

The Boy from Tennessee:

*A Chronicle of the Life and Times of George H. Huffman*

The boy stands in the muddy road— with a rifle at the ready. He aims, resolutely, as the Confederates make their charge; drunken, gibbering, they tear across the fields on horseback, striking down the fleeing sodbusters... and driving onwards towards the dusty, little town.

But the hero of this tale— the adolescent in the road— a teenage youth named George— holds his shot: even as the Rebels swarm throughout the plaza; even as the Rebels set fire to the stables; even as a rider comes upon him— and striking... knocks George down into the dirt.

Suddenly, three soldiers are upon him; they snatch up the boy's rifle and shatter his nose— while a host of Grey's kick in his family's door... and drag his father moaning down the street.

Rifle gone... father gone... so our hero saddles up a mule and rides on through the fray and to the church— where the Confederates have rounded up the men of fighting age... placed them all against a wall... and force the lot to take the oath of the C.S.A— at gunpoint.

Some do, weeping— but George's father, and three other men, belt out the Union Battle Hymn instead... and are duly beaten to a gruesome pulp.

At the edge of the crowd, George sees his brother-in-law, A.J. The two exchange a knowing look, and A.J. mounts the boy's mule— the kinfolk riding hell-bent out the town, into the woods, past the creek, and, by sundown— reach the Union camp.

George informs the Commanding Officer of the Confederate's attack— and urges the man to send a mounted division to save his town. The C.O. agrees: and enlists the boys to act as scouts.

Seasoned hunters, Tennessee natives, expert foresters with a knowledge of the rough terrain, George and A.J. guide the Union troops through the woods— the two youths painted up like play-time Indians— and lead the men to Confederate outposts across the countryside: where the Rebels, without so much as a warning, fall beneath the Union guns.

So George and A.J. act out their roles— more in the fashion of a childhood game than grim reality... still untutored in the truths of war— until the Confederates are put to the run... and finally expelled from the small, southern town.

At last, George returns home... sneaking through his bedroom window— until he discovers his father, a bruised and broken sight, huddled in the corner: and dressed in Confederate garb.

The old man has taken the oath at last— to his son's disgust— and offers the boy back his stolen rifle... as if some paltry excuse, or maudlin apology. George studies the weapon, shakes his head, and declares that he'll enlist— and be the man his father couldn't be.

So father and son share one last moment— and George leaves... beginning his dark and savage journey— and never looking back.

.....

A few miles from town, George buries his rifle beneath a fallen tree. The act is ceremonial, funerary— a goodbye to youth itself... as George sings the rifle one last lullaby.

But as the boy makes to leave, he looks back at the weapon a final time— and sees that a black snake has wrapped itself around the barrel. George studies the serpent— a dark portent of his coming future— and moves on: making his way by moonlight... to the Recruitment Center in Illinois.

In the north for the first time, George finds himself woefully out-of-place. The men at the Recruitment Center mock his accent, his patois; they accuse George of being a Rebel spy, a hillbilly, and incestuous idiot— forcing him to pronounce words ‘correctly,’ to deny his heritage, to be “a northerner and nothing else.” But George handles the hazing stoically, obeying the military orders with grace and duty— and is finally permitted to enlist.

As George puts on his uniform, he hears someone crying in the privy— and discovers A.J., half dressed in Union blues, weeping deeply.

The young man is shaken, humiliated by the northerners’ taunts and jibes— and declares that he’s going back to be with “his own kind.” But George persuades A.J. to stay, explaining that part of growing up is abandoning your past.

A.J. agrees— while muttering that biscuits *are* better than wheat bread, no matter *what* they say— and so the boys move out with their new platoon: traveling onwards to Georgia... at the height of the war.

Suddenly, the sound of cannon fire— as we smash-cut to Macon in the midst of a bloody battle— The Siege of Atlanta: and the boys’ first taste of war.

George and A.J. course the battlefield on horseback— under the command of Captain Lord: a rabid abolitionist and expert drunkard.

