

**Knight of the West**

***The Origin of Paladin***

## Foreword

In the late 1960s, a TV series titled "Have Gun, Will Travel" recounted the adventures of Paladin (acted by Richard Boone) whose real name and backstory was never developed, perhaps deliberately. We were gently led to believe that Paladin was (possibly) a retired Army officer, although for which army was always a matter of speculation. It is unlikely that he was a retired *Confederate Army* officer since the time period for HGWT appears to be the late 1880s, so a retired Confederate officer would by then be in his mid-40s or older, and in 1885 that would have constituted advanced age — but it's not impossible.

Paladin, whatever his etiology, is well-read and erudite, not to mention a dab hand with a six-gun. We first meet him at his residence, The Carlton Hotel in San Francisco, California, but we know nothing that might have happened before that.

"Knight of the West" provides the missing backstory.

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## 1 — Montana

Dr. Mark David Gilliam, Professor of History at Montana State University—Bozeman, knocked on the open door of his department head's office, then poked his head inside. "You wanted to see me?" he inquired.

"Yes, come on in, Mark." Gilliam entered and took a seat facing his boss. "I have what looks like an opportunity and I wanted to get your reaction to it. San Francisco State U wants you to come down and teach a Summer session for them, and they're offering a lovely pile of loot if we can come to an agreement. What do you think of spending your Summer break teaching at SFSU?"

Mark's eyebrows lifted at this. "What's in it for me?" he asked in return.

"Well, they'll put you up in in a nice hotel and give you an expense account for meals and incidentals, plus they're offering to pay you at the going rate for adjuncts and pay us the same amount as a bonus for us getting you to agree to come down. I don't have to tell you what that will do for our budget numbers. We're not paying you anyway during the break, but SFSU will be paying you like an adjunct, plus your free time (such as it is) will be in a world-class tourist destination. Did you have plans for Summer break that will be trampled if you go?"

Mark thought briefly about Vivian's likely reaction to this. She was going to work the Summer semester doing remediation for the small group of students who had to goose their GPAs in order to keep their scholarships, so neither had made elaborate plans for vacation time, but she surely expected him to be close by for date nights and weekends.

"Let me see if Viv throws a fit and get back to you. When do they need an answer?"

"Probably about the same as us. They have to know if they should start signing up students, and they have to get the course catalog put together before that. Even so, I guess you have a week or two before they have to know up or down."

"The topic?" Mark probed.

"Your specialty, naturally. That's why they want you. 'The California Gold Rush And Its Aftermath'. Just grab your notes from last year and you're ready to teach."

"Okay, I'll give you my answer before the weekend." He rose and left, waving over his shoulder.

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Professor Vivian Harper was not pleased. "The whole summer?" she whined.

"At the moment, it's just their Summer session-1, but if they want me to stay on for an encore performance, then yes, the whole summer. It's good money, Viv, and I'm not getting paid otherwise."

"...But it's not like you need the money, is it?"

"Well, no... but if we ever decide to get married, it would be nice to have some spare cash put away..."

"That again..."

Mark shrugged.

"Well, SFSU is bribing the Dean to pressure me to do it. If I agree, then he owes me."

"Okay, but don't be mad if I find myself a summer boyfriend to warm my bed while you're gone." She smiled, and Mark smiled back.

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Jerry Flynn toed the line at the entrance to the combat course, checked his Colt Dragoon revolver, made sure he had two spare cylinders loaded and ready, cocked the hammer, turned and nodded to the scorekeeper.

"Start!"

Jerry took one step forward into the pen, his muscles relaxed but ready, his eyes darting left and right. A target popped to his left. It was a woman in a hoop skirt and bonnet carrying a child. He ignored her. A second target appeared on his right: a cowpoke with a bandanna mask. Jerry fired once and hit the target's left breast pocket, then re-cocked the hammer. Two more targets popped up in the center, one deputy, one bank robber. He pegged the bank robber in center mass. Two more bank robbers snapped to on his right, and he shot each once. After two more targets, he swapped the empty cylinder for a full one and continued down the path.

Of the 18 shots in three cylinders at the start, he finished the course with 2 rounds unspent, having scored 'kills' on 14 targets and nearly setting a course record for shortest time.

Flynn took the 1st place trophy at the Single Action Shooting Society meet. Babe McGuire took 2nd. Mark Gilliam placed 3rd.

All the winning contestants wound their day down by cleaning their shootin' irons — Flynn's Dragoon, McGuire's S&W Model 3, and Gilliam's 1873 Colt SAA — before packing up and heading home.

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"As you all may have heard, I'm headed for San Francisco for the Summer to teach two seminar classes on the Gold Rush and its aftermath. That means I won't be back in Bozeman until the Fall semester starts. You all have my email address, and if there's anything I can do by way of letters of recommendation, let me know.

"Good luck on your finals. You've been great students and I'm confident you all will do well. Class dismissed."

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SFSU put their visiting professor up at a very nice B&B within bicycling distance of the campus, and Gilliam bought a serviceable bicycle at a thrift store

to use for commuting. He intended to abandon it at the end of his contract, but it provided free transportation that allowed him to pocket most of the *per diem* SFSU was providing for the purpose.

The notice of the seminar had attracted most of the dedicated history majors to the point that there were enough 'standby' students that Gilliam could piggy-back a second session in each of the two summer sessions. Teaching the seminar was a delight primarily because every eager face hanging on his every word was there of their own volition to soak in the expertise of one of the foremost authorities on the topic.

"A billion words have been written on the subject of the Gold Rush and the Forty-Niners. I'm not going to re-hash that for you. If you need to know more about Sutter's Mill, there are literally hundreds of well-written tomes that you can gobble in your spare time. My focus in this seminar is going to be 'what happened when the gold ran out?'. The economy of the Bay Area is still to this very day shaped and influenced by the events of the Gold Rush and — more importantly — the Gold Bust that was the inevitable follow-on.

"By 1868, just after the Civil War ended, there were clear signs that most of the gold available had been taken. In just shy of twenty years, gold went from being the route to worldly fortune to being a tedious, tiresome, toilsome work-a-day occupation. For those who had the backing of mining conglomerates, high-yield industrial-scale extraction methods still uncovered enough gold to make the investment worthwhile. For the bulk of the 'olde tyme prospectors' however, it was a tough way to make a living. Have any of you run across the name 'Ezekiel Cavendish'?"

A student raised her hand and Gilliam recognized her: "Stand up. Tell us what you know about Ezekiel Cavendish."

"Cavendish was a stereotypical stream prospector," she began. "He worked a claim on Cherokee Creek west of the modern town of Angels Camp, California. By all accounts, he did... okay, but he never struck it rich until he stumbled across what's known in the lore as 'The Cavendish Serving Platter', a monster chunk of gold and gravel weighing in at something like 67 pounds. Unearthing it stirred up a storm of gold flakes and gold dust in the creek that prompted a new mini-gold-rush, and then everything just quieted down. By 1892, there's no one in the gold-extracting business for 20 miles around Angels Camp."

"You've studied this," Gilliam congratulated her.

"I was born and grew up in Columbia just down the road from Angels Camp. I was raised on that piece of lore. Everyone in the area knows about it."

"Interesting. That's almost a first-person account. Thank you. Yes, the Cavendish Serving Platter is said to have brought Cavendish about 26 thousand dollars at assay. He retired from the gold business right after that, sold his claim for a few hundred dollars, moved on, and was never heard from again. It was the last notable strike in the area. Anybody know the date?"

The same girl shouted out: "August 28th, 1888."

Gilliam smiled at her. "Why am I teaching this class?" he asked

rhetorically. "You might know as much about the subject as I do."

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As Gilliam's head hit the pillow, he muttered to himself *'I'm not teaching these kids anything most of them don't already know. I need to brush up on my research or I'll never feel like I'm earning my pay.'* His eyes closed and he drifted off to sleep almost immediately.

In the wee hours, one eye slowly opened. He had been awakened by a breeze blowing in through the open window and fluttering the gauzy curtain. A kerosene lamp burned dimly, its wick turned almost all the way down and just a slim fingernail of wick exposed and burning oil. He closed his eye and went back to sleep.

When his alarm clock woke him rudely at 7:50 a.m., he muttered an imprecation or two, but pulled the covers back and swung his feet onto the floor. A remnant of a dream still lingered at the back of his brain, a memory of an open window and a kerosene lamp. It was certainly a dream, for his room was air conditioned and electrified, and its windows were permanently shut. He rose, showered, and dressed for the day ahead.

In the faculty lounge at SFSU, he opened his tablet, started the email app, and checked his mail. Nothing. He began composing a note to Vivian:

Talk about 'frustrating'. You should meet some of the students here. A few of them are from families whose history goes back to and before the Gold Rush. The stories grandpa tells about the stories his grandpa told could be the meat of an entire new book on the period. They know — maybe that's the wrong word — they've heard — second hand or third hand — about events and characters that never made it into mainstream historical sources.

I've actually considered interviewing some of them to collect those folk tales. They could be fiction, but they could have an element of fact, too.

How are things in Big Sky country?

He shipped the note off and headed for the library. SFSU's stacks ought to have some material in his field that would be comparatively rare. He was anxious to see what might be here that he hadn't come across before. The Chief Librarian knew precisely what he was looking for. "You want the unpublished stuff, I bet," she offered, "the handwritten and typed manuscripts. We have a couple dozen of those, but they're in 'white glove' territory." She unlocked the gate leading to a restricted section and led him forward.

She stole a quick glance at his hands, then pulled a pair of white cotton gloves of approximately the right size from a drawer for his use, and retrieved her own pair from her lab coat pocket.

"Are you interested in anything specific?"

"My specialty is the aftermath of the Gold Rush," he explained. "What happened after the gold was gone..."

"Well, you know the gold was never really 'gone'. Even today, hobby prospectors will spend their two weeks vacation sloshing silt in a pie pan and end up with a tenth of an ounce or a quarter ounce of metal. It doesn't come close to being economically practical, but that's not why they do it. Anyway, if you're looking for first-person accounts of the post-rush era, why don't you start with Ephraim Broadmoor's diary. It's about 140 or 150 pages, handwritten, from about 1875. Broadmoor was the founder of the Farmers' Mercantile Bank here in San Francisco. Just don't take it outside the fence," she indicated the metal latticework surrounding the restricted section.

Gilliam sat down at a work table, opened his tablet's note-taking app and began reading the diary.

At 10:45, the tablet's alarm sounded and Gilliam realized he would have to hurry if he were to be on time for his own seminar. He let the metal gate latch behind him as he exited the restricted area. As he passed the librarian, he whispered "I didn't have time to put it away. I hope you don't mind. I have to rush off to teach a class." She assured him that was not a problem and he hurried away.

He managed to fold into that day's seminar a few of the facts he had gleaned from Broadmoor's diary, and was surprised by the same girl adding a few more facts that perhaps even Broadmoor would not have known.

"Farmers' Mercantile existed until the 1920s, you know. Bank of America came through The Crash of '29 almost entirely intact and took over Farmers' in 1930. So I guess technically, it's *still* around."

Gilliam buttonholed the girl as the class was breaking up.

"You are a treasure trove of information. Is there any chance I could interview you at length to collect as much of it as I can?"

"Why, Dr. Gilliam, you aren't making a pass at a student, are you?" and she smiled.

Gilliam smiled, too. "You're charming and pretty, and I doubt anyone would fault me for doing so, but, no, this is a serious request for purely professional motives, Miss Sanchez."

"Mrs.," she corrected him. "If you're really serious, you should interview both me and my husband. He grew up in the same general area — Knight's Ferry — and he has lore that neatly dovetails with whatever I have to pass along. Shall I set up a meeting?"

"This is getting better and better. Yes, please set up a meeting any evening. The sooner, the better."

Checking his faculty mail drop later that day, he found a padded envelope addressed to him from Vivian. Inside was a note and two small gold coins.

Your birthday is coming up and I can never think of what to get

you. Well, I came across these three or four weeks ago and I couldn't resist. They're just what you need for show-and-tell: gold Eagles from 1867 and 1871. I hope your students get a kick out of seeing something straight out of the period you're teaching them about.

