

REVENGE OF THE POTATO MEN

Castlebar, Ireland
Southern County Mayo
Midnight, April 13, 1847

Simon Wright was a wicked man.

I tell you this right up front so as to sway your sympathies. To be sure they won't be torn or misguided. The justifiable right of my best friend, Cyrus Gallagher, to exact his revenge against that maniac could not be disputed. My brother Tom and I even volunteered to help, in a minor sort of way.

So there I sat in a corner of the pub in Humbert's Inn, cloaked in the shadows near the front door. I wasn't hiding, but nobody paid much attention to me. I was just waiting for the right moment to slip out and give the signal. Cyrus and Tom were responsible for carrying out the plan. But I felt good about my role, proud to be of assistance and stand on the side of righteousness. Not that Simon Wright had ever brought havoc to me or my family, because he hadn't. But fair is fair and justice must be served. I believe in that creed. And everyone knows that our corrupt sheriff wouldn't carry it out. Besides, Cyrus said we were just going to scare him; rough him up a bit. He promised it wouldn't be a full blown eye for an eye type of thing. That may seem hard to believe after Simon and his hooligans burned the Gallagher home down to the ground, even though they may not have known Cyrus' little sister was inside. But I trusted my friend, and don't forget, crimes aren't treated so leniently for us poor tenant farmers. Now, I want you to know that I'm not a violent man. But if anyone was deserving of a thrashing, it was most certainly Simon Wright.

Humbert's Inn was the swankiest pub in town, although these days, that wasn't necessarily a

resounding endorsement. Three years into the potato blight, it had managed to keep its doors open and retain much of its charm, which was more than could be said for most other such establishments in the County.

It was a little after midnight and a few lads from the livery stable staggered to their feet and stumbled out the front door. The place was nearly empty, just the bartender and five men at the bar.

A well dressed man sat aloof at the end of the pine slab, sipping from a glass of red wine. Simon Wright leaned against the bar; supported by his left elbow and surrounded by his buddies. His back was turned towards me, but I could see his face in the mirror. He stood a full head taller than the others. Spider veins blanketed his crimson nose and cheeks, and a grungy beard drizzled half way to his waist. I'd seen him before, but never this close. He was bigger than I recalled; his neck the size of a tree stump and his arms busted through the seams of his shirt. When he glanced in my general direction, I lowered my head slightly and felt small beads of sweat accumulating on the palms of my hands.

Simon slammed his empty glass on the counter and flapped his hand in both directions, demanding another drink for himself and his cohorts. Everyone knew the four, inseparable thugs; Simon, Lefty, Four Eyes and Mac. They made a living terrorizing the countryside collecting rents from poor tenant farmers at the behest of their English master, Sean Donegan.

Lefty's black eyes and paper thin lips sat in the middle of his overgrown head. He was balder than a baby's ass and his right shirt sleeve hung limp by his side, empty. The story around town was that anybody who'd seen him in action knew to stay clear of Lefty. Four Eyes mimicked every move that Simon made. He laughed when Simon laughed and scowled when Simon scowled. But it was hard to take a scowl seriously from a short skinny punk with three little

whiskers on his chin and black rimmed glasses thicker than a beer bottle. Mac had sandy blonde hair, broad shoulders and resembled half the male population of Ireland. But he talked with a lisp, he even laughed with a lisp.

“Last round fellas, it’s quitting time and I gotta go home.”

Simon grabbed the barkeep’s shirt and yanked him so close that he was within a warm breath of Simon’s nose. “Listen little man. Humbert’s closes when Mr. Donegan says it closes.” The barkeep dropped his towel and both hands shot high as he dangled in mid air. Simon roared with laughter and Four Eyes offered his best imitation. The bartender’s face blossomed like a scarlet rose in springtime and he struggled to breathe. His short choppy gasps bounced all the way to my corner of the room.

“Let him go, Simon. It’s time we all retired for the night.” Simon hesitated but a second and then opened his fingers. The bartender disappeared behind the counter with a thud and a groan. Silence spread throughout the room and all heads at the bar turned in the direction of the soft voice from the end of the counter. I craned my neck to get a better look. He slowly rose to his feet, set his napkin down and gently placed his wine glass on the pinewood. I’d never seen the man before, I’m not sure he’d ever set foot in this town. But everybody in County Mayo was well acquainted with the name, Sean Donegan. The English landlord owned most of the County, including the sheriff, Simon and his buddies.

