

PART 1

Chapter one.

The Beginning.

Dense clouds of cigarette smoke hung in the air as men piled around the bar tables.

“Another round for the crowd!” bellowed Mister Cleavland.

“Ahhh *shucks* Mister Cleveland,” another man said bashfully. “I’m as chipper as a jaybird, the way you keep treatin us!”

The crowd was drunk and cheering, clinking beer bottles against one another with a sense of unequivocal satisfaction.

Although they were not satisfied,...

Every Saturday, beginning at ten at night, the bar was inevitably filled with people, their little sums of gold being spent on liquor, smoke and bets.

Although they always regretted it in the morning as that was when their wife’s would shriek at their useless loss of money.

“The bar is the *only* place a guy can go to cheer up in this god-forsaken town!” Bart Abner the blacksmith used to say. Many townsfolk would scowl at the loudness of the bar at night, but they understood the need for it. They understood the desire to get drunk.

This, my friends, was West Town. The only town in the west that *didn’t* have a cowboy to solve their troubles. It consisted of worn out people, fighting day by day against the evasive heat, dust and sand. Many of the goings on in the town were boring day-to-day sort of things. The daily chores consisted of caring for livestock, cleaning out barns and houses of grime and dust, and of course purchasing food and wine from the market. (even as the butcher was raising the prices of his meats.)

Some people worked in the mines, worked hotels, gunshops, saloons,....

Most days people strolled down the dusty roads, sunburned and dirty, with boring tasks on their minds. The young children didn’t have much play time as their parents desperately needed work to be done. After all, the town was barren and starved. It wasn’t much fun for an adult, let alone a child.

The town had problems for sure, but the worst one of all was deadly, almost unspeakable.

West Town had an enemy, an enemy that repeatedly shut off their trade routes, took all the good food and resources a town could need, plus more. That town was simply known as East Town. (Although some people called it something more vulgar.)

East Town was large, rich and powerful. The mayor of East Town, Mayor Zane, lived in what most would consider a mini mansion constructed by the hands of his minions.

“East Town makes me *sick!*” Lady Abigale, who owned a dress shop hissed. “They are so rich and *spoiled*, and they give *nothing* to us people in West Town!”

Despite the two towns' differences, they had lived in somewhat harmony. That was until August of 1868, the year the violence all began.

One of the gangs from East Town had raided West Town. They looted stores, burned buildings, there was even a murder of two innocent individuals.

Mayor Zane claimed he was deeply sorry for the violence caused by the gangs.

“Inexcusable!” He exclaimed. “The atrocities caused by this gang will *not* go without punishment! I will *personally* make sure that West Town gets justice, especially since they have no *real* defense of their own...”

The passive aggressiveness of the speech was enough to make the two towns divide *completely*. Since then, West Town and East Town were mortal enemies with no compromise between them.

Chapter two.

The Mallet

September 4th, 1884. The heat of West Town was slowly cooling as the fall months approached, however there was still a warmness in the breeze. The bars were relatively empty that day, with some people trickling in and out for a shot or two of whisky.

Cash, who was sixteen, liked to stop by a few times. Although he was too young to drink, he liked to listen in on the happenings of the town. Nothing new however. *Nothing is ever new around here.* Cash mumbled.

He never wanted to leave West Town so badly. He had lived there all of his days, but never felt a real connection to the place, or to the people.

Maybe things would have been different if his parents were still around.

Cash lived with his grandfather, a man with a long history of hard work and sternness. They lived in a small house bout' a quarter of the way from the marketplace. A house built by his great grandfather when they moved to West Town, quite soon after the westward expansion. His

grandfather, more commonly known as Dale, spent much of his day working on the house and the farm, which he made Cash do as well.

Dale was a worker. He didn't take pride in small talk, games or absurdity. Many of the townspeople said things like,...

"Ol' Dale is such a dry, smart alec, I bet he grits his teeth like he could bite the *sights* off a' six gun!"

Dale didn't take offense to these terms though, he simply had no interest in what others had to say. He did, however, take a great deal of interest in what his grandson Cash did in his life and felt the moral duty to dictate to him in every way he could. At least that's how Cash felt.

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"Hey kid!" The bartender began. "Would ya care for a shot of whisky? I won't tell nobody if you have a little somethin."

Cash smiled and stood up from the tall bar stool. He was reading the newspaper (*The Daily Westworld*) like he always did. Nothing new, of course.

"No thanks." He said coolly. "I do appreciate it though. I'll see you around."

The bartender nodded as he carried beer barrels across the room.

"Be careful in the heat out there kid, make sure to wear yer' hat!"

Cash pushed a forced smile as he walked across the saloon floor. With his newspaper in his right hand, he walked through the swinging saloon doors and into the sunlight of the town.

He stood for a moment, taking in the atmosphere. It was an average day in West Town. He heard the sounds of repetitive clinking as the blacksmith forged a creation. Women with small children crossed the dusty road, potato sacks in their arms and hard looks on their faces.

As he made his way down the dusty street, he quickly remembered that his grandfather Dale needed a new mallet from the hardware store. *Hopefully it's a reasonable price*, he thought as he entered the shop.

Cash reluctantly entered the old place, the dusty floorboards creaking beneath his feet.

“Well hi Cashy-boy!” Exclaimed the cashier. A pink faced lady ran up to him. She was a middle aged widow named Meena. “What can I do for you?”

“Do you happen to have any mallets?” Cash asked unenthusiastically. Meena’s smile dropped.

“Is ol Dale making you work again?”

Cash sighed at that inquiry. It was no secret to the townspeople that Cash and his grandfather didn’t get along too well.

“I suppose he is.” Cash said shortly. Meena frowned and went behind the counter to grab a mallet, her long auburn dress trailing behind her.

“You know,” She began. “-you guys should really take a day off. It’s almost a constant thing, Dale makin’ you work on his ol’ house and farm. He’s takin’ advantage of you Cash, and you know it.” She sighed. Cash agreed with her. But he knew that wouldn’t be happening.

“Mallet’s two dollars.”

Cash’s eyes widened. “Two dollars?” He asked.

Meena nodded sadly. “Things have been goin’ up in price Cash, ever since East Town cut off more of our supply routes.”

She leaned in as to tell a secret.

“You know, things are getting scarcer to find. I don’ know how I get by with this old shop of mine.” She sighed somberly.

Cash was full of anger at that very moment. He detested East Town. He detested the unfairness of it all, that they had good food, water and resources and that West Town was left without.

“Cash,” Meena began, her voice soft and quiet. “I’ll let ya have it for free, but you gotta promise me one thing.”

Cash’s face softened as he listened to her speak.

“Promise me you’ll find a way to get out of this town. Save up, go somewhere with opportunity. Ain’t nothing happening here but trouble.”

Cash smiled at Meena. A warm, understanding smile. Meena was always kind to him, almost like a mother would. He supposed not everyone in the town was cold hearted.

“That’s been my plan ever since, ever since,..” He stopped. Meena seemed to understand.

“Take the mallet Cash. Remember what I told you.”

Meena placed the mallet into Cash’s hands and walked into the back of the store. She was whistling a soft tune as she went. Within an instant, Cash grabbed a dollar coin from his copper hued jacket, placing it squarely on the store counter. *That’s the least I can do.* He thought as he left the store, mallet in hand.

Chapter three.

Injustice

To get to his house, Cash had to walk up a large, steep hill. It didn’t take too long to climb, but you sure had to know where to step or else you might find yourself with a few bruises. In the years Cash had spent living with his grandfather, he knew the steps by heart.

“Is that you?” Asked a rough voice. Cash was walking up to his front wooden door. His grandfather was seated on the porch with a whittling knife.

“Yeah Grandpa, it’s me.” Cash murmured.

Dale glared at Cash as he walked up the porch steps. “You’re late again.”

Cash fumbled with the front door handle, trying to get it open.

“Yes, I know.”

“Then you *know* that that’s an hour wasted that could have been spent working.”

Cash stopped what he was doing and finally bothered to look at his grandfather.

“You don’t know that it was wasted.”

Dale's glare grew harsher as he put down his whittling knife.

"I know you like to go down to that awful saloon place and read them newspapers." He said. Cash shifted his feet embarrassedly.

"Let me ask you this kid, is anything new today? Has *anything* been new in the past few years, huh?"

