

FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN PREQUEL—THE MISSING CHAPTERS

Coming to America

By Andy Walker



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Photo by author

Andy Walker

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FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN, THE MISSING CHAPTERS, COMING TO AMERICA

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Chapter 1

Ireland 1847

Eighteen months of choking down British soup and boiled cabbage exceeded Denis O'Neill's long-suffering grit. The potato famine had devastated most of Ireland's primary food supply, and by the fall of 1847, Denis surrendered to inevitability. With his wife, Catherine, and five-year-old son, Patrick, he began a dour quest to bend destiny toward escape from this land of lingering death.

"Catherine," Denis began, his dirt-stained face drawn thin, "with every effort we pursue punished, I'm seein' no light in any quarter. With what energy remains to us, I think we best channel it toward gettin' away from this place before it kills us. If you've got feelings otherwise, or strong objections, make 'em known now, before the idea gets too firm."

"Terror's been fillin' me heart," Catherine said, her shoulders sunken as deep as the sallow bags beneath her eyes. "I didn't want to say it out loud 'n' have the Lord thinkin' me ungrateful. But when I pray about it, I'm hearin' clear as morning dew that God's too compassionate to keep testin' us like this. It's more likely, I think, he's showing a way out if we can just see it. I'm for us all survivin', Denis, and like you, I'm seeing little sign Providence can provide that here."

"I'm sorry for delaying talk of this matter for so long," Denis said, eyes brightening. "It's so hard when it comes down to leaving our homeland. Me heart aches so much I'm not thinkin'

clear. But I'm seein' hope now, more than a minute ago, seein' we're both of a mind. We'll find a way, that's a promise. Right, Patrick?"

Patrick dozed in Catherine's lap as they sat in the shade of a massive Arbutus tree easily three stories tall. The fruit of the tree mimicked strawberries but the taste didn't. Foul as it was, it would be heaven to enjoy a single berry, but there wasn't one to be had, even in its highest reaches.

Patrick stirred, reigniting a spark in Denis's heart. He smiled at his wife—her copper hair hanging nearly to the midline of her back in hopeless tangles that diminished not a fraction of blossom from her lovely, freckled face. The stage of her features still set fire to her jade eyes, and in the hearts of both husband and son.

With new buoyancy, Denis bid their tiny confederacy on westward, where lay the great Atlantic Ocean, and somewhere across it, God willing, refuge.

* * *

Protestant members of Parliament, by some negligent oversight, left intact an obsolete liberal clause in Statute Law. Enacted during some less discriminatory period, it levied a welfare obligation upon property owners on whose lands laborers toiled in their service if, through no fault of their own, their employment expired.

Denis and Catherine both picked potatoes for such a man, who was badly annoyed that the old law hadn't been expunged by his peers long ago. While the pittance required of him had no significant bearing on his financial wellbeing, it was its principle that vexed him. Why, he wondered, must I pay those Irish peasants if they produce no income for me?

An audience with his barrister revealed a more suitable formula that would be less costly. If his grubbers would accept paid passage out of Ireland, his financial obligations would end.

The miserly Protestant overlord made an offer of passage to America, and its delivery came at a speed only Providence could entreat. As the young family lumbered, advancing upon the outskirts of Shannonbridge, they were surprised by the sound of an approaching gallop that shook the ground.

“You there!” yelled the rider. Denis stepped back to stand firm between the approaching horseman and his family.

Wasting from near starvation, Denis’s chassis was sparse, but still he exhibited a dire presence any sensible rival would cross with caution. He stood silent, waiting for whatever confrontation might follow.

“Are you Denis O’Neill of Clonony?” asked the large man wedged in the mighty Cleveland Bay’s saddle.

“I am, and who’s asking?”

“I’m Barnabus Kenworthy. I represent Lord Dowdeswell. Lord Dowdeswell wishes to ascertain if you would be amenable to passage to America in lieu of the allowance he presently provides.”

Denis turned and smiled at Catherine. “It appears God has bestowed the most expedient benediction ever.” Catherine let loose the first laugh to pass her lips in weeks, maybe months.

“We most certainly will,” Denis replied, still guarding his family, suspicious of the gentleman’s true intentions.

“Here then,” Kenworthy said as he climbed down from his mount and reached into his saddlebag, “are promissory notes that will secure your passage. If you’ll just sign this paper, our business will be concluded.”

The blemished landscape, devoid of the merest green sprout, took on new tones after Denis made his mark on the papers. Instead of sheer bleakness, its abstraction resolved in an

instant to a fine thoroughfare, and a new gait made easy haste that had seemed impossible moments ago.

* * *

They boarded the barque ship, *Creole*, at the port of Galway on Monday, January 18th. The three-master stood off a pier made from thick timbers fixed across huge floating beams that carried a narrow walkway a hundred feet out from shore. Sails furled, it waded deep in the bay, rocking gently, sloshing pier-dousing waves in alternating cadence. Men scurried about in frantic urgency, reacting to harshly barked orders from officers readying it for sail. The thick knot of fellow migrants was depressing to both sight and olfactory senses, and while the ship's aging constitution presented a fearsome vulgarity, Denis knew it was their best hope for any kind of future.

Frost clung to the gangplank, and guide ropes cut into the flesh of freezing hands wielded by the destitute, struggling for good footing up the slippery bridge.

"Catherine," Denis gently coached, "you go first and hold on to the ropes with both hands. Don't hurry. Place each hand and foot carefully. I'll be right behind you and won't let the mob push us. I've got Patrick. Ready?"

"Are you sure you can handle Patrick?" Catherine implored. "The bridge seems to be bucking like a mad horse and looks icy."

"Speaking of horses, Patrick's going to ride on my back and hang on around my neck with all his might. Aren't you, Patrick?"

"Yes, Daddy. Don't worry, Mommy, I won't let go." Denis beamed the only genuine smile of the morning hearing the fortitude in his precocious son's bearing.

"I promise you, sweetheart, there'll be no risk to this young lad today. Go ahead now, easy does it."

Slow and steady they made it aboard, but another horror awaited to fill them with new, oppressive gall.

“O’Neall family of three!” yelled one of the mates.

“Yes,” Denis answered, more resolute than his starving physique should have permitted.

“Follow me.” He was brusque and impatient. “Here’s your quarters. You share water from a bucket when it comes around. Hog it and those downstream from you won’t get any. There’ll be bread every day or two and sometimes, maybe a piece of fruit or a vegetable. Don’t get used to it.”

Denis was incredulous. “You mean this tiny space is all that’s allotted to our whole family?”

“That’s exactly what I mean. Your lord paid the bottom fee for your passage and that’s what it bought you. Three feet for you and the missus, and another nine inches for the kid. If it’s not up to your standards, you’re welcome to disembark.”

The rogue marched off to torture others with the obscene news of their confinement.

