

**A Fox And A Hound**

*In regard to this great story, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good the savior gave to the world has communicated through this story. The things I want to know are in books; my best friend is the man who'll get me a book I ain't read. And whereas truth, is generally the best vindication against slander, fiction is what sets a man free, with its ability to reconstruct, to change history. Because when you have got an elephant by the hind legs and he is trying to run away, it's best to let him run. Thus, I shall live on.*

**Abraham Lincoln**

**Chapter I**

**The Hole In The Ground**

*1879, Fossil site, Pennsylvania, USA*

“Lincoln is dead.” Cope said.

“What do you mean, Lincoln is dead?”

“What do you mean, what do you mean? Well, he's dead. Went to the theater, got shot in the head.

Fell right to the ground. Applause, Applause, Applause. Curtains closed, end of story.”

Miller shook his head.

“Who did it?”

“I don't know. Some guy... Claims he's been planning to do it for 14 years! Guess he was just never able to afford a ticket.”

Miller sighed.

“You want a coffee, my boy?” Cope asked.

The boy nodded. He had never had coffee before, but he never came to a job unprepared. Do your research, find out who you're going to be dealing with. It was one of the many rules his brother had taught him.

He took a sip and tried hard not to give away just how much the bitter taste displeased him.

“That's good,” he said. “Nothing like a decent coffee to start your day.” The two men around him exchanged a look and responded with a smile.

“You're a wise boy,” the short man said. Edward D. Cope, his boss for the day. The boy had yet to find out what the D. in his name stood for. Respected scientist and paleontologist, published his first scientific paper at the age of nineteen, thus only five years older than the boy was now.

“Is it Ethiopian?” the boy asked. Cope shrugged his shoulders, chuckling. For the last ten years, Cope had mainly been known for his heated rivalry with his old companion Othniel Marsh. On the hunt for dinosaur bones they had come to choose ever more ruthless measures, plotting against each other whenever possible, even if it led to the complete and utter destruction of new findings; science was no more than a convenient cloak to cover the genuine and honest hatred they felt for each other.

“You know,” the boy began. “Legend says the coffee bean was discovered by an Ethiopian goat-herder who noticed that his sheep were acting oddly vivid when they ate from the plant.”

Cope shared another look with the man to his right, then they started laughing.

“Boy, it's just a hot boil of dirt.” The boy blushed and turned silent, trying to make sense of Cope's words and the direction he was trying to steer the conversation. He nodded.

“Of course. The pure existence of the black race itself is somewhat fascinating, questionable, even. We've got to thank them for bringing us coffee though.” The boy smiled.

Cope responded with another high pitched laugh.

“No. You're actually drinking a hot boil of dirt!” The boy felt his head turning hot. “I'm sorry, my boy. We always do that to the new boys. Don't take it personal - welcome aboard!”

“Good one,” the boy said and put his cane down. That did not go well. Then again he wasn't here to bond, he was here to watch. The boy prided himself on being a keen observer. He examined Cope carefully. The short, slight man did not stand out at first sight, except maybe for his thick mustache which seemed to take up most of his face. An inconspicuous man, not much of a physical presence, and yet there was something utterly intimidating about him. 'It's in his eyes,' the boy thought. 'There is madness in them.' The man next to him, who went by the name Miller, was the complete opposite of Cope. Tall, broad shoulders and thick long black hair bound into a pigtail. Though admittedly most men would, Cope looked flamboyantly fragile in comparison. His rivalry had taken its toll. Growing up in a wealthy family, the concept of losing wasn't exactly one he had to become familiarized with before Marsh came into his life. 'Some things are better learned at a young age,' the boy thought. Still, Cope did not seem like someone likely to give up, even though it might ruin him.

“Let's get to work then!” Cope said, walking towards the large hole in the ground. “What do we have here... Large tail, broad ribcage, short arms... snake like... mhh Elasmosaurus...” Cope stopped and let out a deep sigh. “Destroy it,” he said harshly.

“But sir, this is in much better shape than any of the other fossils that we found,” Miller tried to object. Cope said nothing and simply raised a brow.

“Bring the explosives!” Miller yelled. And the workers immediately started to prepare for the destruction.

