

Restricted Territory

Departure

Tuesday, 27 Nov 1877

[Send Off]

Tuesday morning, just after sunrise, at the train station. The weather is clear and cold. Around the station, there is snow in the shaded areas and mud everywhere else. The platform is busy with passengers, railway workers, and well-wishers. The train pulls into the station with a lot of noise, releasing steam as it stops. Passengers disembark and greet their waiting friends and family. Railway workers access the baggage and cargo cars.

Sam, Victoria, CJ, Tylor, and Austin are dressed in fine traveling clothes. Victoria and CJ both have small cases. Sam and Victoria are surrounded by Gus, Yellow Feather, Falling Leaf, Mr. Fry, Paul, Robert, and Mrs. Pratt. The boys are off in a separate area, keeping Peter and Victoria apart. Sheriff Hawkins and his deputy, Lewis, are standing on the platform, away from the crowd. Everybody is talking at the same time.

Gus, Yellow Feather, and Sam are discussing the property.

"You're welcome to use anything left in the cabin," states Sam. "Victoria was concerned that some things might be in your way. If that's the case, please just store them in the – um – 'pantry' (meaning the mine) until we return next year. Austin gave you some maps and instructions, right? And by the way, Victoria left a trunk in the pantry that she'll send for once we get safely to Ohio."

"Yes, yes," Gus replies. "We – that is, the three of us, are aware of the 'pantry' and its extra storage hazards. I'll be sure to keep things safe there."

Yellow Feather knows the town will miss what the Creightons contributed to Harmony Flats. She contends, "It will be much different here without them. It will be many years before the town can fill their void."

"I'm sure Victoria and Austin will miss you as well," says Sam. Adding, "Austin is quite fond of Falling Leaf."

"Yes," Yellow Feather submits, "They are like brother and sister."

In the background, toward the back of the train, an unidentifiable figure wearing two pistols and carrying a rifle stealthily boards the train's last car without notice.

Sam is sure Falling Leaf and Austin's relationship has a romantic element, so he presses for clarification. "Nothing more? I thought they were like boyfriend and girlfriend."

Yellow Feather laughs, "No. White Squirrel does not have those feelings for her." She looks around to make sure the kids don't hear her and speaks in a slightly hushed tone, "I think Paul has those feelings, though."

Gus feels betrayed by his lack of information about romantic developments. "You've gotta tell me these things. How is a father to look after his daughter if nobody tells him what's going on?"

Yellow Feather continues her course in first loves: "Paul is not the one to watch. He is a well-mannered boy and respectful of Falling Leaf. It is Falling Leaf that should be watched." Using her head, she points to Tylor and Falling Leaf, standing away from the group. "She seems interested in Tylor." Speaking directly to Gus, "Tell me, who is as single-minded as your daughter? It is not your place to try to change the river; nature will find its course." Gus lowers his head, knowing she is talking about his stubbornness, and understands she doesn't want him to interfere or be too protective in Falling Leaf's love life.

Tylor and Falling Leaf are standing on the side of the station with fewer spectators. Falling Leaf looks at Tylor and then at the floor, trying not to make eye contact when she says, "I will write to you."

"But you don't even know my new address," states Tylor. "Heck, I don't even know what my new address will be."

Falling Leaf doesn't back down. "Still. I will write you."

Tylor nods in resigning agreement. "I know you will. And somehow, I know I'll get your letters wherever I am."

Falling Leaf's statement, spoken as a question, compels Tylor to commit. "You will take good care of White Squirrel?"

He knows not to take Falling Leaf's words lightly. Tylor responds, knowing he is making an immutable promise: "Of course. We're like brothers. I'll always be there for him."

Falling Leaf steps closer to him and speaks softly. "Tiger, I will miss you."

He gently takes her hand, "Me too." Then Tylor's look changes as he remembers something.

Tylor and Falling Leaf start speaking at the same time. "I got..." He drops her hand to retrieve something from his pocket. She pulls something out from a small pouch.

They both bring out a leather necklace with a heart-shaped stone. Each sees the other's gift. Tylor and Falling Leaf speak together again, laughingly, finishing the sentence. "You something."

They both laugh while they exchange gifts and take turns putting them on each other.

Paul, CJ, and Austin are talking in their small group of three.

Looking at the ground to avoid eye contact, Paul is feeling emotional. He fears that if he looks into Austin's eyes, he will start crying. His unsteady voice reveals the emotions he endeavors to suppress: "I never thought you might leave Harmony Flats." Paul's eyes gloss over as he looks directly at Austin. "I figured our kids would grow up together like one big family. It's gonna get real quiet without you."

Not looking well, Austin speaks with a bit of difficulty. "That just means you'll have to work twice as hard to stir things up around here." He puts on a weak smile.

Trying to lighten the mood and take some pressure off Austin, CJ tells Paul, "We'll be back in about a year to visit and to see how you're doing. Becoming the sneakiest and smartest person in town will take a lot of effort."

Softly, Austin voices a request: "Paul, promise me that you'll look after Mrs. Pratt." Austin can see in Paul's face that Paul is not sure he can handle that big a request. Anticipating that, he had recruited some help for Paul. "I already asked, and Falling Leaf agreed to help you."

Paul smiles at the thought of him and Falling Leaf working together. He surreptitiously compliments Austin and how much Austin is needed in Harmony Flats: "See, you should stay here. It takes two of us to take over what you did by yourself. And even combined, we don't know half as much about this town as you."

