

**A decent cowboy does not take what  
belongs to someone else and if he does  
he deserves to be strung up and left for  
the flies and coyotes ~ Judge Roy Bean**

August 21, 1863

**ONE**

A half dozen men huddled around a small campfire in Mount Oread hidden by thick cypress trees discussing the upcoming raid on the little town of Lawrence, Kansas, while the rest of the troops milled about waiting for the order to mount their horses. Quantrill read the letter Mrs. Loren sent to him a second time.

“Well, this

letter spells it all out. We have a good map of the town and we now know which houses to spare.” He looked up at his lieutenants and laughed, which on this night, gave him an otherworldly unbalanced look that foretold of the horror that was about to be visited on the town of Lawrence. “Tonight we will ride into Lawrence and

we’ll clean the town out. We’ll rob the bank, stores, houses, and we’ll take everything of value and when we’re finished sacking the town, we’ll slaughter every man, woman and child.” He held the letter up for all of his men to see and then he paused for effect.

“Except for the few names of friends mentioned in this letter.”

Cal Rymes, John Mercer, who was known to his friends as Bear because of his size and fierce fighting skills, and another young raider, a sixteen year old youth named Jesse James sat around a small fire drinking coffee and discussing the upcoming raid. The reflection of the flames dancing in the campfire reflected off of Jesse’s

cold eyes. “I’m going to get rich tonight. I’m going to concentrate on the bank. There’s sure to be a lot of cash in the safe and I’m going to make sure I get my share. Then I’m going to go and find me some Yankees to kill,” Jesse said

wide-eyed, his voice a pitch higher than normal because of the anticipated slaughter that he was

about to take part in. John Bear Mercer smiled malevolently. "I'm going to kill me a lot of Yankees today and then I'm going to join Jesse and help myself to some Yankee money."

Cal sat hunched over by the fire trying to keep warm. "I can use some money too, but I don't like the idea of killing defenseless people, especially women and children." Jesse laughed. "This is war Cal, and in war, people die." He laughed nervously... "And come this morning, a lot of people are going to die and that's a fact and

nothing in the world can change it. That's life Cal and there's nothing you or me can do about it."

Mercer, a 21-year-old Missouri boy who was real handy with a six-gun agreed with Jesse. "Jesse's right, Cal. This is war and killing Yankees is what we do." Cal shook his head as he poked at the dwindling fire. He joined Quantrill's band in the Spring of '64. He was proud to be a part of Quantrill's raiders believing the 27-year-

old confederate colonel was a patriot. He learned differently while riding with him. Quantrill was a murdering psychopath using the war as an excuse to rob, murder, and pillage Yankees.

"What do you want to do when you get out of this war Cal?" Jesse asked.

"I'd like to get me one of those new Yankee navy colts and then when we hit Lawrence, maybe I can get me a good horse while I'm there."

Jesse nodded. "I hear you... but that's not what I asked you. I want to know what you are going to do *after* the war."

Cal blinked twice and then he looked at Jesse. "You know Jess, I never looked that far ahead, but now that you mention it, I'd like to get me a spread and raise me some cattle... maybe some horses too." "You need money for that Cal," Jesse added. "Yeah I know. I never got much money from

these raids we been going on. I guess when this war ends, I'll do some buffalo hunting. They're getting good money for the skins and if I can kill enough of them, I could maybe get me enough money to start a small ranch."

“Why would you want to do that when you could rob a Yankee train or bank and just take what you want and be done with it? That’s what I’m going to do when this war ends. I’m going to make those Yankees pay for what they did to the South and I’m going to do it for years to come.”

Mercer nodded in affirmation. “That’s what I figure on doing too. There’s a lot of banks between here and California that’s waiting to be taken by a man who’s not afraid to die or to kill, and I’m just that man.”

Jesse smiled. “Now that’s what I’m talking about. Maybe I’ll put a gang together after the war and do just that. Rob Yankee banks.”

Cal noticed the look on his friend’s face and he knew that he meant what he said. “Look Jess, you’re my friend and whatever you do, you know I’ll always be your friend... but I joined Quantrill to fight Yankees, not to rob and kill unarmed civilians like we been doing. It ain’t right. These people have a right to live. They’re hard

working God fearing Christians even if they are Yankees.” They were shaken from their conversation by a command from Colonel Quantrill.