"I.. Actually, yes. Things are getting quite expensive." Cash stammered as he laid the new mallet on the table.

"-It was two dollars, but I managed to get it for one."

Dale didn't speak about the increased price, he knew that the inflation was caused by the trade routes being closed, trade routes closed by the evil hands of East Town.

Dale mumbled. "A good job requires good tools. Now go do something useful 'round here."

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Usefulness: The act of contributing or having a practical worth.

Cash didn't see why he was, or should be "useful" if he didn't care for the things he was supposed to, like the farm or the house, the things his grandfather cared about, maybe too much. He kept thinking about what Meena had said to him that day, her words going backward and forward in his conflicted mind.

"Promise me you'll find a way to get out of this town."

If there was even a way out, he thought. Both West Town and East Town were secluded in the middle of the desert. Of course East Town had more relations with neighboring cities, it didn't help Cash very much as East Town was nothing more than an enemy to him.

The sun was slowly going down as the town's bell rang five. That day was a Saturday, and he knew that once ten o'clock hit, the bars would be filled with people.

"I'm done working." Cash muttered to Dale. He had been working many hours on fixing the roof's shingles, as some were becoming loose with age.

Unsurprisingly, Dale was still working.

“-I’m done working and I’m going to go to the town.” Cash said sternly. Dale looked up from his work, which consisted of painting

“No you won’t.”

Cash glared angrily.

“What?”

Dale stood up from his painting job. Despite his old age of eighty-three, he still had a strong build. His face was worn though, with streaks of white in his short hair.

“You’re not to go to town this late.” He said shortly.

“May I ask why?”

“You know why, there’s nothin but low lives who are out at this hour.”

“Maybe at the saloons, I just want to walk down into the fore,..”

“You’re to stay home and stop complaining. You hear me?”

A silence came after those words. Cash walked back into the house, leaving his grandfather on the steps. His mind was filled. He never got used to the injustice of it all.

Chapter four.

The Attack

The midnight air was cool that night, with a crisp breeze sweeping across the western land. Cash had snuck out of the house through his window and crept down the steep mountain side. He escaped this way often, especially since his grandfather never let him leave the house after dark. There wasn’t much his grandfather could do, he supposed, but there was still a sharp pain from the words of Dale. His harsh words and demands wearing down Cash by the day, for sixteen years.

He walked down the dusty countryside, just outside of the town. The stars were bright and reflective, with crickets chirping loudly and wind blowing against the desert floor. Even from far away, he could hear the drunken laughter of people and an off-key piano from the saloon.

It's Saturday night alright,.. He whispered.

Cash hiked down the dark road, his arms swinging loosely at his side as he admired the stars above. It was a moment of peace. A moment, not known to Cash yet, that would become scarce in the next few days.

He made his way to a nearby stream. One of the only streams in the town that was on West Town's border, and that East Town hadn't taken for themselves.

Sitting in a relaxed posture, he dipped his hands into the cool water. There was nothing but sincere tranquility around him. Nothing but,....

Suddenly, he heard an eerie, spine chilling sound, something like a muted clacking against the desert floor. Quickly, he reached for his pocket knife, which was usually strapped to his side, and swiftly hid behind a tall, nearby rock.

The sound got closer, and closer. Cash peered above the rock. Squinting his eyes, he saw what looked like three, no five, shadowy figures riding on horseback coming in his direction. Quickly, he ducked down behind the rock. *Did they see me?* He thought anxiously.

It must be some of the townspeople taking a midnight ride, he considered, but quickly pushed that idea out of his mind. Nobody in West Town would be out this late except for the people at the bar, and him.

Must be a traveler, stopping into town. But yet, nothing and nobody was near West Town. All except for,..

“HEY KID.” Yelled a booming voice, startlingly close upon him. Cash jumped up so fast his stetson hat fell off, revealing his dark amber hair. Cash didn't have to examine the men to know they were from East Town.

“GET HIM!!!”

Scrambling for his pocket knife, he heard the whistle of bullets flying near him. This was no ordinary group of East Towner's, this was a gang. A vicious, bloodthirsty gang.

Cash yelled obscenities at the men. He had been taken by immense surprise!

“QUICK! HE’S CLIMBING UP THAT HILL!” One of them yelled. The horses kicked and squealed at all the sudden excitement. With much adrenaline from the attack, he kicked dust towards the men and slashed his knife around, missing entirely.

“LOOK AT THIS KID!” One laughed. “CAN’T EVEN USE A KNIFE PROPERLY.”

Cash ran a few steps ahead, nearly tripping as the men laughed.

“STAY BACK!” He ordered as he swung his knife around. The men laughed and began to circle around him. “I, I SAID STA,..”

“We know what you said kid.” A man spoke. His voice was calmer than the others, but somehow, more evil. Cash’s mind was swimming, he was quickly looking for a way out. More of them began to circle around him.

I’m going to die, I’m going to die, I’m going,..

“What is a kid like yourself doin out this late?” The calm man asked. He wore all black, with a golden handkerchief collar gleaming in the moonlight. He jumped off of his horse, and began to walk toward him.

“Look,” Cash panted. “I don’t know what you want, but I *order* you to stay back. You’re, you’re on West Town territory. You shouldn't even be here,”

“Do I look like the kinda guy who cares about borders?”

The others remained quiet as he spoke.

“You listen to me and you listen well kid, I’m a man of my own principle. I see something I want, I *take it*. And right now,..” He stopped for a moment. “West Town has something I want.” He stepped closer, “And you’re going to help me *get it*.. ”

Cash rapidly looked around him. *Too many people*, he thought. *I’m trapped!*

“What could you possibly want from West Town?! East Town took EVERYTHING from us! You think I’m going to *help you*?” Cash boldly stepped forward. “I don’t think so.”

The man’s face turned to a smug expression. “Too bad.” He said smugly. Cash watched as he reached for his pistol, his life seconds away from being taken.

Think fast! I can't just stand here, I can't just,..

BOOM.

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The man's face turned a ghostly white. With a terrified expression, he fell to the ground, dead. In his place stood another mysterious figure, their face covered with a black scarf, and a smoking pistol in their right hand.

Chapter five. Interrogations

The men on horseback, after realizing the sudden change of events, all turned and rode away with a flash, leaving Cash, the dead man and the figure in solitude. No words were spoken. The only sound was of the men on horseback riding into the distance. The mysterious gunman placed their weapon into their holster, and began to walk away. Cash tried to speak, but no words left his mouth. He stood there in shock, his hand white from clasp onto his pocket knife. With incredible force, he blurted out.

“Thank you,..”

The figure stopped and turned. Their dark cloak bowling softly in the warm breeze. The figure nodded slowly before walking off into the darkness of the night, leaving Cash alone with the dead man.

Cash wasn't sure how long he had been standing there, a dead man at his feet. His mind spinning in confusion, he lost his balance and fell to the hard, desert ground.

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He wasn't sure how long he had been out. The stars were still bright in the sky and the saloon music could still be heard. He jumped up quickly, panicked from the deceased gang member on the ground. The memories came flooding back into his mind. An East Town gang was in West Town. AN EAST TOWN GANG! He had to tell someone, and quickly! He swiftly grabbed his stetson hat from the sandy ground, placing it on his head in a hurry. With a start, he began running towards the town, specifically the saloon.

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“HELP!” He exclaimed as he ran through the saloon doors.

“I HAVE URGENT NEWS!” He yelled.

His voice was drowned out by the drunk men and women at the bar, the saloon music roaring obnoxiously across the room.

“PLEASE! I HAVE URGENT NEWS! I NEED EVERYONE TO LISTEN!”

A few people turned their heads in his direction.

Cash gasped for air. “THERE’S AN EAST TOWN GANG! I SAID THERE’S AN EAS,.”

“What do you mean, East Town gang?!” A pink faced woman yelled.

“THERE’S AN EAST TOWN GANG NEAR HERE! THEY ATTACKED ME AND,..”

“They attacked you?!”

“**YES** THEY ATTACKED ME!!”

The crowd began singing a bar shanty at the top of their lungs, Cash looked at them desperately.

“I NEED YOU TO LISTEN TO ME!”

But they weren't listening. All the townspeople, young and old, began yelling and screaming at the same time. It was deafening. Cash desperately tried to yell.

“I,.. YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND!”

BANG.