Happy birthday.

The coins were in what he thought looked like very good condition. Rosalia Sanchez would especially appreciate these. He slid them back into their little leather pouch. *Is that a scrotum?* he wondered. It sure looked like it.

The students did, in fact, enjoy seeing Gilliam's newly-acquired 19th-century artifacts. None of them had ever seen real gold coins such as these in the flesh, and they still had never touched any such, since Gilliam kept them each in their protective plastic slipcases, but they got to heft the coins to appreciate how heavy such chunks of real gold were.

Rosalia Sanchez begged him to bring them along to the Sanchez house that evening so that Eduardo, her husband, could see them, too. To sweeten the deal, she and Eduardo planned to feed Dr. Gilliam dinner in addition to letting him interview each of them for their historical wisdom.

Dinner over, Gilliam got his voice recorder placed, and Eduardo started speaking. "The area around Knight's Ferry didn't participate in that secondary gold rush Rosalia talks about. That event was very localized and it was very short-lived. It was all over by the end of 1889. During the prior twenty years, as the gold dwindled, most of that land turned either to farmland or grazing pastures. You had the typical sort of conflict between the meat-people and the veggie-people that most Western movies are all about, but mining never figured into that very much. In fact, most prospectors welcomed the arrival of a herd of cattle crossing upstream. All those hooves churning up the riverbed also churned up new deposits of placer ore, but as the 19th-century came to a close, even that wasn't enough to keep 'panning for gold' an economically feasible way to earn a living. Cavendish's strike was what they now call 'a black swan event', something that couldn't be predicted because it was so odd and unusual that no one would even think it possible."

Rosalia chimed in. "Cavendish's claim, in fact, was petering out. He would occasionally take on help — usually local children, I heard — for a share of whatever gold the assistant could deliver. That was true, I think, for most of the Angels Camp prospectors. Unless you had help, by 1886 or so you couldn't make a go of it. It was taking more and more effort to extract gold to the point that it was often difficult to feed yourself on the proceeds. Whenever that happened, a prospector would sell his claim to anyone who would buy it, but most of the time, they just abandoned the site and moved on."

Rosalia and Eduardo went on like this for several hours, dredging up stories even they had forgotten over the course of their lifetimes. As Gilliam had suspected, these were tales they had heard from grandfathers who had heard the



same or similar tales from their grandfathers. Gilliam knew that such oral histories had to be taken *cum grano salis*, with a grain of salt, but most of the detail therein matched well to what he had uncovered in his own research.

When the night was over, Gilliam had enough material that he started to seriously consider making this topic his next book. If the rest of his SFSU students were even somewhat valuable sources, he could pop out that book over Christmas break.

He thanked the Sanchezes lavishly and called for a taxi to take him home.

At the B&B, Gilliam made a backup copy of the voice file and shipped the copy out to his cloud storage. It just wouldn't do to lose that file.

He tucked his little pouch beneath his pillow and settled in for the night. In five minutes he was fast asleep.

## 2 — San Francisco

The breeze blowing in through the open window awakened him with the smell of salt air and... something else... horse manure. He snapped awake.

This was no dream. The sheer curtains billowed in the breeze and brought the smells of the street in with it. A kerosene lamp adorned the bedside table, and a bowl and ewer sat on a dressing table. He sprang out of bed and dashed to the window ignoring his nakedness. Outside, horse-drawn carriages plied the dirt-packed street and pedestrians dressed for the late 19th-century ambled on the elevated wooden walkways fronting stores and businesses.

Mark Gilliam had gone mad, of that he was absolutely certain.

The pajamas he had worn to bed last night were missing, and there was nothing in the wardrobe that dominated the room's furnishings that he recognized as 'underwear'. Perhaps such things were uncommon here... whenever. Most of the clothing in the wardrobe seemed to fit him passably well. He washed his face in the — probably a wash bowl — dried himself off with a towel hanging from a nearby peg, and got dressed as well as he was able. Searching the room for anything he might have missed, he tossed the pillow aside and discovered a small leather pouch under it. Greedily, he opened the pouch and discovered two gold Eagle coins, 1867 and 1871, but no plastic protective sleeves. Hopefully, wherever he was... no, whenever he was... it was later than 1871. He pocketed the coins.

Exiting the room, he passed the hotel clerk's desk.

"Good morning, Mr. Sutherland," the clerk greeted him. The view through the glass on the front door confirmed what he saw from the window in his room. He took a seat near the clerk.

"I seem to have suffered a slight bout of amnesia..."

"Goodness, Mr. Sutherland! Shall I fetch the doctor?"

"I don't know that that's necessary quite at this moment. Perhaps you and I together can work this out. First, can you tell me who I am and anything you may know about me?"

"Yes, of course. You are Mr. Charles B. Sutherland — I don't know what the 'B' stands for — and you work for The *San Francisco Enterprise* as a reporter."

"How long have you known me?"

"You've been living here at the Dowling House Hotel for about five months, I'm told. I first met you about two months ago when I took this job."

"Anything else?"

"You occasionally tell stories of your time in the Army which I enjoy very much."

"Which army?"

The clerk looked confused. "The United States Army, sir. I think you left their service as a Captain."

"And what is today's date, if I may?"

"Today is Friday, August 10th, 1888."

"Grover Cleveland is the President..."

"Thank goodness, sir, I think your memory is returning!"

"...and Robert Waterman is governor."

"He is! That is a very good sign, sir!"

"How far are the offices of The *San Francisco Enterprise*?"

"Two streets to your right as you leave the hotel, sir. Right there on the corner."

"Thank you very much... I'm sorry, but I seem to have forgotten your name..."

"Jeremy Parker, sir."

"Jeremy, thank you very much. You've been an enormous help to me today."

"And, Jeremy... It might be best if you didn't mention this to anyone?"

Now as 'Charles B. Sutherland', he walked the two blocks and found the offices of The *San Francisco Enterprise* exactly where Jeremy had told him they would be. He entered to the jangle of bells and a few heads turned to see who the new arrival might be, then returned to their work. "Morning, Charlie," one of them greeted him as he passed by.

"I seem to have suffered a slight bout of amnesia," he whispered to his co-worker. "I had to ask my hotel clerk who I was this morning," he admitted. "Who here knows me best and can help me figure out the rest?"

The reporter turned at this with a surprised — or perhaps 'stunned' — expression on his face. "Mr. Folsom probably knows more about you than any of the rest of us. If there are any missing memories, he's your best source."

He nodded his thanks and moved toward the door marked "Jacob Folsom, Editor-in-Chief". He rapped softly on the door and heard the response: "Come in."

He entered. "Oh, Charlie, just the person I wanted to see!" Folsom bellowed. "Come in. Sit down." He sat. "I just got a chance to read through that last article you did on the emergence of fruit farming north of here. It was a fine piece of research. The business community is going to love it that we're providing money-making background information like this. I'm considering adding a business-oriented section to the paper, and so I'm going to need more and more similar articles. What do you think about that?"

"I think that's a wonderful idea, Mr. Folsom..."

"'*Mr. Folsom*'? When did you get so formal? You always call me Jacob."

"I had to ask my hotel clerk this morning to tell me who I am," he admitted, and Folsom's face fell. "He was able to give me some information, but everything prior to this morning is gone. You say I wrote a good article on fruit farming? I don't recall a word of it. I'm in desperate need of help to reconstruct my life and the people out there say you're the man most likely to be able to do that for me."

"Complete amnesia?" Folsom gasped.

"I'm sure I remember something, but I can't know for certain what."

Please... tell me about myself."

"You are Charles Baker Sutherland. You have been a reporter here at The *San Francisco Enterprise* for about five months now. You came to us with very good references from The Dallas Morning News for whom you were one of their earliest hires. You lodge at The Dowling House, but you already know that. You insist on typing all your work on our new Remington typewriters. Your Army service seems to have given you a unique perspective on several issues and we value that since it often results in well-researched and well-written articles that require very little in the way of editorial correction from me, and I'm a hard man to please. You are a font of splendid ideas which is why I pay you so much. Please tell me you have more ideas for more articles like the ones you have been turning out."

"Do I have family?" he asked Folsom.

Folsom paused, then began again in somber tones. "You did. When you and Carmelita moved here, she was carrying your first child and was due very shortly. It appears that the infant died in the womb and no one noticed. Carmelita developed sepsis and died. That was about a month after you arrived in San Francisco. I'm sorry that you now get to mourn all over again, and that I am the cause."

Charlie shook his head as if to clear cobwebs from it. "It's easier this time, I think, because I have no memory of Carmelita. Was she pretty?"

"She was stunningly beautiful. Texas women..." Folsom's voice trailed off.

Charlie paused. "Where do I bank?"

"*Farmers' Mercantile*, I would suppose — right next door. Shall we walk over and check your finances?"

"Thank you, that would be most appreciated."

Folsom rose out of his chair, clapped Charlie on the back, and led him outside and back into the Farmers' Mercantile Bank. Inside, he went straight for the manager. "Horace, we have a problem," Folsom started.

"Charlie, here, has lost much of his memory. He needs to rediscover his life, and that includes his finances. Can you help him out?"

"I can try," Horace Budd answered. "First things first. I need to see your signature." Charlie sat at the desk and Horace passed a sheet of paper toward him, then an inkwell and a pen. Charlie picked up the pen, dipped the nib into the ink, and wiped the excess by brushing it against the lip of the inkwell. He wrote as carefully as he could 'Charles Baker Sutherland', then pushed the paper back toward Horace who compared the fresh signature with the signature in the bank's files. They were different, but not so much that they would arouse suspicion. "Alright," Horace concluded, "you are Charles B. Sutherland. What can I do for you, sir?"

"I presume I have an account here?" Horace nodded. "May I know the balance?"

Horace looked up the account detail in a small ledger and reported "Your balance is \$56.12. Interest will be credited 10 days from now."

"And how do I access my funds?"

Horace looked confused. *Everybody* knew that! "You would normally write a draft on your account and give it to a merchant or other supplier. We can supply you with pre-printed drafts if you wish."

"Thank you. I would like a few of those. Is it possible to get a transcription of the activity in the account for the past... say... three months?"

"It's possible," Horace replied, "but it will be quite boring. Each week you make a small deposit, generally on the order of \$4, and the occasional draft arrives from someone who has earned your custom. I'll have one of our clerks prepare the transcript. Does this mean we will be losing your account, Mr. Sutherland?"

"Not at all. It just means that I'm trying to reconstruct my life after a mild amnesiac episode. Every little piece of information brings me closer to knowing who I really am."

Back at The *Enterprise*, Sutherland sat again with Folsom. "I do have an idea for another article," he started. "The gold fields are starting to peter out, and I'd like to do a feature — a human interest piece — on how this is affecting those prospectors who are still struggling to survive on takings that are worse with each passing season. How does that sound?"

"Hasn't that been done to death?" Folsom whined. "And besides, who really cares?"

"You like what I usually turn out, don't you? I'm asking you to trust me to give you text that will sell papers. That is what this game is all about, isn't it?"

Folsom nodded. "Do you think you can tug enough heartstrings with a story like that?"

"I'm certain of it, but I'm going to need some help planning the trip."

"Trip?"

"Yes, 'trip'. I'd like to head up towards Angels Camp to interview the prospectors there. I hear there are many, and I'm sure to locate a few with stories our readers will want to read. Then I'd like an advance on the trip expenses. I don't know that fifty-six dollars will cover it."

"Ask David to help you figure out what you need."

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The trip turned out to be about 110 miles, starting with a ferry-steamer ride across the bay to Oakland, then northeast to Walnut Creek and more-or-less due east depending on the roads to Angels Camp.

"You'll need five days to get there and another five to get back. If you spend a week doing interviews, we won't see you back here until September. Do you have a gun?" Charlie did not. "I recommend you get one. You've been in the Army, so you probably know how to use one."

