

## EDEN NEVER HEARD

(Copyright 2013 by Richie Swanson)

Appeared in Wilde Literary Journal, Fall 2013, [www.wildemagazine.org](http://www.wildemagazine.org)

I sat at a steamboat landing in a lead-mining town in Illinois, determined to be rid of roughnecks and floozies, and winter downriver in St. Louis and acquire groceries and dry goods to wholesale to settlements booming up the Missouri. But Captain Charles Dunaway docked the *Glory*, and I queried him about shipping rates, and he took me into his cabin and confidence. He knew of a bench of shoreline one-hundred miles upriver in Minnesota Territory, a town-site opening, Sioux Prairie, and he needed men to preempt and hold claims until Congress ratified a treaty that would secure the Mississippi's west bank from Dakota Indians.

He steamed directly there, stopping only at wood yards. He dropped off his brother Gordon, three others and me and turned around. We roped off the site most suitable for a landing in his name and staked out five more claims. We each built a shanty, and one morning lumber floated loosely down the Mississippi, and Gordon and I waded into the November water, and I expected a logging raft to appear any moment, a crew-boss to holler, "Thieves!" I pitched boards ashore hastily, banging them, and Gordon gave me an icy-blue glare, arching his Scotch-Irish eyebrows—tall, auburn, instantly commanding. He tossed boards quietly, secretly. He had shared a fifty-pound catfish with everyone last night, but here was a white-pine joist 'would cost anyone three bits.

We wobbled up the bank, cold, drenched, exhausted, and Gordon shouldered a joist jauntily, hurrying ahead. A claim shack had risen on Charles' landing site, and someone fifteen or sixteen-years-old squatted on the roof, fitting a stovepipe--dark-looking, half-breed.

"Hello gentlemen." The lad smiled fluidly, long black eyelashes curving silkily above warm chocolate eyes. "I'm Dorilus Knox."

"This claim belongs to my brother," said Gordon. "He's in La Crosse, getting flour."

Dorilus looked at the four shanties upriver, each tiny as a hog-pen.

“Everyone says Captain Dunaway’s never occupied this claim.”

I caught Dorilus’ eye, raised a hand, but Gordon swung the joist. Roof-boards crashed, Dorilus plunged, and Gordon flung him away, two-heads taller, a bear man-handling a cub. Dorilus bolted up, and they rolled on poles, Gordon on top, punching Dorilus’ head, and then Gordon screamed, his right hand bleeding between Dorilus’ teeth. Gordon punched Dorilus left-handed, Dorilus growled and gnawed, and Gordon swayed up and keeled backward, ghost-white. He lay blank-eyed, and Dorilus spat blood, lurching at me, and I raised my palm again. I had no desire to fight Dorilus, and for the thousandth time since coming to America I did not know what was right.

Dorilus knelt pressing a kerchief against the bleeding thumb, and I told him the same thing Gordon had told Silas, Erwin and Henry when they had begrudged the captain his landing. “It is six-miles long here, enough for twelve claims.”

Dorilus shrugged, Gordon moaning, shivering uncontrollably.

“Did you cut him?” Erwin arrived, drawing pistols.

Silas and Henry followed, and I nodded desperately at Gordon. We carried him to Erwin’s shanty and laid him by the stove, and Dorilus unbuttoned him, and I turned, shedding my wet clothes too, sneaking looks, feeling pained, captive. Joseph who had owned warehouses with me in Zurich had acted too boldly and had been pressed to death in a bale of coats, and I had come to America to marry a wife and forget the *polizei* unrolling the bale, showing me the gouge between Joseph’s legs. But Dorilus drew blankets to Gordon’s chin, washed and salved his thumb, rubbed whiskey on his chest, and I saw in him what any man such as I would hope.

Dorilus lithely spooned Gordon raccoon stew, his fingers uncommonly gentle. “I’ll give your brother until the river freezes to occupy his claim,” he said.

“Agreed, but I warn you, nothing is final until the government surveys it,” said Gordon.

“Yea, we must hold together.” I tightened my coat importantly around my warming flesh. “We cannot lose our claims every time we leave them.”

“Yea,” said Henry and Silas.

“Long as his thumb don’ rot,” said Erwin.