As the men fight on through the fray, George sees two northern boys struggling with their rifles. A perennial hunter, George instructs the fledglings in the art of gunmanship— teaching them how to track their “prey” and “draw a bead.”

But when George looks back a minute later— the northern boys have been slaughtered.

Suddenly, an alarum sounds retreat— the Union general has been captured... and the Confederates are approaching.

So the cavalry soars into the forest confusedly— dividing the columns into small, chaotic groups.

George, with A.J., Captain Lord, and ten other men, begin their journey back to camp— the path unsure, and the daylight fading.

The men travel onward for thirteen days— with two young Wisconsinites passing the time by sharing the grimmer, bloodier version of childhood fairytales— as youth and horror slowly coalesce... into the brutal truth of manhood.

In the evening, the soldiers make their camp— George shaving the peach-fuzz from his lip while A.J. practices his new northern dialect.

The boys share a look and smile— when suddenly, a bullet rips through A.J.’s head— and an ambush of Confederate troops ensues.

Half of the Union men fall beneath a barrage of bullets, while George, Captain Lord, and the two storytellers fight their way out with sabers, loose and Confederate horses, and ford the river— leaving their enemies stranded on the bank.

Come sundown, the weary party reaches a farmhouse— and is invited to spend the night by the proprietor: a blind old man named Kincaid.

That night at dinner, their host performs a shadowy Pentecostal ceremony— passing a black snake from man to man to prove the protective power of Christ.

But when the serpent reaches George, it suddenly strikes— biting him across the face.

A deathly silence passes, and Kincaid forewarns the event as a harbinger of doom— prophesying an apocalyptic vision of risen corpses and storms of fire... an image which will in fact prove to be a concise description of Andersonville prison— and other horrors soon to come.

After dinner, the men make camp in an old barn behind the house. George, convinced that Kincaid is a Confederate spy, tries to persuade his party to leave immediately— but, when put to a vote, it is decided that they will stay the night.

The men rise early and make their way across the verdant lands on foot. At noon they reach a cornfield— and spot a covey of fellow Union soldiers lolling against a fence with a bottle of mash. The platoon calls out to our travelers, inviting them to come and share in their liquid repast.

But, as George and the others approach, the boy suddenly sees that the soldiers are bound to the fence with barbed wire— and their feet brutally nailed to the ground.

George makes to shout— but a volley of Confederate fire bursts out from the cornfield.

As the men run and scatter, the storytellers are picked off instantly— while George and Captain Lord make their way over a hill: only to be blocked by a trundling river.

With the Confederates nearing, the captain says his final words— ending with the question: “What makes a man?”— but, before answering his own question, he draws his pistol— and promptly takes his own life.

George raises his hands in an act of stoic surrender— and is met by a party of twenty Confederates... led by Kincaid.

Silently, the blind prophet moves to the boy— and kisses the bite mark on his forehead.

In the same instant, a Confederate strikes George in the back of the head— knocking him unconscious.

.....

Suddenly, George awakens— finding himself tied to a mule... and passing through the gates of Andersonville prison.

Kincaid’s hellish prophecy slowly comes to fruition before his very eyes— bloated corpses line the walls... emaciated prisoners, more skeleton than skin, wander moaning through the grounds... excrement and urine flow freely underfoot... and a ceaseless murder of crows circle over head— blotting out the sun.

Soon, George and his fellow captured are cut from their mounts and thrown into the mud— then quickly stripped of all their clothes and possessions.

From the crowd of Confederate guards, a ghoulish man emerges— Old Wirz, the prison warden... dressed in black from head to toe: and bearing a spiked cudgel in his hand.

The pockmarked specter approaches his latest menagerie of victims— and, like some decrepit patrician, begins to pontificate: condemning the Union men for not dying when they had the chance... when they finally could have found some use for their lives— by feeding the earth with their molted flesh.