On the feces-stained deck, Denis noticed bores drilled into the weathered planks. It dawned on him they were cavities where bolts once strained to secure manacles. They were getting the same accommodations, minus the iron shackles, that kidnapped Africans had used on this same ship barely a generation ago. It was no wonder their benefactor had chosen this ship. His investment could hardly have added up to a single month of his already-stingy charity.

Her decks groaned with age and deformation as the *Creole* crashed through the north Atlantic’s steel-gray waves. The constant heaving of the ship kept the vile brew of raw sewage and vomit in her bilge always agitated, ceding a continuous gut-wrenching stench. By early February, nearly all four hundred thirty-eight Irish castaways showed some degree of disease arising from their sickening torment. Starvation, dehydration, pus-discharging wounds, scabbed

lips, and terrible bruising were now nearly universal among them. Dangerously gaunt and boiling with fever, Catherine bore deepening grades of ill health. Her stomach would no longer accept food. Denis patiently tried to spoon-feed her moistened bread or the softest morsel of fruit, but it all came back up. Her fever soon allied with devils driven from freezing, ocean-drenched winds that scoured the decks of the *Creole*, setting her body to roil as if an angry army of hornets warred beneath her clothing.

Making a fort with his own body, Denis protected Catherine the best he could. His fear of losing her put him off-balance and frayed his heart. Yet in her face, he saw the same visage he'd always seen. He smiled and she returned it, lifting his heart and deepening their bond while he nursed her burning forehead with strokes from his cool hand.

"Catherine, me angel," he whispered, "what else can I do to bring you comfort? Coddlin' seems to ease your tremble." He turned his hand to continue stroking her with its softer backside.

"I love the warmth of your body close to mine," Catherine murmured, "and the gentle touch of your hand on me face."

"I'll stay with it till you find sleep then," Denis said. "I've been prayin', asking Jesus for mercy enough to leave you here with us." His vision blurred suddenly as unexpected tears grew, and his smile melted. "It's anguish itself seein' ya suffer."

Catherine's face radiated peaceful composure despite her obvious misery. Her eyes showed their lusty green hues, and her smile danced deeper in Denis's heart than ever. "Denis, me love, you've been a saint to me all these years." Her whispered words barely carried through her parched lips. "But you know that's not how it works. Jesus has a plan, 'n' I don't think our petitions are likely to amend it. Maybe we should celebrate, knowing he'll be merciful no matter how things look through our clouded vision."

Patrick began struggling against her other side, and wriggled up until his head was even with his parents'. "Why are you shaking, Mommy?" Before she could answer, he added, "And how come you don't hold me tight like ya used to?"

Turning to face him, her smile grew bolder, and she said, "I'm surrounded by all me favorite people in the whole world, 'n' that, me little prince, brings a boil to me heart that'd cook a peck a potatoes. But Patrick, I need ya to listen to me now, okay?"

"Okay, Mommy," he said, the innocence of his youth showing in his wide eyes.

"I might be leaving soon, but if I do,"—she stopped to carefully wipe growing tears from his eyes—"I'll be going to heaven to be with Jesus. That's where you and Daddy will go someday too, so we'll all be together forever. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mommy," he said, as his legs began an awkward dance trying to intertwine with Catherine's. "But I don't want you to go live with Jesus. I want you to stay here and live with me." Tears began flooding his cheeks, and mucus ran in streams from his nose.

She turned her head to look at Denis, silently asking for help.

"Patrick," Denis said, reaching over with a rag he snatched from his pocket to wipe his son's face. "What Mommy's saying is the choice of when we go live with Jesus isn't really ours. It's God's and we must trust him. It's very hard for us to see clearly what God's bigger plan is." Denis's own tears rolled slowly down his cheeks and couldn't be stopped, even with all his might. "But it's not hard to trust that it's the best plan. Right now, the nicest thing we can do is love Mommy with all our hearts and snuggle close to her. Can you help me do that?"

"Yes, Daddy," Patrick replied, saying the words he knew his daddy wanted to hear. He buried his head in Catherine's neck and threw his tiny arms around her. His quaking body showed the most candid view of emotion among them. Years would need to gouge the velvet fields of his life a little longer before he learned the craft of masking pain.

Sandwiched between her *men*, the effect of the pitching deck settled a peaceful surrender on her face. As her eyelids sank, the windows of her consciousness closed. Denis prayed she could find comfort there. Absent her gaze, he allowed himself to crumble.

* * *

On Wednesday, February 24th, a week into her deepening coma, Catherine's eyes flew open and shined a beam of energy onto her husband's face. Denis woke as if by an urgent tapping and, looking into her dilated pupils, sensed a stark channel open between them. Emerald flecks threading the juniper mat of her irises quickened his heart as memories flooded his mind's eye with images from rosier times. He could feel tears rising as he waited for whatever gift Catherine might offer.

Her dehydration was so extreme, her lips withered to cloud-white, and her tongue looked like an ivory-colored horn. It had no dew to lend her cracked lips, and she clucked in strained efforts to form words, but Denis understood every utterance.

"Denis," she started, "this has been a bad tempest for our family, and always, you've remained me unwaverin' rock. But the Lord's calling and I must be goin' soon. You're gonna have to hold to this life more fiercely than ever, and I'm bitterly sorry for leaving you to face it alone. Patrick's been the prize of me life and I know yours too. As you raise him, remember it's part me you're raisin'. I'll be with you through him always. I pray, Denis, I pray with all me heart that brings you some comfort. Take care of our boy. Tell him I love him 'n' always will, no matter from where."

"Catherine," Denis said tenderly, brown eyes piercing from skin burned a shade redder than his scraggly beard, "your words are pure honey to me heart. I'll always see you when I look at our Patrick, and I promise ya, he'll have a good life."

“I know,” she said, fading. “I just wanted to hear it...one more time. I love you, Denis, me darlin’ man... I’d like a kiss now...to carry me home.”

A gentle kiss transported their unshakable love heavenward, in a crescendo that spun a lifetime of thoughts in seconds. At its peak, Catherine’s corporeal life took flight, and her radiant flame blew out forever. Feeling her lungs stop, Denis pulled back and gazed at her, breathing her in, knowing that even in death, she was the most stunning creature he’d ever beheld. Peace settled like a blanket of grace over her body and in Denis’s heart. But as the minutes passed, misery strangled his bliss, and his heart sank into the quicksand of despair.

* * *

When Patrick awoke, Catherine’s body lay still, her face as serene as a mill pond. Denis had closed her delicate eyelids, kissing them repeatedly. Patrick must have seen the red in his father’s eyes, sensing the loss that bound father and son. Sobbing quaked throughout his lithe body as he rode the terrifying storm marking the worst moment of his tender life. Denis hefted him over Catherine and squeezed him between them.

“Patrick, your mommy’s gone off to heaven. The last thing she said was to tell ya she loved ya dear ’n’ always, but now it’s from somewhere other than the mortal place of her flesh.”