Donegan was a man in his late fifties. Everything about him seemed to be narrow and academic. Wire rimmed spectacles sat atop his slender nose, but weren’t wide enough for his head. The chin of his elongated face pointed to a checkered bow tie and his skinny legs were too long for the trousers that ended just above his ankles.

Mr. Donegan looked directly at Simon and his cohorts for a long moment, his eyes shifting from one to the next. Simon's arrogant grin had long vanished and his hands drooped to his side. Donegan straightened his tie and strode past me without glancing my way or acknowledging my existence. He pushed his way through the front door and turned left towards the Great Mall Park. The bartender struggled to his feet and the next few minutes passed without a word spoken. I slouched in my chair and raised a hand to discreetly cover my face. Simon, Lefty, Four Eyes and Mac finished their drinks in unison then stormed past, paying me no heed. They burst through the front door and angled to the right, the opposite direction as their boss.

I leapt to my feet and rushed out the back door. I dashed down the alley, then wheeled left behind the general store and raced towards the Great Park. There was no time to lose. A half moon shed enough light through the broken clouds to help show the path. But I could have found my way along this shortcut with my eyes closed. Every night for the past two weeks Simon had left Humbert's and walked home alone past the Great Mall Park, but not tonight. I had to warn Cyrus and Tom that the plan had already gone awry.

I turned onto Main Street and sprinted down the middle of the dirt road. Shops and little stores lined the road to my left and the Great Park spilled out to my right. Cyrus and Tom should be waiting a few blocks up ahead, ready to ambush Simon. I expected to see Donegan walking down Main Street, but the street was empty. I slowed my pace to a brisk walk and caught my breath. I angled to my left and hopped onto the wooden sidewalk. The slats creaked under my footsteps. To tell the truth, I was a little relieved that Simon had gone in the opposite direction with his friends. Cyrus said the plan was foolproof and that it would be easy. But after seeing those guys up close, I'm not sure we were any match for Simon Wright and his buddies.

Just then I saw a figure walking about a block ahead. He hugged tight to the storefronts, but I couldn't make out who it was. I slipped onto the road and quietly tried to catch up. I crouched and quickened the pace like an army soldier trying to surprise the enemy. I closed to within thirty feet, then twenty. He stopped. I stopped. He turned slowly, checking to see if anybody was following him. I stood sideways behind a four by four pillar in front of the sidewalk, only partially concealed. I peered in his direction without flinching or moving a fraction. It was dark enough and he didn't seem to notice me. But I recognized him. There was no doubt that Sean Donegan stood just down the sidewalk in front of Brown's Druggist.

He turned his back to me and continued his stride in the opposite direction. I jumped into the middle of Main Street and cupped both hands around my mouth. I started to holler, "Stop! He's the wrong man!" But before the words could escape my mouth, Donegan's head jerked backwards. His feet flung high and his body flew through the air, crashing in a heap onto the wooden walkway. A log club from the alley beyond the Druggist continued its wild arc and smashed into the store front window, glass splattering everywhere.

I rushed forward and knelt by Donegan's crumbled body. His eyes were rolled to the back of his head and his mouth hung open as if his jaw were about to fall off. I was overcome by the sickening feeling that I was responsible for this man's death. If only I had rushed out of Humbert's immediately after Donegan, I could have prevented this tragedy. There was no reason to wait for Simon and his gang to finish their drinks, I could see that now. We were all so caught up in Cyrus' righteous indignation and justifiable quest for revenge. But now all those emotions felt trivial, even petty. The puke boiled in my belly and erupted into my throat. I leaned toward the street to heave, but nothing came. I coughed and gagged, then closed my eyes and sighed as

the inner turmoil retreated.

I returned my attention to Donegan. I felt for a pulse and placed an ear over his heart, looking for any sign of life. The wooden slats from the sidewalk creaked under the weight of a man's footstep, then another. Was it Cyrus or Tom? I wasn't sure I really wanted to know. Surely he could have confirmed Simon's identity before applying such a ferocious blow. But I slowly lifted my head. My eyes first made contact with a splintered log dangling from the culprit's hand, then to the impassive face of my brother. "I think he's alive, Tom. Barely, but he's alive. We've got to get him to the doctor now."

But Tom didn't move, not even a quiver. His face remained hollow and his eyes held steadfast on Donegan's body. Perhaps he was in shock, aghast at what he'd done. He shifted his head toward me and his jaw firmed. The muscles around his eyes and mouth tightened. I couldn't detect even the tiniest sign of remorse on my brother's face.