With his oration complete, Old Wirz snaps his jaundiced fingers— and the prisoners are promptly dragged by their hair to the barracks... and locked up fast in filthy cells.

George enters his cage and sees a figure huddled in the corner. Straining his eyes, the boy suddenly makes out the face of one of the storytellers— now with a blackened, bloody bandage patched over his forehead... where the Confederate bullet had entered— and taken a piece of his brain.

But as George makes to rejoice, he is met only with silence. The once garrulous man is now taciturn, sullen— refusing to speak a single word. He merely stares at his hands... gently rubbing away a spot of imagined blood.

In the morning, George awakens to find the storyteller hanged from the rafters. The man swings slowly from his makeshift noose— with a grotesque, almost clownish expression frozen to his face.

It is the first time in months that George has seen anything so close to a smile.

As the day wears on, Georg comes across a group of southern prisoners— members of the Tennessee Light Brigade— and quickly befriends his fellow countrymen.

The youths reminisce about their home— detailing the land in all its nuance and banality as only homesick men can do.

As the conversation turns to childhood, two of the soldiers— Lowey and Smoot— suggest the group plays “Cowboys and Indians”— for old time’s sake.

Slowly, the hardened warriors undergo a profound reversion— drifting back into the safety of their youth... pretending at an imaginary battle without pain or consequence— as if children once again... untouched by the true horror of the world.

But as the game reaches a head— as each falls beneath the rifle of another— reality starts to take hold; untenable memories of actual brutalities, both seen and done, overwhelm the youthful imaginings— and instead turns the scene into a stark confession of atrocity.

The soldiers stop, struck by this inevitable truth— and begin to weep deeply, helplessly... in their first display of vulnerability since childhood.

Only now has the war become real.

.....

That night, George is awakened by the baying of bloodhounds. Two prisoners have mysteriously escaped— and a full-on manhunt is underway.

In the morning, Old Wirz proclaims that until the escapees’ tunnel is found, the prisoners will not be given any rations.

And so the great famine begins.

By the sixth day, the whole camp is overrun with sickness and death.

George and his group are nearly broken— emaciated, pale, monosyllabic... with Lowey and Soot subsumed by black rashes, and Bose’s left eye filled up with blood.

Perkins, our hero’s closest friend, tells George that there’s a group of men in the prison who know where the tunnel is hidden— and, with a little reconnaissance, the boys could glean this information and deliver it to Old Wirz... thus putting an end to the deadly famine.

But George remarks that it’s better to die a man than live like a rat— and decides instead to gamble his last piece of cornbread on a chuck-a-luck game— a weekly dice-toss organized by “Big Red”: the prison’s resident confidence-man.

So George makes his way to the mess-hall scullery— prepared to hazard everything for the chance to win Big Red’s whole pot: \$1... enough to buy a week’s supply of food from the prison’s more entrepreneurial and well-connected residents.

With three rolls to secure his fate, George tosses the dice— and comes up with snake eyes.

He rolls again— and it’s snake eyes once more.

But, on the third and final roll— George proves the winner: raking in 25¢.

Big Red then offers all or nothing on one last roll— the whole \$1... or a week of the boy’s rations.

George throws the dice— and wins.

But the dealer suddenly knocks the dice from the table and declares that George rolled snake eyes.

When George protests— Big Red draws a knife.

The two take to grappling and, as they flip onto the table— the dealer falls on his own knife.

As the man bleeds out, George makes to call for help— but, thinking better of it, snatches up the dollar and runs— making his way to the trading-post and exchanging 50¢ for five sweet potatoes.

When he arrives back at his cell to share the bounty— George discovers that Lowey, Smoot, and Bose are dead.

Perkins, sitting amongst the corpse, smiles weakly and says— “Don’t reckon they got much appetite.”

Suddenly, shouts ring out— announcing that the tunnel has been found... and the famine is over.

.....

An abrupt smash-cut— and our scene shifts now to the coast of Georgia.