“Lawrence is over yonder just beyond that mountain and we can be there in an hour, so mount up. We’re riding to Lawrence. When we enter that town, you’ll kill everyone you see and I don’t care if it’s men, women or children. You kill them all understand?” The men all gave an eager resounding “YES” to Quantrill’s question.

“Look men, I’ve assigned some of you to guard the few friendly houses in that town, but don’t worry, you’ll still get a share of the loot when I divvy it up. Now let’s ride.” An hour later, all hell broke loose early on the morning of August 21 when Quantrill and his raiders entered Lawrence. Quantrill galloped down from Mount

Oread leading 450 guerrillas and attacked Lawrence. Senator Lane, the prime target, escaped to a cornfield in only his nightshirt, but the rest of the town wasn’t as lucky. Quantrill ordered his men to kill all the men and boys claiming that if they were “old enough to carry a rifle” they were old enough to die. Quantrill led by

example using his French pinfire revolvers, which were his weapons of choice, killing several men by dragging them out of their homes and executing them in front of their families. Cal was ordered to burn down a gun shop but before doing so, he entered the shop looking for a colt navy 44-caliber repeater. He found a matched

set of knives under the counter and he took them, but as he was about to leave, he noticed a display case with various carved ivory handles so he took two sets of those as well. He found a can of kerosene and poured it liberally around the store and then he lit a match and threw it on the kerosene-soaked wooden floor which

caused the building to whoosh instantly into flames. Quantrill, still mounted on his horse, watched the building go up with satisfaction. As Cal stepped out onto the street, he suddenly pulled his old battered Remington from his hip holster as quick as lightning and whirled around and fired. Quantrill ducked thinking Cal was

shooting at him so he pulled his gun and spun his horse around in time to see a man fall dead from Cal's bullet just as he was about to plug the colonel in the back. Quantrill said nothing. He just nodded at Cal who holstered his gun and then Quantrill pulled the reins on his horse, spun around, and galloped down the street. The

fighting was over almost as quickly as it had begun. That morning at 9 a.m., Quantrill left 183 men and boys dead, ranging in age from 14 to 90 years and most of the buildings in Lawrence were burning except for two businesses. Back at camp, Quantrill sat by the fire beside a hanging oak tree sipping coffee as Cal walked past.

He hadn't noticed the colonel because of the shadows cast by the hanging limbs of the trees. The colonel called out to Cal and when he got his attention, he motioned for him to come over to his campfire and sit down beside him. "Thanks for watching my back today trooper. That blue belly would have plugged me for sure if you

hadn't shot him first. I owe you one for killing that yank. I don't like owing a debt to anyone so what can I do for you to even us up?"

"I could use a good horse colonel?"

"Is that all you want soldier?"

"That's it colonel. A good horse will do me nicely."

"We took a number of good horses from that town today so... go pick out the one you want. He's yours"

"Thanks colonel." Cal was about to walk away but

Quantrill stopped him. “Before you leave, I just wanted to say I was impressed with the way you handle a gun. That was some pretty fancy shooting you did today. Where did you learn to shoot like that?”

“My father was a gunsmith and I was handling guns almost before I could walk. He had a range in the back of his store and I used to practice shooting there for hours. I never thought much about it until I became a soldier. When I saw what bad shots the other men were, I realized that my constant practicing and shooting guns

behind my father’s gun shop made me a much deadlier shot than them.”

## **TWO**

The next two years were grating on Cal. Ever since he saved Colonel Quantrill and brought it to the attention of the men, they took note of the way he handled a gun. And when they talked about him, they always referred to him by his given name of Calico, which rankled the young man. He preferred to be called Cal but he never

let on that he knew of the gun handling reputation he had with the men. Cal believed in the Southern cause but he was burnt out and although he was a soldier, he didn’t agree with the way Colonel Quantrill fought for the Southern cause. The senseless killing of 150 Negroes only caused Cal to regret serving under him, but Cal

was a soldier and he performed his duty—albeit reluctantly. He desperately looked forward to the day when he could leave Quantrill and his raiders. He knew if he rode away now and disappeared, one night the colonel would track him down and have him shot as a deserter. Even though the war was quickly coming to an