“Anything else?” Cope asked walking along.

“Possibly a new finding at the far east end over there.” Cope nodded and walked his way up. He stopped taking long and deep look at the buried giant in the ground.

“Now that - is fascinating.”

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*Night*

At midnight, the boy was awoken by his brother.

“Get up. We got to go,” he said. Grinding his eyes, the boy slowly got out of bed.

“You sure this is a good idea?” he asked. His brother said nothing as he attached his gun holders to his belt. He nodded.

“We've been through this, it's an easy job. No security whatsoever, and Cope is not someone we need to worry about.”

“That's not what I said,” the boy objected. “He may seem weak, but he is still dangerous.”

“Because there is madness in his eyes? Boy, we cannot give up a plan based on your voodoo shit. You know how much someone like Marsh will pay for these bones? There is at least \$500 just lying in a hole waiting to be taken by us.”

The boy nodded. He knew how much they needed this money. Especially his brother. There was a family to be fed. He put on his trousers and grabbed his boots.

“He was nice to me, you know? Mocking, but I've worked for far worse. I almost feel sorry for stealing from him.” His brother smiled, then they heard the knock on the door. Panicked, they raised their guns. Had they been found out? Little did it matter. Whoever stopped by at this hour didn't come for a nice chat.

Another knock.

His brother prompted him to stay silent. But there was no third knock.

“You think they're gone?” the boy whispered.

On the other side of the door, Cope nodded and covered his ears. Miller released his rifle and

fired a shot. Through the big hole the impact of the gun had created, Miller turned the key on the inside and opened the door.

“After you, Sir,” he said waving Cope inside.

“Thank you, Miller.” Cope entered the room and looked into the scarred face of the boy.

“Mr. Cope!” he shrieked. “What are you doing here?” Cope smiled.

“I believe your brother here was about to offer me a drink.”

The four men sat awkwardly around the dining table, like a couple of old husbands that were dragged to a party they had never wanted to attend, their hands wrapped around their glasses, as they didn't know what else to do with them. Calmly Cope calmly sipped on the cheap bourbon and served himself a half a dozen or so refills before Miller hinted that he might have had enough.

“Come on!” Cope yelled. “Drinker is my middle name.” Miller nodded and Cope let out a high-pitch laugh. ‘He's completely insane,’ the boy thought to himself. He gulped.

“You're right, Miller. I'm starting to come off as impolite. And we really wouldn't want that, would we? So who do we have here. Let's introduce our little *Bone Hunters*, shall we? And with that let me make sure you understand the bind you've gotten yourself into trying to steal from Edward Cope.” He wiped his mouth and poured the last bit of bourbon into his glass.

“Let's begin with the elder brother then. Charles or Charley, as I believe you'd like to be called, age 25, average height, a bit overweight but overall fit. Married to Evelyn Miller, no relation to the man to my right. Got three kids, two girls – twins, age 3, and one boy – age 5. Is that correct?”

Bewildered, Charley nodded.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Splendid. To the boy, Bobby. Age 14, a bit small for his age but he'll get there. Thin, too. Not married, no kids, no girlfriend. Currently masturbating to the rhythm of Sarah McAdams, the pastor's daughter. Oh you dirty little boy.” Cope chuckled. “Not much more to say about you, is

there?”

The boy shook his head. How could he possibly know all this stuff? Even if Bob had aroused suspicion in Cope earlier today, how could he have possibly put all these pieces together in such a short time?

“And I believe the two of you were planning on stealing some dinosaur bones tonight, is that correct?” Charley and Bob nodded.

Cope shook his head.

“How foolish of you. Well, but I'm a man of greatness, aren't I Miller?”

“You're a man of greatness, Sir.”

“Thank you. So I thought, why kill you, when I could put you two to good use?”

“Why indeed, Sir,” Charley said, glancing at his brother. Bob forced a smile, nodding.

“So you two are going to do a job for me. There is a train leaving early tomorrow, a train the two of you are going to be on. You will leave for Como Bluff, a fossil site – a site you are going to destroy. You will find a bag of explosives hidden under your seats. Do not mess this up.”

“And why would we want to work for you, Sir?”