That sounded like a splendid idea. 'Charlie' visited the hardware store on his way back from the newspaper office and picked up a new Colt model 1873 — exactly what Mark Gilliam was used to — and ammunition for it, \$14 for the gun and \$1.10 for two boxes of .45 Colt. The proprietor also sold him a serviceable

used holster for another \$1.50.

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He spent the week reading articles he had written for The *Enterprise* over the past five months to get a feel for the way Charlie wrote. Mark was certain he could turn out fresh material every bit as good as what he was reading, and wrote one new article, as a test of his writing ability, that Jacob Folsom heartily approved.

He felt as though memories that didn't belong to him were slowly creeping into his mind. Was he beginning to remember Charles Baker Sutherland's life? That could be as much 'curse' as blessing. He certainly remembered Mark David Gilliam's life. Having to keep two distinct sets of memories from clashing with each other could become a problem.

He churned out two more articles, one that speculated about possible uses for petroleum by-products that often were burned because they were considered 'waste', and the other — building on that — that noted the recent paving of Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D.C., and positing that an up-and-coming metropolis like San Francisco ought to consider doing something similar.

Folsom was thrilled with both of the pieces because they coincided with an increase in subscriptions from several well-respected local businessmen.

On Saturday, August 18th, Charlie attached his bedroll behind his horse — something else he didn't know he owned — and rode to the ferry docks to start his journey. On most nights, he could sleep in a rooming house or hotel along the road, but occasionally, he would have to make camp. For several days, he traveled in company with others including salesmen and Army officers moving from one outpost to another. Around a campfire or relaxing in a sitting room, Charlie's notebook was always handy and his pencil recorded a steady stream of freshly-minted memories.

A horse, if it's healthy and in good physical condition due to training, can carry a rider up to 50 miles in a day, but that horse can't do that two or three days in a row and needs a week or more to recuperate afterward. A typical saddle horse can cover 20 or 25 miles a day for a week. A trip of 110 miles, therefore, is five or more 20-mile days depending on the availability of overnight accommodations.

On the afternoon of the 23rd, Charles Baker Sutherland rode into Angels Camp, California, put his horse in the care of the stable-keeper, and checked into the one and only hotel. Angels Camp had a bath house not far from the hotel, and Charlie put it to good use to clean off the week's worth of trail dust.

The specialty of the restaurant was beef stew. Considering Angels Camp was barely more than 'a wide spot in the road', Charlie thought it pretty good. The waitress was pretty, too, but as the proprietor's daughter, Charlie stayed on his best behavior.

"Do you know a man named 'Cavendish'?" Charlie asked the waitress.

"Ezekiel Cavendish? Sure, 'most everybody 'round here knows Zeke."

"Where would I find him?"

She thought about that for a moment. "Take the road to Copperopolis west out of here, and when you get near the lake, follow Cherokee Creek south a quarter mile. You'll see Zeke's cabin close by the creek. What do you want with Zeke?"

"I'm a reporter for The *San Francisco Enterprise* doing a story about gold prospectors. Someone said Zeke would give me a good story."

"Most everybody here could give you a good story, I guess."

"If Cavendish doesn't pan out, I suppose I'll be back looking for some more."

"You can come back anytime," she replied, and she winked.

### 3 — *Angels Camp*

After breakfast on the 24th, Charlie mounted his horse and rode west out of town. In about 2 miles, he saw a lake to the north and a road leading southward following the creek. It was a certainty that he had ridden past this spot the morning prior. A quarter mile down the road was a rickety clapboard cabin, smoke lazily drifting from its metal stovepipe. In the stream, a gray-bearded old timer swirled gravel in a tin pie plate.

"Mr. Cavendish?" Charlie inquired.

"That's me. Who be you?"

Charlie dismounted and walked toward Cavendish with his hand outstretched. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Charles Sutherland, a reporter for The *San Francisco Enterprise*, and I've been sent to Angels Camp to interview prospectors for a feature The *Enterprise* is doing on the gold fields. A little bird whispered in my ear that your story would be worth hearing and worth writing about."

"Don't know who that could be, but my story is just about like ever'body else's 'round here. We swirl dirt in pans and hope for shiny bits, and most days our hopes don't yield much. I don't have time for jawbonin', either, less'n I get behind in my work. The missus will be out here in a bit to remind me I'm supposed to be lookin' for gold, not talkin' to city folk." He squatted back down and continued working his pan.

"Well, maybe I could help and we could talk while we both work, and for payment, you can have half the gold I find while we're talking. At worst, it'll help pass the time. Say... 50-50?"

Cavendish cocked his head to one side. He usually had one of the Tucker kids to help, but they hadn't been around for two or three weeks. They were content with a third of the takings, and Miz Tucker was grateful for what they brought home. "How about one-third?" Cavendish proposed.

Charlie thought about that very briefly. Cavendish didn't know the future the way Charlie did, and probably didn't expect the excess to be more than slim pickings. "40-60," Charlie countered.

"Okay," Cavendish agreed. "Get a pan from the porch and we can start talking."

Charlie sat on the edge of the front porch and pulled his boots off, then the socks that protected his feet from abrasion by the leather, rolled his trousers up above his knees, selected two tin pie plates from a stack, and returned to the stream. He reached into the water, grabbed a handful of silt and gravel, and dropped it into a pan, then began the monotonous drill of splashing water into it and swirling the mixture to wash the lighter material away.

As he worked, he plied Cavendish with questions: Where were you born? When did you come out west? Is this your first claim? Tell me about your wife. Periodically, Charlie would jot notes in his pocket notepad before getting back to panning, and every now and then — less frequently than he wished but about as often as he expected — he found a small shiny bit and transferred it to the other



pan.

Saturday was much the same, and Charlie got Cavendish's agreement that he could stroll downstream to talk to the next claimant who, oddly, declined to reveal his last name. By Monday, Charlie had interviewed two others and had collected valuable notes about life in the gold fields. On Tuesday the 28th, Charlie announced that he was moving some yards upstream in hopes of richer pickings.

Wading barefoot in the tepid water, stirring up the silt, his foot detected a rocky deformity in the stream bed. He bent down, felt around the edges of the rock, and finally got his fingers underneath the edge. With his heart beating like a kettle drum, Charlie put his back into it and heaved the rock, an inch thick, two feet long, and 14 to 16 inches wide, up and out of the water.

As the rock rose out of the water, Charlie could see that it was mostly gold with some gravel mixed in. "Zeke," he screamed, "come help me with this!"

Zeke came a-running and arrived just in time to see Charlie hefting a huge chunk of rock out of the stream. With Zeke helping, Charlie manhandled the 67 pound slab to the stream bank. "It sure as Hell feels like gold!" Zeke exclaimed. "What do you think it weighs?"

"60... maybe 70 pounds, it feels like. We should stop work for the day and get this slab into town so the assay office can price it."

Together, they toted the slab down to Zeke's cabin. Dorothea Cavendish came out wiping her hands on a towel and marveled at the find. "Lordy, that's a lot of gold!"

The men saddled their horses and rode away toward town, Charlie Sutherland, as the finder, in charge of the slab.

At the assay office, onlookers were aghast at the size of the find. The assayer recorded its official untrimmed weight at 1,050 Troy ounces and estimated it to be 70% gold. The townspeople had by now named it "The Cavendish Serving Platter", and the town photographer had Cavendish, Sutherland, and the assayer pose with the slab.

This being the most important find in the town's history, the assayer put aside all other tasks and got straight to work cleaning the slab of debris and smelting it down.

"Come back in the morning and I'll have it all separated and smelted," the assayer advised them.

Sutherland bought a bottle of good whiskey from the saloon to take home and celebrate with Cavendish and the other prospectors.

That evening, the Cavendishes hosted five other downstream panners for drinks after sundown forced the end of the workday.

"Charlie, you said Zeke here promised you 40% of whatever you found? That's going to be a pile of loot," Igor, the panner who didn't want his last name known, remarked.

"That was the deal I struck with Zeke, yes," Charlie confirmed.

Zeke glowered. "I said that when I thought what you found was going to

be small potatoes," Zeke came back. "You're not going to hold me to that now, are you?"

"Since The Cavendish Serving Platter would still be hiding under the gravel in this stream except for me... yes, I'm going to hold you to it. Tomorrow, you're going to be the wealthiest man in Calaveras County, thanks to me, and that's true even after you hand over the 40% split we agreed."

Zeke grumbled, but knew he better not go back on the agreement he had just admitted to in front of witnesses.

When finally rendered as 'pure gold', the weight was 752 Troy ounces, and the following morning, the assayer presented Cavendish with a bank voucher for \$26,250 drawn on the San Francisco Mint. Cavendish deposited the voucher into the first bank account he ever held in his name. He then transferred \$10,500 to Sutherland's likewise-newly-opened account in the town's bank.

The following day, Thursday, Sutherland gathered his belongings, saddled his horse, and departed Angels Camp for San Francisco, arriving back home at midday on Tuesday, September 4th, 1888. After a quick bath, he strolled to the offices of The *San Francisco Enterprise* to let everyone know he was back, then went next door to the Farmers' Mercantile Bank where he deposited \$10,500 with a draft drawn on The Bank of Angels Camp. The draft would take seven weeks to clear, but Charlie was in no particular hurry.

Back at The *Enterprise*, Charlie cozied up to one of the Remington Model 2 typewriters, rolled paper onto the platen, and began to churn out text. The trip home had given him time to mentally organize his notes, and he had four, maybe five, columns ready detailing his adventures among the prospectors.

In Angels Camp, the act of unearthing The Cavendish Serving Platter stirred up the bed of Cherokee Creek sufficiently that, for a few months following the event, there was a sudden upswing in the takings by the panners downstream of the find. "Y'all know that's all my gold you're pulling out, don't you?" Zeke Cavendish carped to the rest of the panners. "Thieves..."

The others laughed and went back to work. In 20 months, almost no one was able to live on the takings from Cherokee Creek any longer, and all of the panners had moved on to other locations.

## 4 — *The Carlton*

Jacob Folsom was disappointed when Charles Baker Sutherland gave his notice, but he was not surprised. Among the stories that constituted Sutherland's *opus* were a series of tales centered on the prospectors of Angels Camp, California, and one story about The Cavendish Serving Platter wherein he revealed that he had been paid \$10,500 for his part in discovering it. That made Sutherland a member of the San Francisco elite, an independently-wealthy man.

Nevertheless, Sutherland stayed on at The *Enterprise* doing the job for which Folsom had hired him, writing and reporting with an emphasis on business-oriented news, for several weeks following his return. Because of his skill at ferreting out business opportunities — often before others were aware of them — and his skill at converting ideas to newspaper column-inches, he was now on at least speaking terms with many of San Francisco's movers-and-shakers, when such a relationship did not extend to actual friendship. As a result, he was soon invited to invest in this developing business or that one. Of course, not every investment pays off, but Sutherland was sharp enough, thanks to his access to Mark Gilliam's memories, to shy away from the more dangerous ones. His fortune ballooned.

In January 1889, Sutherland moved from The Dowling House to The Carlton, substantially more *posh* and comfortable. The spacious public areas of The Carlton enabled Sutherland to meet with his new business acquaintances and not be embarrassed at a lack of privacy.

He, naturally, maintained his subscription to The *Enterprise* as well as to The *San Francisco Examiner*. The *Examiner* featured a different sort of story, since they had been, from their founding in 1863, correspondents of the Associated Press. Because of this, The *Examiner* often had news items from far afield that were not replicated in The *Enterprise*. Sutherland had investments outside the ambit of San Francisco and needed to know about developing conditions that could affect those investments, whether positively or negatively. The *Examiner* was his vehicle for keeping his thumb on the pulse of other cities.

Every now and then, he would take note of local conditions, but it was rare that a news item mentioned by name a place that held his attention — and his money. Rare, but not unheard-of.