They embraced, wept, and mourned together, often trembling as the day wore on. Denis hoped nobody would notice Catherine had passed until they made port, but within a few days, the unmistakable scent of death, even against steady winds, reached to a wide circumference.

Showing little sympathy, mates in the employ of *Creole* appeared with a tattered sheet and forced Denis and Patrick aside to collect her remains. Death was so common a sight, few even noticed, and those employed by the shipping company, being imbued with prejudice common to the times, looked down on Irish Catholics. Too weak to mount much of a protest, Denis and Patrick watched, gloomily tormented, as the men wrapped Catherine in mummy-like

sheathing. The blokes stuffed her sack with a few stones and slid her over the side, so she'd lie at the bottom of the Atlantic for eternity.

* * *

The tossing deck, vomit, and stench went on for seven more weeks, and between stretches of debilitating grief, Denis found opportunities to consider the life, country, and wife left behind, and what lay ahead. It was strange, and a little terrifying, to imagine adjusting to a new world with effectively a different language and culture and single-handedly raising Patrick.

"Patrick," Denis began one morning at dawn, his eyes fixed on his boy's, "I've been thinking about the challenges we might be facin' in our new country. I don't know much about Americans but have a feelin' we'd be wise to drop our Irish manner of speaking as much as we can. Maybe you can help me learn to jabber more like these Englishmen. I think that's closer to American talk. We'll learn better once we land. Till then, I'm thinkin' the less we speak, the less trouble we'll find."

"Okay, Daddy. I like talking like that. It's fun. I'll teach you how," Patrick said, a gleeful smile arching his face.

Rounding Cape May, the *Creole* sailed up the Delaware River, revealing their new country, shores often within a hundred yards, during thirteen more days of sluggish transit to the Port of Philadelphia. Disembarking, Denis and Patrick, practically skeletons, miraculously evaded the harassing bullies that commonly greeted immigrant ships at the port. On this Tuesday evening of April 13, fading carnation-pink cottony clouds embellished the sky overhead amid balmy temperatures.

Beaming an oversized smile, Denis felt like he'd pop from pure delight if he didn't laugh, or dance, or shout, but he settled for sharing his thoughts instead. "It seems a miracle we're finally free from the *Creole*, Son. I think we know what it feels like to be in prison now, and I

want no part of it—I'll bet you don't either." Then, after a few seconds he added, "I hope you're not havin' as much trouble walkin' as I am."

"I feel like when Mommy twirled me around and I looked up at the stars. It's kind of fun and kind of scary. It feels like the ground's movin'."

"It's our legs misbehavin' after so much time at sea. Don't worry, Son, I'm certain we'll be gettin' used to solid ground soon."

They shambled southwest, aiming for thinning civilization and a populace of green fields and towering trees they'd noticed from the decks of the *Creole* when they were approaching the port. It felt safer the farther they got from the city center, especially when footpaths took off into tall sycamore and ash forests, granting them breathtaking asylum that swam in birdsong.

Suddenly, Denis stopped and sniffed the air. "You smell that?"

"I smell something," Patrick said wide-eyed, giggling. "It makes my nose tickle. It's pretty like Mommy."

Inhaling deeply, Denis went on, "That's fresh blooming jasmine if me nose has proper memory. I've not smelled that heavenly scent in years. I guess I'd forgotten that things in the world can smell beautiful."

"Daddy, it's *my* nose." Patrick giggled.

"I don't know how long it'll take me to change such an old habit, but it sure helps that you speak the way we ought, 'n' would be a gift as fine as a goose for Christmas dinner if you'll keep reminding me when I forget."

They paused for a few seconds to stand and breathe in their new world, father and son, side by side, tall and small, luxuriating in the rich rewards riding the breeze.

Restarting their trek, they passed several encampments housing other immigrants, all appearing weary. Then, along a stretch that seemed private enough, Denis stopped.

“I need to relieve myself, Patrick. You wanna wait here or come with me? I’m just gonna walk right over to those bushes,” he said, pointing.

“I need to go too, Daddy.”

“Okay, come on with me then.”

It was only a few feet to the little bit of thicket they were aiming for, and along the way Denis stepped on something hidden in the grass. Reaching down, he discovered an apple core, mostly gnawed to its limits but with enough flesh left to ward off some of the gurgling protests calling from their starved middles. After finishing their duty, Denis used his knife to cut the core through the thickest part of the seedpod.

“Dinnertime,” Denis said, handing the prize to Patrick. “If it’s good enough for horses, it’s good enough for us.”

The sweetness and a few drops of juice tasted like heaven. And they got a lot of pleasure putting their molars to work crunching on the seeds and tough fiber. Whoever tossed that core hadn’t fasted as long as they had. Denis and Patrick left nothing, not even stickiness on their fingers. They’d find better tomorrow.

Finally, reaching a private spot not already claimed, Denis stopped and scanned it. “Well, Son, it looks like we’ve found our first night’s sanctuary. What do you say we kneel down and thank the good Lord for this fine weather and the miracle of bein’ here?”

“I wish Mommy was with us. I miss her so much,” Patrick said, as he sank to his knees in the high grass.

“Me too, Son. Tell you what, let’s pray a while and then have a talk with Mommy. Remember she’s right up there,”—he pointed at the dimming sky—“and can always hear us.”

“I been talkin’ to her a lot, Daddy, but I can’t ever hear her talkin’ back.”

“Well, Patrick, I think you just need to learn how to listen different than you’re used to. Come on, we’ll do it together.”

On their knees, they thanked God and told Catherine how much they loved and missed her. Minutes later, what seemed like a divine reply sent them tumbling into restful slumber. After so much suffering and heartbreak, the visitation Denis enjoyed brought him the forgotten feeling of serenity. He couldn’t remember from which side of consciousness he’d thanked Catherine, but trusted that dreaming or awake, she got it. Patrick swore he had the same dream. In the years to come, they often pondered the curious night aloud, wondering if somehow, they’d had a family reunion that magical night.

Chapter 2

As Denis and Patrick began settling into their new lives in Pennsylvania, off to the west, across three-quarters of a continent, a few dozen rivers, grand mountain ranges parsing vast plains and deserts, Brigham Young was birthing the Land of Zion in the Great Salt Lake Valley.

* * *

With religious zeal and an uncommon gift of persuasion, Prophet Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon Church, spent many an hour in direct consultation with God, so he claimed. He would have saved himself a good deal of trouble, not to mention his own violent end, if he'd stuck with his 1831 vision that ordained that plurality of wives was sanctioned by God, but it wasn't yet time to practice. On July 12, 1843, new instructions came from on high, and the Prophet published God's polygamist decrees.

The largely puritanical population of the US stood deeply opposed to this fiat. Joseph then took a run at the US presidency, so he could set the nation straight, but the campaign came up short. Joseph proceeded to take a bit too much leeway with a local militia which the town's folks called treason. Joseph was thrown in jail and a trial date set. But a mob formed, their anger fomenting and patience for the *scoundrel* dried up. They broke into the jail and shot him to death.