“Glad you asked, Charley,” Cope said. “The word you were looking for is leverage. You see, if you refuse or fail, God forbids, I'll kill you. Then some of my men will rape your wife and kill her. The kids? I don't know, I'm not a monster, I'll probably sell them, maybe keep the boy for myself. Always looking for good, cheap workers of the kind you've just become.” Cope smiled, looking satisfied with himself.

“Any other questions?”

“Nope,” Charley replied.

Cope and Miller got out of their seats and walked towards the door.

“Oh by the way,” Cope said. “We slaughtered your horses, just in case. Well, to a successful liaison then,” he said, pulled on his necklace and kissed the strange stump of an amulet that had been

hidden under his shirt.

“What is that thing?” Bob asked.

“That, my friends, is the tip of the middle finger belonging to Jesse James.”

## Chapter II

### Leverage

#### a chapter in three acts

*The Next Morning. The train to Como Bluff*

“Aren't you a bit young to be hitting on women, my boy?” The boy blushed.

“I'm sorry, miss. I didn't mean to... I wasn't-” Charley chuckled.

“I believe my little brother here was just meaning to say is that he'd be more than happy to let such a lovely lady sit with us.” The woman raised a brow, sighed and sat down in the seat opposite to them.

“I'm Charley. And this shy little fellow to my left is my brother Bob.”

Unimpressed, the woman nodded.

“Doesn't the lovely lady have a name, too?”

“Certainly.”

“And what might that be?”

The lady rolled her eyes.

“Susan. Susan Lavenia.”

“Pleased to meet you, Susan Lavenia.”

Bob mustered the lady carefully. Something about her struck him as odd and he was

overcome by the weird sensation that he had seen this woman before. She was beautiful, and the boy felt himself immediately drawn to her. But while her fluffy dress, her white silk gloves and her elegant way made her look like a real lady, the scars on her face and arms suggested otherwise. 'She's putting up an appearance,' the boy thought.

Bob held his breath as his glance met hers. As he felt his head turning red, he wondered why he had to keep falling in love with every woman that showed even the faintest hint of interest in him.

Susan Lavenia started to laugh.

"Well you really are a cute little fellow, aren't you?" Bob responded with a shy smile.

"Don't worry, my boy. There's no crime in looking," she said patting his arm. The boy did not dare to look.

"So what brings you on this train, if I may ask?" Charley said.

"Just visiting family...," she replied. Charley looked at her in anticipation.

She caved. "And the gentlemen?"

"Business," Charley said. "Got to earn a living."

She nodded.

"What kind of business?"

"We're in the dinosaur business, my brother and I. Working for none other than the famous Edward Cope. Have you heard of him?"

She stared at him and for a blink of a moment Bob saw her eyes light up with terror. She nodded.

"Yes. I've heard of him," she said, smiling. Susan turned oddly silent, and made not even the slightest sound of a breath, as she drifted off in her thoughts.

"Miss, are you alright?" Bob asked.

Surprised, she looked deep in Bob's eyes, and he noticed her eyes zooming in as he drew her back into reality. She cleared her throat.



“Yes,” she said. “Of course.” Anxiously she looked out of the window, as if she suddenly couldn't wait for the train to stop.

“Would the gentlemen excuse me for a second?” she said. Without waiting for an answer, she stood up and left the cabin. As she turned to close the door, she winked and endowed Bob with a small but genuine smile.

“She's nice,” Bob said.

“Well, don't get your hopes up,” Charley said.

“I'm not.”

“That woman is all kinds of trouble.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, there is stories behind those scars of hers, you know? And behind those stories there usually stands a man.”

Bob sighed.

“Got to protect the women of this world, my boy. But some just can't be saved. Best to accept that it's a rough world out there, Bobby. Especially for petty crooks like us.” He gently punched his brother's arm, as the Negro opened the door to ask for the tickets.

*6 years earlier. The train to Como Bluff.*

“Thank you, Duncan”, Cope said smiling as the Negro handed him back his ticket. “You're a good Nigger. Too bad the Abe' couldn't free all of you.”

The man forced himself to a smile, as he bowed to him.

