell and I’m from South Carolina.”

Doc Adams interrupted, “No one here could vouch for you.”

Forcing his facial features to relax, William looked at each man and replied, “I live over in Greenville, where I have a business. I came here because I was looking for my family. I had sent them to North Carolina to be with relatives so they would be safe from the Yankees.”

The sheriff snorted and then asked William, “Why aren’t you serving in the army? You are young enough, and look fit.”

Still making it up as he went along, William answered, “I served in the 3rd South Carolina under General Kershaw, but I was wounded at Gettysburg and they sent me home to recuperate.”

Internally proud of his answer, William deflated by the look on the sheriff’s face.

“Is that so? Show Doc Adams your wounds.”

William shoulders slumped and he looked down at his shoes. The only scar he had was from an appendectomy, so he reluctantly pulled down his pants and showed it to the doctor. Doc Adams stepped closer to William and examined the scar.

“This doesn’t appear to be a very serious wound. Why would the army send you home for this?”

Being at a loss for words, William could only shrug his shoulders.

Acting like giving up was a choice, William didn’t resist as he



was taken under arrest. Shuffling his feet, he followed the sheriff out onto the street.

Getting a better view of the town, his eyes widened as he recognized this as Main Street. It obviously was different from the Main Street he was accustomed to, but it still was familiar. There was a row of buildings across the street from the doctor's house that he noted were the town's grocery, a dry goods store, and a seamstress shop. These buildings still stood in William's time but were a pharmacy, real estate agent's office, and a tattoo parlor.

Being led down Main Street past the gazing eyes of the townspeople, William could see what their destination was. The building was a single-story, red brick building, but in William's time it was a three-story complex that was the town's sheriff's office and jail.

William's mouth was dry and he slowed his pace. Why would they put him in jail for waking up in the middle of the street and not knowing where he was? His next thought was how he was going to get out of this mess, and how his family must be worried about him.

Entering the building, which was very small and cramped, he was escorted to the rear, where there were three small holding cells. There didn't appear to be any other criminals locked up, so he would be by himself. William lost the tight grip he had on his sanity as the sheriff opened the cell door. Being unlikely that he would be able to overpower his captors and make his escape, William reasoned that the invasion of Sherman's army would be causing chaos in this area very soon. This should buy him more time to figure out how to get out of his predicament.

After Sheriff McCall locked William in his cell, he stated, "I asked Captain Akers to follow up with the Army of Northern Virginia to see if they can verify who you are. If they can confirm your story, then I will let you go. If they can't, you will have to deal with the army."

Sheriff McCall asked William, "Is there anyone else who can verify who you are and confirm your story? Maybe someone over

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in Greenville? You look like a decent chap, and I would hate to see an innocent man punished.”

William couldn't bring himself to make eye contact with the sheriff. He slowly shook his head no.

The sheriff sent one of his deputies to go to the local diner and pick up something for William to eat, and told him, “Make yourself comfortable, you're going to be here a while.”

William's stomach rumbled uncontrollably; he could not remember the last time he ate. He greedily shoveled the meal of beans and cornbread in his mouth. While he ate his breakfast, he overheard a conversation going on in the other room about the progress General Sherman's army was making through Georgia. Then someone mentioned something about Lincoln sending Sherman to punish South Carolina for starting the war.

Shaking his head emphatically, William slapped his knee. For the first time since he found himself in his quandary, it dawned on him the exact date and time he found himself in. Tightly gripping the bars of his cell, he whispered, “Can I really pull it off?” He may have been given a golden opportunity to go to Washington and try to save President Lincoln. Even though he was an insurance agent by trade, he considered himself to be an aspiring historian. How would the South have turned out if the president hadn't been assassinated? Could he possibly alter the course of history to right a horrible wrong? This all seemed so improbable, and he was not sure how he could get out of jail, let alone make it all the way to Washington before April, in the middle of a war.

Methodically pacing around his tiny cell, his mind raced with the possibility of pulling it off. If he did nothing, he could be hanged for being a spy. There wasn't anyone who could verify his story. The sheriff was blunt, but reasonable at the same time. The danger came from the captain, who looked at William like he was out to get him. Either way, he couldn't sit idly by waiting for his fate to be decided; he had to find a way to escape his cell. He knew he would need allies to gain his freedom from the jail.