"Help me move him, Tom." I heard a pleading cry in my own voice. "If we don't get him to the doc now, his blood will be on our hands." But there was still no reaction from Tom. I lifted Donegan's head and examined his wound.

I felt the sidewalk bend under my knees and a new set of footsteps came close. Cyrus towered over my brother. He was the only man in town tall enough to look Simon Wright straight in the eye and strong enough to match him muscle for muscle. "We'll not be in need of a doctor, Peter, not tonight."

"This man is bleeding. He'll die if we don't get him help."

"Then help him, but no doctor." Cyrus dropped a rag onto Donegan. "This should stop the bleeding."

I pressed the cloth against the side of his head. There was plenty of blood, but not as much as I would have expected for the wallop he'd taken. The flow had pretty much stopped and his hair was disheveled into a mass of sticky clots. His glasses were shattered, but his eyelids began to flutter. Faint puffs of fog emanated from his nose in the cold midnight air. Soft groans escaped his lips and his eyes struggled to focus on my face.

Cyrus knelt to one knee and yanked both of Donegan's feet and legs so that they were fully extended. He tightly bound the injured man's ankles, one to the other. He tossed another length of rope to Tom. "Tie his hands behind his back." Tom dove into the task without hesitation. Cyrus snatched the rag out of my hand and jammed it half way down Donegan's throat. He bounced to his feet and flipped the limp body over his shoulder as though it were a sack of grain.

I glared at Cyrus in disbelief. "Have you gone completely daft? You know this isn't Simon."

Cyrus ignored me and stomped across the street towards the Great Mall Park. I turned to my brother. But he disregarded my pleas and lumbered off in Cyrus' footsteps.

I froze. I couldn't believe what I was hearing and seeing. I couldn't believe what I was a part of. Then panic set in. What were they going to do with him now? I followed them into the center of the Park.

Cyrus dumped the body under a large oak tree. He tied the end of a long, water soaked rope around both ankles and threw the end of the rope over a broad limb of the tree. The branch hovered horizontally about twelve feet above the ground. Tom jerked the loose end of the rope, raising Donegan's feet slightly off the ground. The Englishman's eyes opened slowly, then grew

wider.

Tom turned to Cyrus, seeking final approval. Cyrus nodded decisively. Tom paused for just a second. Cyrus sensed Tom's hesitation and grabbed the end of the rope. He yanked hard and Donegan jerked off the ground. Tom pitched in and they pulled together, one hand over the other, elevating Donegan's body higher. Cyrus tied the end of the rope around the trunk of the old oak tree, leaving Donegan suspended upside down. The top of his head hovered about three feet above the ground.

Cyrus crouched in front of Donegan, staring into his upside down eyes. "Don't worry Donegan, your name will live on. It will be on the lips of every tormented Irish man, woman and child as we sound our new battle cry."

Donegan's cheeks scrunched up, eyebrows stretched above his bulging eyes. Every muscle in his neck and jaw tensed tightly. The rag in his mouth vibrated from screams that could not be heard.

I moved forward to untie Donegan. "This has gone far enough. He's not even our man."

Tom grabbed my arm and jerked me back. "Simon's just this Englishman's lackey. Donegan calls the shots. He's been the target all along."

I felt my fingers curling into a fist. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"We were afraid you wouldn't go along."

I was an idiot for being duped by my own brother and best friend. "Cyrus has had his revenge, now cut him down."

"We can't do that, Peter. We're going to leave him swinging right here as an example for all to see."

I protested. “It won’t do any good to leave him hanging. Nobody in town even knows who he is. What kind of statement is that?”

Tom yanked a flier out of his back pocket. He picked up a rock and stepped over to the trunk of the old oak. He pulled a few nails out of his coat and pounded the handbill to the tree. Tom turned back towards me and pointed to the poster, smiling. “That’s the message, brother.”

NO RENT – NO LANDLORD’S GRASSLAND!

THE LAND FOR THE PEOPLE!

TENANT FARMERS UNITE!

JOIN THE YOUNG IRELANDERS!

Cyrus pushed past both of us and stooped in front of Donegan. For a moment his face softened and he started to speak. But the words wouldn’t come. Perhaps he wanted to claim revenge for the burning death of his little sister. The moment of his retribution had arrived, yet now he seemed torn, indecisive. But suddenly the venom returned to his face. He stood up abruptly and pulled a whiskey bottle out of his coat. Cyrus removed the lid and doused the whisky over Donegan’s clothes, face and hair.