\* \* \*

Dorilus propped up his shanty, and later I found him alone, watching the river in the last crystalline light before dusk, the silvery-blue surface tinkling sluggishly, crusting with ice, mist rising sleepily, and I wondered if what Gordon said was true, that birds here in spring sang more of Eden than even God heard, and Sioux Prairie's beauty would be surpassed only by its wealth.

"You've had schooling?" I said.

Dorilus flashed a bright-white grin and padded around a preacher, a snag bobbing, baptizing its crown in freezing slush. "And you, money?"

He nodded at his dugout hidden by the bank, and a laugh leapt in me. We launched at nightfall, looking out for sawyers and sleepers, dark-rolling logs, ice-slabs scraping and banging the bow. We passed Sioux burning their low fires on islands, waiting to be moved west, and then the Rattlesnake Cliffs--bone-colored outcrops shadowed by geese and ducks, flocks cackling, flying furiously south. Dorilus had no hurry. The mist swallowed us, frosting my face, and the dugout was so tiny he arched his legs and snuggled my hips with winter moccasins, and I reclined into his hands, feeling heat as hungry as my own. I was twice his age, had loved no one since Joseph, and Dorilus stroked my cheeks, murmuring, and I closed my eyes, the river breathing a cold-dark veil and tangled mass of islands on both sides of us.

At dawn we paddled past the ice-rim of La Crosse's shore, the *Glory* frozen in, and we landed up a creek and climbed a sandbar to wooden sidewalks—Wisconsin had been a state four years, and La Crosse had a railroad coming, plain-frame houses, fences around lots, smithies, a brick schoolhouse, bookshops, groceries.

Dorilus wrote a list in precise hand, his voice certain beyond his youth. "Corn meal, salt pork, whale oil--" He rapped the back door of Lute Ulrich Mercantile, and a bald-headed chap welcomed me in Swiss German. His wife brought chocolate in china cups, and Lute perused the list, disdaining my bank notes, his eyes twinkling at Dorilus through gold-rimmed spectacles. "You'll pay in logs?"

Dorilus smiled yes-- Lute had known Dorilus' father, had supplied Spencer Knox's

mill and pinery camps thirty miles up the Black River before Spencer had caught the croup and died in a day. The storekeeper ushered us upstairs and winked at me before leaving us alone. "I trust this boy. I credit him like gold."

Doris and I settled into a back-corner room with a sheet-iron stove and a single tick stuffed with swamp-grass.

"I could not name my mother," said Dorilus. "The justice ruled I was not an heir."

"She was Sioux?" I said.

"The Indians up the Black are Winnebago."

"She was that?"

"Don't know."

"Brule?"

"Don't know."

"French?"

He tittered, the beautiful brown devil.

\* \* \*

Knocks pounded the door in the morning. "Mister Kountz!" called Captain Dunaway. "Nicholas Kountz! Open up!"

I knew he would persist, I cracked the door, and he swelled in a velvet-collared coat, five-years-older than I, ten older than Gordon, his beard broad, stiff, shaggy, chestnut. He saw the body beneath bed quilts and frowned repulsively. "You have a woman here?"

Dorilus sat up in his night shirt, and Captain Dunaway eased his countenance—men commonly shared beds on the frontier, an undeniable necessity.

Dorilus stood and grabbed the chamber pot. "Please, sir."

The captain glowered at the brownness of his skin, "Who is this?"

I pushed out into the hall, and he paced beside me, whispering angrily, the clap of his boots barely restrained, and I told him, yes, the Sioux Prairie claims were intact, and no, I would not help him haul flour there. His face shut down testily against his beard. "Why, he's Spencer Knox's boy!" He banged down the stairway, and Dorilus leaned

suddenly against me, sighing lightly, smugly, watching him hustle out.

Dorilus had been raised white, not Indian, and we dressed in frilled shirts and formal coats and strolled to the riverfront, where Dunaway's crew loaded provisions from the *Glory* onto a carry-all, his clerk Luther McKinney harnessing a two-horse team, fidgety mares. Dorilus walked past him and banged an oak club against the ice, and the ice twanged, shaking, and Dorilus turned toward Ulrich's—no hurry again, all smile.