As it happened, he was invested in the Cattleman's Bank of Batavia, and here was an article that actually mentioned that town's name:

## Range War Brews in Batavia

*Sacramento (AP). Farmers and ranchers in the otherwise-quiet town of Batavia, California are at each other's throats and events are heating up to the point that it may soon fit the definition of 'range war'...*

*More than the ordinary complaints of cattle trespassing on croplands, emotions are running hot and the ranchers are pressuring the local bank to deny banking services to the 'sodbusters'. Some violent episodes have been reported, and ranchers and farmers are both arming themselves for conflict...*

Any conflict in an area that affected the operation of the bank would, perforce, affect the value of his investment there. True, he could simply sell his interest, but it was likely that any potential buyer would also be aware of the existence of trouble in the area. That knowledge necessarily diluted the value of his investment. That could not be tolerated.

Sutherland had been mulling for several months now an idea that he might have to take direct action to pour oil on troubled waters rather than retreating on his investments. He did, after all, have some experience pacifying opposing forces, and he wasn't just thinking of the men under his command. Perhaps this would be the day to put those plans into effect.

Sutherland made his way to the nearest Western Union office to confer with its manager.

"How might I register as a business?" he inquired.

"It's quite straight-forward, Mr. Sutherland. You let us know the name and location of your business, and we will deliver your cables, both incoming and outgoing, for a small monthly fee," the manager explained.

"I wish to remain somewhat anonymous," Sutherland replied.

The manager mulled this for a moment. "I don't see that as a problem, sir. A cable arriving addressed to the business need not actually name you, only the business. Only we at Western Union need to know the connection between business 'A' and person 'B'."

Sutherland nodded his understanding. "Very well. I wish to register the name 'Paladin' as my business. Is that possible?"

"Give me a few moments to verify that the name is not already in use." The manager opened a ledger and scanned the 'P' section, then wrote a short note and handed it to his telegrapher. In seconds, the Morse key started clattering. "It isn't in use as of March 31st. I have asked the central office to check for recent activity, but I feel confident you will be able to use that name. What does it mean?"

Sutherland smiled. "The paladins were twelve knights of the court of Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor. They were the protectors of the realm in the 8th century."

"How odd," the manager mumbled. "Why would you choose such a name?"

"I have my reasons."

The Morse repeater began clattering again and the telegrapher bent over his desk to scratch letters on a note pad. When the clattering stopped, the telegrapher ripped the note free and handed it to the manager who glanced briefly at it.

"The business name 'Paladin' is now reserved to this office. Let me gather a few details, and I will make it official momentarily." He collected Sutherland's name and address, The Carlton Hotel, and the fee for registering the name, gave Sutherland a receipt, and shook his hand. "Congratulations, sir, you are now officially in business."

His next stop was a local printer.

"I wish to have business cards printed," he told the printer, and described the form he wished the cards to take: a white Staunton-pattern chess knight with the words 'Have Gun, Will Travel' above the instruction to 'Wire Paladin, San Francisco'.

Sutherland ordered 500, a single box, not knowing how many he might eventually use. He suspected 500 was more than enough to last a lifetime.



The holster he had for his Colt Peacemaker was adequate, but just barely. It secured the firearm so that it wouldn't work its way loose while on the trail, but it wasn't as well-constructed as it needed to be for someone for whom the Colt would be a working tool.

The printer recommended a leather goods shop nearby, and that became Sutherland's next stop. There he was measured for the holster's 'fit', and the gun with its 5½" barrel was modeled so the holster's pocket would fit it precisely. When delivered, the black leather would sport a silver chess knight, and tie-

downs to secure it to Sutherland's right leg to prevent snagging during the draw. With Mark Gilliam's skill added to his own, he felt he would be a formidable opponent for anyone whose primary argument was a handgun.

To test this theory, Sutherland put aside some time for practice. He chose a time when he thought strollers and picnickers would be unlikely to frequent the cliff area in the northwest corner of the city. There, he put Mark's facility with a single-action revolver to the test, and was pleased that Mark's skill seemed to have augmented Charlie's Army training with small arms. Charlie was comforted that he seemed to be faster than he had ever been before, and that his aim had improved more than just a little. For anyone involved in a gun fight, he knew — because Mark knew — that 'speed is life'.

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As time went on, the articles in *The Examiner* became more worrisome.

## **Death in Batavia**

*Sacramento (AP). Farmers in the Batavia area have taken to going abroad armed at all times after the shooting of two of their fellows. Tensions between the farmers and ranchers over the issue of access to range land have resulted in bloodshed after clashes on the streets of Batavia sparked by the recent use of barbed wire around farmsteads...*

*Gregory Parsons, son of Willard Parsons, a prominent local farmer, was shot and killed during an altercation with Benjamin Scott, a ranch hand for the M Bar T cattle operation. Two days earlier, Walter Brady, farmer, was severely wounded in a gun battle with Gus Toplin, co-owner of the M Bar T ranch...*

Taking a pearl-handled folding knife from his waistcoat pocket, Sutherland carefully sliced the article from the paper. A business card he turned over and wrote on the reverse: \$500. Addressing a plain envelope without a

return address to "Mr. Willard Parsons, Batavia, California", he placed the business card and newspaper clipping in the envelope, sealed it, and handed it to the Chinese *ku li* girl who ran errands for the denizens of the Carlton, then returned to browsing the newspapers.

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The Western Union delivery boy entered The Carlton and spoke briefly to the desk clerk who nodded and pointed to Mr. Sutherland who was playing chess with another of the guests.

"Telegram for you, sir" he informed Sutherland, and tapped the brim of his cap. Sutherland took the envelope and handed the boy a quarter-dollar from the stash of coins he always kept handy. "Thank you, sir!" Sutherland had just tipped the boy more than Western Union was going to pay him for this day's work.

Sutherland inserted the blade of his pocket knife under the flap of the tan envelope and sliced it open with a single smooth swipe before folding the blade back and tucking the knife back into his waistcoat. Unfolding the telegram, he read: "*Fee acceptable. Come soon. Parsons, Batavia*".

He returned his attention to the game, swept his rook down to the 8th rank and announced 'check'. His opponent quickly pulled a knight back to block the attack, and Sutherland responded by taking the pawn no longer being guarded by the otherwise-occupied knight but guarded by his own.

"Checkmate."

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He was getting to know the ferryman almost on a personal level. He was certainly on a first-name basis with him even if Harold Smith didn't think he ought to reciprocate. "Good morning, Mr. Paladin." Harold did not know his passenger's real name.

"Good morning, Harold. Fine weather for a crossing."

"It is, indeed, sir. Where are you headed today?"

"Heading up toward Sacramento for some business."

"Government business?"

"No, just checking on some investments I have nearby."

Harold grunted, not knowing what to say beyond what he had already said. Three more passengers with mounts and a carriage rounded out his cargo, so he put the little steam engine into gear and headed out across the bay toward Oakland.

As the four debarked the little steamboat in Oakland, one of the other passengers engaged Paladin in conversation.

"Did I hear you say you were bound for Sacramento?"

"Not quite that far. Is that your destination?"

"No," he replied, "only as far as Batavia."

Paladin's ears perked up. "Bank business?"

The man laughed as he and Paladin mounted their horses. "No, I wouldn't know what to do in that business. Why do you ask?"

Paladin smiled. "I have a financial interest in the Cattleman's Bank of Batavia, so it looks like we're headed for the same place. What business are you in, Mr. ...?" and extended his hand.

The other gripped it. "Orville Martin," he answered. "My uncle has a part interest in a ranch in Batavia. I'm heading up there to help him with some issues he's having." The two riders started their journey, but continued their conversation as the horses ambled along.

"Ah," Paladin nodded knowingly, "so we are almost in the same business. I'm interested in the Cattleman's Bank, and you're interested in cattle. Which ranch?"

"The *M Bar T*. Uncle Bob is the 'M' part of that."

"You say he's having 'issues'?" Paladin queried. "What sort of issues? Anything that happens locally is something a bank's investors should be aware of, no?"

"It's nothing related to money... well, I guess maybe everything comes down to money, doesn't it?" Martin mused. Paladin nodded and Martin continued. "The farmers are stringing barbed wire all over the place, even where they don't have farm property. It's like they have it in for the cattlemen... and the cattle. Some of the livestock is getting damaged by the damned stuff."

Paladin nodded again. "What's causing the bad blood?" he asked.

"I don't know for sure, but it may have something to do with love."

Paladin laughed. "Well, don't they say that *'all's fair in love and war'*?"

"That's what they say, alright, and I suspect the amount of blood is about the same either way."

"How does 'love' result in barbed wire fences?" Paladin asked.

Martin shrugged his shoulders and the conversation, such as it was, moved on to other topics.

Over the succeeding days on the trail, Paladin and Orville Martin got better acquainted, Paladin harvesting facts — or their equivalent — from Martin, and Martin learning little or nothing about his traveling companion beyond the single name by which he went when on the trail. Paladin's clothing was what one expected of a businessman on such a journey: a black hat, flat-topped with a severely curled brim, a tweedy jacket, black denim pants, and boots, also black. The ever-present accessory for any man on the road would be a good revolver, often a souvenir of one's military service, but not always. Orville sported a double holster holding two of Colt's famous Model 1873 short-barreled Peacemakers chambered in .44-40 and a Remington rifle chambered for the same cartridge.

Orville's Uncle Bob had written to Orville recommending a route that included comfortable lodging along the way, and Paladin happily adjusted his own travel plans to align with Uncle Bob's advice. It was always better to sleep in a bed than a bedroll, and he could afford it. Apparently, so could Orville. Then, too, a lodging house or inn typically provided a home-cooked meal for its guests



and that worked to stretch the rough-and-tumble biscuits-bacon-and-beans fare that was standard for camp grub.

On the fifth day of travel, Orville reined his horse at a fork in the road leading to Batavia. He reached across and shook Paladin's hand. "Batavia that way, Paladin. I'm headed for the *M Bar T*. Perhaps we'll see each other in town?"

"I wouldn't doubt it, Mr. Martin. Thank your uncle on my behalf for his excellent travel advice." They each rode off in different directions.

## 5 — *Batavia*

Paladin's first stop in town was the Cattleman's Bank of Batavia where he introduced himself as Mr. Sutherland's agent. He presented a letter signed by himself (as Sutherland) and was welcomed into the general manager's office.

"Tomaso O'Kelly," the bank manager introduced himself.

Paladin smiled. "A *San Patricio* descendant?" he asked.

O'Kelly smiled back and nodded. "My grandfather and my father, both. How may I help you, Mr. Paladin?"

"Mr. Sutherland is particularly interested in the conflict brewing locally between the cattlemen and the farmers, since it seems likely to negatively affect his investment in this bank. What can you confide that I may transmit to Mr. Sutherland on that issue?"

"I'll be brutally frank, Mr. Paladin. The entire issue stems from Ronald Toplin eloping with Rebecca Stone. Ronald is the grandson of Gus Toplin, a cattle rancher, and Rebecca is the daughter of Barnaby Stone, a farmer. Stone accused Ronald Toplin of kidnapping the girl, and Toplin reacted poorly to his offspring being accused of a crime, as you might expect. Violence ensued and you have probably read about it in the San Francisco papers —"

"*The Examiner*, yes," Paladin interrupted.

"— well, it's mostly been the farmers who have been suffering from it. Cattlemen are generally better prepared for dealing with life-and-death emergencies like rattlesnakes and coyotes, and their gun-handling skills are typically quite high. When a farmer sets himself at odds with one of them, it's generally prelude to one of them getting shot, and that's happened several times over the last few months.

"In retaliation, the farmers have taken to randomly stringing barbed wire on what everyone local considers 'open range'. The ranchers, as you might expect, have reacted negatively to the practice."

"By 'negatively', do you mean violently?"

"I do. Just this week, another farmer went to meet his maker, and it looks as though the situation is growing more dangerous with each passing day."

"Do you have any suggestions for how the conflict might be ameliorated?" Paladin asked him.

"Alas, sir, I do not," the bank manager admitted.

"Thank you for your time," Paladin offered, rising and extending his hand.

Paladin booked himself into the Batavia Hotel, one of two hotels in the area and highly recommended by the banker, changed into his all-blacks, and since it was still early enough, rode out to the Parsons' farmstead.