Speaking weakly, Austin presses for an answer. "Just promise me you'll watch over her."

"Yes," Paul avows, "I promise." Austin is very pale and loses focus, then snaps back alert. "Are you okay? You don't look so good."

Concerned that Austin's health has declined rapidly, CJ insists, "Austin. You need to sit down for a bit." He wraps his arm around Austin and takes him to a bench. As he's helping Austin to the bench, he looks at Paul and silently mouths, 'Get Victoria.'

After they sit down, CJ asks in an upbeat tone, "Hey buddy, what's up?"

Austin softly responds, "I'm just a little tired."

CJ puts his hand on Austin's forehead, then whispers in a caring tone, "Dude, you're burnin' up."

Paul searches through the crowd until he finds Victoria. She is talking with his dad and Mr. Fry.

Paul steps right next to Victoria, interrupting the conversation. "Pardon my interruption, Miss Creighton, Au . . . I mean, Peter isn't feeling well. CJ sent me to get you."

"Where?" Victoria's concern scares Paul. He points to the bench's location.

Victoria tells Mr. Fry and Robert, "I'm sorry, you'll have to excuse me."

Mr. Fry promptly says, "Of course, please go." Victoria leaves in a controlled rush.

Robert calls out as she weaves through the crowd, "I hope he feels better soon."

After winding her way through the people on the platform, Victoria arrives at the bench where CJ and Austin sit. CJ briefs Victoria, "He was really pale and looked like he was going to faint. He looks better now, but I think he has a fever."

Trying to sound well, Austin weakly mutters, "I'm just a little tired. I'm okay."

Victoria places her hand on Austin's forehead and sternly demands, "And how long have you been a nurse?"

Austin looks at Victoria, then looks down, defeatedly, without a response.

"That's what I thought," admonishes Victoria. She tells CJ, "We should get him on the train and resting. We're in cabins three and four on the second passenger car."

CJ states, "I'll take care of it. We'll see you in there." With his arm around Austin, he helps him up and walks him to the train. "Come on, you little heater. Let's get you settled in. I'll get you some water from the dining car once I have you lying down."

Bravely trying to minimize the situation, Austin maintains, "Really. It's no big deal."

CJ stops and looks directly at Austin. "You want to check with Victoria on that?"

Austin answers softly, "No." CJ smiles at the response as he continues to assist Austin to the train. Austin feels helpless and an unwanted burden to the rest of the group. Tears slowly form as he talks to CJ. "Thanks for taking care of me – again. I feel like such a baby. I'm not always like this – you can ask Victoria."

CJ laughs, "Of course you aren't; you're just sick. Once you're better, I'll have a hard time keeping up with you. Besides, taking care of you is a privilege that very few can boast about." Austin smiles, knowing that he is loved.

To lighten the mood and lift Austin's spirits, without warning, CJ kisses Austin on the forehead. "Ouch!, I think I burned my lips." He smiles when he sees Austin smile. His plan worked.

[Ohio Bound]

On the train, in Victoria's cabin, Austin is lying on one of the two benches. CJ steps into the cabin with a glass of water and closes the door behind him. The cabin is small, with two bench seats facing each other, one forward and one backward. The windows can be opened in better weather, but it's too cold in winter. The rhythm of the train cars as they run from track section to track section offers a restful sound.

Getting on one knee next to Austin, he hands the glass of water to him and asks, “The same, better or worse?”

While Austin answers, CJ puts his hand on Austin’s forehead to recheck his fever. “The same – Maybe a little better.”

CJ starts to take Austins’ pulse. It is weak and fast, but he can’t calculate a rate before Sam and Victoria enter the cabin.

CJ gives the adults an objective status report on Austin’s condition. “His color’s better, but he hasn’t cooled down any. His pulse is weak and rapid, but I did not get a rate.” CJ excuses himself, sensing that Victoria and Sam might want to talk to Austin alone. “It’s getting a little crowded. I’ll join Tylor in the other cabin.” CJ takes Austin’s hand and looks him in the eyes. “Feel better soon.” He then gently returns Austin’s hand to rest on his stomach before leaving.

Sam takes over CJ’s spot, kneeling next to Austin. He checks the capillary refill in Austin’s finger and then begins taking Austin’s pulse. “Hey, big guy, you’ve got me worried again. Can you tell us what’s going on?”

“You sound just like CJ,” Austin murmured.

“No,” insists Sam. “CJ sounds just like me. Now, tell me how you feel.”

After briefly smiling at Sam’s comment, Austin downplays his condition. “I don’t want to be a problem again. I’m just a little tired.”

Placing his hand on Austin’s arm, Sam speaks directly but gently. “First of all, you’ve never been a problem; secondly, you’re more than just a little tired.” He looks at Victoria to pass the conversation to her and then looks back at Austin. “If you don’t want to tell me about how you’re feeling, then tell your sister.” Sam stands up. “I’ll step out if you’d like.”

“No!” Austin grabs Sam’s pant leg. “It’s okay. You can stay.” He releases the pant leg. “Please.” Sam gets back on one knee and, taking Austin’s hand, squeezes it slightly.

Sitting on Austin’s bench, Victoria runs her hand through his hair, brushes his cheek, then gently rests her hand on his chest. “Tell me exactly how you feel.”