We stayed two more nights, and when Dorilus went to the stable, I felt a thread to him, a vacancy which tightened unbearably until his steps finally sounded again in the hall, and we drank to Bliss and Bane, the only available oxen in Crawford County, and I showed him how to gather kirsch around his tongue, allowing the nuttiness to wallow, even though the cherry liqueur failed to wash away my doubt—another thread pulled me painfully toward Charles Dunaway, who stole ahead to the landing claim and market we had foolishly left him.

\* \* \*

We loaded our own carry-all as sunrise spread a buttery glow across a fresh dusting of snow, the rive-ice underneath pearly and smooth, the valley yawning between cliffs sheer and white, junipers and cedars wind-twisted on towering rims, boughs groping anciently. We rode upriver, the oxen finding fine traction, and about noon we saw a slash of blue water, a mare dead on ice. Captain Dunaway came out from a wooded shore, and McKinney waved distraughtly, his second arm dangling crookedly.

“Stay here,” Dorilus said to me. “Keep the team in the middle where the current doesn't sweep so much.” He turned, and rage gripped me. Dunaway hailed him, and he abandoned all caution, pacing directly to the hole. Dorilus and Gordon peered down from the edge, and Dorilus smiled back at me. He stripped to his drawers and jumped in feet-first, and I gawked, disbelieving, dumbfounded.

Dunaway and McKinney knelt, screaming into the hole. “No, it's too heavy! Cut it!”

McKinney handed Dunaway a knife, and Dunaway slid in, and I grabbed blankets, a rope. I ran shaking, panicking. I arrived as Dunaway pushed up Dorilus by his armpits.

I pulled one arm, and McKinney struggled one-handed with the other, and Dorilus slid out and crawled up, dripping, puking water.

Dunaway went under again. He crouched in water as clear as a lake in the Alps. He hunched, cutting something, and he surfaced and tossed out Yankee schillings--each worth two and one-half bits.

McKinney jumped to them, scooped them onto a blanket, barked excitedly. "The saddlebags were under the seat! They went in when the ice split! The mare broke her leg! The sled got my arm!"

"The girth caught my foot down there," said Dorilus.

Dunaway surfaced again, his face welt-red. He dropped two more fistfuls of schillings, and Dorilus screamed a savage shriek, jumping in again, and then he and Dunaway surfaced with four fistfuls, Dorilus beaming at me, his raven-hair dripping, his eyes and teeth sparkling, chest pulsing madly. I shed my cloak, and McKinney glared like a peasant who would never get out from under. He twisted his mouth in dire foreboding, his eyes begging me to stay. I jumped in.

We splashed up, down, up, cheering, tossing coin, gasping giddily. We squatted at the bottom, groped beneath the bags of schillings. We heaved them together, shoved them out.

We ran on the ice, screeching, snow stinging our feet, drawers freezing against flesh. We guzzled whiskey, panting around Dunaway's fire, and McKinney tossed on slash, his coat filthy from gathering it.

"Oh, boys," said Dunaway, "I've had those schillings since I came from Pennsylvania."

"Mister Kountz and I deserve half," said Dorilus.

"I saved your life," said the captain. "You owe me. I'll pay you the use of your cattle and sled to Sioux Prairie, and after you get my goods to Gordon, I'll pay you by the day to hold my landing and chop cordwood. Luther can't do it now. His arm's broken."

"Sprained," said McKinney.

"It's a perfect landing for a mill," said Dunaway. "It catches rafts naturally."

Dorilus' smile broke slowly, amiably. "I own that landing, captain. You weren't on it, and I built a shack a week ago."

“You’re not old enough.”

“I will be by the time a land office opens in Sioux Prairie.”

“You’re not a citizen, never will be.”

“Wager me, captain. I’ll show you a season’s worth of rafts free for the taking—two-million board feet, maybe three.”

The captain grimaced no, and McKinney moaned mournfully, rocking in anguish.

\* \* \*

Dunaway walked McKinney to La Crosse, and Dorilus and I packed Bliss, Bane and a mare and drove his goods to Sioux Prairie. We dropped them at Gordon’s shoreline, and Gordon glared us to the landing. Dorilus grinned readily, “I will show you something to pay for our carpenters, saws and steam engines. I will split it four ways.”