“You know Duncan. I have a dream that one day we will rethink the concept of slavery and find a much nicer term for it. It has become such a biased word – *slavery* - so many negative attitudes that come with it.”

Miller nodded.

“You're a wise man, Sir.”

“Indeed I am,” Cope said chuckling. “Miller, roll me a cigarette, will you?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Well, Duncan. But I must admit that, while your condition truly hurts me, I can't quite see us living in a slave free world one day. It's against human nature! We need our classes, our feeling of superiority. Don't you think so, Duncan?”

Duncan shrugged his shoulders, not moving even a single muscle of his face.

“I guess so,” he said.

“You see? And here in lies my point. You're a clever kid. Calculating tickets in your head all day and all that. Being a slave is an honest profession. A profession we should honor much more.”

Miller handed over the cigarette and lit it as Cope put it between his lips.

“And why limit it to race? Certainly I can imagine circumstances where I can see a white man making quite a nice slave as well. Give him a nickel and he'll do anything. Don't you think, Miller?”

“Indeed, Sir.”

“And other races, too.” Cope said, gesturing with his hands.

“There is truth to that, Sir,” Duncan said exchanging a glance with Miller.

“Yes,” Miller said. “How about an Asian? I look into their tiny eyes and all I see is a world of opportunities.”

Cope turned to Miller and raised a brow.

“I'm overcome with the strong suspicion that someone seized the opportunity for a bad joke,” he said, then started to laugh.

“Come on, Duncan. It was a good joke. You can laugh. You're among reasonable men here.”

Nervously, Duncan joined in the laughter.

“Oh enough of that,” Cope said and at once the men around him stopped. “Those Asians are

honorable men. Even if they mistook their dinosaur bones for dragons'. Those foolish little dwarfs.”  
He chuckled.

“Well, better be off then, Duncan,” Cope said as he flipped and twinkled his eyes. “I fear you won't find such charming philanthropists in every cabin.”

Just as Duncan took a lost bow and closed the door, the shooting began. Alarmed, Miller grabbed his gun, but Cope instructed him to stay calm.

An instance later, two armed men entered the cabin, their faces covered with rags. But the camouflage did nothing to distract Cope from noticing the face that had been plastered all over the country for years.

Surprised, Cope raised a brow.

“Well if it isn't the world famous Jesse James?”

“You bet right it is,” Jesse said. “Don't you dare think of doing anything foolish. Hand me your belongings.”

“Oh Jesse, why so agitated. You're talking to Edward Cope here!”

“Cope. I know that name. You're the dinosaur guy,” Jesse's companion said in his muffled voice.

“That's what they call me!” Cope said cheerfully.

“Aren't you the guy who mistook the ass for the head?” Within milliseconds Cope pulled the revolver from his belt and fired a well aimed shot.

The man screamed.

“You shot me in the ass!” he shrieked in pain.

“Honest mistake,” Cope said waving with his hands. Bewildered Jesse looked at his mate, then he raised his gun just as Miller raised his.

“Guys, guys. Let's all calm down here,” Cope said. Suddenly the train shook and started to tremble. Cope seized the moment and swung his knife, but the train tilted as it derailed and the men were

thrown to the ground.

“Fuck!” Jesse screamed out in pain.

“You fucking idiots!”

Cope moaned as he tried to shake the shock out of his body. But as he looked up again, the robbers were already gone. He ran his hand over the back of his head and felt the thick blood running through his fingers.

He chuckled.

“Jesse James...” He turned left and looked across the cabin where he found Miller sitting in the corner, his eyes widened with shock.

“You all right, my friend?”

Miller nodded. Cope noticed their belongings were gone, but he just shrugged his shoulders. Money didn't matter to him, but there was nothing that he found more intriguing than an interesting story. And this was indeed one to rouse his interest.

“Jesse James.”

Lying dizzy on the ground, he spotted it, right in front of his nose, the bloody little tip of a finger belonging to Jesse James. Cope smiled.

*1879, A Cabin In The Woods*

“How could you blow this off? You've been planning on doing this for years!” Frank yelled.

“Because there are bigger things to be concerned about.”

“The guys are confused, and to be honest – so am I. They fear you're starting to lose it.”

“Fuck the guys!”