Austin knows that he is very sick, and he’s scared. He doesn’t know anyone that was as sick as he is, that didn’t die. Hesitantly, Austin starts his report. “I feel super weak,” His voice gets shaky as he bravely holds back the tears of fear. “And it’s hard to catch my breath most of the time. I’m pretty hot, too. I feel better sometimes,” He closes his eyes. “But I feel worse most of the time.”

Victoria speaks softly to lessen the impact of what she must tell him. “Little brother, you’re pretty sick. I think you already knew that.” Austin’s eyes are still closed. He nods slowly. “We may have to put you in the hospital in Sacramento until you’re better.”

Austin opens his eyes wide, his fear evident. “No!” That’s usually the last stop for sick people before they die. He is almost begging as he cries, “I don’t want to go to a hospital.”

“We can’t just let you get worse,” reasons Sam. “The symptoms you described . . . and from what we can see, it looks like you might have a bad infection. I don’t want to say this, but I have to make you understand how serious this is.” What he must say weighs like a ton of bricks on Sam, so he hesitates and takes a deep breath. “If you don’t get treatment, you may not make it to Ohio. We just can’t take that chance.”

Although Victoria knew what Sam was going to say, hearing it actually said made her heart drop. Sam’s heart breaks when he sees Austin face reality.

Tears stream down Austin’s face. “I’m scared.”

Victoria takes his hand. “We know you are. We’ll be with you the whole time, making sure you get the best treatment. Sam and I will help you get better real fast.”

Reassuringly, Sam adds, “We’ll stay in Sacramento until you’re well enough to travel to your uncle Colin’s hospital. Okay?”

Understanding that it’s not optional, Austin clarifies the situation. “I don’t have a choice, do I?”

Victoria gives him two options: “Your choice is to either fight against us or let us help you. Either way, you’re going to the hospital when we get to Sacramento.”

Sam wipes the tears from Austin’s cheeks and rests his hand on the top of Austin’s head. “I suggest we team up to fight the infection together. How about it?”

Looking toward his feet and giving up his fight to stay macho, Austin’s attitude becomes passive as he accepts their decision. “Okay.” He looks toward Victoria and then toward Sam; he speaks weakly but with sincerity. “Thanks.” He has expended his physical and mental energy and closes his eyes, exhausted.

Sam leans over and kisses Austin’s forehead. He then gets up and goes to the cabin door. He calmly tells Victoria, “I’ll let the boys know that there is a slight change in plans. They may even like spending a couple of days in Sacramento. They only know what it’s become, not what it was.” Sam exits the cabin, quietly closing the door behind him. With Austin’s strength sapped, Victoria moves him like a ragdoll as she props him into a semi-sitting position.

In the hallway, Sam walks slowly to the other cabin, his expression pensive as he searches for words to explain the situation to the boys.

[Bad News]

In the other cabin, CJ stands by the window, and Tylor sits, reading a book. The trees pass by the window at various speeds, slowly at an incline and rapidly when on decent. Snow depth changes with the density of the trees. Shady areas have kept their snow, while sunny areas are nearly bare. The

snow along the tracks is deeper due to the plow on the front of the train piling it up as it clears the tracks. As the countryside goes by, CJ is deep in thought, worried about his new brother.

Sam steps in and closes the door. Looking up from the book, Tylor sees the worried look on Sam's face. "What's wrong?"

His mouth is dry, and his voice cracks when Sam says, "Austin." CJ, hearing the tone of Sam's voice, turns from the window to look at him. Sam clears his throat. "It looks like he's got pneumonia."

CJ doesn't want to believe his ears. "What? – Is it curable?" After reflecting on Sam's tone, CJ has significant doubt that it can be cured, but he hopefully asks, "It is right?"

"No." Sam's answer hits them like a ton of bricks. Both boys have their hearts drop. Sam struggles to hold back his tears as he tells them plainly, "Not really –. They don't have the same medical capabilities in the 1870s as we're used to."

Tylor is desperate to offer a solution. "Can't we just give him a big dose of antibiotics or something?"

Sam elucidates further, trying to stay objective in his explanation: "We could if we were in 2017. But they haven't even scratched the surface of antibiotics in 1877. Most people don't survive pneumonia now. Even in 2017, they lost a lot of people. Most treatments available now are just short of lethal poisoning. It's almost barbaric, but it's the best they have."

Almost beside himself, fearing they will soon lose Austin, Tylor raises his voice. "What are we gonna do? He's supposed to be part of our family. Falling Leaf said so. She's never wrong!" He stands up, throwing the book he was reading onto the bench. "We can't just give up on him."

Sam gestures to Tylor to quiet down so he isn't heard in Austin's cabin. "No. Of course not. We're going to do everything we can."

CJ feels helpless and scared. The words 'everything we can' seem hollow and final. CJ looks to him for direction because he has seen Sam solve almost any problem or issue. "What can we do?"

"We're taking him to the hospital in Sacramento," instructs Sam. "With both Victoria and I working on him, he'll have a chance to pull through."

Angry and frustrated, Tylor barks, "So we just sit and wait . . . and hope he doesn't die?"

Trying to calm the boys down and reassure them that he won't give up on Austin, Sam clarifies the boys' role. "Not even close. You two have the second most important role in his recovery." The boys look at Sam for their part in his treatment. "Maintaining a positive attitude. Besides helping keep him quiet and resting well, you must keep him in good spirits. Attitude is super important. It could be the difference between success and failure. You have to be supportive and keep him fighting. He knows that he's very sick and is on the brink of giving up. It's your job to prevent that."