That was June 27, 1844, and it didn't take long for the new leadership of the church to realize similar hostilities were likely if they didn't find a more hospitable region in which to abide, so they packed up and headed west—way west.

Brigham Young was the church's new leader, and in July of 1847, he emerged from the mouth of a canyon on the eastern flanks of the Great Salt Lake Valley and decreed, "This is the right place," and the Mormons, also known as Latter-day Saints, began divining their "land of

Zion” with great industry. Three years later, Utah became a US Territory in part of the endless national tug-of-war to keep new states and territories balanced along slave and non-slave provinces.

Tensions between the Saints and the US government, and, in fact, many of the nation’s citizens, simmered in a stew that would erupt into blood-soaked fields in southern Utah a decade later.

Chapter 3

Among throngs of immigrants, work was scarce, but Denis was a hardy man with a child to care for. He accepted anything that resulted in a few pennies or crumbs of food. At the end of ten days cleaning, slopping, and dredging sewer pits, Denis watched as a page from the *Philadelphia Bulletin* skidded along the cobblestone street on a light breeze. Hungry for news, he seized it from the wind, and his gaze fell immediately on a picture of a great railroad locomotive. Reading the underlying article, he learned of a railroad being built to connect Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Looking heavenward, he swore an oath to God—and Catherine—that he'd be staked to that crew.

* * *

Irish immigrants were well-known as earnest laborers capable of long hours of backbreaking work, so Denis had no trouble getting hired. By 1849, they'd worked their way into the Juniata River Valley where the railroad entered a forested sanctuary. Work crews flourished along the wide river packed with brown trout. Flowing more than a hundred miles along folds south and east of the Allegheny mountains, dense forests of towering sycamore and hemlock swarmed the adjacent slopes. Vast troves of white-tailed deer, black bear, and turkeys inhabiting the landscape made easy work for the camp cooks as well as the indigenous Iroquois Indians who'd lived here for centuries.

Breaking a roadbed for tracks was onerous work requiring the felling of hundreds of trees, some with trunks as wide as ten feet, but well-fed Irishmen pushed through the charge without complaint. A few months of toil brought them to the point where they needed to begin their assault up the steep grades of the Allegheny Mountains rather than follow them at the valley's floor.

The small town of Altoona was born there, where the slopes began their resolute climb. The monumental enterprise of getting the Pennsylvania Railroad, widely known as *the Pennsy*, across and through these mountains consumed colossal investments of capital and labor. Eight years of grit completed the undertaking and by then, 1857, Altoona had grown to be a major industrial hub for the railroad.

Young Patrick was nurtured among this demographic of hard-drinking, hardworking Irish and was treated something like the team mascot. By the age of eight, he had biceps overswollen for a boy his age. He could already strip, section, and stack the logs and branches of the smaller trees felled by the older men. He'd learned to read the stream so well he knew where the trout hid. When the signs were right, he'd wade in and catch fish hiding under rocks with his bare hands. He could shoot well enough to bring dinner to camp and did so most evenings, relieving others of the duty. At ten he was chopping down trees himself, and supervisors finally recognized his contribution and put him on the payroll.

But life in these labor camps seemed a betrayal of Denis's promise of care for Patrick, and with savings in his pocket, he decided to settle in Altoona. The new town would be a perfect fit, precisely what Denis and Catherine had envisioned. And Patrick, now fifteen, had contributed in no small measure to its birth.

Denis became skilled in ironwork and had a natural ability with tools. He could fix anything that could be wheeled or otherwise hobbled to him. Patrick apprenticed under him and sometimes attended a small school where math and English were the only subjects taught. Altoona brought a kind of stability to the O'Neill dyad of which Denis had dreamed and prayed. They'd found solid footing.

Chapter 4

A party of about a hundred thirty pilgrims was passing through southern Utah near a town called Parowan in September 1857. Bound for California, they were attacked on September 7th by Paiute Indians, only the attackers were really a group of Mormon militia dressed up as Indians. They believed the trespassing party was in cahoots with federal troops and had been sent to wipe them out. A couple of the settlers who were fired upon noticed their assailants weren't Indians at all but were plainly white men.

The masquerading militiamen knew they'd been seen and that their secret was spoiled, but leaders in Parowan devised a solution. On orders from the local elders, a troop of these citizen soldiers approached the beleaguered settlers and convinced them they, the Saints, had permission from the Paiutes to escort them through the territory, peacefully, in exchange for the settlers' provisions and livestock. It was a bad deal by any measure, but the travelers were battle weary and agreed to the terms. On September 11th, 1857, the party marched through a haven known as Mountain Meadows. Commander John Higbee then turned to his men and gave the order, "Mormons, do your duty." Each Saint turned to one of the settlers nearest and killed him or her. That moment brought the end of one hundred twenty innocent lives. A few young children were left unharmed, and subsequently "adopted" by the Mormons.

* * *

Brigham Young, both president of the church and governor of the territory, held sway in all legal matters with courts of every stripe stacked with loyal church members. The Mountain Meadows Massacre brought the strain between Mormons and *gentiles* into a focus too stark to be ignored by the authorities in Washington, and it was lost on no one that the Mormons were getting a free ride to do as they pleased in their new enclave.

With a civil war brewing between the states, military resources available for detachment to Utah were meager but considered essential in the brewing disunion in Utah's territory. An outfit composed mostly of out-of-luck miners, known as the Third California Volunteers, was assigned the job. Colonel Patrick E. Connor, Irish enough to be born on St. Patrick's Day, commanded the regiment and, like his men, engaged a keen interest in precious metals. Part of the volunteers' purpose was to guard the mail routes into and out of the Great Salt Lake Valley, and part was to keep an eye on the Saints. It was feared the Mormons might be inclined to join the secessionists, and Connor's job was to ensure they didn't. It was also believed that the area around Salt Lake City might be rife with valuable minerals whose discovery by troops loyal to the United States could bring rich capital to help finance the war.

Connor and his men were finding little to do in their supervisory duty with the Saints on mostly good behavior. Hearing of the glorious battles being fought back east got gas for battle coursing their blood streams.

Increasingly bloody skirmishes were being waged between white settlers and the Shoshone tribes populating an area near the Cache Valley, about a hundred miles north of Salt Lake. Obstinate pestering from the restless colonel got the ex-miners the job of settling the bloody conflicts—an assignment sure to sate their brutal yearnings. On the morning of January 29, 1863, mist from the Bear River floated skyward in the minus twenty-degree air overlaying the peaceful meadows. Connor's solders infiltrated the area and massacred about two hundred fighters, but four hundred ninety-three Shoshone died in the purge, mostly women and children. When the troops returned to Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City, the edgy men sought other adventures, and looking for precious metals dovetailed with most of their backgrounds while accomplishing another of Washington's ambitions.

Chapter 5

In 1863, Patrick waded into his twenty-first year while Denis was stricken with lung cancer. Treatments were mostly herbal and spiritual then with surgery possible only for those with large, easily harvested tumors, and that was so painful, given the lack of anesthesia, few survived.