Gunboats fire upon the land... decimating fields and homes and churches in a scorching blast of total destruction.

George and the rest of Andersonville prison march beneath the rockets— positioned in direct shot of the gunboats.

It is revealed that the naval fleet is a Union flotilla besieging the coast— and the prisoners have been maneuvered by their captors to act as a human shield against the barrage— though their presence has in no way curbed the attack.

Old Wirz berates the Andersonville men— declaring that their own army does not value the prisoners' lives.

As the refugees move on, they pass a burning house— and hear the screams of a woman... calling out for someone to save her infant child.

The men stop, survey the scene— and continue onwards.

Suddenly, a Confederate lieutenant— an enormous hulk of a man called Barrett— breaks from the ranks: rushing into the house and, somewhat scorched, returns with the baby.

He looks up at the burning window as the woman cries for help— and calls out sardonically: "Ye said the baby. Didn't ne're say a goddamn thing 'bout ye self."

And so our journey continues... the men marching through the fire... and into yet a deeper ring of Hell.

Now relocated to Florence, South Carolina, the remaining prisoners are met by conditions which make Andersonville seem almost pleasant— wild dogs roam the grounds, attacking residents sporadically... enormous rats and bugs scurry over every surface... and a bleak, freezing winter has set upon the land— leaving all in perpetual darkness.

Throughout the camp, a roving band of thuggish prisoners— calling themselves "The Masquerade"— take to robbing their fellow inmates... stealing food, clothes, and bedding.

To add to this nightmare, Lieutenant Barrett has proven even crueler— and more insane— than Old Wirz. Day after day, with the rescued child strapped to his chest in a swaddle, Barrett makes his rounds— senselessly beating prisoners and firing his pistol amongst them at random.

One afternoon, coming out of the privy, George is approached by two Masqueraders— who demand that the boy hand over all his goods... including the three sweet potatoes which George had bought for Lowey, Smoot, and Bose— and has saved throughout his travels.

George gives them everything— except the sweet potatoes, which he explains don't belong to him— but to his friends.

One of the Masqueraders suddenly draws a pistol— but, thinking quickly, George leg-sweeps the man— knocking him to the ground... and sending the pistol skittering across the dust.

George and the other Masqueraders leap for the weapon— but George is faster, snatching up the pistol— and firing.

As the smoke clears... George sees that both Masqueraders are dead.

The boy hurries to his cell and explains to Perkins that they need to escape— before the Masqueraders hang him... and Perkins too— by association.

George proposes his scheme, telling Perkins that if they were posted on wood-collecting duty, they could make a break for the outlying field— taking advantage of the lag between the changing guards.

Perkins calls it suicide, arguing that even if they did outrun the Confederates, they'd die of starvation or frostbite in the wilderness.

But George assures him that there's more to the plan— and tells him to get his rest.

The following day, the prisoners line up in the yard to receive their “coward’s bounty”— a supply of weekly provision brought by Quakers from the neighboring county. Unbeknownst to the Quakers, however, the charity is always immediately pilfered by The Masquerade, Lieutenant Barrett, and the rest of the guards.

Nevertheless, George goes to collect his extra rations— and purposefully strikes up a conversation with an old Quaker named Lazarus. The boy tells the man his plan— and asks if he and Perkins can hide out on the Quaker’s land once they’ve made their escape.

Lazarus agrees— on the condition that the boys no longer fight in the war.

As George makes his way back to the cell, he suddenly realizes that he is being watched by a group of Masqueraders.

Hurrying quickly, George reaches the barracks and tells Perkins about the Quaker— trying to persuade his friend one last time.

Perkins listens in silence— then simply answers, “Good. Cause I already done got us on wood duty.”

The next morning, George and Perkins take to the field to collect kindling.

As the guards change shifts— still groggy from the last night’s revelries— George and Perkins break for the purlieu... climbing on their stomachs towards the forest.

Slowly but surely, George makes it to the edge of the field— when, suddenly— gunshots ring out.