CJ accepts the responsibility for both of them without hesitation. "We'll do whatever it takes."

"Can I see him now?" asks Tylor.

Sam shakes his head. "No. He's resting right now. You can stop by his room in about an hour to make sure he doesn't get further depressed. Your goal is smiles. Keep him smiling."

"Does he know how sick he is?" inquires CJ.

"He knows he's very sick, and it scares him," Sam says. "But don't mention pneumonia to him. These days, that's like a death sentence. He might stop fighting. We need to stay strong for him and keep him hopeful."

Tylor is about to burst with anger. "I hate the 1870s. I need some air!"

CJ pats Tylor's shoulder in empathy before he storms out the door.

"I'll check on Tylor in a few minutes when he cools down," CJ tells Sam.

"Thanks, CJ." Sam asks, "You okay?"

Sad and unconvincingly, CJ answers, "I guess."

"You sure?" pries Sam.

CJ explains his feelings: "Yeah. It just hurts to think about everything he's been through and now this."

"I know what you mean," Sam concedes. "I'm going for some air, too." He points to the rear of the train. "If you want to talk, I'll be on one of the platforms."

"Okay, Thanks." CJ sits on one of the benches and stares out the window. "I'm going to spend some alone time here."

Sam leaves the cabin.

CJ starts talking to himself. "What just happened? Once we got on the train, he was supposed to be safe. Now –" CJ puts his head in his hands and sobs quietly.

[Tipping the Scales]

Tylor is deep in thought, walking down the hall. Sheriff Hawkins approaches from the other direction, followed by Lewis. They get very close before Hawkins says something.

Seeing Tylor deep in thought, Hawkins gets his attention. "Tylor?"

Startled as his train of thought breaks, Tylor quickly returns to reality. "Oh! Sheriff Hawkins. I'm sorry I didn't notice you sooner."

"You seem to be deep in thought," suggests Hawkins. "Is everything okay?"

Tylor starts to tell him about his sick friend 'Peter.' "Well –" Tylor notices Lewis behind the sheriff and changes his mind. "I think so. I'm just stretching my legs and thinking of the friends we left in Harmony Flats."

Hawkins gives his unsolicited opinion: "If you were to ask me, it looks like maybe you were—" His tone changes to a slight tease. "Thinking of someone in particular." He insinuates that Tylor is thinking of a girlfriend. Hawkins laughs.

Tylor agrees with Hawkins' presumption to keep Lewis in the dark. Meanwhile, he keeps it to himself that the 'someone in particular' he's thinking about is his new, very sick brother, Austin. "Yeah, you could say that."

Hawkins trumpets his investigative skills. "It's real easy to see through young bucks like you." Tylor gets a little nervous. Maybe his deception failed. Hawkins continues, "It's either food or girls, and the dining car is the other way."

He is relieved that the sheriff didn't catch on to the deceit. Tylor does his best to put on a smile. "Got me there, Sheriff. Guilty as charged."

Tylor looks past the sheriff, making eye contact with Lewis. He wants Lewis to know that he has been noticed. "Oh, hi, Lewis." Austin's condition has put Tylor in a bellicose mood; therefore, he has no compunction in venting his anger by making Lewis uncomfortable. "Did you ever find Victoria's documents that you lost?"

Lewis becomes defensive. "I didn't lose any documents. The Judge must have misplaced them. He's not very organized."

"Oh, sorry," Tylor adds another jab. I heard maintaining the records was the bailiff's responsibility, but I must be mistaken. Well, you gentlemen, have a nice trip. We'll probably see each other at lunch. Until then."

Hawkins notices the combination attack on Lewis but does not interfere. He intends to have Lewis investigated when they get to Sacramento, so letting Tylor pick on him is fun to watch. "Sure. We'll see you then." He suddenly remembers that he wants to speak with Sam. "Oh, would you know where I might find Captain Reynolds?"

Unlike the way he spoke to Lewis, Tylor speaks courteously to Hawkins. "He was in his cabin just a few minutes ago. I'll let him know you're looking for him if I see him."

Hawkins is in no hurry. "That won't be necessary. If I don't catch him now, I'll speak with him at lunch."

"Okay. Well, take care," bids Tylor.

They pass each other as they continue on their respective paths. As they pass, Tylor stealthily takes Lewis' pocket gun from his vest pocket.

[Encouraging Message?]

In Victoria's cabin, Austin rests comfortably on one bench, and Victoria sits on the opposite bench. She looks through the small case she brought and takes out a note. On the front, it says Folsom. It is the note Falling Leaf gave to Austin to give to Victoria. Even though they are not in Folsom yet, she opens the note.

Dear Victoria,
I know that this is going to be hard to believe, but White Squirrel, Sam, CJ, and Tylor will be fine in their new family. Sam will take good care of White Squirrel and give him the medicine he needs. I will write to you soon.

Your friend, Falling Leaf

Victoria looks at the note again, then flips it over to see if there is anything on the back. There isn't. She puts it back in the case and ponders the cryptic message. The words aren't cryptic, but the phrasing is. Why would Austin live with Sam and the boys? Will Sam find the right medicine in Sacramento to help Austin? Victoria is too mentally exhausted to consider the meaning now. She, again, checks on Austin, who is asleep.

CJ is the only one in Sam's cabin. He has the table opened up so he can write a letter.