Frank shook his head. It had never been easy on him, being the brother of the world famous Jesse James. A legend with an uncontrollable temper. But Frank loved Jesse, and there was nothing

he wouldn't do.

“What is it Jesse?” he asked calmly.

“Edward Cope,” Jesse said lost in thoughts, as he lit his cigarette, gently rocking in his chair.

Frank held his breath.

“*The* Edward Cope?”

Jesse nodded.

“Shit...”

“He's here,” Jesse said. “After all these years we'll meet again.”

Jesse looked his brother deep in the eyes.

“What if this a trap?” Frank asked worriedly.

“He doesn't know we're here.”

“Jesse, you know this man is dangerous! He's charming and clever. He's persuasive ...”

“Not as clever as Jesse James.”

“...and he's hiding a beast you'll never see coming. And when it comes out, it destroys everything and everyone around it, just for the fun of it. And its hunger is never stilled, because there is no one there to call it off...”

“No beast can awe Jesse James.”

“...he's like a fox and a hound.”

Jesse did not comment, but simply shook his head in disgust as he put out his cigarette.

“I'm just trying to protect you, Jesse,” Frank said softly.

“Jesse James doesn't need protection!” he screamed, jumping out of his chair. “Jesse James ain't no bitch of no one! Not even Edward Cope. And now get out and give me a fucking break!”

Frank gulped, then he nodded and went to the door.

“Tell me if you need anything,” he said smiling sadly. Then he closed the door behind him.

Jesse took a deep breath and poured himself a drink. He sat down and lit himself another cigarette.

“Edward Cope,” he whispered.

And as Jesse closed his eyes, he fell into a light sleep, dreaming of a time when Susan Lavenia was still alive.

### **Chapter III**

#### **A Fox And A Hound**

The boy sighed.

“Just how much longer can it be?” he asked.

“I don't know, Bob. I've never been here before either, remember?”

Bob nodded. As they stepped off the train, they were surprised to find everything neatly arranged. Edward Cope wasn't a man to leave anything to chance. The simple thought of Cope caused the boy to shiver and he had yet to apprehend just how much of a menace a single man of power could be. Armed with a map, some water, a loaf of bread and a bag of explosives, they had settled the horses and ridden west. Cope's messenger had prepared them for a six hour ride, but there was no saying for how long they'd been riding now and the brothers became more anxious with every passing minute.

They didn't talk much and the boy found himself fatigued and completely unable to concentrate on even the simplest of thoughts. The recent events had taken their toll. Not much to hold on to, when your mind's just a slippery slope. The sun was starting to set, but fear kept them going. Best to strike at night anyways.

“Bob!” Charley shouted in a mixture of excitement and utter exhaustion. “Bob, I think we're there. I think we've found it.”

Bob was pulled out of his trance.

“You sure it is not just a mirage?”

“A what?”

“You know, like a dream?”

“Listen to yourself. You're completely delirious.” Charley chuckled.

“Come on, dreamy boy!” he said, jumping off his horse. “We made it. Let's have a look.”

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“There's no one here,” Bob whispered as they observed the site from the cliff.

“Probably gone home already,” Charley said. “All the better for us. No one here to disturb us.”

“Charley. We've been careless before, we can't risk this.”

“We can't risk failing either, Bob. Evelyn is all alone with the kids. There is no one there to protect them.”

“This is probably Marsh's fossil site, Charley. And just how much better do you think Cope's biggest rival could be?”

“Bob,” Charley said, gently padding his brother's shoulder. “There is nothing else we can do but to take that risk.”

Bob sighed, then he nodded.

“The sooner we get this over the better.”

Bob shook his head, tears in his eyes.

“Just how the hell did we get ourselves into this thing?” he whispered.

“I know,” Charley said as he lit the cigarette he had rolled from the last bit of tobacco he had left and inhaled deeply before he handed it over to his brother.

“Never get yourself into politics,” he said. “Nothing good ever comes of it.”

Carefully they unloaded the bag and began to prepare for the destruction right away. Neither of the brothers felt the need to talk and the fossil site remained almost bizarrely silent. Bob placed

the last pack of dynamite when he saw the figure appear behind his brother. He held his breath as he saw him draw closer.