While Denis's suffering was relatively short—a few months—he rarely complained, instead celebrating the fact that soon, he'd be reunited with Catherine. Patrick, a tough young man undaunted by suffering and death, which he'd experienced at close range from his earliest memories, could barely endure the suffering of his beloved father. On June 21st that year, the summer solstice, Patrick leaned from his creaking chair whose glue joints failed some years earlier, washing his father's sweat-drenched forehead with a wet cloth. Denis moaned in a mostly comatose state on his horsehair mattress, still ravaged by coughing fits that produced a disturbing amount of blood. The stench of body odor and sickness riddled the room.

In an unexpected moment of calm, Denis tilted his head toward Patrick, his eyes red and puffy, and whispered, hoarse from his ruined throat, "Patrick, my strapping lad—for men startin' out as us, it seems we've done fine." A coughing fit spattered more blood down Denis's chin onto his crimson-soaked union suit that had given him warmth from ankle to neck for years. A moment later, his thoughts recrystallized. "We've made a good start, and now, you're braced to move forward into your destiny with a strong body and moral standing. I know"—he coughed again—"I didn't give you the Catholic upbringing I hoped to, but circumstances being what they were..."

Clearing his throat, he went on, "I've been visiting with your mum lately. Surely you know she and I will be joining each other soon, but I want you to know, I'm happy for it. It's high

time I climb out of this wasted old body. In case I haven't mentioned it enough, I'm proud of you. It's the gift of my life to have raised you, Son. Now give me your hand."

Squeezing with a surprising strength for a man riddled as he was, he looked his son squarely in his eyes with the same honesty Patrick had known for a lifetime and quietly continued. "I'm putting no burden of expectation on you, Son. I know you're smart and tough, and I have no doubt you'll do plenty to honor the O'Neall name. Don't ever forget the blessing of this life, Patrick,"—he wheezed with a death rattle that rose from his lungs—"and stop at nothing to make it as special as you. You deserve nothing less."

Sitting quietly near a far wall, reading his Bible, Father Fitzsimmons waited, offering as much privacy as the small confine allowed. Alerted to Denis's looming demise, he had arrived earlier to attend to God's work in these precious, final hours.

Denis's raspy breath shallowed, and Patrick looked toward the priest who rose and joined them bedside. Denis's confession was heard earlier to ease his burden at the end. Now, leaning over his ravaged body, Father Fitzsimmons began the final phases of the last rites triune, a ritual the holy man knew too well. Beseeching God in the melodic Latin they so cherished, Father Fitzsimmons intoned extreme unction.

"Per istam sanctam unctionem..."

Then a tranquil moment interrupted time's immutable march as Denis, eyes glistening, whispered a lilting verse containing only one final note—"Catherine."

His chest sank with a final volume of poorly processed air, leaving his maimed lungs. Patrick vaguely remembered how he looked when they arrived in America, and thought his wasted frame looked similar, but in his mind, his father was still the strong man he'd been most of his life. Patrick folded his father's arms across his stomach and laid his head on Denis's chest, quiet for the first time since the cancer'd taken up residence months before. He prayed and

cried through the evening, feeling no need to attend to anything but the sanctity of the love they'd shared for a lifetime.

Tenderly laying a palm on Patrick's shoulder, Fitzsimmons straightened himself and quietly left.

* * *

A collection of friends from the small community gathered the following day as Fitzsimmons offered an uplifting service at Denis's graveside. He concluded with Psalm 23.

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters..."

The assemblage, mostly compatriots, looked on, some shedding tears, as the priest finished the requiem. Folks leaving patted Patrick on the back, and some shook his hand, but few words were spoken.

After everyone but the cemetery's workers were gone, Patrick asked for a shovel and joined the work party dropping rich, Pennsylvania soil onto his father's unadorned pine coffin. When the grave was filled and the others retired, he sat alone, patting and smoothing the reddish-brown earth, contemplating life and the endless cycles that nurture it. Tears pushed through the soil, smudging his cheeks while he watched the sun sink below the endless, forested horizon. The sky dimmed through a colorful wheel of alpenglow shades, finally blending with darkness.

Chapter 6

At the south boundary of the Salt Lake Valley, a glacier-cut canyon, with immense granite walls, revealed a place where tectonic plates collided, pushing sedimentary rock of dark rust and wood-ash grays steeply upward. Its name derived from the cottonwood trees that line the chasm's stream, but "Little Cottonwood" belied the actual coniferous flora that populated most of its rocky crags.

Signs fancied by prospectors abounded in the geologic folds spreading both vertically and along the uppermost few miles of the great canyon, harbingers few missed—nor did Becky Houser.

In June 1864, not quite summer in these soaring elevations, Becky accompanied a group of picnickers to the upper reaches of Little Cottonwood canyon. Settling on a south-facing slope put the festive troop on dry ground where sprouting new growth of yarrow and silvery lupine inched into the rarefied air. The surface was laced with scree, chipped for millennia from the cliff bands, christening much of the burnt-orange and slate-gray ridge above. New and boundless sprigs of chartreuse-green grass sprouted against contrasting slivers of brilliant white snow preserved in the shadowy folds of the terrain's contours.

Dr. Theodore Houser, Connor's personal surgeon, was engaged in Salt Lake with a medical staff meeting so was unable to attend. His wife, Becky, however, was unencumbered and wouldn't miss such leisure among her friends for anything.

"Minnie," Becky said to her close friend as the other picnickers chattered, "I'm afraid my legs are beginning to pain me. Teddy tells me it's not a worrisome condition and all I need to do for relief is walk and the spasms will melt away. I'm going to take a walk up toward that high ridge." She pointed north. "The hillside looks steep, and I don't see any game trails, but I'm

curious to see what's up there, so that's where I'm going. I'll take it slow. Lord knows what Teddy would say if I fell and injured myself," she quipped, blue eyes brightening in mirth. "After all, distance isn't my goal; relief is. Please tell the others I'll be back soon if anyone manages to notice I'm missing."

"All right," Minnie said, worry studding her voice, "but please be careful. When do you think you'll be back?"

"Within an hour I'm sure, long before this party begins unwinding." Becky rose with a couple of audible pops from her kinked structure, bent forward to stretch her back and hamstrings, and began her trek.

Being something of a rockhound, she always kept an eye open for curious nuggets. After a few minutes, an unusual dark gray stone snared her attention, and she reached down to pick it up. Examining it, she believed she'd found silver-bearing quartz, and, in fact, she had. In that moment, silver was discovered in the Wasatch range for the first time.

* * *

Rich veins lacing the gulches and cliffs high in the canyon brought miners and the industry to support and house them. During the ensuing decades they honeycombed the substrata, scrubbing rich ore from deep tunnels. Their burrows were propped up with timber, voraciously harvested from the mountainsides, and the collective acreage upon whose flanks all this industry lavished became a town called Alta. By the mid 1870s, Alta's summertime population numbered in the thousands as men unremittingly dug for ore.