end, in the spring of 1865, Quantrill, with only a few dozen men, staged a number of raids in the western part of Kentucky. On April 26<sup>th</sup>, Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Grant, and on April 26, General Johnston surrendered his army to General Sherman. On May 10, Quantrill led his small force of about a dozen men into

an ambush at Wakefield Farm and because his horse was skittish, he couldn’t escape and was shot in the back by a union soldier. Cal watched in horror as the raid turned to a slaughter, watching all of his men being killed by the yanks. Cal

managed to escape only because he was the last man to enter the farm. The moment the

union forces opened fire and began killing the men in a crossfire Cal turned his horse and dashed away to safety. He discovered later that Quantrill was brought by a wagon to the military prison hospital in Louisville, Kentucky paralyzed from the chest down where on June 6, 1865, at the age of 27, he died from his wounds.

Fortunately, Jesse James wasn't with Quantrill; he was fighting Yankees alongside Bloody Bill Anderson where he was shot in the chest. What turned Cal off to Jesse was the part he played in the Centralia Massacre which witnesses described as a "carnival of blood." While the gang was looting the town of Centralia and

murdering everyone in their path, a train with 21 unarmed Union soldiers on leave pulled into the center of the town. The soldiers were massacred as well as another 150 captured soldiers and Jesse was credited with killing Union Major A.V.E. Johnson in the massacre. In Cal's mind, Jesse had stepped over the line when the gang

mutilated, disemboweled, and scalped the bodies. When he found the matched set of navy colts in Lawrence in the waning days of the war, he began wearing two guns. He was right-handed and while not a bad shot with his left hand, he was deadly with his right hand, so he wore both guns in the most convenient positions on his

body for his right hand to reach them quickly. His fastest position was the belt holster or hip holster. He could pull his gun as quick as a rattler could strike and he was a match for any man wearing a gun. He wore his second gun on his left in a modified shoulder holster but with the butt facing right horizontally so he could pull it

if he needed to. In June of 1865 in Kansas, Cal was discharged. He packed his meager gear in his saddlebags, mounted his horse, and headed west toward the plains to hunt buffalo. He could have hunted buffalo in Kansas but he wanted to put some distance between Kansas and his memories of Quantrill and Bloody Bill

Anderson, the war, and the part he played in it. To him, Kansas was like a festering boil that had to be lanced and the only way to do that was to put a lot of distance between him and the state. He was in no hurry to get anywhere so he took his time and little by little, he settled into a relaxed routine, traveling 25 to 35 miles a day.

He had a good horse and he had two fine guns but what he didn't have was a saddle gun. And he needed a good buffalo gun. But that would have to wait until he had the money to buy one. He was heading out of Kansas but to do that, he had to pass through Dodge City. Cal checked his pockets and found that all he had to his

name was \$15.75. Still, it was enough to buy him a bath and shave and a traveling shirt. He looked down at his

boots which were still serviceable. He was lucky in a way because riding with Quantrill and looting the towns they destroyed meant he'd at least have boots on his feet and clothes on his back when most confederate soldiers were barefoot. Cal rode into town looking like a ghost. His clothes were tattered and hung loose on his

rail-thin frame. He hadn't shaved in weeks and his face was almost hidden by his black beard which grew down low on his face accentuating black eyes sunk in deep sockets under thick black eyebrows, which gave him the appearance of a wraith. In short, he looked like a walking corpse. He saw a sign saying 'lunch 25 cents' so

he pulled over, dismounted, tied his horse to the hitching post, and walked in. The place was crowded and there were no free tables and as he was about to leave, he noticed two men get up from their table. He walked over and was about to sit when someone grabbed his arm to stop him. "That's our table, mister."

Cal looked at the hand holding his arm and then he shifted his gaze and looked directly in the man's eyes. "I would get your hand off of my arm while you still can, mister." Cal said it to the man quietly but firmly. "I'm not going to tell you again." The man released Cal's arm and tilted his head towards the door. "We'll teach you

some manners Reb so next time you'll think twice before taking someone's table. We'll be waiting outside for you, Reb."

The customers at the surrounding tables heard what was said and they studied the young man as he sat down calmly at the table as his waitress approached to take his order. He didn't seem particularly worried about the men waiting for him outside. "What will it be, cowboy?"