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William's jailer was an elderly, disheveled man named Nate Caldwell. Nate was very talkative, and reminded William of one of the actors that used to play a jailer in an old TV western. William would patiently and politely listen to Nate go on about all he had seen and done. William needed a friend, and Nate seemed like the one who would fit the bill.

While waiting for word of his fate, William spent hours trying to cultivate a relationship with Nate. He saw in Nate his best opportunity for an accomplice to aid in his escape. Fortunately, Nate had been too old to serve in the army and seemed sympathetic to William's plight to find his family. Over the next few days, William spent time alone with Nate. Nate's duties consisted of keeping the office tidy and looking after the prisoners. Since William was the only prisoner, they had ample opportunity to get to know one another.

Going for broke, William teared up sharing with his jailer his feelings about his wife Linda, daughter Janice and son Christopher. He was concerned about their safety and tried to convey this to gain sympathy from Nate. Without revealing that he was from the twenty first century, he shared his concerns for the South and the punishment that was sure to follow.

Struggling to make eye contact, Nate honestly told William just how bad things had gotten for the South, and it looked like they were losing the war. Looking over his shoulder, Nate kept his opinions between William and himself, as it was paramount to treason, and these were dangerous times. William played on Nate's concerns and continued to talk about his missing family and how urgent it was that he find them.

Mentally fatigued from lack of sleep, William's bloodshot eyes revealed the toll the waiting took. He needed to make a play sooner rather than later. How much longer should he wait?

One night, when William felt confident enough to bring up the possibility of an escape, he asked, "Can I talk to you, Nate?"

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Nate ambled over to William's cell. "What's on your mind?"

"You know how concerned I am about finding my family."

Nate nodded that he understood.

"I was wondering if you would be able to help me."

"What would you like me to do?"

Squinting his eyes and staring intently into Nate's eyes, William talked barely above a whisper. "I was hoping you would help me escape so I can go looking for my wife and kids."

Nate smiled at him. "I was wondering when you would get around to asking me to help you."

Letting out a huge breath, William briefly closed his eyes.

"I will agree to help you because I don't think you should be here, and I don't like that captain. He has too much power, and he's mean. We'll have to make it look real and if I'm asked, I will have to tell the truth about you escaping."

Reaching his hand through the bars, William firmly squeezed Nate's arm.

They planned to pull it off the next night. The old jailer even suggested that to make it realistic, William would need to knock him out. Frowning, William started to object, but agreed.

The sheriff and his staff usually went home at the end of each day, which left the jail solely manned by Nate. Making short, jerking movements, and wiping his sweaty palms on his pants, Nate prepared to get William's evening meal. Looking around the jail one last time, Nate put the cell door key within reaching distance, and left.

Clumsily, William snatched the key and opened his cell door. Jumping at every noise he heard, William fumbled to change into some clothes he was given by Nate. Taking deep breaths, he grabbed a burlap bag that Nate had stuffed with more clothes, food, and money. Tightly holding the bag, he waited for Nate to return.

Nate came back a few minutes later and told William there wasn't anyone else on the street and it should be safe for him to

go. He told William, “Stay off the main roads, as the Home Guard would be patrolling looking for deserters.”

Eyeing the door to his freedom, William was speechless. Loosening the grip on his bag, he gave Nate a hug, which, by the look on his face, surprised the old man.

Nate handed William a club, and half-jokingly said, “Don’t do anything that you ought not do, but give me a good whack.”

Feeling nauseous, William struck Nate on the side of his head. Doubling over trying not to vomit, William made sure the old man was still breathing. Furrowing his brow and clasping the coat tightly around him, he went out the door and fled into the night.

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His heart thumped in his chest and the blood rush to his brain made him lightheaded. Carefully looking around him to ensure he would not be seen; William hugged the side of the jail as he headed away from the center of the small town. Swiveling his head to make sure no one was following him, he clung to the buildings as he stumbled down the wooden sidewalk. It helped that there weren’t any streetlamps during this time.

With increased adrenaline pumping through his veins, William’s senses were heightened. There was a brisk chill in the air, but he was visibly sweating through his clothes. It was eerily quiet as he sped across a wooded area outside of town. Pausing to get his bearings, he hugged his shoulders to warm up. Taking time to steady his breathing, William resumed his flight. He kept up a brisk pace to get as far away as possible, but not so fast where he could break a leg in a fall. Growing up in the area, William had a good idea of where he was and where he needed to go. That would realistically apply more to his time than to the 1860s, but it was still an advantage. With the lack of lighting and paved highways, it would still be challenging.