At the Parsons farm, he received bad news. "I'm sorry that you've come all this way for nothing, Mr. Paladin," Mrs. Parsons began. "The Mister was shot dead by that rabble of ranchers just three days ago. I'm all that's left of the family now, seein' that they've already killed my son. What business did you have with him?"

"He had hired me to help with the trouble between the farmers and the ranchers hereabouts," Paladin started, carefully avoiding mentioning the specific talent for which Parsons had hired him and hoping she wouldn't ask. He was about to be disappointed.

"Hired you? To do what? The only way we're going to end the trouble, as you put it, is to end them. What business are you in that you could help us with that?"

Paladin reluctantly drew his business card from the breast pocket of his shirt and handed it to Mrs. Parsons. She gazed at it thoughtfully for a few moments before handing it back. She stepped to the door of the Parsons homestead and called to her farm hand. "Jamie, come here."

When the youngster entered the house, Mrs. Parsons instructed him: "Take Mr. Paladin here over to the Stone place and tell them I sent him."

Barnaby and Ethel Stone welcomed Paladin to their rough-hewn farmhouse following Jamie's introduction. "We knew Willard had made some arrangement, but none of us farmers knew exactly what that entailed. What was your agreement with Willard?"

"I quoted \$500 as my fee," he replied, passing his business card across the table, "but I have learned some additional facts to which I was not privy before doing so that make me believe something else is called for here."

"What do you mean?"

"I spoke with the bank manager in town because I have two missions here. One of them is to safeguard my regular employer's investment in the Cattleman's Bank of Batavia." The expressions on the faces of the Stones turned to one of great concern. "Mr. Sutherland's prime concern is to pour oil on troubled waters so that his investment flourishes. I offered my talents to Mr. Parsons in case something more... persuasive were called for. What I heard from the bank manager earlier leads me to believe the problem may not be solvable solely with hardware and skill with a handgun."

"I don't follow you," Ethel Stone replied. "What else do you think will keep them from killing all the rest of us?"

"Briefly, Mr. O'Kelly suggested that the source of most of the problems is this very house..."

"He would," Ethel Stone snorted.

"Well, then, since I've come all this way, let me make use of it. Tell me your side of the story," Paladin prompted.

"Ronald Toplin kidnapped our Becky..."

"You know this how?" Paladin interrupted.

"She would never have run off with a rancher's boy!"

"Juliet's parents probably felt the same way," Paladin inserted with a smirk.

"I don't know any 'Juliet' that run off with anybody. If Becky went off with that Toplin boy, it was because she was forced."

"There's no possibility in your mind that anything else is in play? That Ronald and Becky might have run off to avoid the bad feelings they could easily

have seen resulting from their love for each other?"

Ethel Stone's face was a mixture of shock and revulsion. "Becky didn't love that boy!"

"Do you know where they might have gone?" Paladin asked. The two Stones shook their heads.

Paladin paused, thinking. "I'm willing to make an effort to end the conflict should you wish to hire me to do so, on the understanding that 'ending the conflict' might not necessarily involve any killing."

"And your fee?"

"Given the death toll among your people so far, let's leave it at the figure I quoted to Mr. Parsons."

"I'll have to ask the others," Barnaby Stone replied. "\$500 is a little steep for us alone."

"I'm at the Batavia Hotel in town. Let me know what you decide."

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At breakfast in the hotel's dining room the following morning, Paladin was enjoying bacon and eggs with fried potatoes when Orville Martin entered. Paladin waved him over and invited him to join him. Orville sat. It was the first time Orville had seen Paladin in his all-blacks and the thought flitted through his mind that the holster he had admired on the trail up to Batavia matched quite well.

"Did I ever mention why Mr. Sutherland sent me to Batavia?" Paladin asked Orville.

Orville thought for a moment before replying. "I don't believe you mentioned that you were sent. My understanding was that the investment in the Cattleman's Bank was your own, but I don't think you went deeper than that."

"Mr. Sutherland became worried that the conflict between the farmers and the ranchers hereabouts would lessen the value of his investment, and asked me to find out if there might be a solution to that conflict. He also authorized me to do whatever I thought necessary to bring that conflict to an end."

Orville wore a concerned expression. "And have you concluded what that solution might be?" he asked.

"Not yet," Paladin admitted, "but you were right that it revolves around love, if Ronald Toplin and Becky Stone actually share that. You wouldn't, by any chance, know where they've gone, would you?"

"I do, but I have been asked not to share that information."

"The Stones, Becky's parents, are thoroughly convinced that Becky has been abducted. Are you aware of that?"

"The Stones are crazy. There was no abduction. Becky and Ronald ran off together because she knew her folks would never allow her to marry a cattleman, even if he'll one day own the spread — half of it, anyway. Her parents flew off the handle when Becky told them Ronald wanted to marry her, made her stay on the farm, wouldn't let her go to town anymore in case she might meet Ronald..."

"But she did meet Ronald," Paladin interjected.

"Yes. I won't tell you how, but when her folks went to town to do their shopping, Ronald went to the Stone farm with a buckboard, and he and Becky eloped."

"So there's no one who can independently verify that Becky was not abducted, is there? No one can step forward and testify that Becky left of her own accord? No one whom the Stones would trust to confirm your story?"

"There is," Orville admitted, "but she can't — she won't do that."

"May I ask why?" Paladin pressed.

"You can ask," Orville parried, "but you won't get an answer."

"So the killing will continue," Paladin muttered.

"Every time we catch one o' them sod-busters stringing the devil's rope, yeah, the killing will continue."

"I think I'm going to have to talk to Mr. Toplin," Paladin added morosely.

"I don't know that it will do any good."

"I've got to do something to justify Mr. Sutherland's sending me all the way up here. What do you suggest? That I let this go on until everyone is dead?"

"It'll only be the farmers who are all dead. Ranch hands generally know how to defend themselves."

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Gus Toplin seemed to be expecting a visit from Paladin. Perhaps Orville had shared that breakfast conversation with his uncle and his partner. Toplin was cordial, but reticent about sharing information with Paladin given that Paladin was working for the farmers.

"I assure you, Mr. Toplin, that whatever knowledge you entrust to me will be used solely to bring a peaceful conclusion to the present difficult situation — if that is possible," Paladin pleaded, but Toplin would not be moved.

"Peaceful or otherwise, Mr. Paladin, the situation will be concluded, and it will be concluded to our satisfaction, of that you can be certain," Toplin finished.

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In town, Paladin visited the post office and spoke with the town's postmaster. In a brief conversation, Paladin learned that mail had arrived from Ronald Toplin bound for his grandfather, and that letters outbound to Ronald Toplin had passed through his hands, but he denied making note of the destination for those letters.

Paladin held up a \$10 Golden Eagle coin before the postmaster's eyes. "Yours if you can provide me with the address," Paladin promised before pocketing the coin. "I'm staying at the Batavia Hotel."

He didn't have to wait long. The next day brought a note from the postmaster, delivered to him by an errand boy. As was his custom, Paladin tipped the wide-eyed lad a quarter-dollar for the service. The note said:

I have the information you seek.

— Edward Gilly, Postmaster

Paladin took his time finishing his lunch of greens and chicken in a light sauce before ambling toward the post office. There, Gilly presented him with a handwritten note, a copy of the address of Gus Toplin's latest outgoing missive to his grandson:

Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Toplin  
Rocking W Ranch  
Folsom, California

Paladin presented Gilly with a \$10 gold piece, left, and walked back to the hotel.

## 6 — Folsom

Folsom was easily 45 miles away, and was a two-day trip on horseback. He began packing for a journey. After breakfast the next day, he mounted his horse and rode east toward Sacramento and Folsom, finding overnight lodging in Sacramento along the way, and arriving in Folsom late on Saturday. Folsom had a rooming house for long-term residents, but the proprietor was amenable to letting Paladin stay in the last empty room available even though it would be for just a few days.

Paladin inquired about church services for the following day, and the location of the Rocking W, and learned that the ranch was close enough to town that many of the hands there might be found in town on Sunday after church let out. He suspected that Becky Stone would be among them.

While his church attendance was charitably termed 'spotty', he made a special effort to be found among the congregants the following morning. Because of this, he finally made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Toplin, formerly of Batavia, California, and shared a few words over coffee at the fellowship following the service.

"Newlyweds?" he inquired, and received in return a shy smile from Rebecca Toplin (*née* Stone). "How long have you two known each other?" he pressed.

"Becky and I have known each other since we were in school," Ronald offered. "We've loved each other at least that long."

"Both ranching families?" Paladin probed.

Becky shook her head. "My folks are farmers. They didn't approve of me and Ronald taking up together. We had to elope."

Paladin feigned a shocked expression. "But they've accepted this... your arrangement, yes?"

Becky shook her head again and Ronald looked at the floor. "They don't even know where we are," she admitted.

Paladin paused. "I'm certain they're worried," he opined, looking them both in the eyes. "Shouldn't you at least let them know that you're safe and happy?"

"How?" Ronald demanded. "A letter would have a postmark letting them know where we are. If they decided to make trouble for us, that would tell them where to look. Same for a telegram."

"There's no one you could trust as a courier to bring the message to them? You said you were from Batavia, didn't you? I'm heading back toward San Francisco tomorrow or the next day. Would you trust me to bring them news from you?"

"Would you?" Becky gushed. "I fret every night that I've broken their hearts. I'd give anything to give them peace."

"I'm staying at Winslow's boarding house. If you give me your letter, I'll hand it to the postmaster when I pass through Batavia."

Becky pulled Paladin's head down toward hers and kissed his cheek.

"Thank you. You don't know how much this means to me."

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As he dressed for dinner at Winslow's that evening, there was a knock at his door. As was his custom, he cocked the hammer of his Peacemaker and held it at low-ready. "Who's there?"

"Mrs. Winslow, Mr. Paladin. Someone just delivered an envelope for you."

He opened the door and Mrs. Winslow handed him the envelope addressed to

Mr. and Mrs. Barnaby Stone  
Batavia, California

"Dinner will be ready in just a few minutes, Mr. Paladin."

"I'll be right down, Mrs. Winslow."

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With nothing further to keep him in Folsom, the following morning, Monday, Paladin settled his bills at the boarding house and the stable, and began retracing his path to Batavia via Sacramento.

Early Tuesday afternoon, he was alerted to the sound of hoof beats heading toward him from the west, and guided his horse into cover off the main road, but where he could observe the traffic passing. He was surprised to see Orville Martin among a group of four men in what seemed a very great hurry. When they had passed, he resumed his travel toward Batavia.

He wondered whether he should handle the note as he had suggested to Becky Toplin — handing it to the town's postmaster as if it were an ordinary letter — or to deliver it directly to the Stones. Concluding that the fewer people knew he was aware of Becky Toplin's whereabouts the better, he resolved to handle it himself. On Wednesday morning, he rode out to the Stone property and presented the letter to Barnaby and Ethel. He watched as they sat at their kitchen table, opened the letter, and read:

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Dearest Ma and Pa,

This is just a short note to let you know that I am alright. Ronald and I are married now, and we're happy, and we want you to be happy, too.

We eloped because we knew you would never allow me to marry him. Ronald and I love each other very much. Now that you know this, we hope you'll stop making trouble between the ranchers and the farmers.

I'll write again someday to let you know where we are, but only if I first hear that things have settled down there.



I'm having this note personally delivered by a trusted acquaintance so that it won't be postmarked.

Love,  
Becky and Ronald

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"You've seen Becky?" Ethel demanded.

Paladin nodded. "I have."

"Where?" Barnaby snapped.

Paladin shook his head. "That information I am not privileged to divulge," he told them. "If your daughter wanted you to know that, I'm sure she would have included it in the note she wrote. She sent that letter with me so that you would not know where she is."

Barnaby Stone rose and retrieved his shotgun from the fireplace mantel, opened it, and began to load two shotgun shells into it. Paladin quietly slipped the safety loop off the hammer of his Colt. His hand now hung mere inches from the Peacemaker's grip.