"Bring me your 25 cents special."

“That’ll be two eggs, bacon, toast and coffee. Coming right up.”

“Could you make that three eggs, miss. I haven’t had eggs in two years.”

She looked at his ragged uniform and she felt sorry for him. She could tell he had gone through some hard times. “Sure I’ll give you a couple of extra eggs and I won’t charge you for them.” She looked outside to see if the two troublemakers were waiting like they said they would. She was disappointed to see them still loitering

in front of her store. She returned a few minutes later with Cal’s breakfast and as she placed it in front of him, she whispered so the other customers wouldn’t hear. “Those men are still outside. You could leave through the back door and they wouldn’t see you.” Cal dug into his eggs like a man who hadn’t eaten for a month, which

wasn’t far from the truth. She waited for an answer and when she didn’t get one she turned to leave. “Thank you for caring, ma’am, but after what I’ve been through, those two don’t bother me in the least. If they’re still there when I leave here, then they won’t ever bother anyone again.” He took a sip of his coffee and finished his

meal. The waitress came to clean the table and Cal asked her, “Where can I get a bath and a shave around here?” “Tony’s Barber Emporium. It’s right down the street, you can’t miss it.”

“Thank you ma’am, and that was a right elegant meal you served.”

“But what about those two men? Aren’t you concerned about them?”

“Not in the least, ma’am. After what I’ve done in the war, it’s them that should be concerned about me.”

Upon hearing him say that, her maternal instincts awakened and she felt sorry for the cowboy. She took a closer look at the pathetic ex-soldier sitting at her table noticing his torn clothing and his proud demeanor. Yes... he had been through hell but he survived and she knew that anyone who survived the action this man must have

experienced must be tough under fire.

“Are you sure you don’t want to use the rear exit?”



“No ma’am, I came in through the front door and that’s the way I intend to leave. But I appreciate your concern.” All eyes were on him when Cal stood and walked to the door and then stopped. He instinctively lifted his hip colt smoothly from its holster. Satisfied, he took a deep breath and walked out onto the plank sidewalk

where the two men were in the street waiting for him. Dodge at that time was a lawless town after the war with ex-soldiers from both the North and the South passing through. Some restless souls just passed through and they didn’t linger there long before they left town. But there were others who were looking for trouble; ex-

soldiers, gunfighters, cardsharps, prostitutes and others of their kind who preyed on the weak or unfortunate. Cal looked like a weak and easy mark for the two troublemakers. He looked as if he couldn’t stand on his feet for long let alone handle himself in a fight and these two saddle tramps preyed on the weak. They noticed the

torn and ragged uniform he wore and then they noticed the anomaly of the two ivory handled colt navies he wore and they paused for a second. They should have taken that pause as a sign to let the man be, but they didn’t. They were full of themselves knowing that two men who lived by the gun could certainly kill the rail-thin,

pathetic looking ex-soldier standing before them in tattered clothes in the streets of Dodge. The men circled and pedestrians scurried out of the line of fire. By this time, curious onlookers gathered on either side of the street to witness the young ex- confederate soldier who was about to be gunned down by the two known Yankee

troublemakers. One of the men called out to Cal. “You should have let us have that table in there and none of this would be happening, but you Rebs just don’t know when to quit. We killed you in the war and now we’re going to kill you in the street.”

Cal didn’t say a word, which gave the men false courage thinking he was a coward. He watched the men get in position as they circled him. Suddenly the man on his left went for his gun but Cal was faster on the draw and he plugged him square in the chest and without warning, he spun around to face the other blue belly while at

the same time in one fluid motion he pulled the hammer back and shot the dead man’s partner before he could get his shot off. The action happened so fast that the two shots almost sounded like one shot... almost, but not quite. Cal turned

and said loudly to the crowd assembled on the plant sidewalks, "It was a fair fight. You all

saw it so when the law comes around wanting to know what happened here, be sure to tell them what you saw." As Cal walked toward his horse, he pulled the second gun which was fully loaded from his shoulder holster and placed it in his side holster. He would replace the two spent cartridges in the other gun the first chance he

had. The waitress was standing on the plank sidewalk in front of her store as Cal approached.