Chapter 7

In the midsummer of 1863, as Patrick was gathering goods from Len's mercantile, he couldn't help noticing a woman with a mane of curly auburn hair tied in a thick ponytail that trailed halfway down her back. Light pinkish freckles peppered her face, and her slender nose perched softly above pouty lips. Her green eyes matched his memory of his mother's, and in that sacred moment, Patrick felt certain he'd found his bride.

Acting before fear and insecurity routed his nerve, he spoke, "Good mornin', ma'am. I believe you're new here. My name's Patrick O'Neall." He knew he was blushing but couldn't stop himself. "I've lived here most'a my life and would be honored to help you settle if settlin's your aim. Would you be so charitable as to share your name?"

"My name, Mister O'Neall, would be none of your business. Are you always so bold in your acquaintance making?"

"No, ma'am," he stammered, "and I'm sorry for the trouble. I meant no disrespect." Patrick picked up his groceries and fled. Abashed, he needed time to recover from his blunder. Len Zajac had overheard the encounter and offered his thoughts to the young lady as she settled her account.

"Patrick's a quiet man," Len said. "He came to town with his father laying tracks for the Pennsylvania. A young boy when he arrived, he lost his mother crossing the Atlantic, and his father died a hard death only a few weeks ago. He's also a good man."

* * *

Immediately west of Howard Street stood a small, light-salmon-colored brick building. The day following Fiona's brush with Patrick, Sister Gabriela noticed her slumped over a grave in the cemetery across the street. After a long visit with the dearly departed, Fiona, bearing

qualities of someone in a trance, drifted north past the building where Mary Gabriela stood in quiet observance.

“Good day, my child.”

“Hello, Sister,” Fiona replied quietly.

“I’ve seen you in the cemetery often. I’m sorry for your loss but happy for the soul of your companion who enjoys such frequent visitation.”

“Thank you, Sister..? I’m sorry I don’t know your name. I’m Fiona Doyle. My husband, Shane, lies in the cemetery.”

“No, Fiona, it’s me that’s sorry, both for your loss and not properly introducing myself. I’m Sister Gabriela, principal of this small schoolhouse.”

“I’m pleased to meet you, Sister Gabriela. I’m just on my way to the mercantile.”

“May I ask if you’ve got somewhere to stay?”

“I do, but it’s a hotel on 11th Street that’s draining my funds quickly. I’m hoping to find less costly lodging soon.”

“Well, Fiona Doyle, the Lord seems to be in a prayer-answering mood today. I’m seeking help right here. I need someone who can help with cleaning and running errands for the school. I have so little time for the round but stubbornly persistent vacancies in my cupboards. I could offer you a mattress in the basement in exchange for such service.”

“Praise the Lord, yes, by all means, yes. When may I begin?”

“Right now. You said you’re on your way to Len’s, right? I could give you a small list of items we need today. If you could bring those, I’d be happy to send one of our pupils to help move your things from the Continental. Is that where you’re staying?”

“Yes again, and that would be heavenly.”

“Tell Len you’re working for me. He’ll put the groceries on the school’s account, and please, include whatever supplies you still need on the bill. Let me write out that list and you can be on your way.”

Patrick spotted her walking west along 12th Avenue. Catching his glance, she cast a tentative look toward him. She was carrying a wooden box with onion leaves and carrot fronds jutting above its sides. Irresistibly, he smiled, feeling heat rise in his ears, and she smiled back. He crossed the street, and without hesitation she said, “Fiona’s my name, and I’m sorry to have been so short with you at the mercantile. It’s a hard world for a single woman, and I’ve had more than my share of trouble lately. I’ve been placed here by the Lord’s will, it seems. Now I’m tasked to determine for what purpose. Len made a strong case for your decency.”

“May I?” Patrick asked as he positioned a sack of apples above her groceries.

“I suppose,” she replied, surprise knitting her forehead.

“Good, now please,”—he reached for the box—“if you’ll allow me your company, I’ll carry your cargo.”

“But you were headin’ the other way. Don’t you need to be somewhere?”

“Work’s three blocks behind us. I work as a mechanic on the trains. It’s why my hands are always so filthy. I was just returning from lunch, but I’m early.”

Fiona smiled and began walking west again, Patrick beside her.

“What’s brought you to this wee nook in the mountains of Pennsylvania, Fiona?”

She hesitated and looked up, eyes scanning the sky. She must have felt a mountain of trust in Patrick to continue as she did.

“I landed at the port a month ago with my husband, Shane.”

A long pause followed while Patrick remained silent, attentive.

"We inherited what our parents left behind," Fiona said. "They were saving to make the crossing, but both Shane's mum 'n' dad died in Loughrea. His dad fell to typhus and his mum, not a year later, died from dysentery. My own father got laid low by the Grip. Pneumonia took his soul just before we set sail in April. It seemed impossible they all passed within a couple of years of one another, but it's said the wasting from the famine weakened our people. Shane and I set sail with my mum on April 19, having enough money for tickets and a dowry to tide us into our new life in America. We had little choice in sailing ports and took the first available ship. We felt we had to hurry out before we all died of Ireland."

"My Lord, Fiona, your heart must barely be holding together."

Another long silence threatened, but again Patrick held his tongue, musing on his own losses.

"There's more. We'll turn here on Howard," she directed, nodding to her left. "I'm afraid my faith has been tested mightily and too often in this migration. Sometimes I'm not even sure I can forgive God for all the tragedy laid in my path."

With that declaration, her voice found the edge of anger, but she trailed off into silence again, then softly continued. "Along a few weeks at sea, my mother got sick with the chills. Her fever was as high as any I ever felt, and yet she shivered fiercely head to toe. Eleven days later, she died. They took her body from us, and while we never saw it, we were told they dropped her over the side."

The parallel history of their mothers' passing astonished Patrick. "We've both been orphaned by the scourges of our times," he said. "My own mother lies beneath the same ocean as yours. Mine's near an identical story."

Fiona's enormous eyes connected with Patrick's in that startling moment, then she continued. "Mine's not ended quite, I'm afraid. Shane went to work for the Pennsy shortly after

we landed and seemed to be settling okay with the customs and requirements of the company. During his first week at work, they decided to move us here, to Altoona. A few hours out from the port, the train stopped. Shane jumped off to see what the trouble was. A tree'd fallen across the tracks, so Shane found an axe in one of the cars and was the first man to take a swing at it. Not one to wait for orders when work needed doing, his eagerness was answered with a lightning-fast strike of a serpent coiled among the boughs. They said it was a big timber rattlesnake. It sunk its poisonous bite directly into Shane's neck and he was dead before I got to him. That was the end of May. A few people on the train collected some money, feeling sad for my loss and knowing I was now alone. Some other men carried Shane's body back to a freight car and took him to Mr. William Fox's office here in Altoona once we arrived. He's the coroner."