We waited ten days, sled-hauling oak from islands, improving Dorilus’ shanty on the landing claim. We built a storehouse on my claim, and then Charles arrived with draft horses, and we left Erwin, Silas and Henry at Sioux Prairie with new rifles. We rode upriver in breezeless sunshine, the snow shallow, and we hugged the Wisconsin shore, the gullies rocky up the cliffs, and I thought of Valais, Joseph sauntering beside hard-edged boulders, his gait resplendent in his mountaineering garb, as if he and I had somehow gained more command of our world after we had climbed to see the Matterhorn.

Dorilus glanced at me furtively, searchingly, and I waved to indicate the expanse of the valley, pinelands ahead, our destiny of owning timber and mills together. He deepened his look and turned us into a stinging gust, air suddenly frigid, snow-clouds racing down the frozen channel. He dismounted and thumped his oak club against the ice.

“I’ve piloted boats here ten years,” said Charles. “The draft’s too shallow, too narrow.”

Dorilus eyed island-banks, walking confidently along the draft his father had shown him. “Listen.” He thumped the ice again. “Hear it? The *Glory’ll* have three and one-half feet here even in low water.”

“No,” said Charles. “We’ll float our log rafts with oarsmen.”

Dorilus looked at him gaily, “The *Glory’ll* float five rafts at once here.”

We turned and rode into the Chippewa River's delta.

We slept on furs and boughs, in eider-down blankets, the Chippewa's ice belching, quaking below us. The ground pitched, buckling, and we woke to trees swaying dizzily, stars shimmering at twenty-below.

"If you're wrong about your El Dorado, you're a criminal, and I'm a fool," said Charles.

"I gave my word," said Dorilus. "The army made rafts to rebuild Fort Crawford years ago. They started to float them down, and they smashed apart against snags. The army never returned. I saw the jam last fall."

"Last fall?" said Gordon. "You know you must maintain truth before your neighbors *now, always*. You cannot bear false witness."

Dorilus stared skyward, eyelashes flicking, and my fingers ached to touch and slow him, but Gordon leveled his voice gently, "If you join the Dunaway Log Company, you must serve more than yourselves. You must record every cent you spend. You cannot drink or dance your earnings away. All of us must give land for churches and schools. Nobody works on Sabbath Day."

"Gordon's going back to Pennsylvania for a wife next winter," said Charles. "You boys can go along."

Dorilus rose glaring into the night, tossing wood off-handedly on the fire.

"Indeed I would love a wife," I said. "When I have built my house, I will write Switzerland."

\* \* \*

We breakfasted on red squirrel and biscuits and rode half the morning through wooded bottoms. Dorilus led us miles up a slough, and then logs rose cockeyed from ice and snow—a frozen jam backed up round several bends, stacking up horse-high in places, keeping on all the way upstream clear to the Chippewa's channel.

"Ho!" laughed Charles.

"Eureka!" cried Gordon.

Dorilus dismounted and swung an ax, his eyes following his stroke as tenderly as a

mother her child. His axe-blade rang against heartwood, and the dust smelled dry, rich for milling.

He led us back to edge of the wooded bottoms on the long slough. He chinked a cottonwood. “You put our names on your charter like you promised, both your mill and raft company.” He walked the edge and chinked an ash. “Before the ice melts, cut a channel here to there and line it with spar-poles. When the water opens, float the logs through, and tie rafts against the island where we entered the slough.”

“*Knox Slough*,” said I.

“Cinch rafts stern to aft, corner to corner, tight as saddles.” Dorilus pointed his axe at a faded-gray flood-ring on a maple. “If the water gets this high, break the jam with hand-spikes and cant-dogs—if not, dynamite.”

Charles nodded acquiescently, and Gordon pulled from a leather valise a stack of Congressional certificates—hundreds of land warrants issued to soldiers, worth one-hundred-sixty acres apiece, five bits an acre—bought back east by the Dunaways’ father, mostly at three bits per acre.

Dorilus pored over them an entire day, I logged coordinates, and the next morning the Dunaways dropped to their knees, and we recited with them, “Oh, Almighty God who hast commissioned angels to guide and protect us from our setting out until our return...”