"Come back later tonight for dinner. It's on me. My name is Lorraine... what's yours?"

"Cal, ma'am."

"Well you go and get yourself cleaned up and when you're ready, you come back here and I'll have a nice meal prepared for you."

Cal looked at her wondering why she was being so kind to him. He hadn't had anyone make a fuss over him since his mother passed away from the flux. He didn't verbalize his thoughts. Instead, he turned and started to walk towards the barbershop but he took two steps and stopped. "Excuse me Lorraine, but do you know where

those two troublemakers' horses are?"

"I saw them take something out of the saddlebags of that horse over yonder."

Cal looked at where she pointed and saw the two horses. "Thanks Lorraine." Cal crossed the busy dirt thoroughfare and headed toward the horses. Both horses had saddlebags on them so he started with the horse closest to him and looked at what was in it. He found an extra shirt and a pair of pants, which he took wondering if

they would fit him. After he took his bath, he thought, he'd try them on to see if they fit. He moved to the second set of saddlebags and looked through it but found nothing but a small leather bag and some ammunition. When he looked in the bag, he found it contained 42 silver dollars, which he pocketed. He was about to head to

the barber when he noticed a long rifle in the saddle sheath. He pulled the rifle from its scabbard and took a good long look at it. This was the rifle he was

missing. It was a very special rifle: a .50 caliber Kentucky Rifle that had a 41" barrel instead of a stock 36" barrel and it weighed a whopping 18 pounds. This rifle—in the

hands of Cal—could hit targets at about half a mile away. It was perfect for hunting buffalo. He gathered the ammunition from the saddlebags and then he unhooked the saddle sheath and the rifle and took them to his horse where he secured the rifle and sheath to *his* saddle.

### **THREE**

Cal sat in the tub for a half hour allowing the hot water to do its job dissolving the dirt and grime from his body. But the water had cooled so Cal decided that after a half hour of blissful relaxation it was time to get out of the tub. He dried himself off and tried on the black pants and black shirt and was delighted to find that though

they were a little large, to him, the clothes fit perfect. The next stop was the barbershop for a haircut and shave. When Cal entered Lorraine's restaurant, she didn't recognize him. She pointed to a table. "There's no one sitting at that table, sir."

Cal laughed knowing that she didn't recognize him.

"What's so funny cowboy?"

"I came back for that meal you promised me."

"Meal? What meal?" She squinted her eyes and took a closer look at the handsome young man standing before her. "My God, is that you Cal?"

"Yes ma'am, it's me."

"My God. I would never have recognized you.

Under all that hair and dirt you are a striking looking man Mr.? Mr.?"

"It's Rymes ma'am, but just call me Cal."

"Cal Rymes. Hmm, your name has a nice ring to it, Mr. Rymes. Is Cal short for Calvin?"

"No ma'am, it's short for Calico, but no one calls me Calico, it's just Cal."

“Calico... I like it. I think I’ll call you Calico. Calico Rymes. That sounds good.” But she thought to herself *Lorraine Rymes sounded even better*. “Are you staying long in town, Calico?”

“No ma’am, maybe for a day or two. I have to buy some supplies for the road and then I’ll be on my way.”

“Where are you heading, Calico?”

“I’m heading up into the plain’s territory. Plan on doing some buffalo hunting.”

“Buffalo hunting? Why would you want to do that?”

“Well I figure if I get enough buffalo hides, I can make enough money to buy me a small ranch somewhere. I don’t have any skills, but I do know cattle and horses, so I figure I could make a go of it with a small cattle ranch and maybe breed me some good horses.”

“Have you given any thought to staying in Dodge?”

“No, Lorraine. Dodge is still in Kansas and Kansas reminds me of all the bad things that have happened to me in the war. I want to get as far away from Kansas as I can.” Lorraine felt terrible picturing what Cal must have gone through in the war. She understood his plight but she selfishly hoped she could convince him to change his mind.

“Why don’t you stay here Cal and help me with my business? I can use a partner and you seem to be pretty level headed. Why don’t you think about it before you go running off to hunt buffalo?”