"Mr. Stone, please don't make me kill you. If you close the action on that shotgun, I will."

Barnaby Stone glanced quickly at the blued steel firearm that, from Paladin's demeanor, he was sure would spell his end. The shotgun, its barrels still hanging like a broken arm, stayed still. Ethel's face wore a look of fright.

"Unload that for me, would you?" Paladin pleaded. Stone used a fingernail to extract the two rounds from the shotgun's barrels, placing them in his vest pocket. "I'm not your enemy, Mr. Stone," he continued, "I may, in fact, be the best friend you've got around here. You may not realize it, but I'm doing my best to keep you alive. If keeping you alive is something that meets with your approval, then work with me instead of against me. Do that, and you may avoid permanently alienating your child. Do not, and Becky will be lost to you forever."

"What now?" Ethel asked.

"As I mentioned before," Paladin began, "I have two missions here in Batavia. One is to help solidify my employer's investment in the Cattleman's Bank of Batavia, and the other is to solve the issue of conflict between the farmers and the ranchers. Those two missions, it now seems, are intimately connected, and the key to both is right here in this room, but before I put anymore effort into keeping you and the other farmers alive, there is the matter of my fee..."

Ethel moved to her sewing basket and lifted the cover. From its interior, she drew eight bank drafts from six farmers, and handed them to Paladin who examined them briefly, adding their amounts together mentally. Satisfied, he folded them and slipped them into his shirt pocket.

"I believe your daughter's letter eliminates as an excuse for conflict any lingering suspicion that she was kidnapped." Barnaby and Ethel nodded silently.

"Further, from what I have learned from other sources — including Becky herself — you had to know that she was in love with Ronald Toplin and that your contention that she would never have run off with him had to be — let's just label it 'not absolutely true' and let it go at that, shall we?" Ethel nodded again, her face now red with shame. "Is there anything else that provides an excuse for conflict? Something I may have overlooked?"

"There's only the traditional enmity between cattle-folk and vegetable-folk. I don't know how to solve that," Barnaby replied.

Paladin nodded. "Conflict between ranchers and farmers often ends poorly for the farmers. As the saying goes, 'whether the rock hits the pitcher or the pitcher hits the rock, it doesn't bode well for the pitcher'. In view of that, I recommend — I *highly* recommend — that the pitchers avoid, to the extent possible, contact with the rocks. Don't start trouble. Go further than that. Don't just *be* in the right. *Appear* to be in the right. I'll leave it to you two, since you seem to be the leaders of the farmers, to spread that gospel among your company. In the meantime, I'm going to make the same appeal to the cattle-folk." He shook both their hands and headed back to town.

Tomaso O'Kelly happily deposited the eight bank drafts, all of them on his own bank, into Charles B. Sutherland's account on Paladin's assurance that Mr. Sutherland would reimburse him on his return to San Francisco.

He then rode out to the *M Bar T* ranch to consult with the elder Toplin, but his reception there was decidedly frosty.

"According to Postmaster Gilly, you pressured him for Ronald's address," Toplin hissed. "Is that true?"

"Certainly not!" Paladin objected. "I paid him \$10 for that information. There was no pressure at all."

"And what do you intend doing with your newly-bought knowledge?" Toplin demanded, clearly angry.

"I've already done it. I rode up to Folsom, made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Toplin, convinced Mrs. Toplin that her parents needed assurance that she was safe and sound; she wrote a letter, gave it to me to hand-deliver to the Stones, and they are now content that their daughter was not, in fact, kidnapped, and went of her own free will with her beloved to be wed."

"So now those crazy people know where Ronald and Becky are, and they'll go and murder my grandson..."

"No, they don't know where Ronald and Becky are. Becky didn't tell them in her letter, and I was under no obligation to share that information with them."

"But you work for them..."

"Mr. Toplin, I was hired to put an end to the conflict between the ranchers and the farmers..."

"You're their hired gun..."

"If that becomes necessary. It's becoming apparent, to me at least, that I may be able to do what I've been hired for without making any loud noises. I've already convinced the Stones that there's no need for further violence, and

they have promised to spread that word among the farmer community, so half of the problem is already solved — or on its way to a solution. Now, if I can convince the ranchers that there's no further need to spill farmers' blood, my task is complete. The only outstanding question is 'what will convince the cattle-folk to stop shooting the vegetable-folk?'"

"We didn't start this, Paladin. We didn't start any of this! It was them who strung barbed wire across open range to hurt our livestock. That's a declaration of war. If they want peace now, they have to fix what they broke."

Paladin nodded in agreement. "And if they pull all the wire they put out on the open range, the ranchers will be satisfied?"

Toplin paused. "I think so," he said at last.

"Easiest \$500 I've ever made," Paladin muttered to himself as he rode away.

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Orville Martin and the riders accompanying him reined their horses at the Rocking W ranch late on Tuesday, their horses spent from the gallop up from Batavia, dismounted, and rushed inside.

Before James Walker, his uncle by virtue of marrying the Martin girl, could even welcome him, Orville demanded "Has Paladin been here?"

At the sound of the name, Becky Toplin rushed in from an adjoining room. "What about Mr. Paladin?" she demanded in turn.

Orville had never before met either Ronald or Becky and didn't know who she was. "He works for the Stones," he blurted.

Becky's face froze. "That lying..." she almost shrieked.

"So he was here! Does he know where Ronald and Becky are?"

"I'm Becky," she announced. "Yes, we made his acquaintance at church on Sunday. He offered to carry a letter from me to my parents telling them that I was alright..."

"So by now your folks know where you are. I think you all should prepare for an unfriendly visit from some angry farmers..."

"But wait," Becky cautioned as a fresh thought invaded her brain, "why would he go to all that trouble of finding us and then carry my letter? He could just as easily go to the telegraph office in town and wire the information to my folks. Something's not sitting right. What are we missing?"

"He's a hired gun. The farmers brought him in to take care of the ranchers. Maybe he needs to make sure you're safe before the killing starts."

"How did he know where we were in the first place?" Becky asked Orville.

"He got your address from the postmaster in Batavia. Bribed him, it looks like."

Becky's face wore an exasperated expression. "Why did he come? Why not just give my folks the address and let them take care of it?"

Orville was starting to grow puzzled himself. "I don't know. Maybe he was scouting the territory?"

"You've got more questions than you have answers, Mr. ..."

"I'm Orville Martin, nephew to Bob Martin who's half-owner of the *M Bar T* ranch."

Uncle James injected himself into the conversation. "Let's get you boys fed and bedded down. Sleeping on this problem may give us better heads in the morning. If you need to rush back in the morning, we'll get you fresh horses. The ones you've got will need to pasture for a few days before they're any good to anyone."

In the morning as the whole household gathered for breakfast, Becky started the conversation. "Any further ideas why Paladin would come here, offer to be a messenger for me to my family, not kidnap me, and then just ride off after a very pleasant and civilized conversation?"

"I think we're just going to have to ask him ourselves," Orville offered.

"So you're headed back, then?"

"I don't think we have any choice. We're going to have to face him to get any information about his motives. One thing I don't understand, though..."

"Just one thing?" Becky asked with a smile.

"We should have passed him on the road coming up here. Why didn't we? Did he even go back to Batavia?"

"Did you check every *cantina* and tavern along the route?"

"We didn't see his horse at any of those. No need to check inside if his horse wasn't outside."

The four riders finished their meal, saddled their fresh horses, and began the 2-day trek back to Batavia and the *M Bar T*. They arrived in the town late on Thursday and went directly to the Batavia Hotel to confront Paladin. They found him seated in the hotel's dining room enjoying dinner.

"Why did you go to Folsom?" Orville Martin demanded of him.

"That's where Becky Toplin was," Paladin answered matter-of-factly. "I had to see for myself that she had not been spirited away against her will."

"I already told you that," Orville seethed. "Now Becky's parents will start some fresh trouble."

Paladin shook his head. "I doubt that."

"Well, now that they know where she is..."

"But they don't know where she is," Paladin interrupted Orville's rant.

"Didn't you tell them?"

"No. Becky Toplin wasn't ready to have me share that information with her parents. You need to calm yourself, Orville. How many times do I have to remind you that my job here is to prevent a range war, not to start one?"

"You keep saying that, Paladin, but you sure don't act like it."

Paladin's expression would have been called 'a snarl' except that his lips were tightly clamped. "What have you seen me do that makes you think I'm lying, Orville?"

"Well, you should have just kept your nose out of this business..."

"That's the surest way to stoke that range war I'm trying to prevent. The farmers lie and the ranchers lie right back at them, and the lies keep getting

hotter until there's a fire. *'Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.'* If you want peace, find the truth and tell the truth."

"Are you calling me a liar?" Orville blustered as he backed away and slipped the safety loops from his brace of Colts.

"I've heard nothing but lies since I rode into town. As far as I can tell, the only person who hasn't yet lied to me is the banker, and that's only because he admitted he didn't know how to stop you idiots from killing each other." Paladin rose from his seat. "You look like you're ready for a fight, Orville. Shall I meet you outside? You don't want to draw down on a man who still has his gun cinched down, do you? People around here would think you a coward if you were to do that, and I'm sure word of that would make its way back to San Francisco, as well."

It was almost possible for Paladin to see the thoughts racing through Orville's head. Orville was angry at being called a liar, but being labeled a coward or a back-shooter was worse than that by orders-of-magnitude, and now Paladin — a man about whose capabilities Orville could not speculate — had offered to meet him on the street, and he had brought this all upon himself.

"I'm not looking for a fight, Paladin," he began. "If anyone is looking for a fight, it's you, accusing people of falsehoods..."

Paladin turned and sat back down at the table. "Let me know if you change your mind," he told Orville, and then resumed eating his dinner.

The three *M Bar T* cowhands and Orville stormed out of the hotel and spurred their mounts toward their ranch.

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Barnaby Stone addressed the gathering of farmers in his parlor. "At Paladin's insistence, I admit to you all that Becky was not kidnapped by the Toplin boy. She eloped with him to parts unknown and is now Mrs. Ronald Toplin according to a note she sent to Ethel and me. The main reason for us being in conflict with the ranchers is gone.

"Further, Paladin has spoken with Gus Toplin over at the M Bar T and assures us that if we pull back all the barbed wire we strung out along the grazing range, the ranchers are willing to 'live and let live'. As Paladin put it to me the other day, 'whether the rock hits the pitcher or the pitcher hits the rock, it doesn't bode well for the pitcher'. Our encounters with ranch hands have mostly been unfavorable to us pitchers, and Paladin advises we steer clear of the rocks in our life... and clean up the barbed wire we ran. Any objections?"

"Since it was you that got us riled up enough to string wire on the range, maybe it should be you that cleans up the mess. We've all got farms to run and we've already put in time to support our poor neighbor whose daughter was kidnapped. If someone needs to unstring barbed wire, that someone is you, Barnaby. I suggest you get busy."

## 7 — Patches

The following morning, Barnaby, assisted by his wife, began scouring the range land north of Batavia-proper for signs of barbed wire installations. As they encountered a strand, the two would follow it in their buckboard wagon until it came to an end, with Barnaby walking along pulling staples as he went and freeing the strand section by section. At the end, they would connect the free end to a wire spool in the wagon's bed and one of them would wind it onto the spool as the wagon rolled along. It was a much more tiresome job removing the wire than it had been to emplace it, and not solely because there were just two of them working. On ensuing days, the occasional teen-aged son of one or more of their neighbors could be found lending them a hand, with Paladin pitching in, something that sped up the operation noticeably, but there was a lot of barbed wire to be removed.

It all seemed to be going along smoothly, with the Stones amassing quite a huge store of barbed wire that they had no real use for, until the third day. Paladin had, by this time, concluded that his services were no longer needed, and had resolved to return to San Francisco, content that he had earned his fee. As Barnaby and Ethel removed wire, a shot rang out and Ethel fell wounded. Barnaby went immediately to her aid and prepared to return fire with his own rifle, but whoever had fired the shot apparently didn't stay long enough to do more damage.