We mounted and waved, and Charles screwed his eyes inwardly, giving us a long, calculating look. He and Gordon turned toward Sioux Prairie, and Dorilus and I rode up the Chippewa to Eau Claire—nearly the size of La Crosse—the land office a little clapboard shack. Dorilus reached for its door, and Luther McKinney came out, plat books under his good arm, his sprain much looser. His eyes glossed mirthfully at us. “Your lords order you here?” He and a narrow-nosed compass man shuffled past, smirking, and they disappeared down the landing, calling to sled dogs.

“Working for Stanchfield and Nelson.” Dorilus chuckled. “Cruising like us.”

We went in, ordered the same plat books, and the clerk studied us, deliberating, chilling me with the same lingering gaze as Captain Dunaway—McKinney knew and had told the clerk—the Dunaways would tell all of Sioux Prairie—Lute Ulrich and his wife also knew.

“No, nobody knows.” Dorilus poured steaming water down my back in the tub at

the hotel, soaped and rinsed me. “If the Dunaways knew, they wouldn’t sign papers with us.” He paced about nimbly, his leanness crackling immaculately against his gown, his stare glistening in stove-light, his lashes shadowy, his cheeks high and optimistic, shining fearlessly. “We’re rid of them until spring,” he smiled.

My skin tingled, my lips thirsted. My heart sorrowed and feared.

\* \* \*

We rode up the Chippewa a day and one-half, stabled the horses for the winter at Johnson’s Ranch and walked inland in larigans and snowshoes, pulling a freight toboggan along Jump Creek and finally into the real mother lode, white pines, blazes on posts and trees, section and township lines. We arrived at a camp that had been abandoned when his father’s papers had been discounted, and we stooped into the bunkhouse—a thick frost on crude benches and bed-planks, a sandpit for fire, a kettle still suspended, a roof-window above it—no stove or chimney, only dark smells of smoke, old-sweaty leather, unwashed men, bean pails, sour whiskey, rank tobacco juice. I held my tongue, for Dorilus thought some of the Dunaways’ warrants very near and many others incompletely claimed, and that we would spend a profitable winter here, estimating board feet and planning cuts, dams and tote roads.

“I’ll not do what Father did,” he said. “I’ll register all claims in order.” He stared closely at me, suddenly showing a great need.

“Certainly,” I said.

He blinked painfully. “You’re afraid. You don’t believe.”

He turned, and my heart leapt after him. “Listen, Joseph, please!” He gawked. “*Dorilus*, you could do it by your beauty alone.”

He tapped a glove against his capoté’s hood, suddenly amused, meaning his noggin would pull us through, make us rich, and he tromped off to look around, forgiving me, and I went in and lit candles and kindling, his steps crunching clearly through the strike of my match, my blow, flames fluffing, crackling.

*Bang!*

I found him lying in snow, wriggling his head, his face powder-burned, smoke

hanging between pines. “Am I hit?”

I tore open his parka’s maze of zippers, no blood, and he gazed at a cord stretched tautly up to one tree and around another, and he nodded me to snow-scuffs, powder-stains, a muzzle loader, a forked stake, and he wobbled up, digging the cord from snow at his feet, and he staggered after it to an opposite tree, and I bolstered him, and he shook himself, recovering from the discharge’s blast.

“McKinney,” I said.

“Not necessarily. Loggers set guns like this for deer. Someone likely heard us coming and left quick.”

“The Dunaways knew we would come here.”

“No.” Dorilus looked at the priming tape, tasted the cap, sniffed the barrel. “No need to hide any crime out here. No witness, no law, no trouble. A man does what he wants.”

He kissed me lavishly, clinging heavily, his weight tottering woozily.

\* \* \*

He lit morning fires in the dark, worked the fire-irons gracefully, silently, feline-like, and traipsed over the tree-trunk bridge across Jump Creek dauntlessly, kitten-like.

He climbed colt-strong and paced forties soldier-serious, his gaze squinting, absorbing pines, subtracting balsam, spruce and hardwood, his eyes widening as he spoke his estimates, and I logged them and secretly surmised my own—not instinctively as he did, but counting the sixteen-foot lengths in each pine at four-rod intervals, four-rods deep, multiplying, arriving sometimes at ten times more board feet than he.

I merely raised my eyebrows, played along, and he said nothing until one midnight we finished our love and lay in our tiny clearing of furs, our tin baker reflecting flames, trees fragrant but invisible in darkness four steps away, my head nestled against his shoulder and chin.