The sound of a gun bellowed across the audience. A silence broke through the crowd. People turned their heads quickly to see the mayor of West Town, Mayor Maverick, with a gun pointed at the ceiling.

“What do you *mean*, East Town gang?” He growled.

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Cash found himself seated on an old, leather chair, the room around him very old, woody and dim. He was alone in the mayor's office.

He had never been in a law office before, it looked just how he imagined. Plenty of books, documents and spare ink bottles on the desk. The mayor had directed him in before quickly exiting the room. He heard people shuffling and talking outside the door. The sounds were muffled, but it didn't sound good.

Cash lowered himself deep in his chair. *I must be in serious trouble.*

The squeaky wooden door opened and the mayor stepped in.

“What’s your name, boy.” The mayor asked plainly. The sounds of arguing people could still be heard outside.

“I, uh” Cash began. “My name is Cash.”

The mayor looked at him for a moment.

“Cash,.. Cash, Cash, Cash,..” He repeated his name a few times as he strolled across the room.

“Isn’t Dale your grandpa? Tis’ that right son?”

Cash nodded hesitantly.

“Tsk, tsk. Well he’s a stern ol’ bugger, ain't he?”

Cash didn’t speak. He didn’t quite know what to say.

“Alright then, I want you to tell me what you told those folks outside, about that East Town gang.”

The mayor sat down on the other side of the desk. Cash watched as he lit his pipe.

“Sir, I mean mayor, or sir,” Cash began.

Gosh, pull yourself together!

“Look. The first thing I have to say is I am *not* lying when I say this. I was almost killed a few minutes ago, I wouldn’t make this up.”

The mayor glared at him.

“Go on,.”

Cash swallowed and began to recall his experience. The mayor was very still and thoughtful as he listened, widening his eyes at the frightful story.

Cash explained how there was one gang member with a golden collar, one who seemed to be their leader.

“And that,” finished Cash. “is why we need search parties to investigate the gang. RIGHT away.”

Mayor Maverick smiled. “You know,” he began. “you’d make a good story writer!”

Cash froze.

“You don’t believe me?” he exclaimed.

The Mayor chuckled and puffed his pipe.

“Now sunny-boy, it’s not that I *don’t* believe this story of yours, it’s just,.. It’s just,..”

“It’s just *what?*” Cash cried.

The mayor stood up and motioned Cash from his chair, as if to show him the door.

“Well, it’s just I don’t have time to play along with your story right now Cash, run along won’t you?”

Cash scrambled from the Mayor’s grasp. “What?! NO! I’m not lying to you!!”

“Now kid,..”

“I am *not* lying!!”

“IT DOESN’T MATTER.” The mayor bellowed. Cash went quiet.

“There is no WAY an East Town gang would come back again. Not after the raid of 68’. If ANYONE you would know that Cash.”

Cash stepped back.

“Yeah that’s right, I know your parents were killed Cash, both of your parents were killed by those gangs. But Mayor Zane, as bad and dirty as that rich old man is, would not permit that to repeat.”

Cash smirked angrily. “Oh yeah, of course he wouldn’t. He’d just close borders, starve and steal from us, is that right?”

“ENOUGH.” Maverick yelled. With a heavy hand, he opened his office door.

“I,..” Cash struggled to find the right words.

“You’d best run off now.”

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Cash stumbled from the mayor’s building and into the crowd outside. People were asking him dozens of questions, but he found he wasn’t listening as he pushed through them.

“What happened in there kid?!”

“Is there a gang?!”

“How DARE you make up stories that,..”

“Why aren’t you speaking! Are you *deaf?!!*”

“What did the gang look like! Did they,..”

Cash then remembered why he never respected the townspeople.

Chapter six.
Banashmint.

“I DON’T NEED EXCUSES.” Screamed Dale.

“I NEED *ANSWERS!*”

Cash walked inside of his house, it was late, very late.

“You SNUCK OUT, you WENT TO THE SALOON and you,..”

“Yes, I snuck out, but I wasn’t heading to the saloon.” Cash grumbled. He was too tired and too upset to argue with his raging grandfather.

“AFTER **ALL** I HAVE DONE FOR YOU?!”

Cash stopped in his tracks.

He cracked.

“All you've done for *me*? You cannot be serious,”

“I HAVE FED YOU, HOUSED YOU, PAYED FOR YO,..”

“THAT DOESN’T COMPARE TO WHAT YOU HAVE **TAKEN** FROM ME!” Cash bellowed, hands clutched. His grandfather’s face twitched with rage.

“GET **OUT!**” Dale screamed, his quivering hand pointed at the door.

Cash quickly stormed from the house, leaving his grandfather in the kitchen.

Chapter seven.

The Mapmaker

“Give me a shot.”

The bartender squinted his eyes.

“Now Cash I,..”

“Just do it.” Cash sighed. He was sulking, seated on the bar stool. The saloon had just opened for that day, and Cash was ragged from sleeping below a tree the whole night.

“Cash, I know you didn’t mean no harm by makin’ up that gang story, but you,..”

BAM.

Cash’s fist hit the bar table.

“I did NOT lie about that!” he insisted. The slam must have startled the bartender.

“Okay, okay. Preten’ I didn’t say nothin’” he said before pouring a shot.

Cash was motionless after that.

How could they not believe me? he thought.

They know my parents were killed by a gang. Of all people why do they not believe,....me?

The shot was placed in front of him, the alcohol swimming in the glass. He took a quick swig and cringed at the taste. It was his first shot he’d ever had.

“You know,” said a voice.

“I wouldn't let it get to you.”

Cash turned to see a girl, roughly his age, seated at a table. She had a map in front of her and a pen. He hadn’t even seen her when he walked in.

“What are you talking about?” he mumbled.

She pushed her golden hair behind her ear thoughtfully.

“You know, the townspeople. They aren’t good judges of what is real or what is fake.”

Cash smirked sarcastically, “What, do *you* believe me?”

The girl thought for a moment,

“I’m not sure yet.” she smiled.

“Anyway,” she continued. “I wouldn’t let it get to you.”

Cash examined her for a moment.

“Do I know you?” he asked. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you in the town before.”

She smiled.

“I don’t get out much I suppose.”

She stood up from her table and walked toward Cash, hand outstretched.

“My name’s Betsy. Betsy Lewis. I’m a mapmaker on the edge of town.”

He shook her hand.

“I can’t help but get angry that they don’t believe me, especially since, oh never mind.”

Betsy sighed assuringly.

“I know your parents were killed by an East Town gang many years ago.”

Cash nodded plainly. It was common knowledge that they were killed oh so many years ago.

“Well,” she began. “just keep your head up. If you know you’re right, that’s all that matters.”

And without another word, Betsy walked across the bar floor and out the door.

Chapter eight.

Evidence

A day passed, then another, and another. Cash found that his grandfather Dale wasn't speaking to him about the incident. To Cash's astonishment, he didn't even speak to him of work that needed to be done. He was totally and entirely shunned. He had been living in an old barn for a while, he had a nice hay bed set up and a place to keep belongings. As long as he was away from his grandfather, he was happy.

The townspeople didn't seem to let him off the hook though, whenever he would enter the town they would say the usual- "HA, I can't believe this kid started tellin' lies to the *MAYOR?*" Miss Meena would watch sympathetically from the hardware store.

Surely she believes me? Cash wondered, *right?*

He remembered the conversation with that one mapmaker girl from the bar. He wondered where she was in the town? Again, she said she didn't get out much.

Cash didn't quite know what to do. Frankly, the last week had left him in a daze, he couldn't really sort things out clearly in his head.

He was scared of the fact that maybe, just maybe, the gang would return. The leader said he wanted something. What was it? It could have been anything! Money, power, riches,.. Cash scowled at that thought. It implied West Town had any riches to begin with!

No, that can't be it. He thought. Everytime he tried to find an explanation it just returned to memories of that night. The shooting, horses, mysterious gunman, the gang leader shot dead,..

Cash paused. "THAT'S IT!" He exclaimed.

The gang leader! He never buried the body! It must still be there!

Cash winced at the thought of the body, a few days old, empty and cold,..

Nevertheless, *that* was the evidence he needed! Once he showed the Mayor, they would set up deputies and security men to keep West Town safe from the gang!

Cash straightened up boldly. He knew what happened the last time an East Town gang came, and he would make sure it didn't happen again, no matter what.