Harmony Flats Press,
Dear Editor,
As a person of no bias, except squarely against violence and criminal activity

There is a knock on the door.

CJ asks, "Who is it?"

From the hall: "It's Sheriff Hawkins."

CJ thinks he recognizes the voice, but just to be sure, he takes precautions. "Okay, just a moment." CJ Takes the pistol from the holster near him. He hides the gun behind the door as he opens it. Sheriff Hawkins and Lewis are in the hallway.

Hawkins asks, "CJ, is Captain Reynolds here?"

"No. I'm sorry," CJ replies. "He stepped out to get some air. Can I help?"

Hawkins hands an envelope to CJ. "Could you see that Sam gets this? The undertaker found it in the pocket of one of Wilson's men. He may find it interesting. It's a page from the recorder's ledger."

"Yes, sir. Of course." CJ takes the letter. "Is this all, or should I let him know you're looking for him?"

"There's a couple of things I'd like to discuss with him," mentions Hawkins, "But there's no hurry. I'll just wait to see him at lunch. Sorry to disturb you."

"That's okay," CJ says with a forced smile. "I was just passing the time. I'll make sure the captain gets this and let him know you stopped by."

"Thanks. We'll see you later." Hawkins walks toward the front of the train, followed by Lewis.

Sam is standing on the platform between the cars, staring into the forest as the train heads down to Pollack Pines. His thoughts revolve around Austin, the ad hoc family, and the unknown future.

Thinking about how Austin has captured the hearts of three strangers in only a week speaks volumes about his personality. His bright eyes, quick wit, unbigoted attitude, and charming smile endear him to everybody he meets. He recalls that CJ told him that even the town bullies don't mess with Austin, not because they fear him, but because they respect him.

The child he found in the snow at death's door, whom he pitied only a week ago, is now a cherished loved one, again fighting for his life with barely a thread of hope. And should that tread break, what will it do to the rest of the family? CJ will, undoubtedly, feel that he failed to protect his youngest brother, and Tylor will lament that he couldn't see the problem sooner, so more could be done. Victoria will feel it most of all. She loved her parents, uncles, and aunt, but she loved her little brother most of all. Sam can't imagine the sorrow she would feel.

Sam shakes his head to erase all those thoughts. He finds it hard to believe he could wander down that trail of negative thinking when he knows that the only thing that can save Austin is God's grace and positive thinking. Deep in thought, he does not notice Isaac quietly opening the coach door leading to the platform. The sound of the train masks the sound of the door and Isaac's footsteps. He feels a sharp pain.

[A Little Modification]

Tylor stands at the cabin's door and knocks the special knock. He hears the clunking of door locks turning, and the door opens. Surprised to see CJ as the sole occupant, he asks, "Where's Sam?"

CJ steps back to his previous position to stare out the window. "He went for some air, too. Better?"

Tylor replies, "I need to apologize for storming out. I'm pretty scared of losing Austin, and I feel powerless to help him. It's just really frustrating. I'm sorry. You and Uncle Sam must be just as upset. With no words to comfort her, I can't even face Victoria."

CJ walks over to Tylor and hugs him. "Me too, bro. Me too."

As CJ releases Tylor, he inadvertently taps the gun that Tylor took and had secured in his waistband. He pats the gun before stepping back and wiping tears from his face. "Wow, what's this?"

Tylor takes the two-barrel pocket gun from his waistband and places it on the table. "I took it from Lewis. He doesn't know. Austin told me about it. It's the gun Lewis uses when he's up to no good. If he gets questioned about a shooting, he can offer up his revolver and show it wasn't used - removing himself from the suspect list."

Confused but slightly amused that Tylor got it from Lewis without him knowing, CJ wants to know what Tylor is planning. "What's up with that?"

"Falling Leaf told me," Tylor whispers to CJ. "That the sheriff was going to be shot in the back while he was on the train. I'm sure Lewis shoots him, so I thought we could change things up a bit."

There is a knock on the door. It is not the secret knock.

CJ takes a blanket from the bench and covers the gun with it. "Who is it?"

A voice from the hall: "Train steward. Lunch is being served in the dining car."

Loud enough to be easily heard through the door, CJ responds, "Thank you. We'll be on our way."

[Lunch]

Sheriff Hawkins and Lewis are seated at a table in the dining car. The sheriff sees the boys and motions for them to join them.

Hawkins stands as he shakes their hands. Lewis remains seated. "So, where's everybody else?"

"Victoria will be taking lunch in her room," advises Tylor. "I haven't seen the captain in a while. I thought he might be here."

"Have a seat with us." Hawkins motions to the empty chairs as he sits down. "We'll make room for him when he shows up."

"Thank you." CJ steps aside and allows Tylor to sit across from Lewis.

While Tylor is getting settled, there is a clunk under the table. "What's that?" While the others look on with interest, Tylor reaches under and seems to feel around for something. "I'm not sure, but I think I kicked something on the floor. It probably went under Lewis's chair."

After quickly checking his vest pocket and finding it empty, Lewis reaches down to the floor and picks something up. He hides it in his hand. "It was just a rock," he tells the sheriff, "The kids I saw playing here earlier must have left it. I'll toss it out after lunch."

When Lewis feels the others are distracted by conversation, he discreetly checks to verify that the gun is loaded and then puts it back in his vest. CJ and Tylor look at each other, satisfied that their sham worked. The train whistle blows.