George and Perkins quickly leap to their feet, charging through the snow as the bullets fly overhead— branches exploding all about them, they breach the thicket, hurl their bodies over a creek— and soon disappear into the forest.

Slowly, the gunshots fade into the distance— and all is silent at last.

.....

As the afternoon wears on, George and Perkins travel blindly through the woods— using moss and animal tracks to find their way.

At the edge of a hillock, the boys come upon a stream— and take to washing.

While wiping away month upon month of grime and soot, the two youths pause... looking at their reflections in the water— and seeing, for the first time, stubble on their cheeks.

The sight, so often the delight of adolescents, instead seems to harrow George and Perkins— like an ill omen... or a vision of death.

Suddenly, in the distance— the baying of bloodhounds echoes through the forest.

George and Perkins run— but the forms of the approaching dogs draw closer.

Thinking quickly, the boys climb a tree— just as the bloodhounds strike— and the shouts of Confederate guards surround the grove.

The leader of the gundogs— a vicious, battle-scarred blue tick— sets up a booming howl at the foot of the tree... catching the Confederates’ attention... and drawing them nearer and nearer.

Suddenly, George sees a black snake perched on a limb above him.

The boy and the serpent study each other in profound silence— their eyes locked as if in some supernatural arbitration... communing in the primordial tones of an



unspoken language— connected, as one, like ancient enemies... who have finally reached a grim accord.

Slowly, George reaches out his hand and, with expert skill, he lifts the serpent... handling the creature like an adept mystic... and, fearlessly— drops the snake onto the dog bellow.

The serpent wraps itself tightly around the bloodhound's neck— and proceeds to bite the dog wildly across the face.

The blue tick shrieks out in pain— and scampers off... prompting the rest of her pack to follow suit.

Slowly, the Confederate voices drift farther in the distance— and the boys are left alone.

At sundown, George and Perkins come upon the light of a campfire.

A solitary figure sits before the ragged conflagration— reciting Shakespeare to himself in a grim and ponderous diction... Brutus' immortal soliloquy: *"It must be by his death: and for my part, I know no personal cause to spurn at him, but for the general..."*

The boys approach the shadowy specter cautiously— but, upon seeing his civilian dress, are quickly assuaged of their fears— and readily accept the man's silent invitation to join him.

With the soliloquy complete, the bleak journeyman explains that he is a traveling actor— abandoned by his company when the attack on Charleston disrupted one of their performances.

George, deeply taken with the quiet power of this man, offers up the three sweet potatoes in exchange for a performance.

The thespian agrees— and acts out Macbeth's *"Is this a dagger I see before me?"*— using a .44 pistol as a prop.

Afterwards, George remarks that, while the show was "the purtiest damn thing this side a Heaven"— the actor was handling the pistol incorrectly.

So, with a schoolmarm's patience and strict exaction, George takes to teaching the performer how to use the weapon properly— particularly, at the man's request... at close range.

At the end of the night, the company parts, with the traveler giving the boys directions North-West by a safe and secret path.

As George and Perkins make to leave, the actor finally tells them his name.

It is John Wilkes Booth.

.....

At last, by evening the next day— George and Perkins reach Lazarus' farmhouse.

The sounds of a party come from within— music, voices, laughter... the trappings of happiness— now a strange and foreign thing... to these wayward sons of gross misfortune.

But nonetheless, the boys cross the field, mount the porch, and enter through the threshold.

Suddenly, all falls silent; a sea of men and women dressed in white stand before them... and, upon the soldiers' entrance— the congregation kneels.

After modest, almost bashful, introductions, George and Perkins are placed in leather chairs at the center of the room— and asked to share their account of the war... in all its grizzly detail.

As the boys recite their tale of horror and atrocity, the Quakers seem to absorb the very misery of war itself— taking it upon their own shoulders... in a penitent catharsis.