Chapter nine. The Spoken Words

Friday, the day before the attack. Two people sitting around a buzzing campfire.

“You know,” said she

“there are a few things that *really* put a woman like me on edge.”

Silence.

“You know what that is?”

“I know a few,” said he

He puffed his pipe, the smoke circling around his lined face.

“The people who have things they don’t *deserve*.”

She smirked, her red lipstick gleaming from the fire light.

“Yeah,” he chuckled. “-Things they don’t deserve.”

Chapter ten.

Cash made his way through the town marketplace, walking straight towards the Mayor’s office. Now was the time to tell him about the body.

As we walked, glimpses of that night ricochet around his mind. *Who was that mysterious figure?*

He stopped for a moment. It felt strange. Usually at this hour he would be at the bar, reading the same, boring newspaper. Now, he was on his way to the Mayor’s office to present gang evidence of a body, and he was a laughing stock to the whole town.

I was getting bored of this place, he thought. But this,..this is too much.

He continued walking and made his way to the government building. The doors were large and medal, with ornate designs down the edges. With a deep breath, he went inside.

There were two secretaries gossiping loudly at their desks. When they noticed Cash, they burst into laughter.

“Ha! Look who it is!” The first one laughed, her lanky finger pointed outward.

“I just need to talk to the Mayor, please.”

The second secretary was laughing uncontrollably.

“Kid, he has company right now. You’ll have to come by later.”

Cash panicked. “Wait, what? No, I need to speak to him right away!”

The women sneered at him, still chuckling from before.

“I can’t do much kid, I only get paid 10 cents an hour for this job. What do you want me to do, berate the mayor to see you?”

Cash huffed in irritation and began walking towards the Mayor’s office.

“HEY KID!” They yelled after him.

Too late. Cash flipped the door open. The Mayor was at his desk. Another man, a cleaner, expensive looking man was seated in another chair.

“I,..” Mayor Maverick squealed. “What are you doing here? Didn’t I tell you to leave me alone?!”

“Yes! Yes, I know all about it. I need you to listen to me! I have evidence! I have evidence that a gang is near West Town!”

Oddly enough, it was the other man that spoke.

“Mister Maverick, what does this young fellow mean?”

“Oh, it’s nothing good sir it’s noth,”

“YES IT IS!” Cash bellowed. The room went quiet.

“I NEED you to listen to me! The town might be in danger! YOU KNOW what happened last time a gang invaded!”

The Mayor and the other man exchanged glances.

“Well,” the Mayor began shakily. “Oh, okay then. I will go see this evidence.”

“Bring a few guards with you.” Cash said. “You can never be too careful.”

“Yes,” said the well dressed man. “You can *never* be too careful.”

.....

The mood of the Mayor had changed drastically. He began to round up some men to check out the evidence. The Mayor lent him a brown Appaloosa from his stable. Cash didn't know her long, but he had a warm feeling about her.

“Alright men.” the Mayor began, his lip curled.

“If Cash is right about this gang, *and he's probably not*, and we find that body, we will have to have a town meeting and figure out our next steps. As Cash said, a gang invaded once before, it didn't end well for nobody in West Town. Let's not repeat that.”

The men grunted in hesitant approval and began to mount their horses. Cash climbed onto the Appaloosa and gave her a light pat on the head.

They began to ride down the edge of town, the Mayor riding unsurly in the front. The breeze was warm and the sun was high, but worry was prominent within Cash. *What if they still don't believe me?*

Within a few minutes they reached the countryside.

The Mayor raised his hand to halt the men behind him.

“Is this the place?” he asked. Cash nodded his head.

“Alright then. Men, let's start lookin' for this body.”

“It was down this way.” Cash directed as he jumped off the mare.

“That way?”

“Yes, that way.”

They walked across the sandy earth, climbing down stones and up hills. Soon, they came across the cool stream of water. They all stopped. There, next to the stream, was the corpse of the gang

leader, hungry crows crowded around. Cash closed his eyes to block the horrid image. The Mayor took a deep breath.

“Joey, I want you to search him.” Mayor Maverick asked.

“Why me?!”

“Just do it.”

With a scowl, the man Joey jumped from his horse and walked towards the body. Cash realized he was holding his breath.

“Well, these are no ordinary clothes, Mayor,” Joey said.

“These are fancy clothes. Look at this golden collar!”

Cash looked at the Mayor desperately.

“Boy, he sure has a nice lookin’ hat. Looks like it's been adorned with golden thread or somethin,”

“Any credentials on him, Joey?”

“He’s got no papers sir. Wait, I found this. He’s got a diary, Mayor, looks like his name was Bart Marton.”

Joey’s face fell.

“Says here resident of,..of East Town, sir.”

The Mayor closed his eyes and swallowed anxiously.

“Alright men, that’s all I needed to know. Joey, you and Sam bury this body, and bring me that diary. You, Cash, come with me.”

The men all nodded in agreement.

.....

Cash and Mayor Maverick rode back to the town, their horses kicking up dust as they went. They didn't speak until they reached the horse stable, Cash suspected the Mayor was embarrassed that he didn't believe Cash's story. Cash had to say goodbye to the horse. The Mayor directed the horses to their hay stations, then turned to Cash.

"Meet me in my office in five minutes."

"Yes, sir." He replied. The Mayor turned and walked from the barn and Cash made his way into the town square. The townspeople glared at him as they walked passed, but it didn't matter. The Mayor believed him!

"Cash?" Said a voice. He turned to see, ..

"Betsy! The mapmaker, right?" He asked brightly.

"That would be me," She laughed. "I saw you ride into town with the Mayor! What was that about?"

Cash contemplated for a moment, then he told his story.

"-I'm about to speak with the Mayor about what to do now ."

Chapter eleven.

"You were right." The Mayor sighed. He turned his gaze to the fancy man.

"He was right."

Cash stood at the Mayor's door, hands clasped at his side.

"This,.." He quivered. "This must be dealt with, and quickly. Cash, I'm sorry bout' not believin you, you understand this is a big deal and I,.."

"It's okay." Cash assured, although there was a hint of resentment in his words.

"Cash, my name is Sam. I'm a representative of Waterloo-Pipelines." The fancy man said calmly. He shook Cash's hand firmly, he seemed like the type to have shaken many a hand.

“Are you from the *city*?” Cash exclaimed. The city, known as Creetvill, was many miles away from West Town and East Town. There was little contact with the city.

The man chuckled at Cash’s surprised words.

“Yes I am. I’m here to speak with Mayor Maverick about the pipelines of West Town. I am, however, an up and coming politician in Creetvill, if I can service you in any way, do not hesitate to ask me.”

“We won’t, we won’t.” The Mayor mumbled, a cigar dangling loosely from his mouth.

Sam grabbed his hat and coat respectfully and left the office room, giving a slight nod before leaving the room. Cash boggled at the Mayor from the doorway.

“I need you to listen to me kid,” Maverick said.

“You did yer’ part, and I’m grateful for that, but now you need to leave this to me. I don’t want a kid like yourself gettin their hands dirty with this business. I’ll be havin a meeting tonight with some people and we’ll decide the next steps.”

Although Cash wanted to protest, he merely nodded at the Mayor’s words. *What else could I do?*

Chapter twelve.

West Town began to look at Cash differently. They didn’t tease him like the previous week, but they asked him worried questions and huddled in whispering groups.

The Mayor had scheduled a meeting with the West Town politicians, but no word had come from them. Things were pretty hushed up until a flier passed through the town square.

The mailboy delivered the flier to the hands of the people.

“What’s this?” Cash asked, a paper in his hands.

“There’s gonna be a town meeting tonight, seven oclock.” The boy mumbled.

Cash examined the paper. Sure enough, it scheduled a town meeting outside the government building.

Cash sighed for a moment. Surely his grandfather wouldn't show up, right? After all, he hadn't been living at home since the argument. Nevertheless, Cash tipped the mailboy and went on his way. He might as well get ready for what the Mayor would declare that night.

.....

The hours passed and the sun lowered. More and more people began walking in the direction of the government building. When the clock struck seven, a large crowd was present. Cash pushed through the stares and the people as he made his way to the front row. *No sign of grandpa.* There were dim lamp lights to illuminate the crowd, people's faces a ghostly white. Soon the door of the government building creaked open. The two secretaries from the previous day walked out first, then a few others. The Mayor walked out last with an escort of two men, and made his way to the wooden podium. Cash watched as he opened up a crinkly piece of paper, and cleared his throat.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of West Town," He began nervously. "I'm grateful that y'all could all make it. I hope you all possess good health and attitude."