“Pollack Pines!” At the front of the dining car, the conductor announces the next stop. “Approaching Pollack Pines!” The conductor walks down the aisle to the next car. He can be heard in the background: “Pollack Pines. Approaching Pollack Pines!”

While getting up, Lewis informs the sheriff, “I’ll have lunch later. I will check with the telegraph station about any messages for us. I’ll report back to you when we are underway.”

Hawkins nods as Lewis leaves the table. The boys are not hungry, but they still feel the need to keep Peter’s condition under wraps, at least until they reach Sacramento. For that reason, they stay with the sheriff throughout lunch. During the rest of the meal, they steer the conversation away from personal information and history to local, general topics like the sawmill at Pollak Pines, consolidation of the railways, and the new governor’s mansion.

[Imposter]

In Victoria’s cabin, Austin is asleep on the bench, and Victoria is staring out the window. There is a knock on the door.

Victoria quietly asks, “Who is it?”

A voice from the hall: “Train steward, ma’am. I have your lunch.”

“Oh, very good.” As she stands, she looks at Austin, sleeping soundly. She takes a deep breath and slowly lets it out, hoping the rest he’s getting will help his body fight the infection.

Victoria slowly opens the door to prevent Austin from waking. Lewis is standing at the door with his pocket gun drawn. He barges in, points the gun at Victoria, and closes the door behind him. “Don’t make a sound.” He sees Austin sleeping on the bench. “The three of us are going to take a little stroll to the baggage car. Now!”

Lewis reaches over and pulls Austin up into a sitting position. It startles him awake. He sees Lewis with the gun and is confused about what’s happening. Lewis seethes at Austin, “Not a sound.”

“Leave him alone, he’s not well,” yells Victoria.

Lewis slaps Austin across the face, causing Austin to fall onto his side from the impact. Glaring at Lewis, Austin sits back up, his lip bleeding.

Lewis stares directly at Victoria. “Say another word and see what happens to him!”

“Get up, you little bastard!” growls Lewis. “I’d just as soon kill ya’ here, but for some reason, they prefer you alive. At least for now.”

Austin stands slowly, then flailing his arms, he attacks Lewis. Austin has no strength, so his attack is rather pitiful. Lewis punches Austin in the face, knocking him back onto the bench. Austin tries to get back up to resume the attack but stops when he sees that Lewis has the gun pointed at Victoria.

Lewis pulls the hammer back on the gun. “Try it again.” Austin just sits there, glaring at Lewis. After a few seconds, Lewis feels he has gained control of his victims. “Now get up, Brat.” Lewis opens the cabin door, checks the corridor for witnesses, and, using the gun for a pointer, ushers his victims toward the back of the train.

[Signatures Required]

In the baggage car, Isaac is standing with a gun trained on Sam, who is standing with his hands tied behind him and blood matted in his hair from an apparent injury. Isaac opens the large cargo door on the side of the car. The already noisy cargo car gets even louder, and the cold wind swirls in the car, raising dust and moving lighter cargo about.

“Captain Reynolds,” begins Isaac, “It’s a shame you won’t be going out in a blaze of glory to fit your style, but I like to keep things less spectacular. Like your guerilla friends, you know, out of sight, out of mind.” He pushes Sam a step closer to the door. “You won’t likely die when you hit the ground; in fact, I hope you get a chance to enjoy the pain for a bit before freezing. After that, critters out there will scatter yer bones ‘cross this whole mountain, and you’ll just kind of vanish. Just watch that first step.”

Sam smiles and chuckles. He just figured out the last riddle of Ren’s puzzle. With a loud bang, the passage door slams open, and Austin and Victoria are pushed into the car. Lewis steps in, smiling.

Isaac uses his gun to point at things as he speaks. “The captain here was just about to step out for some fresh air.” Isaac grabs Sam by the back of the collar and feigns, pushing him out. Then, he pulls Sam back into the car. Isaac teases: “However since guests are beginning to arrive, he can wait until the rest of the business is finished. Who knows, he might like some company.”

Isaac pushes Sam backward into the baggage. As he stumbles backward, Sam falls into a sitting position, leaning on the baggage. Austin rushes over to Sam and gives him a big hug. While hugging Sam, Austin puts his pocket knife in Sam’s hand.

“He ain’t goin’ to save you this time, kid.” sneers Isaac. “Sit down and keep still.” Lewis pulls Austin off of Sam and shoves him into a sitting position a few feet away. Then Lewis kicks Austin in the leg and snickers. Austin winces at the pain of the kick but denies Lewis the satisfaction of seeing him cry.

Isaac asks Lewis, “You got what we need?”

“Yeah, boss. Right here. I got it in Pollack Pines; the courier got there just when the train was leaving.” Lewis hands Isaac a satchel. Isaac takes out the papers and looks them over.

Isaac walks up to Victoria, pushing the papers at her. “Here’s the thing, sweetie,” Isaac tells her. “My boss needs these papers signed. You sign ‘em; you and your brother don’t need to die. You can just stay on the train all the way to Ohio and never look back.

On the other hand, if you decide not to sign ‘em, then I’ll have no choice but to kill you all.” He looks at Sam. “Including his two nephews.”

Isaac points his gun at Victoria. “You can sit by them two while Lewis extends an invitation to the boys. He tips his head to indicate to Lewis to get the boys. Victoria goes over and sits by Austin. Austin, exhausted, leans on Victoria. She wraps her arm around him.