They postponed pulling wire and returned to town to get medical assistance for Ethel. Paladin joined Barnaby at the surgery as the town's doctor patched the victim and removed the bullet lodged in her femur.

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Sheriff Gil Post took an interest in the case, and joined Paladin at the surgery.

"Please remove the bullet as carefully as you can," Paladin had requested of the doctor before surgery started. "It may help me find who fired it." Sheriff Post looked surprised.

When Ethel was finally patched up and recuperating, the doctor handed Paladin a distorted chunk of lead. "That was the best I could do," the doctor explained.

"You did fine," Paladin congratulated him as he examined the slug.

His next stop with Sheriff Post in tow was the hardware store where he hoped to discover the approximate caliber of the round. The store owner looked at the slug for only a moment or two, then removed a single round from a box of Winchester-branded ammunition, held the two objects up side-by-side, then handed them over to Paladin for his inspection. ".44-40 is my guess, unless it's a .45 Colt," the store owner mumbled. "Since the shot was taken from a considerable distance, it probably wasn't fired from a handgun. The problem with finding who fired this bullet is that most everybody hereabouts uses either .44-40

or .45 Colt for both their handguns and their rifles."

"But you think it's more likely a .44 than a .45?" Paladin asked.

"Yup. It feels a little heavy for a .45 Colt, and it's way too light for a Henry Flat in .44, so I'm pretty sure it's a .44-40 and probably Winchester. Could be wrong, though..."

Paladin handed back the cartridge, and the proprietor returned it to its box. "Who hereabouts uses .44-40?" Paladin probed.

The proprietor paused. "Where did you get this slug?" he asked.

"It came out of Ethel Stone's leg an hour ago," Sheriff Post admitted. "Somebody shot her while she and her husband were pulling barbed wire out on the grazing range."

"Pulling wire?"

"Yes. Barnaby and Ethel are removing the barbed wire that got strung by the farmers over the last month or two..."

"I heard somethin' about that. Somebody told me Becky Stone eloped. Is that right?"

"That's what I heard, too. The Stones are making amends for accusing Ronald of kidnapping by fetching back all the wire they and their friends strung in revenge."

"Well, I'll be..."

"But there's still the issue of 'somebody shot Ethel Stone' that I'd like to clear up," Paladin steered the conversation back toward 'investigation'.

"Besides the Sheriff," he smirked at Post, "there's Ben Scott, Harry Marcus, Bob Dashman, Leo Turner, Harold Sweet.."

"So, basically, the entire crew at the M Bar T," the Sheriff interrupted.

"Just about," the store owner admitted.

"I appreciate your expertise. Thanks," Paladin offered as he exited the store.

Out on the street, the Sheriff tugged Paladin's sleeve. "You seem to have more than your share of knowledge about how to investigate a crime, Paladin. Do you mind if I ask how you come by it?"

"Well, how would you go about it, Sheriff?" Paladin asked in turn.

"That's just it," Post answered, "I'd do it just the way you're doing it. Are you a lawman from someplace?"

Charlie Sutherland smiled as he recalled all the police shows he had watched on TV as Mark Gilliam and all the techniques that would, in a century or so, become common knowledge among everyone, whether in the law enforcement community or not. "Seems to me it's just common sense to narrow the field of suspects by whatever means available, Sheriff. What special knowledge would anyone need beyond that?"

Post shrugged his shoulders. "Where do you suggest we start, then?"

"I'd like to look at the spot where Mr. Stone said he saw the shooter. We might find more clues as to who we're looking for."

The two rode out to the scene of the crime but, at Paladin's urging, staked their horses some distance off so as not to disturb the ground.

"I'm especially interested in footprints and cartridge casings," Paladin confided to the Sheriff. "If you see anything like that, don't touch anything and I'll show you a trick I learned from an old friend." Paladin winked at him.

Carefully, the two roamed the area from where Barnaby Stone had claimed the shot originated, heads down and stepping only where neither cartridge casings or other footprints existed.

"I've got something!" Post called over to Paladin. "It's a boot print."

Backtracking over already-examined paths, Paladin retrieved from his saddlebags a pie tin, a paper bag with Plaster of Paris, and his canteen, and gingerly worked his way over to Post. Into the pie tin he poured a few cups of plaster, added water, stirred it with a twig until it was pourable, and sloshed the mixture into the depression made by a man's boot. He draped a piece of cloth over it to mark the site, and the two continued looking. Within 4 feet of the boot print, Paladin found a brass cartridge casing in .44-40 and picked it up with another twig. They each fetched some summer sausage from their saddlebags and enjoyed a quick snack while they waited for the plaster to harden. After half an hour, they judged that the mold Paladin had made should have been ready to dig up, and together they returned to town.

At the Sheriff's office, Paladin showed the brass to the Sheriff. There were two smudges on the smooth surface. "Fingerprints," Paladin explained.

"Finger-whats?"

A stamp pad on the desk was used to officially date legal documents. Paladin pulled it closer and got a clean sheet of paper. He inked his right thumb and pressed it onto the paper. "You next," he ordered. Post inked his right thumb and pressed it on the paper next to Paladin's.

"Each of us has ten different fingerprints. It's been suspected for a hundred years that no two fingerprints are identical because they have yet to find two that are. See my thumbprint and yours? Completely different, aren't they? If you were to find a thumbprint on something and that thumbprint exactly matched one of mine, you could conclude that I had touched that something. So now we have three pieces of evidence: a boot print and two fingerprints. If we find a person whose boot bottoms look like that boot print, we can assume that he was recently at the spot where we found the boot print. If the same person has fingerprints that match what's on this brass, we can conclude that he was at that spot and fired his rifle. That will be the person who shot Ethel Stone."

Sheriff Gil Post had an awe-stricken expression on his face. "Where did you learn all this stuff?"

"I read a lot. You'd be amazed at all the scientific breakthroughs being made here and around the world. We're learning something new literally every day. A man in my profession can't just be good with a gun. He has to be good with his brain, too." Gil Post just bobbed his head. "Why don't we head out to the *M Bar T* first thing in the morning and see if there isn't someone there you should arrest for attempted murder in the first degree?"

"I think that would be a good idea."



Early the next day, Sheriff Post and a deputy accompanied by Paladin rode out to the *M Bar T* to talk with Bob Martin and Gus Toplin.

"With your permission," the Sheriff began, "we'd like to interview your ranch hands."

"Why?" Bob Martin demanded.

Paladin stepped into the conversation. "To eliminate them as suspects in the shooting of Ethel Stone," he explained.

Martin nodded. "Okay," he agreed.

One by one, the ranch hands returned from their tasks to the ranch house and sat down to be questioned. The mold of the boot print indicated two prominent bumps that could have been nails, and one gouge, so it was short work to examine each person's right boot-bottom to quickly determine if it matched. Each cowboy was also asked to load a single round into his rifle and eject it for visual examination. Paladin carefully picked each ejected round from the carpet and compared it to the brass they had recovered at the scene of the shooting. All five ranch hands: Bob Dashman, Ben Scott, Harry Marcus, Leo Turner, and Harold Sweet; were no-matches to either of the two fingerprints on the empty brass. They had come up empty.

"Does anybody else use .44-40 that you know of?" the Sheriff asked the two owners. Both of them shook their heads. The three visitors thanked the two for their cooperation, gathered their evidence, mounted their horses, and rode away.

"What now?" the Sheriff asked Paladin as the three rode back to town.

Paladin shook his head. "We'll just have to keep on looking."

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In town, Paladin waved to the two others and urged his mount toward the livery stable for shelter and a rubdown by the stable boy. Walking back toward his hotel, Paladin spied Orville Martin exiting the general store and a memory stirred deep in his brain.

He waved at Orville and Orville returned the gesture as they each approached. "With things settling down out on the range, I expect you'll be headed back to San Francisco soon," Orville offered.

Paladin nodded in acquiescence. "There are still issues with the bank that Mr. Sutherland will want me to handle before I go," Paladin lied. "Sheriff mentioned that he wanted to talk to you, so if you have a few moments, you might want to wander down to his office. I'm headed that way myself if you don't mind some company."

"What did the Sheriff want with *me*?" Orville asked quizzically.

Paladin shrugged. Orville unhitched his horse and the two proceeded to walk down the dusty street together toward the Sheriff's office. Furtively, Paladin slipped the safety loop from the hammer of his Colt.

"You shoot .44-40, right?" Paladin asked as Orville hitched his mount to the bar outside the Sheriff's office.

"And the rifle, too," Orville confirmed.

Paladin quietly drew Orville's Remington from its saddle scabbard and the two escaped from the midday sun into the cooler interior.

Gil Post turned as the two entered his office. He frowned at Paladin toting a rifle. "What's this?"

"Paladin said you wanted to talk to me," Orville started.

"Orville, here, uses .44-40," Paladin explained. Orville looked confused. Paladin ejected an unspent round from Orville's Remington rifle. Post carefully picked it off the floor, being careful to touch only the lead slug itself and preserving any fingerprints that might be on the brass.

"Have a seat over there, Orville," Post indicated a chair, "and put your feet up on the desk."

Orville sat and as he did, smoothly slipped the safety loop from the Colt on the far side of the others in the room.

Post held up the plaster mold against Orville's right boot bottom and glanced at Paladin next to him. Then he examined the ejected round from Orville's rifle against the brass they had recovered out on the range. Even to his untrained eye, the smudges seemed to be close matches if not exact matches.

"What are you two up to?" Orville demanded.

"Somebody shot at Ethel Stone yesterday morning," Post explained. "Paladin and I went out there to where the shooting happened, and we found some clues. We found a boot print and Paladin made a mold of it with plaster. We found a .44-40 brass and it just so happens that Ethel was shot with a .44-40. The brass has some smudges on it that Paladin suggests are fingerprints..."

"Finger-whats?" Orville blurted.

"...fingerprints," Post continued. "Those snaky lines on your fingertips are unique to every person. If your fingerprints are on something, it's because you touched it."

"So, here we have a mold of a boot-bottom that exactly matches your right boot, and we have a round from your rifle that exactly matches the brass we collected from where Ethel was shot. The boot print says you were there... or at least your boot was there, and I don't suppose you lend your boots out to other people, do you? The brass we found that has your fingerprints says that a .44-40 round that you touched was right there where your boot was."

"So, can you explain how your boot and a brass with your fingerprints both ended up right about where Ethel Stone was shot right about the time Ethel Stone was shot that doesn't involve you shooting Ethel Stone?"

Still in a chair with his boots resting on the desk, Orville tried to draw his pistol, but his elbow bumped on the chair back. Before Orville could recover, Paladin's Colt, its hammer cocked, was pointed dead-center on Orville's forehead and just two feet away. Everything paused as Orville realized the futility of his position. The deputy reached around behind Orville and relieved him of the pistol still in his hand, then retrieved the other pistol from its holster. A minute later, Orville was in the town's one and only jail cell.

"I appreciate the help, Paladin," Post told him, "but you know there's no

reward, don't you?"

"I've already been paid, Sheriff," Paladin explained. "I was hired to end the violence out on the range, and I think we're almost there."

"Almost?"

"It all depends on how Orville's Uncle Bob reacts to him being charged with... you know, I'm not familiar with the specifics of the law, hereabouts. How will you charge Orville?"

"Murder, I guess," Post shrugged.

"Even though he didn't kill Ethel?"

Post shrugged again.

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While Ethel recuperated, Paladin accompanied Barnaby Stone on his wire-removal mission. Barnaby felt considerably more confident with Paladin — and his guns — along.

Mid-morning of the third day after Orville's arrest, the sound of hoof beats alerted them to the arrival of strangers. Paladin slipped his rifle from its saddle scabbard and stood ready in case this portended danger. A quartet of riders led by Bob Martin himself rounded on Barnaby's buckboard.

"Mr. Stone," Bob Martin started, "I'm here to apologize for my nephew's behavior. I want you to understand that Gus and I had nothing to do with that. To show how sorry we are that Mrs. Stone was hurt by my blood, I'd be obliged if you would let us help you pull this wire."