The crowd nodded and grunted in response.

"You probably all know why I called a meeting here tonight, tis' not somethin' I do regularly, as y'all know." He put his paper gently away in his coat pocket.

"A few days ago, one of you, I won't specify who, came to me with the urgent news that an East Town gang had plans to attack our town."

All the eyes turned to Cash, he could feel it like a beam of light.

"Now we all know that this is somethin' I don't take lightly. At first, I'll admit I didn't believe this person. We all know that East Town gangs, or any gang for that matter, is a danger to the life of this town. I didn't believe it until I saw some solid evidence."

The town began to shift their feet nervously.

"It has come to my attention that there is a gang presence on the border of town. Now before we panic or cause a ruckus', we need to create a solid plan to combat this."

The town began to all speak at the same time.

“Please ladies and gentlemen the Mayor is speakin!” A secretary called out. The town gradually quieted down.

“Now,” Mayor Maverick continued. “If we learned anythin’ from the last attack bout’ sixteen years ago, we know that border security is *crucial*. We don’t have a secure border, we don’t stand a chance. What I propose is that we set up security around the whole town. Give em guns, knives, anythin’ they need to keep a gang out-a town.”

The crowd all nodded.

“Another thing is to go on complete lockdown. Nobody leaves, nobody comes in. West Town needs to go into survival mode. Now Mister Cleavland is a blacksmith. Do we have Mister Cleveland in the crowd?”

“Yes sir I am right here!”

“Good, good. Now we all have to play our parts to make this town safe. Mister Cleavland for instance can supply the border guards with the weapons they need.”

The town all nodded and grunted once again.

“Remember, East Town is an enemy. It should forever be treated as such, there is no compromise. We all know what we need to do, so let's get it done.”

The crowd all started talking to each other in agreement. The Mayor walked off the podium and back towards the government building as people began to walk away. Cash turned to leave until,

“I HAVE URGENT NEWS!!” Shrieked a voice. The crowd turned to see a squat man wearing purple garments.

“I HAVE URGENT NEWS FROM EAST TOWN!”

“**EAST TOWN?**” The town yelled.

The squat man ran up to the podium.

“My god WHAT IS THIS?” The Mayor bellowed.

The squat man panted before he spoke. He looked as if he had been running.

“I... have news,..big news from,...from,..”

“My god go on man!” The Mayor ordered. The squat man took a moment for his heartbeat to slow down, and then proceeded with his news. The crowd was desperately waiting for what he had to say.

“Mayor Zane from East Town has a message for you, for all of you.” He gasped.

“Lady Levi, the daughter of Mayor Zane has been kidnapped by a vicious gang!”

“Gang?! Did you say,..”

“Yes!! A gang! It happened two hours ago in the Zane estates building. She was just sitting there and then,...and then BANG! The gang bursted through the doors and took her!” His arms were flailing around irrationally.

“Both East Town and West Town are in grave danger from this gang!”

The crowd all started yelling at the man.

“You mean the gang is attacking East Town *too*?!?”

“You know about the gang?!?”

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN ORDER!” The secretary yelled. Cash was distraught at the loudness of the crowd.

“Well, Mister, Mister uh,..”

“They call me Julian, sir, I’m a messenger from East Town.”

“Well then, Mister Julian, our town has enough problems as it is with this ol’ gang. Did you forget that our two towns are *enemies*?” The Mayor stated harshly.

“But sir! This isn’t an East Town gang! We don’t know where it came from, but it’s putting both our towns in danger!”

The crowd started yelling angrily. The secretary shrieked at the people.

“ORDER! ORDER!”

“Please! You must understand that Mayor Zayn is asking for your *help!* This gang is causing trouble for both of the towns! You must work together to,..”

“WORK TOGETHER?!” A man bellowed.

“YES! Work together to find this gang and put a stop to them!”

“What has East Town ever done for *US?*” A woman shrieked.

“Mayor Zane promises to open up trade relations for your town and pay you all in gold! He is desperate for help in finding Lady Levi. He’ll do ANYTHING!”

The town all stopped talking, there was silence.

“He,..he will?” A young girl asked.

“Yes, yes he promises to do so if you help him!”

The town all stood in silence for a moment, Cash could almost hear a pin drop.

Mayor Maverick’s face was white, and he stood with his mouth open.

Was this a compromise? A truce between the two towns? Cash didn’t know what was going to happen. He felt as if so much was put upon him at once.

With a quiet voice, the Mayor said.

“Mister Julian, I would like to speak with you in my office please,”

The prying eyes of the townspeople watched as the squat man Julian nodded.

They walked steadily through the doors of the government building, leaving the crowd in silence.

.....

Cash didn't know how long the Mayor was in there with Julian. It felt like an hour, or more. The crowd of people didn't stir or break into debates. They were all very quiet, and in full contemplation.

It wasn't until the building door opened once again and the two men stepped out, the Mayor in front.

"Um, ladies and gentleman," He stuttered.

"There might be a change of plans."

The crowd darted worried glances at each other.

"Mister Julian has told us that this,..this gang is terrorising both of the towns. East Town, and West Town."

He swallowed anxiously, beads of sweat falling from his forehead.

"I know that this sounds crazy, but,..but maybe it's correct that both of our towns need to work together to stop them. East Town has sent me a written contract declaring that if we help them, they will open up trading and resources for us."

He paused and examined the people.

"Are we in,..in an agreement?"

There was silence. Some people glanced around for other people's opinions, others stood in deep contemplation.

"Yes," Said a woman. People turned to see Meena, the pink faced widow from the hardware store. She wasn't looking at the Mayor though, she was looking at Cash.

"If this will free the town from seclusion and poverty, I say we do it." Cash glared sympathetically back at her, she seemed deeply troubled.

Soon after, the crowd began to nod their heads and declare their agreement.

"Well then, it's settled." The Mayor murmured. He closed his eyes for a moment, taking a few moments before speaking.

"Tomorrow morning, eight o'clock, we are going to have another town meeting. Same place."

He stepped forward.

“Have a good night,” He said calmly.

Chapter thirteen.

Cash couldn't sleep that night. He kept twisting and turning, reminiscing of the events he witnessed. All the townspeople had cleared out, somberly returning to their homes with a sense of worry and concern.

Help East Town? Cash couldn't believe it. He had spent his whole life resenting that place for their riches and their crimes against his home, and his family. And now, the town has agreed to help them?

Cash didn't know how to feel. He knew that if they helped East Town, their long years of fuinding and war might end. It didn't erase the fact of history, thought, something that came back to sting Cash everytime he thought of their infamous name. That deadly, horrible name.

He stood up from his hay bed, he noticed a beam of moonlight shining softly through the barn roof, it was a pretty sight.

.....

The sun had risen somberly into the blue sky. The townspeople all shuffled towards the government building once more. They had stern and worried expressions. Many were quiet, but others had a lot to say.

“How can you even *think* about helping East Town!” A young man spat.

“Don't you understand?! If we help them they will give us gold and trade routes! They will offer protection!” Another said.

Cash made his way into the town square. The clock read eight o'clock, he was promptly on time. He laughed, *that's a first.*

He walked through the crowd until he was almost near the front. Again, no sign of his grandfather.

It took a few moments before the government doors opened. Like the night prior, the secretaries came out first, this time with messier appearances and sterner faces. The Mayor stepped out shakily. Cash was taken back by his rough look. He looked as if he had stayed up all night, he was deeply troubled.

The crowd quieted down once they took notice of him, it seemed as if everyone was holding their breath.

The Mayor took a deep breath, and with a shaking hand, removed a piece of paper from his coat pocket again. This time, however, it was sleek, white paper with a purple wax seal, the kind of thing you wouldn't see in these parts.

“Ladies and gentleman,” He began, voice trembling.

“Last night, I..I received an important letter from Mayor Zane of East Town.”

People's eyes widened as he opened the paper.

“It..it is verifying what Mr. Julian said last night, about the gang, and,..and,”

“READ THE LETTER!” Yelled a woman from the crowd.

The Mayor, quite shaken back, began to shuffle the paper.