Determined to keep a steady pace, William knew that nothing he did in his life could have ever prepared him for what he was

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about to face. He was in his forties and would not consider himself to be fit. He had little camping or survival skills, but he had a sharp and intuitive mind. He would have to work with the skills he had and improvise the rest.

Not only would he have to travel through North Carolina and Virginia, with few resources and even fewer friends, he only had about three months to get to Washington. Then he would have to come up with a plan to stop the assassination. Right now, he had more pressing issues to deal with. He would get around to planning his way north later.

William's mind raced with the possibilities of how he got here in 1865, and more importantly, how he would get back to his time. Right now, he had to deal with the facts that he only had a few hours head start on the Home Guard, and they would certainly look for him. Maintaining an alert gaze, he would walk all night, heading what he hoped was north, while keeping off the main roads.

Every part of his being cried out to stop and rest, but he would keep going and find some place to hide during the day for rest and to move at night under the cover of darkness. His major dilemma would be finding alternate transportation. He wouldn't be able to walk the whole distance and make it in time.

**E**ARLY THE NEXT MORNING, THE sheriff noticed that the front door was left partially open. Nate would never leave the door open. His senses were heightened upon entering the building. Looking around, he didn't see anything amiss. Where was Nate? He usually greeted the sheriff each morning.

Thinking about worst-case scenarios, he cautiously moved to the rear of the office, and called out for Nate. When there was no response, he went back to the cell area and saw him lying on the floor in a small puddle of blood. Gasping, he went to him to check to see if he was alive. Nate began to stir, and Sheriff McCall asked, "What happened, Nate?"

Nate's speech was groggy and he was rubbing his head, but told the sheriff, "That William feller got out of his cell and hit me over the head."

Sheriff McCall had known Nate for years; he was a trusted member of his staff. It would never enter his mind that his jailer would be involved with whatever took place the night before.

"How did that happen?" Sheriff McCall pleaded with Nate.

"Must have been when I came back with his evening meal. He got out of his cell and hit me over the head with something hard."

"I'll get Doc Adams to take a look at you," he told Nate. "But first, I'm going to let Captain Akers know about the escape."

Running out the door, the sheriff went looking for the Home

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Guard. Filled with self-blame, he was furious that he'd let this happen, and chided himself for not taking better precautions. Walking rapidly down the street, he asked everyone he came into contact with if they had seen Akers or any of his men. Most of the townspeople tried to stay as far away from that group of thugs as possible.

He found Captain Akers at the local blacksmith, getting his horse reshod. With eyes that were cold, hard, and flinting, he filled the young man in on the news of William's escape. Glaring at the captain, he asked if they were able to learn anything more about Mr. Campbell. Akers indicated that it was difficult to get much information due to the siege that General Lee's army was facing at Petersburg. He promised the sheriff he would find him and bring him back to be hanged. Sheriff McCall reminded Captain Akers that Campbell told him he was heading to North Carolina to look for his family. Akers acknowledged, and headed off to form up his men for the search.

With the veins in his forehead pulsing, the sheriff went looking for Doc Adams. When he got to the doctor's house, he didn't bother to knock, he just went in to find the doctor. He called out, "Hey, Doc, you home?"

Doc Adams came out of his office and saw the anger on his friend's face. "What's wrong, Chester?"

"That Campbell fella escaped my jail and injured Nate."

"I knew that man was up to no good."

"He just didn't seem like he was a threat. I should have listened to you."

"How's Nate? Do I need to go take care of him?"

"He's got a bad wound on his head, but he'll be okay. I already told that idiot Akers about the escape. Lord knows he will be itching to stir up the locals while trying to capture Campbell."

"At least he'll be out of our hair for a while."

With trembling hands, the doctor started to grab his medical bag to head out the door when the sheriff put his hand up to stop



him. “Did Campbell tell you anything else about himself that you can remember?”

Stopping in his tracks, Doc Adams thought about it and shook his head no.

“Have you checked to see if he might have left anything behind that would give us any clues?”

“I haven’t checked his room yet, but I can go up and see if he could have left anything. First I think we should go see if Nate needs my help.”

With that, they both headed over to the jail to check on poor ole Nate.