"I know Mr. Fox. We've had recent business."

"Yes, I'm so sorry, Patrick." She touched his arm. "Mr. Zajac told me of your father's recent passing."

The sound of their worn leather soles on the brick sidewalk was all that broke their otherwise silent contemplation. They reached the end of Howard Ave. which tee'd into 13th. Across the wide avenue was Altoona's cemetery, a place where both Fiona and Patrick spent a good deal of time. They were surprised they'd never noticed each other before.

* * *

Setting the box on the school's steps, Patrick lifted out his apples. Handing Fiona the best one brought from her hand a light brushing of her soft fingers along his fleshy palm, a touch *accidentally* delayed as their eyes met a little longer than God-fearing folks might sustain in purely platonic relations. Fiona blushed as Patrick, heart afire and fearing he'd do something to wreck the moment, wished her good day and hurried off to work.

* * *

On September 15th, 1863, Patrick and Fiona had another opportunity to enlist the services of Father Fitzsimmons. This time in jubilant celebration of their wedding.

Chapter 8

The Pacific Railway Act was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in midsummer in 1862. There was tremendous incentive to implement any act that might help to unite the fractured states. This was a solid furtherance of commerce strengthening the country and its economy.

As war raged in the east, the Central Pacific Railroad, free from the Civil War, was able to begin laying track out of Sacramento in 1863. The Union Pacific's charter started from Omaha, Nebraska. While Nebraska itself was not involved in the Civil War per se, it sent its military forces to fight for the Union, leaving the territory unprotected from Indians. Volunteer brigades were assembled and that left a void of able-bodied men to work for the railroad. It wasn't until July of 1865, two months after the war ended, that the Union Pacific started work.

By the end of 1867, the railroad had reached Cheyenne in Wyoming territory with five hundred miles of track behind. At an elevation over six thousand feet above sea level, and two thousand more to climb in the next thirty miles, managers decided on a hiatus in the new town to pass the brutal winter ahead. This intermission evoked the town's rise from the prairie as the workforce needed accommodations and provisions and such vacuums don't exist for long in the belly of capitalism. Furthermore, the locomotives needed constant care to keep them serviceable through the subzero winter, so acceptable maintenance shelters had to be constructed in which the work could be accomplished.

* * *

As the Civil War had boiled into bloody skirmishing, government authorities had exempted certain critical occupations from the fighting. Patrick had become something of a

legend in his ability to keep the trains moving, which were among the most critical ingredients servicing the war. Patrick was ordered by the state department to stay put in his position.

At 3:16 a.m. on the last day of 1864, Fiona gave birth to the first and only child she'd ever bear. With no explanation for her secondary infertility, she never again conceived. But the birth of Kevin, a healthy seven-pound, five-ounce boy, was miracle enough for the new O'Neall family. Sometimes questioning God's plan, they wondered at the circumstances barring an extended family, but having each suffered such a compilation of tragedies in their earlier lives, they felt any blessings bestowed were reward enough and did not bemoan their lot. After all, they'd been spared the horrors of front-line military engagement in the war, and Kevin was born without defect. There was plenty for which to be grateful.

* * *

Samuel Reed, an engineer famed for his work on the Erie Canal, was recruited by the Union Pacific in 1864 to survey the rail's route across the Rocky Mountains. By the time tracks knitted the landscape as far as Wyoming, three years had passed. Knowing of the difficulties ahead with both weather and elevation, he sought out the best locomotive mechanics in the industry, and Patrick's name surfaced atop the list. He made a special trip to Altoona to confer with the technician.

"Hey, Micky,"—a nickname Tanner Davidson, Patrick's boss, lightheartedly used with his star mechanic—"that bigwig from the Union Pacific they wired us about is here, and I'll be dadgummed if he's not here to see you. He's waiting in my office."

Patrick washed up the best he could without keeping his superior and this big shot waiting too long. He entered Mr. Davidson's plush office with some trepidation. What on earth could bring such a highfalutin railroad man to see him?

"Patrick O'Neall?" Mr. Reed asked, with an outstretched hand.

“Yessir, I’m Patrick, and I’m afraid my hands are a greasy mess you’d probably best avoid.”

“Nonsense! Let me shake the hand of the finest mechanic in the business.” He reached farther, expecting a return gesture, which he got. “Please sit, Patrick. May I call you Patrick?”

“Of course. Ya can call me anything you want, sir,” Patrick said nervously as he lowered onto the polished walnut seat indicated by the gentleman.

“Please call me Sam. I’m here to talk to you about a matter of vital importance to the nation. Your work for the Pennsy served the war effort well, but that war’s over. And now your country’s calling again if you’re willing.”

“I’m always willin’ to stand with my country. What can I do to be of service?”

“I’m sure you’re aware of the race to complete the Transcontinental Railroad. There’s immense reward that’ll accompany the driving of that final spike, both economically and in rebuilding a sense of national unity. Presently, our efforts are at a standstill about fifteen hundred miles west of here at a town called Cheyenne in the Wyoming territory. We’re stuck because the high elevation winter weather is too severe for us to effectively continue. Adding to our difficulties is the Rocky Mountain range that we must surmount where the elevations and weather will be even worse. I need a man with your skills to keep my locomotives operating through the winter and then stay with the track-laying party next spring to make sure we keep running smoothly as the elevations increase above eight thousand feet. You were personally recommended by Frank Thompson. Do you remember Frank?”

“Like he was here yesterday. A fine man I’d report to any who’d listen. Brilliant mechanic and extraordinary engineer. We worked together here for a couple of years. Where’s he gone off to?”

“He speaks in exactly the same tones about you and the time he apprenticed here under you. Frank’s now the Superintendent of the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad.”

A long, low whistle sang from Patrick’s lips, eyebrows raising as he leaned forward looking directly at Sam. “Well, for the love of Jesus, he’s done a mighty fine job of it I’d say.”

“Yes, he has. And with his supreme recommendation, I’ve taken the liberty of drafting a letter to J. Edgar Thompson to negotiate hiring you away. Mr. Thompson didn’t become the president of your company being half-witted. He recognizes the country’s needs above his own and generously granted permission for your release if you agree to this. There’d be a lot resting on your shoulders, but we believe you’d be the best man for the job. I’m authorized to offer quite an increase in benefits if you’ll agree to the post. Does this interest you?”

“It certainly does, Mister...sorry, Sam. But I’m a family man with a wife and young child, and we’re soundly settled here where my boy’ll begin enjoyin’ the social and educational benefits of school in a few short years.”

“I’m aware of your family circumstances. I’m not asking you to sacrifice the good fortune of your family. I’ve made arrangements for comfortable housing and tutors for your son should he come of school age before the project’s completed. In addition to a generous raise, you’ll be granted a homesteading allowance of up to a section of land anywhere along the UP line after the transcon’s complete.”