Gradually, in the midst of the story, a singing voice grows audible from the other room— the tune slowly drowning out the images of bloodshed and mutilation... overpowering hatred with love.

The congregation rises, taking George and Perkins by the hand and leading them into the dining room— as each member, one by one, joins in the song.

The soldiers are then placed before a great feast— a bounty of almost supernatural proportions.

Lazarus enters— revealing himself to be the first singer. He sits and, in unspoken concord, the Quakers bow their heads in silence— as do George and Perkins.

Through the open windows, a wind begins to blow across the room— a gentle breeze... unseen... unheard... but felt.

Gradually, tears begin to flow from every eye.

The whole table— including the boys— weeps deeply... uncontrollably... beautifully.

Lazarus rises... moves to George— and kisses the bite mark on the boy's forehead. The scar slowly disappears— and George drifts into a deep sleep.

.....

Our hero suddenly awakens— trapped in a coffin.

He is covered in blood— but, as he searches for the wound... he can find none.

The coffin rocks and rattles— as if moving— while George claws at the lid.

Then, the movement slows to a stop— and the lid is lifted.

Thinking quickly, George closes his eyes and plays dead— just as a Confederate colonel appears above him.

The colonel studies the boy, then turns to Lazarus and asks— “So a thresher done this to him?”

Lazarus responds gravely, “Aye. To both my boys. That's my youngest in the other coffin there. I'm takin 'em to Guilford so's they kin be buried with they ma.”

The colonel nods, letting Lazarus— and “the corpses”— move on.

By noon, the party reaches a cabin in the woods.

Lazarus explains to the boys that his home is too obvious a target for Confederate searches— and so, fearing for their safety, he has relocated George and Perkins farther north— to stay with his brother-in-law.

As the group nears the cabin, they see a formation of black men practicing military maneuvers in the front yard— under the direction of a young southerner.

The man, an ex-Confederate lieutenant— and their host's eldest son— is training these former slaves for the Union army... barking out curt orders to the ragged crew— while calling them by their African names.

Before this scene of hope and change, Lazarus and the boys say their goodbyes— with the old man giving them one last piece of advice.

“War,” he says, “if it’s ye nature. Kill... if that’s ye callin. Fer the time makes a man... an God done gave us Time fer our own use. But the future’s His. So when the day do come fer ye to put down ye weapons an people the earth... bring about children a peace... a gentle breed... who won’t know a gun from a broom— an so by change the very nature a mankind itself. Fer what a man can’t do... his children must.”

And so, with these final words— Lazarus hitches up his pony... and rides into the setting sun.

That night, George and Perkins sup with their new hosts— and are told of the men’s plan to teach agency to the freed slaves... a philosophy of self-determination... that will surely end the grievous plight of the negro race.

So the boys agree to help train the slaves and accompany them to the Union base in Tennessee.

At last, it seems— after three long years— George and Perkins are finally going home.

.....

In montage, we see George training the ex-slaves— teaching them battle formations, artillery mechanics, and combat maneuvers.

One of the recruits, a one eyed man called Grits, is elected the Commanding Officer of the black platoon— working alongside George to help instill confidence and discipline in the newly freed men.

At last, with boot-camp complete, George, Perkins, and the ex-slaves march out— the black soldiers now ready for war... and a new way of life.

On the eighth day of their travels, the men reach the Tennessee border— and make camp for the night.

Suddenly, at dawn, all are awakened by a piercing Rebel Yell— and find themselves surrounded.

George tries to wake Perkins— asleep behind a fallen tree— but, unable to rouse his friend, George charges off into the woods: as the whole party scatters.

Soon, George breaches a clearing in the trees— and is immediately met face to face with a squadron of Confederates— their rifles at the ready.

George and the black soldiers are then rounded up and placed along a stream— forced to their knees... their hands raised in the air... and a rifle aimed stiffly at the back of each man’s head.

Thinking quickly, George tells the Commanding Officer that he too is in fact a Confederate— having just escaped a Union prison... and therefore out of uniform.

