

❖ NINE

1832

“**WILLIAM ROBERTSON.** Applicant William Robertson please step up and be sworn in,” ordered the Sevier County, Tennessee court clerk, George McCown.

The old man stood stiffly, forcing himself fifty years forward, back to the present. The courtroom was as stifling as the hall had been, and it was difficult to catch a breath. Thankfully, the clerk offered him a drink of water to wet his parched throat, and then he was sworn in. He extracted a handkerchief, wiped his forehead, and began his testimony regarding his service in the Revolutionary war to the best of his recollection. At seventy-three a body couldn't be expected to remember all of the particulars. He carefully read over the affidavit and signed his name for the official record.

After recounting his story, two of his neighbors were called in to swear to his identity and testify to his good name.

Benjamin Henry and Lewis Reneaux vouched for their friend, “He is believed in the neighborhood where he resides to have been a soldier in the Revolution, and that we concur in that opinion, and we do further certify that we never have heard the fact disputed or doubted that the said William Robertson was a soldier in the Revolutionary War.”

“You all are free to go,” advised the court clerk. “Mr. Robertson, we will notify you when we receive word on your pension application, but it appears that everything is in order. The paper work has been taking nigh on half a year to process, but they generally pay any arrears that would be due you.”

“What rate does the government pay?” inquired the old veteran.

“You being a private, that would be sixty dollars per annum,” Mr. McCown answered.

Lewis Reneaux let out a long, low whistle, “About time the government recognized its heroes. You’ll be living in style, William!”

“That you will,” agreed Benjamin Henry.

“How about the two of you join me for a cold lemonade over at Mrs. Shubert’s boarding house? It’s a fearsome hot day. You are welcome to come as well, Mr. McCown,” William offered.

“I shall have to pass on your kind offer, as I have another applicant to swear in. I shall notify you as soon as I receive word,” Mr. McCown repeated his instructions. You never could tell if some of these old fellows understood the workings of government.

THE THREE NEIGHBORS strolled at a leisurely pace down the road to Mrs. Shubert’s place. She was a pretty young thing with a no-account husband that tended to run off for months at a time. She was able to make a go of things by renting out rooms, cooking, and sewing for the folks in town. She kept the house up mighty fine and took excellent care of her one-year-old daughter, Lucy, and her four-year-old boy, John. By all appearances, Mrs. Shubert had another little one on the way, but a gentleman didn’t inquire about such things. William’s heart went out to her and the wee ones.

As the trio approached the boarding house, the inviting aroma of beef stew and berry pie wafting through the open windows struck them. William had not realized he was hungry until he was met by the tantalizing scent redolent of Mrs. Crane’s kitchen. He must have been waiting to be called by the clerk for a greater period than he realized. He had certainly been lost in thought, wandering through the corridors of his youth.

Mrs. Nancy Shubert was an excellent cook. She was not prone to offer the gourmet fare William had enjoyed at Stratford, but she was known countywide for her delicious, hearty meals. William decided to treat his friends to one of her meals in addition to that promised glass of

cold lemonade. After all, they had been taken away from their fields a full morning to testify on his behalf. William had good neighbors.

“Greetings, Mrs. Shubert, John, little Lucy,” William tipped his hat. “I would like to treat these gentlemen and myself to portions of that fine stew. I tell you, it’s a crime to let that delicious aroma draw a man into your dining room from as far away as the courthouse,” William teased with a warm smile.

“Now, Mr. Robertson, you mustn’t flatter a woman so. You’ll turn my head,” Mrs. Shubert returned. “Can I get you a glass of cold lemonade and some fresh baked bread to go along with your dinners?”

“Yes, indeed, that sounds like a bit of heaven on a day such as this,” Benjamin piped up.

“And I’ll be saving room for some of that berry pie, if you don’t mind,” added Lewis.

“I just now set them on the sill to cool. They will be ready when you are, gentlemen. Take a seat.”

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