“Everyone underestimates the timber in their tracts,” he said.

“Nobody checks?”

“Everyone eats from the same table. He’d get run off.”

*You'd get run off, I thought. I would, no matter what land offices charged for tracts.*

We had hung a mirror back at the bunkhouse to compare our skins, you see. Mine was birch-white, his Indian-brown, but our hands and faces were ruddy from sun, resinous-brown, hardened like bark, identical, and we had located enough timber to afford us each a lumberman's mansion at Sioux Prairie.

We were five nights out on this particular cruise, and dawn broke with delirious shrieks--two gigantic woodpeckers waving blood-red crests, screaming, broadcasting our presence as they hitched brazenly around trunks, glaring at us with wildly liquid eyes. They could not help feeling the March air. I reached for my gun. Dorilus smiled ponderously, tempering me.

\* \* \*

We cruised tracts five days back and approached camp at twilight, Jump Creek boiling against the underside of the tree-trunk bridge, the trunk shaking, sopped, and Dorilus started across, hands in pockets, jaunting carelessly. A crack yawned from the underside, stained by sawdust-gunk from a fresh cut. But a sheath held and slackened again as Dorilus gained shore. He grimaced at the sawdust, looked urgently down-creek--another cruiser had doubtlessly started to Eau Claire, intent upon beating us to register the same tracts we had assessed--by any means.

I ventured across, and we found our dugout stolen, and we set out in pounding rain, mud gurgling beneath our feet--the Chippewa was ours before morning, her flood roaring immensely toward Johnson's barn.

Ice-floes, whole-crowned trees, a bleating moose raced by where the cabin had stood. Johnson was gone, his barn empty of stock, and we pried out hewn timbers inside. We laid them square, and Dorilus roped them corner to corner, stern to aft, tied knots for oarlocks, lines for holdfasts, and I boiled pitch in a pail and poured it atop strips of blanket he held between timbers. His silky lashes dried daintily, inching softly down as his smile angled up through his boyish cheeks. He gently felt the raft's waterproofing, his eyes burning warmly, triumphantly.

We launched and soared swiftly around several bends. We bounced thudding on

rapids, pitched under into Niagara. We surged up like cannon, clinging to holdfasts, my bones whipping, and the raft landed hard, logs everywhere, a jam moving fast. I sat shivering, teeth throbbing, and Dorilus hunched above something out amid banging wood.

“The compass man!” shouted Dorilus. “Dead!”

He flew backward, and McKinney rose, shoving him, face bleeding, eyes bugging out. “Don’t touch me! God knows what you are! The Dunaways do! Everyone knows-- sinners! Filth! Defilement!” Dorilus lay unmoving, staring up at him. McKinney shook and twitched. “You’re mistakes!” McKinney spat. He raised an oar. “God holds you above the pit of fire! He will drop you!” McKinney eyed Dorilus’ head. “You dance and parade before your lords, and *Bang!* God will send his bullet!”

McKinney swung. I shouted, my jaw failed, Dorilus shuffled. Logs clunked, shifted, and an oar lay on logs, no McKinney. Dorilus peered at me, still supine, his gaze glazed, but when I woke again, it hung brightly above me, both of us breathing easy in mild sunshine, our raft firm beneath us, flat atop logs.

He pulled me up. We walked ridge-lines unhurriedly to Eau Claire.

\* \* \*

The Chippewa got higher, muddier, greener as the bottoms leafed out. Logs by thousands floated through Knox Slough, and I tallied them from walking booms, my jaw feeling stronger, Dorilus balancing himself light-footed on a log, poling through our watery camp effortlessly, as if he could easily tap-dance without falling.

He axed boughs from river birches, and his rafts-men laid them across crib-corners, hammering them with oak staples he had designed. His crew tied our log-string five-cribs long, corner to corner, exactly as his smile directed, and when the *Glory* blew her whistle, I was seized by a hollow chill.

She chugged very near on the channel, her engine stopped. Rifles fired salutes, we heard fiddles. A skiff landed the Dunaways at our string, and Gordon whistled, admired Dorilus’ innovations, watched him sidewise and pawed his beard pensively, warily, and Charles pumped our hands robustly, and then he inspected cribs, rubbing his fingertips as

if to shed the feel of us, his stare receding murkily into itself.