Tom lurched forward and snatched the bottle out of Cyrus’ hand, but the bottle was empty. “You promised we weren’t going to kill me.” But before he could finish, Cyrus whirled about wild eyed and smacked Tom square on the chin. My brother tumbled backwards into me and we both collapsed in a heap.

Cyrus tugged a rolled up newspaper out of his back pocket. He jammed his face into Donegan’s and roared. “You killed my little sister. Now you’ll know how she felt; to have flames crawl up your skin and eat you alive.” The evil in his eye and the hate in his voice came

from no man that I knew or had ever called my friend. He lit a match, applied it to the paper, and then dabbed the fire against Donegan's hair, shirt and trousers.

Tom and I scrambled to our feet, but there was nothing we could do.

Donegan gyrated wildly. The flames spread instantly and within seconds his hanging body was a raging inferno. We stepped back, hypnotized by the sight and magnitude of the deed. Tears welled up in the corner of my eyes. Even Cyrus' icy, stone hearted demeanor appeared to falter. I stepped towards the fiery corpse as if there was something I could do to relieve its pain, but then retreated. The burning carcass of Sean Donegan hung lifeless.

We all stood paralyzed for several seconds. "What do we do now?" Tom said.

Cyrus dropped his head and spoke in a soft voice that could barely be heard. "The fire will have been seen. We've got leave now." He looked over at me as if asking for forgiveness.

Fine time for remorse. Well, he wasn't about to get my blessing. Not now, not ever. Cyrus' transformation was instantaneous. All the poison and hatred that had been brewing within him for a month instantly vanished with the death of Donegan. But it was too late. Too late for Donegan; and too late for Cyrus. He held his pleading gaze, but I had no stomach for him. Cyrus Gallagher was no longer a friend of mine.

Voices echoed from the direction of Brown's Druggist. Tom launched into a sprint for the west side of the Park. Cyrus and I followed close behind. Simon Wright and his gang sprang out in pursuit. Lefty arrived at the simmering flames first and announced, "There's not much left, boss, but that's Mr. Donegan." Simon scanned the park and pointed towards Mall Road. "There they are! Lefty, you and Mac cut them off up by the Livery. Four Eyes, you're with me."

Mall Road ran along the west side of the Park. A row of shops and businesses lined the

side of the street opposite the Park. We darted between Molly's Dress Shop and the Post Office, onto the alley behind the stores. "Let's split up. We'll meet at the creek bridge in an hour."

Tom ducked into a shed behind Molly's and Cyrus dashed off to the west. I sprinted north past the back of the Post Office, City Hall and Riley's Pub. I glimpsed to the right, between the buildings, and saw Mac and Lefty angling to cut me off at the Livery Stable. I whirled about and headed back south. I ran about fifty feet, and then froze as two men ran into the alley from the back of Molly's. There was no mistaking Four Eyes and the bearded face and hulk of Simon Wright, about forty feet away. I swiveled about, but saw Mac and Lefty bearing down on me from behind the Livery. My heart rate doubled and sweat flowed from every pore. This was not my crime. Yet I was about to be punished for Cyrus' reprisal. I bolted to my right, between the Post Office and City Hall, and raced north on Mall Road. I tossed my hat on the ground at the mouth of the gap between City Hall and Riley's, then slithered into the horse trough in front of the Pub.

My eyes sank just a few inches below the water's surface and I could see reflections from above. Seconds later, Mac and Lefty rushed onto Mall Road from the north, Simon and Four Eyes from the south. They all converged on the boardwalk in front of Riley's Pub, just a few feet away. The images were blurry, but I could see Simon pointing towards the smoldering cadaver and then back towards the alley. He seemed to be barking out orders.

I strained to stay down. My air supply had nearly run out and I cursed myself for not taking a deeper breath before going underwater. I finally had to raise part of my head as silently as possible and suck in as much air as I could without making a sound.

Lefty pointed, "There's his hat, he must have doubled back." They ran towards the back

alley. I slinked out of the water and peeked around Riley's towards the back street. Lefty arrived in the alleyway first, looking in every direction. The others arrived moments later. "He's not here."

They all turned to the sound of a commotion by the livery. "There he is", Simon cried out. "Let's go!" Mac and Lefty took off, but Simon grabbed Four Eye's arm and whispered to him. Simon disappeared into the alley towards City Hall. Four Eyes crept along the passageway on the north side of Riley's back towards me. I slipped between the steps and crawled under the raised wooden sidewalk in front of Riley's Pub. I could hear water still sloshing in the trough.