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**S**TOPPING, WILLIAM HUNCHED OVER AND placed his hands on his knees. He couldn't make it as far as he wanted to due to a bitterly cold, moonless night. Without gloves, his hands were frozen and he was miserable. Exhausted beyond belief, and struggling to breath in the cold air, "Why did I have to be dropped off here during winter?" He found himself in a heavily wooded area filled with long, slender pines, dotted with live oaks and maple trees, slowing him down even more. Feeling his head spinning, he didn't have a good sense that he was headed in the right direction. The night was lit only by the stars that shone through the canopy of trees casting dark shadows across the landscape. Still he would try to keep going north and stay well west of Charlotte, to avoid any army or Home Guard units. All his instincts told him he couldn't have made it anywhere close to the North Carolina border, which he knew to be about twenty-five miles away from Blyth.

When the sun's rays started to break over the horizon, he started to look for a place to hide out and get some rest. Stumbling upon a small, isolated farmhouse with an old, dilapidated barn behind it, he crept toward the barn and peered through an opening in the boards. It looked deserted. Unconsciously holding his breath, he tried to open the barn door making as little noise as possible. The door was stuck and when he tugged harder to open it, the hinges

made a loud screeching noise, startling an old barn owl, which in turn made William jump and let out a small shriek.

Grasping his chest and clamping his mouth shut, he became as quiet as possible, listening to see if anyone heard him. He wasn't sure if anyone still lived in the farmhouse and would come to check out what made the noise. After a few heart-stopping minutes, he silently entered the barn. Letting his eyes adjust to the darkness, he tried to look around the barn to see if it was completely deserted. It was dank and musty-smelling, but he didn't see any other movement.

Shaking his head and closing his eyes, he could envision that it had once housed horses or other livestock, but now only ghosts of a distant past. He settled in and ate the remaining food Nate had provided. He needed to get some sleep before deciding what to do next.

Collapsing against the rotting boards of the wall, he welcomed the relative warmth. He tried to cover up with the straw scattered across the barn floor, but the stench was unbearable. Even though his mind told him he was still not safe, his body screamed for rest. Eventually he drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

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While William was sleeping during the early morning hours, a small contingent of Home Guard under Captain Akers rode out of town taking the main road, which led to Gaffney and on to Charlotte. Having no idea how far William traveled overnight, they were filled with a sense of duty in finding him to bring him back to hand out their form of justice.

The unit was composed of six men and the captain. Each avoided serving in the regular army due to age, disability, or connections they had. Even though they did not serve, they still felt that they contributed to the cause by rounding up fugitive slaves and deserters from the army.

The local citizens feared the Guard, as they were ruthless in

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their actions and seemed to operate how they saw fit, with little or no control. No one dared to make any complaints or interfere, as it would appear to be unsympathetic to the cause. When the locals saw them riding up to their homes or farms, they would instinctively go inside to avoid any contact.

At one point, the small contingent of men rode up to a farmer's house to water their horses.

Letting out a shriek, the farmer's wife sprinted to gather up her children and herd them into the house while her husband defiantly confronted the group.

"What do you men need?"

Crossing his arms and narrowing his eyes, Akers looked down at the man from his horse, "We are searching for an escaped prisoner who may have headed this way."

"What does that have to do with me and my family?"

Raising his voice, Akers demanded. "Have you seen anyone passing by here that looked suspicious to you?"

"Mister, we haven't seen anyone. You and your men need to be on your way."

Akers had enough of the man's insolence. "We have authority from the government to search any place that could be hiding the fugitive! Do I need to order my men to search your home and property?"

Sagging and looking down, he muttered. "There is no one here."

Glaring at the man for effect. "Then we shall water our horses at your well and be on our way."

As the war started to turn more against the South, the more ruthless and independent these men became.

**P**RIOR TO LEAVING TOWN, CAPTAIN Akers had telegraphed ahead to the Home Guard contingent in Gaffney for them to be on the lookout for their fugitive. What Captain Akers didn't know was that William had stayed off the main road and actually went roughly north through the backcountry. Unaffected by what anyone else thought, Akers was still confident they would easily apprehend their fugitive and bring him to justice.

They trotted in a northeasterly direction. As they rode, they stopped and checked out abandoned buildings and questioned anyone they came into contact with. There was very little traffic on the road, but they still stopped everyone in the hopes that Campbell could have been spotted. No one had seen William, so they pressed on to Gaffney. Entering the small town near the North Carolina border, they sought out the commander of the local Home Guard.