Noticing that Austin is lethargic, Isaac demands, “What’s with the kid?”

Sam doesn’t hold back his disdain for Isaac. He purposely uses a tone to aggravate Isaac, hoping to draw his attention from the others to himself, “Only an idiot couldn’t tell that he’s sick and needs a doctor. You realize that you are not going to get away with this.”

Isaac gets riled up, points the gun at Sam, and pulls back the hammer. Remembering that he might need Sam’s life as a bargaining chip for Victoria’s signature, he lowers the hammer and the gun. “Well, if Missy here signs everything, then the brat will be free to see all the doctors he wants. If not, well, doctors won’t do him any good. And if you didn’t notice, I *am* getting away with this.”

Victoria’s blood boils every time Isaac calls her by a pet name. “I’ll sign if you let us all go,” Victoria angrily blurts. “Sam, the boys, and me. You leave us alone in Ohio, and we won’t go back to Harmony Flats.”

Isaac kicks Sam's foot. “Sounds enticing, but I don’t think I want to let the captain here free to come after me. His reputation makes me a little uneasy. So far, according to Wilson, he killed eleven men in just one week.”

Austin mumbles, “Eight, it’s only eight. The other three Wilson killed.”

Victoria looks at Austin to quiet down. She avers, “He won’t. You leave us alone, and we’ll leave you alone. We just want to live a normal life without always looking over our shoulders.”

Isaac tosses the satchel to Victoria. “Just git t’ signin’. You’ve got no chips to bargain with.”

She reads through the documents. They release all interest in the land of the three ranches and give it to the -R- cattle company. With no other options, Victoria finds the areas she is supposed to sign and slowly starts signing the documents. She pretends to read very carefully. She is not sure how it will help but is trying to buy time. The one thing Victoria *is* sure of is that once Isaac has the signed documents, they will all be killed.

[Vacant]

CJ and Tylor are walking in the hallway, returning from the dining car. CJ has coffee that he has difficulty keeping in the cup as the cars rock and shift along the tracks. Tylor is carrying a book, which he has no trouble with.

Lewis sees the boys enter the cabin as he enters the inter-car passage of the following car. He goes through the car and the next inter-car passage into the hallway of Victoria’s and Sam’s cabins. After verifying that no one is in a position to see him, he draws the gun from his vest and kicks in Sam’s cabin door. The boys are not in the room. The hot coffee is on the table alongside the book on CJ’s letter.

Lewis checks the windows. They are locked on the inside. There is no place for them to go. Lewis has no explanation for their disappearance. The stories about the haunted cabin, the four men getting beaten by two boys, and the boys going to visit the ladies and never coming out start to fill his mind. He gets scared, and a chill goes down his spine as he begins to suspect that the boys are not real people but something else. He darts out of the room and rushes back toward the baggage car.

[Quick Exit]

Sheriff Hawkins is standing on the deck of the inter-car passage to the baggage car. He has been looking for Lewis, who is acting strangely. Hawkins peers through the window to the baggage car and sees Isaac taking a satchel from Victoria. He can also see both Sam and Austin sitting on the floor. Austin is holding onto Sam, who looks to have a head injury and has his hands behind him. He sneaks into the baggage car and works his way through the baggage to a spot clear enough to stand.

Isaac looks at the three hostages with an evil glare and chuckles. "Soon as the others get here, we can finish this up."

Victoria shouts at him, "You said you would let us go. I did what you asked, so turn us loose!"

Hawkins stands up in a path between the crates, trains his revolver on Isaac, and startles Isaac as he pulls back the hammer on his revolver and barks, "Put it down!"

Seeing that he is compromised, Isaac carefully puts the gun and the satchel on the floor.

Hawkins keeps the revolver trained on Isaac but talks to Sam. "Sam, I've been looking for you. I wanted to ask you about some security issues. Looks like you may have stumbled across a couple already."

Sam grins, "Sorry to keep you waiting. I've been a little tied up."

Hawkins smiles at Sam's attempt at humor, even in a bad situation. "We'll see to that directly. Victoria, I'm going to need your help here." He notices that Austin is very weak. "What's wrong with Peter?"

Victoria leans him over onto Sam. She remembers Sam's recent response to that question but chooses a more civil response. "He's pretty sick. We need to get him to the hospital in Sacramento."

She stands up and walks over toward Isaac. Austin puts his arms around Sam who has been trying to cut the ropes he is tied with, but is making slow progress. Austin, more effectively, helps to cut Sam loose.

Two loud shots in succession ring out - with the exact timing as when Austin's parents were murdered. Austin wets himself, and Hawkins falls to the floor. Lewis makes his way from behind some cargo to the main walkway.

Isaac picks up his gun from the floor and points it at Victoria, who backs away. "Bout time you got back. Where's the boys?"

He looks like he has just seen a ghost. “Gone,” mumbles Lewis, his voice trembling.

The three hostages nervously look at each other, hoping the boys are okay. ‘Gone’ can mean many things, dead being one of them. Lewis seems like he wouldn’t think twice before killing someone, but his appearance and tone suggest he didn’t kill them.

Isaac is furious. He wants no loose ends; his boss demands no loose ends. Angrily, he walks toward Lewis, unintentionally putting distance between himself and the satchel. “Gone? What do you mean, gone?”

Shaken by the boys’ disappearance, Lewis tries to explain, “They disappeared. Vanished like ghosts. I saw ‘em go into their cabin, then they were gone.” His voice trembles, “Somethin’ ain’t right, boss.”