Cal stood stone faced and didn’t reply for a moment. Lorraine wondered if he heard what she said. But then as she was about to repeat her question, he replied without showing emotion or interest. “I can’t picture myself working in a restaurant. Not after what I’ve been through. It would drive me batty. No... I need to get lost on

the trail for a year or two before I make up my mind to get involved with anything. I need quiet and solitude somewhere away from towns and people.” Lorraine understood how he felt and she wouldn’t want to get close to someone carrying this much hurt around with him. After he had time to heal maybe then he might

reconsider her proposal. “Well if you won’t be my partner maybe I can put some meat on that skinny frame of yours and fatten you up a little before you leave.”

Cal hadn’t had cause to smile in the last four years but he cracked a thin smile when Lorraine passed that remark. “Lead the way, pretty lady.” Now it was Lorraine’s turn to smile. Cal noticed that he was getting some respectful stares in the small rustic restaurant from the patrons who recognized him from this afternoon’s

gunfight.

“Sit over by the wall, Calico where I know you will feel comfortable and I’ll fix you some vitals and bring them to you when it’s ready.” Lorraine knew that after the gunfight, a man like Cal would want to see who came into her eatery and he wouldn’t be comfortable sitting with someone behind him, not after killing two men.

Fifteen minutes later, Lorraine came out of the kitchen carrying a platter filled with hot, delectable food which she placed on the table in front of Cal. “Let’s see how hungry you really are, cowboy. I brought you a sampling of the finest cuts of veal, pork, lamb, and beef. Now if you leave any food on the table, you’ll have to do

the dishes, so you better eat everything on your plate, understand?” Cal responded with a broad smile showing a perfect set of white teeth which actually made him appear handsomer to Lorraine than he actually was. The door to the restaurant opened and a young boy carrying posters came bounding in. He said something to

Lorraine and when she nodded apparently giving him her approval, he turned and placed one by the window and another on the counter. The boy was about to leave but Cal motioned to him and the boy came to his table. What got Cal’s attention was the one large word headlining the poster. “SHOOTERS” Cal studied the poster

the boy had just handed him. It appeared that a representative of Winchester Arms was in town touting the company’s new rifle in conjunction with the railroad which was heralding its arrival early the following year through the contest. The poster stated that there would be a shooting exhibition conducted outside of town. And

for an entrance fee of \$10 dollars, the best shot would win a new fifteen shot repeater and an improvement over the Henry rifle. The Winchester was

described as a one of a kind 45 Caliber 66 gold gifted relief-engraved exhibition rifle. It had 10 elaborate panel scenes engraved on it,

and the wood was top quality lacquered burl 4X grade. The brass receiver was gold gifted. The day of the contest, according to the poster, was this coming Saturday. He looked for the name of the representative and found it at the bottom of the page. A Mr. Henry Galton would be available in Horace's saloon from 11 am to 4 pm

to answer any questions and to take the required entrance fee.

Cal pulled some change from his pocket to pay for dinner but Lorraine wouldn't hear of it. "I told you earlier, Calico, that dinner was on me tonight." Cal thanked her. "I wonder if Mr. Galton is still at Horace's."

"Did someone mention my name?" a voice asked.

Cal looked around the room until his gaze fell upon a smiling face sitting at a table near him. "Are you Mr. Galton?"

Cal asked. "None other, son. What can I do for you?"

"I read your poster and that is one fine rifle. I want to register so I can participate in your shooting contest on Saturday."

"You can register now, son. I finished my dinner and I have nothing to do, so have a seat and we'll go through the formality of registering you for the contest." Galton reached down and picked up his carpetbag which he placed on the table. He opened it and pulled out a sheath of papers and browsed through them until he found

the one he wanted. "Ah, here it is." There were about ten names on the sheet and Galton pointed to the next line. "Sign on this line, son."

Cal signed under the last signature and Galton picked the paper up and read his name. "Cal Rymes... Can you shoot, Mr. Rymes?"

Cal nodded. "As good as anyone I guess. By the way Mr. Galton, is it just the people with their names on the page I signed that I'll be shooting against?"

Galton laughed. "Hell no Mr. Rymes, there'll be over a hundred men shooting that day. I left these posters in every town I passed through and I expect that all the men who registered from around the country will show up on Saturday."

Galton held out his hand. “Now that I’ve explained everything to you, how about paying me

the \$10.00 entrance fee that you owe me.”