The Rebels test George’s “southernness”— studying his knowledge of the country’s shibboleths... his dialect... and his pronunciation of the selfsame words the Union soldiers had forced him to ‘correct’ so long ago in Illinois.

George passes the examination and is given a pass to return to his platoon— exchanging a final “*God save President Davis!*” with the Commanding Officer.

But as George makes to leave, Grits begs the boy to save them.

He and George share a silent look of profound intensity— but our hero turns his back... moving onward into the forest— his eyes locked straight ahead... unflinching.

As the cold, winter sun beats down on the woods, George returns to the fallen tree where Perkins had been— but finds the man gone.

Suddenly, George sees something buried in the underbrush— and discovers his childhood rifle.

Though rusted and useless, George takes up the gun— cradling it more like an infant than a weapon.

In this tableau, George sits in heavy silence till nightfall— and resolves to return to the Confederate camp.

Traveling through the darkness on his hands and knees, his face caked in camouflaging mud, George reaches the outpost— and breaches the woods.

Before him stands a sight of pitiful horror— a mound of corpses: the black soldiers... executed... mutilated... and tossed in a heap— like so much trash.

Beside the towering midden of bodies sit three more of the black soldiers— alive... but now dressed in full Confederate uniform.

Slowly, George locks eyes with one of the men.

It is Grits.

The two share a look of profound intensity— when, suddenly, Grits begins to shout— “A Yankee! A Yankee spy! Oh Lord, help us!”

Instantly, an alarm sounds from the other side of the camp— cries, gunshots, the barking of dogs.

George looks at Grits one last time— and is met only by a look of withering bitterness.

Slowly, George turns, walking away without hurry or purpose... and gradually disappears into the shadows.

.....

We cut to the Union camp— an American flag flaps overhead... and a wild celebration issues throughout the grounds.

The soldiers drink and dance, sing songs... and play at games— like children.

Wandering through the crowd is George— drifting past the frenetic revelries... unseen... untouched... as if a shadow... or a ghost.

Beneath a tree, George sees a row of corpses laid out on stretchers— Confederate soldiers in uniform... and one man in civilian dress.

It is Perkins— his throat slit... eyes closed... face relaxed— in a look of total calm.

Suddenly, a voice pipes up from behind George.

“We sure licked ‘em, ain’t we?”

George turns— and sees a fifteen-year-old boy... an eidolon of his younger self... innocent... untouched.

George simply stares at the boy— his face a mask of grim entropy.

“We won, sir. We done won the war.”

In an instant, the boy is gone— dancing through the grounds without pause or care... and disappearing into the celebrations once again.

As George reaches the edge of the camp, he sees a filthy man in an open-air cage— a bleak symbol and solitary contrast to the revelries around him... much like George himself.

The figure is haggard and blind— a prophetic specter... none other than Kincaid.

Suddenly, the old Baptist turns with great purpose— staring intently at George... as if seeing him through his blind eyes.

George stares back... unfazed.

Kincaid makes to shout— but his tongue has been cut out... his mouth a black and barren void— without purpose or power.

The prophet gurgles loudly at George, full of fury— but George has already passed him by: two phantoms of an age so quickly vanished... crossing paths a final time... into oblivion, both... as history unfolds without surcease... or sense.

.....

By evening, George crests a hill of dogwood— and in the lambent moonlight: sees his childhood home bellow.

With great stealth, he climbs through his bedroom window and, fully clothed, lies down in the bed— cradling his rifle.

Having heard a noise, his mother enters with a lit match.

She studies the sleeping boy in silence.

Carefully, the woman makes to wake him— but thinks better of it.

Instead, she simply stands over the bed... keeping vigil.

Slowly, George's mother begins to sing a lullaby.

In the distance, fireworks boom overhead.

As the lullaby continues, the light from the match slowly fades to black... leaving only the glare of the fireworks— colored red, white, and blue.

**The End**