“Charley,” he mouthed, but his words were swallowed in astonishment as he looked into the eyes of the famous Jesse James. He dropped his shovel and tried to draw his gun.

“Ch-!” But before he knew it, he was knocked down from behind. The boy fainted.

Bewildered, Charley threw his hands up.

“Please,” he said. “Let him live. Not him.” From behind, Jesse knocked him over and Charley was thrown to the ground.

His eyes widened, as he fell into shock.

“Where is he?” Jesse screamed.

“Who?” Charley whispered.

“Where is Edward Cope?”

“He is not here!”

“Don't you dare mess with me!” Jesse said grabbing Charley by the neck. “Do you have any idea who the fuck I am?”

Charley nodded.

“You're Jesse James” he said.

“Don't lie to Jesse James! Never lie to Jesse James.”

“Please,” Charley pleaded. “I swear. He's not here!”

As Jesse tried to give him another knock with his gun, Charley crouched and threw a punch.

Jesse screamed as his hat was knocked off and his long hair was exposed.

“Shit!” Jesse screamed.

“It's you!” Charley said. “You're-” Still stunned, Jesse hit him hard across the face and Charley fell back to the ground.

“You're a woman,” he gasped. “You're the woman from the train!”



Jesse aimed her gun at the man lying on the ground.

“But you were so lovely,” Charley said.

“Lovely...,” she said bitterly. “Well, I really do put the cute in execute, don't I?” Jesse shot. Striking right between the eyes, Charley died in an instant. After all, Jesse James, while not known for mercy, was not one to let someone suffer.

Jesse collected her hat from the ground and put it back on.

“What about the boy?” Frank asked.

Jesse shrugged.

“Let him live,” she said. “He's no threat to no one.”

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Three Days Later

A Suburban Home

Jesse took a chair, placed it in front of the wall and got onto it, gently rearranging the picture until it hung even again. She smiled as she saw Duncan appear in the reflection of the glassed frame with a hot cup of coffee. Duncan handed her the cup.

“Thank you,” she said softly and kissed her husband gently on the lips.

As Duncan ran his fingers through her hair, they heard the knock on the door.

“Are you expecting your brother?” Duncan asked.

Jesse shook her head.

Duncan went to the door and opened it.

“A letter for Miss Levain,” the postman said. Duncan nodded.

“I'll receive it,” he said. “Thank you, Sir.” Duncan closed the door. As he turned around, Jesse had

already pulled the letter from his hands. She opened the neatly folded note. As she read it, Jesse faded out of the world and was left with nothing but the sound of her pounding heart.

*I know your secret.*

*Edward D. Cope*

“You all right, sweetheart?” Duncan asked worriedly, grabbing her arms and trying to pull her back in.

Jesse screamed.

Somewhere far away, sat the fox and the hound amusedly loafing in his chair.

“Jesse James,” he said taking a deep breath from his cigarette.

Cope chuckled. He puffed and playfully blew smoke rings in the air.

“So Jesse James's been dead all along?” Miller asked.

“Some may say so,” Cope said. “Quite the contrary if you ask me.”

He poured himself another bourbon, for which he'd acquired a weird craving during the last couple of days.

“When little Jesse drowned in that river at age five, his sister simply gave herself up to take his place instead.”

“Why would she do that?”

“Why do people do anything, really?” Cope smiled.

Miller shook his head.

“Susan died, so Jesse could live?”

Cope nodded.

“Jesse James...” He chuckled. “You've been a naughty little girl.”

## **Epilogue**

### **The Hole In The Ground**

*“Such a tragedy,” Cope said shaking his head, his hand gently placed on the boys back. “Jesse James... Who would have thought?”*

*Bob looked into Evelyn's watery eyes, her arms thrown around her three children.*

*“Truly heartbreaking,” Cope said. “No sound as engaging as the sound of weeping.” Miller nodded. “What a monster that man must be.” Cope and Miller stepped back and watched the lone boy staring at the hole in the ground.*

*Bob wiped the tears from his eyes and grabbed his shovel. And as he paid his last respects, and the first scoop of dirt hit his brother's coffin, the boy, who went by the name Robert Ford, swore revenge.*