Major Johnston was a serious, dark-haired, brown-eyed man who had a weathered face from all his time spent in the elements. He had a military bearing and exuded a confidence that made him more imposing. Everyone around him would naturally follow his orders. He had actually served in the regular army until he lost an arm during the battle of Fredericksburg, which was evidenced by the empty sleeve that was pinned to his uniform. Even though he was disabled, he still took his duties very seriously.

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With his shoulders back, chest out, chin high, Johnston met the small contingent at the edge of town. “We received your telegraph, and I have had my men looking for anyone that meets his description,” he told the captain.

“Sir, the fugitive indicated he was searching for his family that he had sent to stay with relatives in North Carolina,” replied Akers.

“Did he say where in North Carolina?”

“No, sir.”

The major then asked, “Is this a dangerous man we are searching for?”

“He assaulted the jailer when he escaped, and we have concerns about his story. He indicated he fought at Gettysburg and was sent home with injuries, which we were unable to confirm,” the captain answered.

“Convince me why we should commit valuable resources to find one man who may or may not be a danger to us.”

His face flushed, Captain Akers was cowed by the major’s tone, but quickly recovered his smug attitude. “Would it not be prudent for us to at least attempt to determine if he is not part of a larger scheme to disrupt our operations in preparation to meet the threat of Sherman?”

Relaxing his posture, the major indicated he would provide some of his resources to assist the captain. “But we have our own issues right now preparing for the Yankees.”

Drawing a deep breath through his nose, Akers thanked the major for his help and gathered his men to continue the search up to Charlotte.

**S**TARTLED AWAKE BY A LOUD noise, William sat up. Grimacing, he didn't know where he was. He shivered, and curled his nose as he smelled like horse manure. Looking around, he remembered he was in an old, abandoned barn. Since it was still early evening and there was some light out, he got a better view of the barn. Slowly shaking his head in disbelief, amazed it was still standing. The boards were dark and warped with age. It looked like a strong wind could bring down the whole structure. Yawning and stretching out his arms, he considered himself fortunate to get some rest and to be out of the elements.

It also brought him back to the reality he was facing. He wasn't sure what caused the noise, but it was now quiet again. Snickering to himself, he knew he would not last very long if he had to camp each night in abandoned buildings during the wintertime without any heat. William had not been a Boy Scout, nor had he learned how to camp and start a fire without matches. These would be some of the lessons he would need to learn as he went. This whole ordeal may be more than he could handle. Somehow, he would need to reach down deep and overcome every obstacle he would face.

Shielding his eyes with a hand, he could see the sun was still up over the horizon. William knew he didn't get far last night. Knowing they were probably searching for him by now, he had to come up with a better plan than walking all the way.

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Drawing from his knowledge of history, he knew he would either have to obtain a horse or somehow hitch a ride on a train. Both of these options were risky, because it could be easier to spot him on a train, and getting caught stealing a horse incurred a heavy penalty in those days. Needing to take the chance to get out of this area before they caught up with him, William would find it hard to believe he could steal a horse or sneak on a train, but these times called for desperate measures.

His biggest problem at the time was not knowing exactly where he was, or where to find a horse or a train. With a hallow feeling in his stomach, he decided to chance leaving the barn before sunset. Letting out a groan, he gathered the bag Nate had given him and slowly opened the barn door. He paused to look around to make sure it was clear. Needing to know what caused the noise that woke him, he took the chance to go to the farmhouse and look to see if anyone was home.

Slowly creeping across the yard to the small house, he peeked through a window on the side of the structure. His eyes barely peeking over the window sill, he saw a family of four sitting at their dinner table. It looked like they were saying grace and were about to eat. The family must have been very poor by the way they dressed and the meager meal that was in front of them, but William smiled seeing how closely they interacted while they ate. With tears welling up, he could see there was love in this home. It made him miss his family even more.

It was time to go. Clutching the bag with both arms, he headed off due north, judging by the direction of the setting sun. Biting his lower lip and getting a good look at his surroundings, he saw nothing but rows of long pines, and smaller hickory and red cedar trees and the ground was densely packed with heavy undergrowth that would continue to make traveling challenging. What he also didn't know was that he was miles from the nearest railroad station, and he would mostly have to go through heavily wooded areas like this, and even cross some rivers, to get to it.



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There was no point in worrying about the situation he was in. He would make do, and get as far as he could each day and let Providence take it from there.