"He's in the park," Simon yelled. I could see through cracks in the slats as Four Eyes took off for the park, but I lost track of Simon. Four Eyes ran wildly through the grounds, looking behind trees, searching the horizon, pausing a moment to examine the remains of Sean Donegan.

Five minutes passed before he returned to Riley's Pub, but still no sign of Simon. Four Eyes came to an abrupt stop and stared at the front of Riley's. Then he sprinted off between the buildings toward the alley. I waited several minutes before even twitching. The smell of simmering embers drifted through the damp night air, an eerie silence fell upon the town. I couldn't hear Simon, Four Eyes, or any of the others. Couldn't even hear my own breathing. I squirmed gingerly under the sidewalk. I took my time. I was defenseless and remained as quiet as could be. Upon reaching the end of the walkway, I lifted my head slowly and peered out. Someone grabbed my hair and violently yanked me up. My back scraped on the underside of the boardwalk and I cried out. He dragged me out onto the street and drilled his boot deep into my gut. I doubled over in pain and rolled onto my back. Simon jammed his boot into my neck and

pinned my head to the ground.

Lefty ran up to Simon, breathing heavily. Four Eyes followed close behind. “Mac’s got one of them in the livery stable.”

Simon nodded his approval. “Good, we’ll bring this guy up to the livery. Any sign of the third one?”

“We were hoping you had both of them.”

“No matter, we’ll take care of these two, and then track him down. I’ve got a feeling I know who it is.”

Tom slouched in the corner of an empty stall, blood crusting on the right side of his face, his left eye bruised and swollen. His mouth hung slightly open and his arms drooped by his side. They dragged me by the collar and dumped me next to my brother.

Simon sauntered over to the stall. “I didn’t think you croppers had the guts to fight.” He turned to Mac and Four Eyes. “Get ‘em strung up, there’s plenty of rope on the table. We can hang ‘em over the center beam.”

An axe, a pistol and two mallets hung on the wall above the work bench. But Mac zeroed in on the hunting knife and an armload of rope resting atop the bench. He cut a few short lengths and tied my ankles together and wrists behind my back. With a longer rope, he secured a noose around my neck. Four Eyes did the same to Tom. Simon checked the knots and gave them an extra tug to make sure they were tight. “Stand them up on those two hay bales and let’s get this over with.”

I stared defiantly into Simon’s eyes, trying to act braver than I really felt. Mac and Lefty dragged us along the manure caked barn floor and stood us up on the hay bales. Simon heaved

the loose ends of the rope over the center beam and tied them tautly to a supporting post. Desperation blanketed Tom's battered face as he looked at me and softly uttered, "I'm sorry." Simon yanked on Tom's rope and the noose jerked his chin upwards. He did the same to me. We both grimaced and murmured a final prayer.

Lefty swiveled his neck about, sniffing the air. "Do you guys smell something?"

Four Eyes stepped back by the front door and looked up. "The loft's on fire! We've got to get out of here."

Lefty and Mac dashed out of the barn without hesitation. Before running, Simon grabbed both bales of hay and hurled them aside. It was only a few feet, but I felt like my body had been tossed off a cliff into a freefall. A millisecond later I reached the end of the rope and was yanked violently in the opposite direction. My larynx absorbed the entire force of the recoil.

Tom and I hung by the neck, side by side, suspended from the center beam. The safety of the barn floor flickered just a few feet out of our reach. It may as well have been a mile. Simon snickered and bolted out of the building. We both squirmed and kicked frantically. I managed to get enough momentum to sway back and forth, going a little further with each swing. The end was near, I couldn't hold my breath any longer and my head was about to burst. But after several swings, I was able to clamp my toes onto the edge of the discarded hay bale, relieving the tension in the rope just enough get a few shallow breaths. Tom was not so lucky.

Smoke filled the barn as the blaze spread quickly through the dry hay. Tom's legs slowed to just a few weak spasms, his eyes rolled back and his shoulders went limp. I tightened every muscle I could find in my neck, gasping for air and convulsing.

Cyrus rushed into the barn and dragged a bale of hay under us. I wobbled, but somehow

managed to stand up and create slack in the rope. Cyrus climbed onto the bale and supported Tom. He loosened and removed the nooses, then freed our hands and feet. “We can get out the back.”