“Well, erm, alright. This is was it says-

Dear Mayor Maverick,

I suspect you are surprised by my letter, but it is extremely important to both of us. My daughter, Lady Levi has been taken by a gang. It happened only a few hours ago. Me, nor anyone else can track her whereabouts and are in desperate need of assistance. Please, try to dismiss our enemy status, both our town and the providence of West Town are in grave danger. I need you to understand that now is not a time to feud but to work together.

I promise that I shall pay you very graciously for your help, and shall assist you in any way possible.

I hope you understand the urgency of my inquiry, I hope to hear from you within the day.

Yours truly,

-Mayor Zayne, East Town.

Cash stood in shock. Was this really happening? The crowd was silent.

“Mayor Zane said one last thing.”

The Mayor cleared his throat.

“We have decided that the best thing to do is to send people out,..outside of both our towns to track down the gang.”

The townspeople shot worried glances towards each other.

“-That means sending able bodied individuals to find Lady Levi, from both of our towns.”

Still, no one spoke.

“Do we have any volunteers?”

The people were frozen. The Mayor’s words echoed through the ears of the desperate people. Cash was stunned at the thing he was about to do.

He had raised his hand.

Chapter fourteen.

The people gasped and pointed as Cash stepped forward. He was volunteering, he was putting himself on the line.

The Mayor glared at Cash from the podium.

“We,..we have a volunteer. I hope you understand how dangerous this is,..”

Cash nodded. He knew of the danger.

“Men? Is there another volunteer in the crowd?”

Nothing.

“I volunteer.” Said a familiar voice. Cash turned to see Betsy, the mapmaker, with her hand raised.

“You can’t be serious,” The Mayor said shakily, “You’re a woman.”

“I’m a mapmaker.” She began. “And I can assure you that you won’t step two *feet* outside of town without losing your way.”

The townspeople nodded subtly at her statement. They were wandering into the unknown, who knew what they would find?

“Very well, we have two volunteers. East Town has two as well, Billy Boon and Sam, you’ll be traveling with them.”

Cash turned his head to look at Betsy, but she had her focus on the mayor.

“That’s all for today, we all have duties to accomplish in keepin’ this town safe. We have borders to secure, people to arm, and meetings to have.”

Cash glared back at Betsy, she looked determined.

Chapter fifteen.

Cash felt numb. Almost distant. The townspeople were all on a roll, securing the borders of the town and stockpiling their small sums of food and riches into secure places. Cash tried to look for Betsy after the town meeting, but she was nowhere to be found. *Maybe that was good*, he thought. He wouldn’t quite know what to say to her anyway. He sat down below a tree, the bright sunlight beaming off the fibers of his hat. Would this be his last days in West Town? He thought about his grandfather. Would he ever see him again? He would be leaving the town with complete strangers. What if he was killed, what if he starved, what if he never came,...

But something stopped him. Something inside him was saying he should do it. Besides, didn’t he always want to escape this town? The memories of the day in the hardware shop came back to him. The words of Meena echoing in his mind like the cool sound of the breeze.

He wasn't sure how long he had been under that tree. He knew that the sky began to darken, and the wind began to cool. He noticed the silhouette of a person walking up the hill. He couldn't quite make out the face. But he soon realized,

"I thought I'd find you here," Whispered Betsy. She had a small piece of paper in her hand, the soft breeze rippling the paper like water.

"Yeah," Cash laughed. They stood for a moment, looking into the distance. The sky was a dark blue by then with the soft glare of stars beaming in the night sky. Betsy sat down next to Cash.

"Why did you do it?" She asked faintly. "Volunteer?"

Cash thought for a moment.

"I know that I need to leave this town Betsy," He whispered. "There is more for me out there. Maybe,...maybe this is my chance to get away."

She nodded gently, placing the paper on her knees.

"And why did you?"

She smiled.

"I suppose I'm just like you, in a way. I'm a mapmaker you know, just like my father. I guess I,..oh,. Nevermind." She paused.

"No, please go on," Cash pleaded.

"I guess I'll never be able to continue my fathers legacy if I don't explore the outside world. I want to leave this place, make maps of new places, and if I stay here,..."

She sighed.

"-I'll never be able to do that."

They both fell silent, both lost in their thoughts. After some time, Betsy took out a small, ink pen and began to draw, the sound of the pen scraping gently against the paper. Cash noticed she was sketching an outline of West Town. He smiled sentimentality as she traced the familiar roads and shops onto the paper, and the base of the hill that led to his home.

“You take it.” She said, placing the paper on Cash’s knees.

“It may be the only piece of this town you have left, you know?”

Cash nodded as he studied the map.

“Oh and by the way,” Betsy began, standing up from the tree base.

“The Mayor wants to see us tomorrow morning. I think we are making a trip to East Town, Cash, be ready.”

Chapter sixteen

“WE NEED MORE AMMUNITION!” Yelled a young man.

“I’M WORKIN’ THE BEST I CAN!” Protested the armourman.

Cash strolled somberly across the town square, passing by the townspeople’s riot in securing the town. Heads turned as he walked by, including the head of..

“Meena?” Cash exclaimed. Sure enough, Meena the widow was standing on the steps of the hardware store. She smiled sympathetically at him.

“Cashy-boy!” She smiled, tear drops falling from her blue eyes. She pulled him in for a warm hug. Cash was surprised at this sudden embrace, but it hit him that maybe he would never see her again. He was happy she was there.

“Cash,” She said suddenly, putting her hands on his shoulders.

“Cash, be careful out there, you hear me?” She sniffled. “-You,..you be careful out there,”

Cash nodded his head.

“I will, Meena.” He assured.

“I promise.”

.....

The government building seemed colder than usual. Although maybe that was Cash's own nervousness. He made his way through the gossiping secretaries and into the Mayor's office, where he found Betsy already present within.

"Have a seat Cash, have a seat." The Mayor said swiftly.

Cash took the next chair to Betsy. She looked stern and determined. The mayor went to a creaky, wooden cabinet, pulling out what looked like a bottle of old whisky. Surprisingly, he took out three glasses and poured.

"Drink it up kids," He exhaled. "You'll need it."

Cash hesitantly sipped on his shot, the strong taste of liquor sliding down his throat like a poison. Betsy had already finished hers. The Mayor was glaring at Cash, then Betsy, then Cash. The kind of glare that a parent would give if you broke something.

"You kids possibly made the worst mistake of your *lives*."

Cash looked up surprisingly.

"Do y'all *realize* what you just did? Do you *really* understand how dangerous it is to leave this damned town?"

He took a sip of whisky as if to cool himself a moment.

"You, *both* of you have volunteered yourself to go into the complete wilderness, followed by complete strangers from East Town, to hunt down a BLOODTHIRSTY GANG." He yelled.

Cash and Betsy sat motionless in their chairs.

"HA! I'd feel different if y'all were older, in yer' twenties at least." He laughed.

Betsy slammed her shot glass on the table.

"I know what I signed up for." She snapped. "And you were the one who offered."

“I DIDN’T KNOW TWO YOUNGIN’S WOULD VOLUNTEER!”

“WELL WE **DID!**” Betsy shouted, standing up from her seat.

Cash sat wide eyed in his chair. The Mayor closed his eyes as if to disconnect for a moment.

“Today,..” He began softly. “-today we are meeting with Mayor Zane from East Town and the two volunteers that they had.”

Betsy sat back down sternly.

“I need you both to be on your best behavior.” He poured himself another shot.

“We ride to East Town within the hour, make yerself’s look *presentable*, and we’ll get goin.”

Betsy was still fuming, her eyes staring at the Mayor as if she was looking into his soul.

“That’ll be all for now,”

.....

Betsy stormed from the government building. Cash had tried to speak with her but she didn’t seem to be in the mood. Look presentable? What does that mean! He came from West Town, they didn’t have jewels and fancy garments that they had in East Town! He almost wanted to dress in the ugliest attire possible to protest the unfairness of East Town’s riches, but he thought better of it. As he walked through the town again, he began to notice things about the town he had never known before. About how some stores had swinging doors, some stores had wooden blocks as doors, he had never bothered to notice the little things.

He walked to his barn where he kept his belongings and found a nice pair of navy blue dress pants and a shirt. They were a bit scuffed up from wear and tear of the barn but they would do.

“So yer’ goin!, aren’t you.” Said a rough voice.

Cash turned around quickly to find the presence of his grandfather, standing at the barn door.