Sam, with Austin’s help, has finished cutting himself loose.

Discounting it as ineptitude on Lewis’s part, Isaac figures he will find them on the train after finishing up here. “We’ll find ‘em later.” He turns back to address the hostages. “Well, missy, looks like this little party’s over. We won’t be needin’ you or your little family anymore. So who’s first?”

Austin, surprising everyone, gets up and grabs the satchel. Seeing Austin make a move, Sam throws a package at Isaac, keeping him from using his gun. Austin runs to the cargo door and holds the satchel out the door.

Austin commands the scene, holding his knife in one hand for defense and the satchel in the other. “Let ‘em go, or I’ll throw this. Your boss, Jedidiah Wilson, will be very upset.”

There is a few-second standoff as Isaac weighs his options. He is shocked to hear his boss’s name spoken. No one, not even Hank, would dare mention his name. They would only refer to him as ‘the company’ or ‘my boss.’ Isaac wonders how much this pain-in-the-butt brat might know. How did he know it, and whom did he tell?

Then, before anyone else could make a move, Austin’s face loses all color, and his eyes roll back as he starts to collapse. Sam sees that Austin is about to pass out and jumps up to get him. Victoria sees what is happening and runs to the door to help Austin. Isaac, recognizing that Austin is about to lose the satchel, races over to get it.

Lewis is focused on the activity at the cargo door and doesn’t notice Hawkins standing behind him. Lewis has his pistol aimed toward the commotion, looking to make a shot, but as they tussle, Isaac keeps getting in the way, preventing Lewis from shooting.

Hawkins hits Lewis over the head with an empty ten-gallon milk jug. Lewis is knocked to the floor, dropping his gun. Lewis is now convinced that he is dealing with ghosts. He clearly shot Hawkins, at close range, in the back two times with his pocket pistol. There’s no way to get back up after that.

While Lewis is lost in thoughts of ghosts, Hawkins grabs his gun and pins him to the floor.

Austin falls backward out the cargo door as Sam jumps for him. They both fly off the train.

While falling, Sam grabs Austin and holds him tightly in a bear hug to protect him from the impending trauma he expects when they hit the ground.

Victoria sees them fly off the train. Then, a tree blocks her vision for a split second, and she doesn't see where they landed.

Isaac grabbed the satchel from Austin but was knocked into the door opening by Sam. He is hanging on to the door with one hand, trying not to fall off the train, and holding the satchel with the other hand.

The train whistle sounds. Victoria knows the tunnel is just ahead. She looks around to solidify her bearings. Soon, the car will become pitch black.

Victoria grabs the satchel and pulls it into the train car. Isaac gets pulled back into the train car, too. Thinking she accidentally rescued him, Isaac regains his balance, smiles at Victoria, and relaxes at the door, once again having the upper hand and two fewer people to throw from the train.

The train whistle blows again. The whistle sound changes as the engine enters the tunnel. Victoria is still holding onto the satchel. She pulls the satchel toward her and freezes, coldly staring Isaac in the eyes. Then, with all her might, she pushes Isaac away and kicks his ribs while releasing the satchel, sending Isaac out the door just before the train car enters the tunnel. The car becomes dark. Victoria falls to the floor and cries.

When the train comes out of the tunnel and daylight illuminates the car, Hawkins takes the cuffs from Lewis's pocket and cuffs him to one of the tie-downs in the baggage car without a word. He then walks over to Victoria, helps her up, and walks her back to her cabin.

[Missing Persons]

Victoria and Hawkins are standing on the platform of the Placerville train station. Lewis is in the custody of the Placerville marshal, standing a few feet away. Hawkins hands the satchel, Austin's knife, and the letter from Sam's cabin to Victoria.

"I'm sorry, Victoria," Hawkins solemnly says. "This is all they were able to recover. There was no sign of Sam or Peter, and we never found CJ or Tylor. I must say, it's a bit strange. We both saw Captain Reynolds and Peter fall off at Webber's crossing, but there was absolutely no sign of them. The snow was undisturbed: Not even a footprint. The pocket knife was found on top of the snow in the middle of the trail. Even falling just a couple of feet, it should have been buried deep in the snow. Isaac, or what was left of him, was easy to find at the tunnel entrance." Lewis is close enough to hear the conversation. Upon hearing the description of Isaac, he shivers at the image his mind presents him with.

Victoria sits on a bench and begins to sob. Sheriff Hawkins continues, "I am truly sorry. We'll get a larger search party together in the morning and try again."

“No,” Victoria replies. “If they weren’t where we saw them fall, they went somewhere they can’t be found. I’m pretty sure I know where they are, or at least where they will be. I will let you know if I’m wrong.”

Hawkins is a bit surprised by her comment but presses for a final question. “One more thing, Miss Creighton, I saw that the transfer papers were signed, but I hope you don’t mind me asking. Why did you sign it, Jane Blackwell?”

Victoria sniffles, “I knew Isaac was going to kill us anyway. There was no way I would give that bastard the satisfaction of my actual signature.” She then looks up and glares at Lewis, coldly stating, “You know that as soon as Sam’s men hear about what happened, they’ll come after you. You’ll never see them until you take your last breath.”

Victoria stands, and using her knuckle, she punches Lewis in the forehead, leaving a red spot. She laughs at him: “Now they know where to aim.”