We coughed and gagged from the smoke. I could walk steady enough, but Tom was limp as a rag doll. Cyrus tossed him over his shoulders and we bound towards the back exit. We made it safely to the alley and sat on a bench clear of the burning livery. Cyrus pulled Tom into his chest and cradled his head. He lifted an eyelid and checked for a pulse. Tom’s wrist slipped off Cyrus’ knee and dangled to the ground. Cyrus buried his eyes into the palm of his hand. He looked up at me and slowly nodded his head.

“Nooooo !” I screamed. I clutched Tom’s body into my arms and kicked Cyrus away. I closed my eyes and rocked back and forth with my brother, oblivious to a flaming timber crash just across the alley. Images flashed in and out of my mind, but stopped at that impish smirk on the face of Simon Wright. All the hatred and hostility that I had despised in Cyrus for the past hour now boiled in my own veins. I wanted to torture Simon, make him pay for what he had done to my brother. I wanted to rip him apart limb by limb, pluck his eyes from each socket. I wanted to hear him scream in agony, pray for forgiveness. I wanted him to fall to his knees, to grovel for mercy, to beg for his life. I could feel myself transforming into the devil himself. But I didn’t care. I wanted revenge. No, I needed my revenge.

I shoved Tom’s lifeless body back onto Cyrus’ lap. I leapt to my feet and charged back into the livery, ignoring Cyrus’ protests. The fire had spread and the entire building was ablaze. The roof creaked and visibility was near zero. The heat was oppressive. I darted and swerved to avoid fiery timbers careening all about. But I never slowed down. I snatched the pistol off the

wall without breaking stride. A log crashed onto my back and my shirt erupted into flames. I flew through the opening that had once been the front door and crashed onto Mall Road. I rolled in the dirt to douse the flames. My skin sizzled like bacon grease in a scalding pan. But the pain was no match for adrenaline that temporarily transformed me into an invincible man. I leapt to my feet and clutched the revolver.

They were all there just a few feet away, right in my sights. Helpless and unarmed, they were mine. Simon, Lefty, Four Eyes and Mac. I pointed my pistol and mustered my resolve. But they didn't attack, they didn't move. Only Lefty and Mac even acknowledged my presence. They stood behind the other two, their hands at their sides. Four Eyes sprawled out on the ground, lifeless. His arms and torso were scorched and his face was a bloody mess. Simon sat on the ground beside him, the head of Four Eyes resting upon his lap. Simon made no attempt to hide or control his sobs. He gently removed the glasses off the dead man's nose and placed them in his shirt pocket.

I hesitated. This wasn't the scene I'd envisioned. I had expected them to fight back, to snarl and be vicious. They were supposed to act like the devils they were and I'd pull the trigger, dropping them one by one. Something like that. Actually, I didn't really have a plan. I just wanted my revenge. But how could I shoot these men just standing there, mourning, defenseless. That reeked of cowardice. But then, what's so noble about hanging a man with his hands tied behind his back? Or beating a man with a club when he's walking down the street? Or burning a man to death as he dangles from a tree upside down?

Cyrus rushed upon the scene and stopped short of his grieving adversary. He turned towards me and looked down at the pistol. "Don't do it, Peter. You'll regret it."

I couldn't contain the chuckle that escaped my lips.

He took a step closer and pleaded with me. "You don't want to be like me. You don't want to do what I've done."

I knew he was right, but venom still flowed in my veins. I couldn't let this demon get away with murdering my brother and Cyrus' little sister.

Simon staggered to his feet and lifted Four Eyes into his arms. "I'm going to go home and tell our mother that one of her sons is dead." He took a step towards me, the hostility in his eyes replaced by tears. He lumbered off without slowing down or looking back.

I wanted to shoot him right then and there, I really did. Front or back, it didn't matter. Cyrus rested a hand on my arm, but he couldn't have stopped me. I eased my index finger over the trigger. Cyrus tightened his grip on my arm, but made no attempt to intervene. I glanced in his direction out of the corner of my eye. His eyes were pleading and his face cringed with despair. I wondered if I would be wearing that same pathetic look in an hour. I forced myself to take a moment to collect my thoughts. How would my parents and my older sister handle the news of Tom's death? I thought about Cyrus and of days when our lives weren't so filled with anger and hatred. Somebody had to bring this ugly night to an end.

I turned to Cyrus and dropped the pistol to the ground. "Let's get my brother and take him home."