“Yes.”

For the first time in his life, he felt a power over himself. His grandfather didn't intimate him anymore, something that his grandfather knew.

“Will I ever see you again?” Dale asked

“I don't know.”

They stood for a moment in silence. A long, painful silence. Cash sighed for a moment before walking towards the door.

“Cash,” Dale said.

He turned to look back.

“May peace be upon you.”

Cash nodded and looked into his grandfather's eyes. He wasn't sure if he saw regret in his expression. The man had a way of portraying a single, strict emotion at all times. He had nothing left to say before turning and walking away.

He was ready for what's ahead.

Chapter seventeen.

The cave was cool and dark, quite unlike the unbearable heat from the outside. They sat in contemplation.

“They're after us now,” Said he. His voice rough and deep.

“I know.” Said she.

“But we'll be ready.”

The man nodded.

“We will carry this out to the end?” Asked he.

She turned her head. Her piercing eyes staring at his.

“To the end.”

Chapter eighteen.

Betsy had combed her blonde, bob style hair into a more even appearance. She had on black pants and a long jacket made from leather. Cash had put on his dress pants and top, although he found they were a bit too large on him. The secretaries had directed them towards the horse stables. Cash found Penny, the horse from earlier, standing there to meet him. He was very happy to see her again and gave her a sugar cube, which she ate with much gratitude.

“You want this horse?” The secretary asked.

“Yes, that would be fine.”

“I’ll take this one.” Betsy announced, her hand on a large, white horse with a gray spot. Cash could tell she seemed agitated, but understood her concern.

The Mayor stepped in the stable. His hair was combed into a sleek side part and wore a dark purple suit jacket. Cash was surprised by his interesting choice of fashion, but didn’t comment on the matter.

“I suppose we are ready then?” The Mayor asked, lip curled.

Cash and Betsy nodded at his inquiry, before ascending onto their chosen horses. Cash noticed that the saddles had small, leather pouches on the sides, quite similar to a coat pocket or a bag. The mayor climbed onto a large, black horse, too tall for anyone else.

“Now, I need you both to listen.” He began.

“When we reach the East Town gates, you say nothing, do nothing, *think* nothing. Got me?”

Cash raised his eyebrows.

“They’re gonna’ bring us into one of their fancy buildings and we are gonna meet the mayor. You understand? We are meetin’ that bastard mayor, Mayor Zane.”

He paused for a moment.

“Don’t tell him I said that,”

.....

Mayor Maverick, Cash and Betsy all rode down the countryside. They passed by the stream of water that Cash stopped at a few nights ago, and made their way outside of the town. For the first time in Cash’s life, he had left West Town.

They galloped through the desert landscape. Cash didn’t really understand how Betsy knew how to ride a horse so well, most women didn’t ride horses. He didn’t think much of it, though. Most women didn’t do what Betsy did. They rode for a half an hour, maybe more. Cash was so in awe of the landscape he had lost the time. It wasn’t until a large gate came into view. It was bright and shining, reflecting from the sun.

“Is that, is that gold?!” Cash exclaimed. The Mayor didn’t respond to Cash’s question, but Betsy nodded her head.

“Yeah, I think it is!”

Mayor Maverick raised his hand in the air, as to signal everyone to stop riding. They watched as men on horseback rode from the golden gate ahead. Cash was boggled at their appearance. Their shoes were clean and shining, with immaculate colored coats and shiny buttons. These are things West Town citizens couldn’t DREAM of affording. Betsy seemed to have been equally taken back. Cash noticed that she raised her eyebrows in shock.

“Hello good sir,” Greeted the first man.

“We have awaited your arrival, please follow us.”

Mayor Maverick nodded in response.

They rode through the front gates and onto a long, cobblestone road. They soon came to another large gate. This one, however, was made of dark wood and had gold laden jewels around the edges.

“Welcome to East Town.” The man said.

When the gates opened, Cash could have fallen off of his horse. The town was *huge!* The streets weren’t dusty and bare, but made with wood planks and stone steps. The houses were two times

larger than his own home, with elaborate carvings on the doors and windows. People rode by on strong horses and carriages, wearing expensive attire and gloves. The two men on horseback led them through the town square. Cash was so in awe he hadn't realized Betsy was tapping his shoulder.

"Not like West Town eh?" She said, almost comically

Cash laughed at her statement. He would have responded if Mayor Maverick didn't shoot a glance at him.

"I shall take you to the Mayor's home. He is expecting you all." The horseman said.

.....

When they reached the Mayor's house, the horseman offered to take Penny and the other two horses to the stable, which Mayor Maverick quickly agreed to.

From the doors of Mayor Zane's home came a butler, or what looked like one.

"Please follow me," The butler asked promptly. Cash noticed that even the servants had fancy clothes and hair. He frankly didn't understand how they got any work done wearing those things. *Do they even work?*

Mayor Maverick, Cash and Betsy followed the butler through a large cobblestone corridor. It was an echoey room, with large paintings on the wall.

"In here, please." The butler continued. They soon came to a room with a large, procline table. Cash noticed it had white linen cloth draped across and lit candles placed nearly every foot. A warm fireplace illuminated the large expanse.

"Wait here, please. Mayor Zane will be with you shortly."

With a start, the butler left the room.

Mayor Maverick took a look at Cash and Betsy.

"Remember what I told you two. Don't say a thing, don't even,..."

"Yes, yes we know." Cash interjected.

Betsy bit her lip nervously.

“Here he comes.” She said,

Sure enough, Mayor Zane came through the door. Cash jumped up, startled from his appearance. The mayor wasn't dressed in a fancy coat and hat, he looked horrible! His pants were creased in an odd way, his shirt stained from what looked like liquor, and a worn out expression on his lined face.

“You came.” He said exasperatedly.

“Yes, Mayor Zane we came and..”

“Come, come, come, have a seat, have a seat.” Zane ordered pulling chairs out from the table.

Cash was so startled by Zane's frail look and quick attitude.

“We have much to discuss, yes,..yes much to discuss.”

Betsy took a seat at the far end of the table, presumingly to stay as far away as she could from the startling mayor. Cash and Mayor Maverick sat far away as well.

“Mayor Zane, I suggest we get down to business. Now these,..”

“BUTLER!” Bellowed Zane, cutting off Mayor Maverick.

The butler burst through the room.

“Yes sir, what can I do for you sir,”

“The dinner should be on the table by now GET IT.”

“Yes sir, so sorry sir, won't happen again sir,”

The butler scrambled from the room.

Mayor Maverick cleared his throat and continued.

“As I was saying, these two people, Cash and Betsy, have volunteered themselves to hunt down the gang and retrieve your daughter Ladi Levi. I know that they are young, but I truly believe that,…”

“BUTLER!” Zane yelled again.

The butler came scurrying back.

“Where are our VOLUNTEERS?!”

“Sir, they are coming up the road sir, they shall be here soon sir,…”

“They ARE LATE! GET THEM NOW!”

“Yes sir, so sorry sir, won’t happen again sir, I truly am sorry for their,…”

“OUT!”

The butler slipped out of the room like he was skiing.

Cash shot a look at Betsy, whose mouth was hanging open.

“Mayor Zane, I would greatly appreciate it if you didn’t cut me o,…”

“Care for some scotch? Brandy? Mead? Wine? Do you drink wine?”

“MAYOR ZANE!” Mayor Maverick screeched.

Before another word came out, two men scrambled into the room.

“Ahhh! Yes, the volunteers are here. Good, good. Mayor Maverick, I would like you to meet Sam, he is our first volunteer,” Zane said quickly.

“Pleasure to meet you, Sam.”

“Same to you, Mayor.”

Cash noticed that Sam was also young, possibly younger than both Cash and Betsy. He had a face like a tortoise, and a build like one too.

“And this is Billy Boone, the best gunslinger in town.” Zane exclaimed.

Cash’s face dropped at the sight of this Billy Boone. He looked like trouble. He was older, meaner and taller. His long blonde hair and his wide build were unusual, but intimidating nevertheless.

“Good to meet you Billy. I’d like you to meet the volunteers from West Town, Cash and Betsy.” Mayor Maverick said sternly.

They all nodded towards one another. Billy Boone gave Cash a daunting smirk.

From the doors of the room, the butler and many other servants scurried in with hot plates of soup, vegetables, meats, pies and other such things.