Patrick enjoyed a modest lifestyle and looked always for opportunity to make better for his small family. This was an opportunity that appeared to offer rewards so rich he thought God himself must be offering to make amends for the difficult beginnings he and Fiona had struggled through. Bowled over and completely unused to much luck, Patrick could barely keep his bearings.

“Mr. Reed, Sam, in all my life I’ve never had such a fine offer, and I’d like to accept it here, on the spot. But I have to confer with Fiona before I can grant a proper answer. Would that be acceptable to you?”

“Not only acceptable but honorable. Go home and speak to your wife. I’m going to lunch and will be back here in a couple of hours. Can we meet again at, say, three o’clock, right here? And Patrick, feel free to bring your family along.”

“We’ll be here. Thank you,” Patrick said, offering his hand again.

When Patrick explained it all to Fiona, she was so delighted she jumped into his strong arms and wrapped him in a bear hug, dizzy with jubilant anticipation.

“What about Indians? Will it be safe for us and little Kevin?”

“I’m certain that detail’s been looked after, but you can ask for yerself. He’s invited all of us to a meeting at three.”

* * *

At 8:30 in the morning of February 13th, 1868, the O’Nealls boarded Pennsy’s No. 49 to Pittsburgh, then changed to Pittsburgh and Fort Wayne’s 826 to Chicago. The Chicago and Northwestern’s No. 337 steamed them into Council Bluffs, Iowa, at 5:28 p.m., a blistering fifty-eight hours all the way from Altoona. It was the first time either could remember experiencing a time zone change. The railroad had sliced the trip by at least a factor of five from what it was only a few years earlier and improved the likelihood of surviving it by even larger margins.

Porters met them with wagons to carry them and their belongings to the ferry that crossed the Missouri every four hours, more frequently when passenger trains arrived. Docking on the Nebraska side of the big river, they were again met and taken to a hotel for the night in Omaha. True to his word, Sam Reed had meticulously planned their itinerary, crafting for the O’Nealls a worldly adventure far beyond their dreams.

In the morning they boarded their final train car, on the line now employing Patrick, the Union Pacific, all the way to Cheyenne, and in less than twenty-four hours, they arrived at their new, frigid home.

* * *

Ushered to a hotel in Cheyenne where comforts and conveniences exceeded any they'd ever known, the family thrived. The environment couldn't have been more foreign, with a tenth the humidity they were used to and an appreciable decrement in oxygen available to feed their lungs. The cold blizzard winds brought all snowfall sideways, and there wasn't another human settlement closer than several days on horseback. Yet indelible smiles plastered their faces, portraying startling exhilaration that gripped each novel moment of their new lives.

Patrick proved to be exactly the asset the railroad had bargained for. During the balance of winter, he attended to multiple injuries the locomotives suffered during their tortured service. As temperatures warmed and sagebrush turned spring green, he had them primed to endure an onerous summer's industry. The rough landscape ahead would repeatedly test the limits of man and machine as they laid for Utah.

Chapter 9

After the railroad's completion in 1869, and in accordance with Mr. Reed's pact, Patrick staked claim to a section of land on the western flanks of the Wasatch mountains, north of Ogden. The family settled their six-hundred-forty-acre prize six years after a "purging" of Indians in the vicinity. Nearly the entire tribe of Idaho Shoshone lost their lives in Connor's blitzkrieg, only a hundred miles northwest of the O'Neill homestead. Fiona admitted her worries for their safety were no longer a concern.

Robust crops of wheat, barley, corn, and watermelon, plus an apple orchard, sprang from their fertile soil during most years. When drought ravaged a growing season, they survived on stores they cached in outbuildings, and could normally count on local wildlife to fill their meat lockers. With a railroad depot just twenty miles south, imports were always available if times got too tough.

By his late teens, Kevin's indulgence of farm life was waning. Patrick and Fiona were fond of the quiet life and were about to expand their enterprise to include livestock. Together they'd fenced in a cow pasture, built some hog pens, and erected a chicken coop. It was paradise for the senior O'Nealls, but for Kevin, it was becoming a prison.

Around him, the vast reaches of territory and opportunity—of which he was confident and capable—abounded in limitless profusion, and Kevin's need to venture was growing faster than spring corn. He loved his parents with a fierceness few possessed. Bred from a lifetime of careful nurturing, like that they continuously invested in their own matrimony and dominion, Kevin knew allegiance and incumbency. But that debt was paid in full, and his obligations to his own path, tenets instilled in him from his earliest memories, needed to be faced.

He knew he'd need to corral all the fearlessness he'd ever rooted to do what must be done. *Breathe deep, man. The time has come.*

Acknowledgements

As with the main part of this book, I owe a deep debt of gratitude to my writers' group who kindly, patiently, and generously helped guide this story's unfolding: Sherri Peterson Curtis, Linda Orvis, Ericka Prechtel, Jeff Lowder, Rich Casper, and David Tippetts. And again, I single out its leader—my friend and mentor— Karla M Jay, for plowing through this several times, and always giving encouragement and valuable tips.

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These few chapters did not escape the scrutiny of my amazing editors, Ann Suhs and Ann Riza of Happily Editing Anns. I'm always gobsmacked by the sheer magnitude of grammar, punctuation, timelines, and persuasive posture that would go afoul were it not for them. They earn my highest accolades every time they pry between the covers of anything I write.

Author's Note

The history in these chapters is accurate, but the characters, except as noted below, are fictional. The Creole was a real barque three-master that sailed between Galway, Ireland, and the Port of Philadelphia near the dates of the O'Nealls' journey.

Brigham Young and Joseph Smith are real characters and accurately portrayed. The Mountain Meadow Massacre is told with as much historical accuracy as my research allowed.

Colonel Patrick E. Connor is a real person whose exploits in both Indian battle and command responsibilities is accurately portrayed.

Dr. Theodore Houser, and his wife, Becky, are real people and, while there are numerous accounts of who first discovered silver at Alta, this one is as likely to be accurate as the others, as far as my research could conclude.

The number of deaths from disease during the period around 1850 is not far-fetched in this story's reckoning. The Potato Famine took a devastating toll on Ireland's population killing about a million from starvation and related illness, with another million emigrating to other countries. That left a deficit of nearly a quarter of the population from the country's pre-famine numbers.

The Union Pacific's hiatus at Cheyenne is real though, of course, Patrick's recruitment to keep the trains moving is made up. Samuel Reed, Frank Thompson, and J. Edgar Thompson are all real characters whose positions were accurately told. I'd have enlisted a little more creativity in naming the Thompsons were it otherwise.

Author Bio

Andy lives in the mountains east of Salt Lake City with his wife, Marcia. He grew up on a ski slope there, then spent twenty-five years away chasing dreams that netted twenty-two moves before finding his happy place right where he left it, at home. When not writing, he can be found plying the slopes of his beloved Alta, gliding around the ice aspiring to become some modest version of a figure skater, or trying not to break any more bones on his mountain bike.



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