Barnaby walked over to Martin and extended his hand. "Nothing could please me more than to finally have peace between us. And I must apologize for being the one who started this all. When a man's child is involved, reason goes out the window, I guess. I hope you'll forgive me as well."

The two shook hands, and the cowhands tied their mounts to the back of the wagon with extra-long leads.

"I guess you don't need me anymore, then," Paladin told Barnaby. "I think I'll get ready to head home to San Francisco." The two shook hands for the last time, and Paladin rode away back to town.

## 8 — Reunion

With the coming of Spring, Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Toplin arrived back in Batavia. Mrs. Toplin, because of her 'delicate condition', traveled in a much more comfortable vehicle than the rough-and-tumble buckboard so often used for such household moves. What few possessions the couple had thus far acquired went with Ronald, while Becky and her mother took the stage.

By the time mother and daughter arrived in Batavia, Ronald had already furnished a small cabin where he and Becky and their expected new arrival would start their married life.

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### **Solano County hosts State Fair in Batavia**

*Sacramento (AP).* Despite a history fraught with violence, farmers and ranchers in the Batavia area have managed to settle their differences — or most of them, anyway.

Solano County has announced that the next State Fair will be presented in Batavia, just 25 miles from the State Capitol. The Batavia Farm-Ranch Cooperative Association was instrumental in the small town's successful bid for the prestigious award that normally results in driving a local economy to new heights.

Batavia authorities have promised a State Fair that will go down in the record books as the best such event in memory.

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Sutherland reached into his waistcoat pocket and extracted a small pearl-handled folding knife, and carefully snipped out the notice somewhat further down the page that simply announced

*"Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Toplin will be pleased to receive visitors at their new home on the grounds of the M Bar T ranch, Batavia."*

Later that day, he entered the premises of his favorite silversmith, picked out a not-too-expensive pair of silver candlesticks, directed that they be sent — express — to Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Toplin at the *M Bar T* ranch in Batavia California. A short note within the package said, simply,

*"With my warmest wishes for a happy and productive life —  
Paladin."*

After dinner, Sutherland enjoyed several hands of whist with other

residents of The Carlton, sipped a nightcap at the hotel's bar, and turned in early against what he suspected might be another busy day to come.

As was his custom, he placed beneath his pillow the leather pouch that he had independently confirmed was, indeed, a scrotum. The bag now held the two coins Vivian had gifted Gilliam over a century in the future and seven others with mint dates of 1868, 1869, 1870, 1872, 1873, 1874, and 1875, a nine coin flush from '67 to '75.

He was asleep almost before his head touched the pillow.

## 9 — B&B

The steady *beep-beep-beep* of the alarm clock finally became annoying enough that Mark Gilliam threw off the covers so that he could reach the *snooze* button. With a gasp, he realized where he was — and, more importantly, where he *wasn't* — and tried to steady his nerves and calm his heart, both of which were reacting as to a fright.

He snaked his hand beneath his pillow and withdrew a mud-brown leather pouch. It was heavier than he remembered. He undid the string closure and poured out onto the bedclothes nine gold Eagle coins, two of them in protective plastic sleeves. Lining them up, he arranged them in date-order, one each from the years 1867 through 1875, most of them in extremely good condition.

Snatching his cell phone from the end table, he shook it to get the display: August 10th. Like Scrooge and his ghosts, he had taken a trip through time and ended back where it had begun. Hanging on a hook behind the room's door was a black leather holster decorated with a silver Staunton-pattern knight, and containing a Colt Peacemaker in near-mint condition and etched with a serial number, 103688, Gilliam was sure would place its manufacture-date in 1888 or 1887.

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He had some spare time before his 11am seminar started, so he made a bee-line for the library hoping to find the same cooperative librarian he had worked with before.

"San Francisco *Enterprise*?" Gilliam prompted.

"Oh, sure. We have almost every issue. Are you looking for anything specific?"

"Mid-1888 to early-1889, a reporter named Sutherland."

The librarian pulled a folio from the shelf and hefted it onto a work table. She carefully turned pages while Gilliam scanned the text for something familiar. In the August 10th edition, Gilliam stopped her.

"On this date in 1888, *The Enterprise* published an article by Chas. Sutherland on the emergence of fruit farming north of the bay." He jotted some notes by hand and the page-turning resumed.

When they got to the second week of September, a series of articles on gold prospecting in the town of Angels Camp began to appear, culminating in one in which Sutherland identified himself as the discoverer of 'The Cavendish Serving Platter'.

"Wow," the librarian exclaimed, "a real local connection to that folk tale!"

"Who said it was a folk tale?" Gilliam asked.

"C'mon," she retorted, "67 pounds of gold? Who ever heard of such a thing?"

"One of my students told me about that a few days back. Lots of people

from that area consider it to be real, and here's Sutherland saying just that: that he was the one who uncovered it."

"Well blow me down," she muttered, "I guess it isn't a folk tale after all."

Gilliam had her make a photocopy of the page to take with him to the seminar that was about to start in... "Holy cow, gotta run," Gilliam said apologetically as he dashed off to class.

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"Got something interesting to show you all about 'The Cavendish Serving Platter' that came up in discussion a few days ago." He passed the photocopy to the nearest student. "Turns out, a reporter for The San Francisco *Enterprise* was doing interviews near Angels Camp the day the platter was uncovered, and claims to be the person who found it while he was helping Zeke Cavendish work his claim. This sounds plausible only because Charles Baker Sutherland quit his job at The *Enterprise* a few weeks later and apparently retired to lodgings that no newspaper reporter could have afforded. Miss Sanchez, I guess that factoid gets added to the lore, *hmm?*"

Rosalia Sanchez smiled.

After class broke for the day, Gilliam bicycled to a nearby bank and rented a large safe deposit box, before cycling back to his B&B. He gathered his important possessions, the nine gold coins and the Colt, and called for a Lyft to take him back to the bank. He wasn't venturing out onto the streets of San Francisco with such valuable artifacts. At the bank, all of it went into storage to remain there until it was time for him to go back to Montana.

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Not willing to check such a valuable firearm or any of his coins on an airline — such things were known to disappear mysteriously in transit — Gilliam, at the end of his summer seminars, bought a bus ticket as a way to get himself home, and never let his carry-on bag out of his sight for the two days on the road.

Yes, SFSU had paid him well, but it was nothing compared to what he had acquired during a dream lasting more than a year.

Of course it was a dream.

It had to be, hadn't it?

## 10 — Bozeman

Vivian Harper met the bus at its regular drop-off point on North 7th Avenue, and Mark gave her an extra-long kiss as a way of letting her know how much he missed her. Then he loaded his luggage into the trunk of her car.

"Wait 'til you see what I brought home," he teased.

When they finally arrived at his home, he shoved most of his luggage aside for handling later, and unzipped his carry-on. Vivian held her breath.

First, he extracted a small wrapped package and handed it to Viv. She unwrapped it excitedly to discover a diamond-encrusted tennis bracelet. "It's beautiful!" she exclaimed. "Thank you!"

"I also brought home something for me," Mark announced with a smile, and he pulled a leather-wrapped package from the bag. With the package lying on his dining room table, he folded the wrappings back to reveal a black leather holster and a Colt Peacemaker.

"My gosh," Viv remarked, "it looks like it's new! How much did it cost?"

"Fourteen dollars," Mark told her.

Viv cocked her head to one side. "You mean fourteen hundred dollars, don't you?"

Mark slowly shook his head from side-to-side. "No. Fourteen dollars."

Vivian picked up the revolver and looked it over very carefully. She brought the hammer to half-cock and rotated the cylinder slowly. "Well, it sure as Hell looks real. That's excellent workmanship on this model."

"It's not a model. It is real."

"Come on! Where can you buy a real Peacemaker for fourteen dollars?"

"You're asking the wrong question, Viv," Mark responded with a smile. "You have to ask 'When can you buy a real Peacemaker for fourteen dollars?'. The answer is that you can buy a real Peacemaker for \$14 around 1887 or 1888."

Vivian stared blankly back at Mark. She could not understand what he was saying. Mark withdrew from the carry-on bag a box of .45Colt ammunition, clearly not modern packaging, but in absolutely pristine condition. The box of 25 cartridges was nearly full. "Twenty-five cents per box," he told her. Then he pulled the leather pouch that Vivian had given him with two \$10 Eagle coins, worked the string-closure loose, and poured out nine coins. Vivian gasped.

"It was a day or two after your birthday present arrived, August 8th, I think, that I had a weird dream. I thought I was in a bedroom with a kerosene lamp, but I dismissed it as part of a dream and went back to sleep. I went to bed on August 9th and awoke the following morning on August 10th... 1888. I don't know how and I don't know why, but I spent about 20 months from August 1888 through April 1890 as Charles Baker Sutherland, a reporter for the *San Francisco Enterprise*. I also seem to have had a subsidiary career as a gun-for-hire, although I never actually had to kill anyone. I bought that Colt at a hardware store on... I think it was Balboa St., but I can't be 100% sure... middle of August



1888 for \$14, plus 50 cents for two boxes of cartridges, plus another \$1.50 for a holster, but I don't have that one anymore. The holster it's in now cost me almost \$4 a few months later."

"You time-traveled?" Vivian asked incredulously.

"I don't know what I did, Viv. I know I have crystal-clear memories of my time in 19th-century San Francisco and environs, during which time I amassed a truckload of money, mostly from my share of a gold find called 'The Cavendish Serving Platter'. It was 750 Troy ounces, and I had a 40% share. That alone was over \$10,000."

"And what happened to it?" Viv asked.

Mark shrugged. "It was in Sutherland's account at The Farmer's Mercantile Bank, but I don't think that bank exists anymore. According to one of my students at SFSU, 'Farmer's' merged with BofA in 1930."

"Wow..." was all Vivian could manage.

It took Vivian the bulk of two days to locate someone at Bank of America headquarters whose job responsibilities covered 'company history', and who could confirm that BofA had absorbed Farmer's Mercantile just after the Crash of '29. A further inquiry revealed that the assets of Farmer's turned over to BofA did, in fact, include two accounts in the names of Charles Baker Sutherland and Claire McCann Sutherland, one used for checking, and the other for savings, the total of both being \$28,317. The two accounts were, at that time, dormant, and a few years later, the State of California seized both accounts as 'abandoned'. There, BofA's paper trail abruptly halted.

A genealogist of Vivian's acquaintance agreed to find out what had happened to Mr. and Mrs. Sutherland on condition that Vivian covered her expenses.

What Lilith MacArthur uncovered left Viv and Mark agog. Claire McCann had married Charles Baker Sutherland in August of 1891 and the couple birthed four children. The two appeared on the 1910 census still in San Francisco, but Charles was not on the 1920 census, and it appeared that he either died or moved away between the two events. Further digging revealed a divorce decree issued to Claire in 1916. The decree identified Charles' address as... Bozeman MT. The couple's San Francisco home had been sold as part of the settlement, the proceeds split 70-30. By the time of the 1920 census, Claire was living with one of her children and his spouse at their ranch near Stockton. She died in 1921.

As soon as his divorce became final, Charles Baker Sutherland married Edith Simpson, also of Bozeman, and the union produced two daughters, Marie and Janet. Marie married Warren Gilliam in 1937. Their son Arthur had a single offspring, a son Mark.

"Arthur is my father," Mark gasped. "My grandma Marie was Marie Sutherland!" Mark exclaimed, "And her father, my great grandfather, was Charles Baker Sutherland! How is it I never knew any of this?"

"Perhaps you did, and what you 'remember' is merely a dream," Vivian

suggested.

"I could write the whole thing off as 'just a dream' except for a pouch full of near-mint gold Eagles and a Colt Single Action Army of a similar period in such a condition as to bring many thousands of dollars from any serious collector. How can those be brushed off as 'just a dream'?"

"Let's just call it 'a mystery' and let it go at that," Viv offered. "At the very least, it gives you a connection to 1888 San Francisco, and may explain why you became — if only briefly — Charles Baker Sutherland.

"Those Eagles will make a fine down payment on a house," and she winked at him.