“Yes, yes, well make yourselves comfortable.” Mayor Zane began.

“We have much to discuss.”

Chapter nineteen.

The food was passed around the table. Cash, surprised at the sheer amount to eat, helped himself to a generous portion. Betsy, unsurprisingly, did the same. Food like this was never found in West Town. *Do they eat like this every day?* All of these sights and questions began to fill up Cash’s head. It took some effort to not start yelling at Mayor Zane about the unfairness of it all, all the hardship they had caused West Town because they couldn’t share a little. Cash’s leg was kicked from beneath the table. Betsy glared at him as if to say, *Now isn’t the time.*

Sam and Billy Boone sat a chair apart, and the two mayors sat at both heads of the long table. The tension was almost unbearable. Cash found Billy Boone glaring at him through the flame of the candle light a few times, he wasn’t quite sure how to respond.

“I suppose we get down to business, shall we?” Mayor Maverick suggested, wiping his mouth.

“Now we have four people willing to go look for your daughter, Ladi Levi, and put a stop to this gang. It isn’t an easy task, Mayor, they will need weapons, food and shelter for their travels.”

“Yes, yes I have all the things that they need prepared in bags.” Zane assured.

“Mayor, you must know that we wouldn’t be doing this for ya’ if we didn’t get nothin’ in return. Now I need more than yer’ word that you’ll pay West Town with gold and food.”

Mayor Zane gasped.

“Mayor Maverick, we wouldn’t even *think* about not paying you for your troubles, how could,…”

“Alright, alright, enough with the sweet talk. I need you to pay us in advance, you hear?”

Mayor Zane took a sip of wine.

“I’ll pay ya half up front.”

Cash’s hands turned to fists.

“Seventy-five percent.” Cash snapped.

Everyone glared at him.

“You’ll pay us seventy-five percent up front, then twenty-five percent when the job is done.”

Mayor Zane poured himself another glass, spilling lightly on his ragged shirt.

“You can afford that, Mayor, that’s what I ask.” Cash continued. Betsy and Mayor Maverick looked fearfully at Zane.

“Seventy-five percent it is then.”

.....

The rest of the dinner was spent silently eating. Cash hadn’t bothered to look up from his plate, besides, he would probably just see the menacing eyes of Billy Boone staring back at him. At the end of the meal, the two Mayors spoke in a parlor for some time, leaving Cash and Betsy alone with Sam and Billy Boone.

The four people hadn’t spoken until, ..

“Betsy Lewis, I know that name. Was your father that mapmaker?” Sam asked. He had a high pitched voice.

“Yes, my father was Mr. Lewis. He was an excellent man of great skill.” Betsy said nervously.

A long silence continued after that.

“I guess we’ll be traveling a lot together, all of us.” Sam said.

“Yeah, I suppose we will.” Cash responded.

The silence commenced once more. A few minutes later, the butler entered the room.

“Gentlemen, Miss Lewis, please follow me to your quarters. You will all be staying the night here. In the morning you leave the city on your journey. The horses are all prepared for usage in the morning.”

The four people nodded subtly at the butler's words. Standing up, Cash realized his legs were like jello. He hadn't realized how nervous he was. From the doorway, Mayor Maverick slipped in.

“Cash, Betsy, may I speak to ya?” He asked.

Sam and Billy left the table giving a quick look back at Cash and Betsy.

“This is where I leave you,” Mayor Maverick said. “I gotta head back to West Town.”

Cash nodded shyly at his words.

“Tomorrow morning you guys will be leavin’. I suppose the only thing I can say to you is,..well,.. Be careful. Don’t do stupid stuff you know? Don’t trust Sam and Billy, understand? Trust your *gut*.”

Betsy extended her hand for Mayor Maverick to shake.

“We’ll find this gang, Mayor. We’ll put a stop to them and save Ladi Levi.” She assured. Maverick shook her hand, then Cash’s.

“Well, I’ll be seein’ ya.” He noted as he left the room. As he walked away, Cash somehow felt more vulnerable than before.

This was it.

The butler had taken Cash to his room, and then Betsy. His quarters were large and gaudy, with a large bed frame and decorative wallpaper. Although he wasn't tired, he knew he should sleep to be energized for the morning. As soon as he felt the soft blanket however, he fell right asleep.

This is much better than a haystack.

PART 2

Chapter twenty.

He had many dreams that night. Many of them he seemed to have forgotten, but there was one that seemed to recur.

The mysterious gunman from that night, the night when the gang attacked, kept popping back into his mind. He had flashes of the dark scarf they were wearing, the piercing gunshot from their gun and the dead man at his feet.

Who was that person?

“Sir, I should bring it to your attention that the sun is rising, you should get up now.” Said a voice.

Cash woke up quickly from his slumber to find the butler at the door.

“Thank you,” he mumbled. The butler bowed his head hastily before exiting the room.

Cash laid in bed for a few more minutes, taking a moment before the inevitable action of the day.

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When he came to the dinner room, he found Betsy and Sam at the table. They looked tired. A bright glare of sunlight came gleaming from the windowsills casting light over the white, marble floor.

“Goodmorning.” Cash grunted. The two seemed to nod their heads slightly at his greeting.

“Would you care for some coffee or tea?” The butler asked calmly.

“Yes, I’ll have some coffee please,” Betsy replied.

“Same for me,”

“-And me, thank you.”

The butler sighed and wobbled out of the room.

“Hey,” Cash began as he sat down.

“Where is Billy Boone? Is he up?”

“Oh he’s up.” Sam muttered.

“He’s probably in his room.”

Cash looked over at Betsy, who was fumbling with a fork.

“He’s...he’s a gunslinger you said?” Asked Betsy.

Sam nodded timidly. The butler walked into the room with a tray of coffee.

“He’s the best in town. In all of East Town’s days, we’ve never seen anyone like him! He practices all the time, you know.”

Betsy nodded as she took a sip of her coffee.

“I suppose you don’t know how to use one of those,” Sam laughed.

“I can shoot,” She mumbled.

“Oh yeah, you can probably make fires and climb trees too, right?”

“Yes actually, I can.”

“That’s a man’s work.”

“I don’t see any real men here,”

“You little,…”

Before Sam continued his insult, Mayor Zane entered the room.

“Hello, hello.” He began, blowing his nose on his sleeve.

“I trust you slept well?”

Cash, Betsy and Sam nodded.

“Good, good. Sleep is the key to success, my mother always used to say, yes, yes.”

He pulled out a chair and took a seat. From his pants pocket, he pulled out a cigarette and match, igniting the flame from the table top.

“You all have a long journey ahead.” He began,

“A dangerous journey, you should know. You're lucky to have the best weapons on your side. BUTLER!”

The butler scrambled in.

“Yes sir, what can I do for you si,…”

“BRING IN THE WEAPONS!”

“Yes sir, right away sir, I shall do that for you si,…”

“NOW! NOW!”

The butler slipped and fell, nearly dragging himself out of the room.

“*Good god I need a new butler,..*” Mayor Zane quite clearly mumbled, a cigarette between his teeth.

The butler came in swiftly with a suitcase in his arms.

“Open it up! Open it up!”

Cash's eyes widened in shock. The contents inside were incredible.

"Now looky here, THIS is what I call a beauty." Zane exclaimed. He pulled a shiny handgun from the case.

"The one and only 1884 Colt gun, single action."

Cash examined it closely. It had a sleek dark wood handle, curved for a comfortable hold.

"Now these suckers are deadly," He pulled out a set of three, silver lined knives.

"The edges are as sharp as an eagle's glare."

He placed them on the table.

"THESE babies are what I call a *must have*." He pulled out two matching redwood revolvers, a medal plating on the handles.

The mayor continued to pull out an array of guns, ammunition and other weapons until the table was covered with them.

"Take your pick." He encouraged.

Cash watched as Sam took the silver knife trio, testing them on the table cloth. Betsy took the pair of redwood revolvers and a group of throwing knives.

"What are ya going to take, Cash?" Zane asked quickly. Cash examined the contents on the table. He wanted a gun, that's for sure. He reached for the Colt gun. It was heavy in his hands, but had a feeling of realness. It was a secure weapon for a dangerous journey ahead.

"Good! Good!" The mayor laughed, clasping his hands together excitedly.

-TO BE CONTINUED-

The Adventure Soon Begins