A pole-man hollered up-slough: “McKinney!”

The body lay before us presently—mud-drenched, bloated, putrefied. Dorilus and I stared at it, and Charles barked boorishly, “Did you see McKinney in the woods? From your raft?”

“No,” we said, voices quavering.

“Lord Jesus.” Charles gulped visibly. “Get a coffin built. Call the minister.”

He paled and returned to the *Glory*. He called us to dinner, and the Dunaways talked only of the Sioux Prairie mill, Chicago capital, saw-blades, boom leases, steam-boilers, cast-iron flywheels.

Dorilus and I canoed mutely from the *Glory* afterward. I fired our bathwater in the office-shack we had built on our raft, and Dorilus stared absently out the doorway.

“They’re spooked, repulsed,” I said. “They’re torn. We have one raft ready and five-million feet stored. They’ve paid nothing for camps yet. They’ll buy us out in a second.”

Dorilus stared into the bottoms, refusing, and the old rage came. Fear wiggled me all night, and we lay shoulder-to-shoulder, Dorilus squeezing my hand. “Do not fail us now, Nicholas.”

“Tell me, why did the body float up today?”

“Finley McCallum found him. He worked for Father.”

“Charles nearly swooned.”

“Because Charles knew McKinney many years. Please, Nicholas, you must trust.”

\* \* \*

Dorilus put on a scarlet shirt at daybreak, a neck scarf water-lily yellow, a new slouch hat, sleek pantaloons, snow-white gloves. “Captain Dunaway’ll see.” He laced high-toed boots. “He’ll pilot our raft just like I said. He’ll have his three and one-half feet and double.”

We readied our first string, and the windlass on the *Glory* winched it to her bow, and Dorilus pranced at the head of the logs, waving his yellow scarf, signaling his rafts-

men.

Charles steered seriously, Gordon and I flanking him in the pilothouse. Charles backed the boat behind four more strings, her wheel slowing, *tat-tat-tat-tat*.

A shot popped--smoke from woods above the Chippewa's mouth. I started reflexively. The Dunaways steadily eyed the raft. Dorilus waved anew from the logs, his scarf flapping snappily.

Another shot.

"Turkey hunt," said Charles.

Another.

Dorilus stumbled down the raft. He bounced up, grabbed and pulled a line.

Gordon gawked at my trembling, and I hastened below, and as Dorilus worked the last line, I wrapped my hand with his. We pulled together, the entire raft nearly set, the Mississippi swollen, hissing coolly past, thumping a din. Dorilus poured me a look, demanding faith, calmness, confidence. He turned. He perused a whole moving ocean hurtling headstrong toward Sioux Prairie. *My boy*, I thought, *my beautiful river boy*. He waved his scarf with a flourish. The windlass groaned, the *Glory* shifted against the raft and swung it five-strings wide, smoothly, into the channel. Tears welled uncontrollably in my eyes, and a shot popped again, smoking from the Minnesota bluffs. I spun willfully.

Dorilus did not necessarily dance before them. He stood smugly on the raft, Joseph at Valais, and I walked away, my chest heaving, the feel of him tearing and pulling at me. I would not live it again, watch it again. I moved un-noticed from the raft toward the *Glory's* stern--everyone watched Dorilus--nobody saw the powder smoke along the Minnesota shore, the channel coming into easy rifle range.

I leapt past the wheel's wake. The cold water clutched me. I came up, the red paddlewheel already spinning distantly, the *Glory* running at flood-pace.

I was yanked under, was shoved forward head-over-heels. I kicked and swam up again, and I fanned my arms, floating backward, and a deadfall approached sidewise, root-wad towering, crown leafless, huge. I ducked, plunged, wrestled my breath.

The spill of the Chippewa pushed me ashore below a line of steamboats and caravansaries, Read's Landing. I lay on sand, sobbing, hating my misery. Flies swarmed, biting savagely, and I heaved myself up. I walked toward town, and hooves pounded

behind me, a horseman shouting. “Man shot!” I whirled. The road’s mud-holes and wagon-ruts sagged empty—no one shot, no one there.

No, no one there.

A stagecoach sat outside a shack in town, a placard there:

Dakota Territory Opening  
Free Land  
Wives for Sale  
Dutiful, Affordable, Reliable.