

CHAPTER 1

The brownstone mansion sat ten miles from Philadelphia. It was perched on a knoll surrounded by cold, leafless trees. The snow falling in the frigid night was thick and wet. The orange window light emanating from the second-story window broke the blackness like a beacon.

A brooding man was humped over a teakwood desk. His hair was auburn brown. His eyes were deep blue and intense. His mustache was neat and trimmed, edged around his tight lips. He was a tall and large man. His physical carriage was military. He was former Brigadier General Frank McGrew. Behind him a roaring fire in a fireplace sent warmth and light throughout the baronial study. He leaned back from his work, laid aside his pen, and studied the names he had written. He sighed audibly, and his mouth tightened. The fact that he was a former brigadier general rankled him greatly. And how he had become *former*. His eyes moved over the desktop into the shadows of his study. His eyes were narrowed and deeply thoughtful.

Behind him on the wall hung a portrait of his late father. The painted but austere face looked vacantly over the study. His stern features were flickering in the orange-black shadows of the fire.

On the other side of the fireplace hung a portrait of Ira McGrew, the younger brother of Brigadier General Frank McGrew. It was a youthful

face filled with promise, but unfilled promise. He had been killed in 1864 at Fort Pillow in West Tennessee.

Frank McGrew's mind went back to Nashville, Tennessee, where he had stood before a board of investigation. His crimes were read before the assembled hosts of Union officers and lawyers and national newspaper reporters. He had been charged with extortion (charging citizens of certain western Tennessee counties a surcharge for protection). He had been charged with murder of both civilians and Union military personnel. He had been formally charged with brutality of Confederate prisoners. All these painful charges were true. He had just sat there listening with callous indifference.

A long line of witnesses testified, and stacks of irrefutable evidence were presented. His guilt was obvious. Levi Brown (not present), the leading officer in charge of military crimes and malfeasance, had an ironclad case against him. It seemed that there was no way he would be found innocent of the charges.

McGrew had sat there with a smirk of disdain on his face. His contempt was hardly masked. His lips had curled nastily when he'd heard the damning testimony from men in his hire that he had considered trustworthy.

The five officers behind the long desk covered in red, white, and blue bunting seemed uneasy. The stentorian words of the adjutant from the provost marshal's office seemed to punctuate each crime and offense with a crisp condemnation. He could remember gasps followed by deathly silence. He knew his wife, Camille, was listening from the back. She had probably feigned shock and sorrow, but she had lived well on the profit of his crimes. He had plans to either kill or divorce her depending on his mood. She was merely a warm body without a brain, and he had grown tired of her.

The five officers refrained from eye contact with him while the charges were read. Two of them, accompanied by many willing and nubile lassies, had been at his West Nashville mansion on many occasions enjoying his food and drink. These lavish parties had been financed at the expense of the rebels of West Tennessee. It had not entered their minds back then, but now they were acutely aware of their hypocrisy.

They were uneasy for other reasons also. McGrew had been a war hero. He had charged up Lookout Mountain brandishing a sword and an army

Colt. He had killed a Confederate colonel in hand-to-hand combat. He had withstood the whistling Minié balls as they zipped around his body like angry hornets. He had led his men up the sharp incline into the teeth of the Confederate batteries. He, in fact, had turned the battle around and was lionized all along the Western Theater.

The officers were also well aware that his brother had been killed at the hands of Forrest's men at Fort Pillow. That particular battle was stuck in the craw of many Union men, both soldiers and politicians. Several on the board held the same contempt and hatred for the men in gray who had committed this tragedy.

The five men also were aware that Frank McGrew's father was rich and powerful, owning newspapers, iron foundries, and heavy interests in the fledging railroads. Any unfavorable decision on their part could impact their futures forever. They were walking a fine line between meting out justice and expediency.

Last, the Battle of Nashville had just been fought. The mangy Confederates had been thoroughly routed but not before they had killed a number of the board's acquaintances and friends.

Frank steepled his hands and allowed his eyes to narrow, muted some in the orange light. Letting his mind go back in time once again, he could still see the five men bunched together with the provost marshal and his father's handpicked attorney. They had adjourned after an hour of back and forth disputations.

Later he was called into the back room to meet with the five officers, his determined lawyer, and the indignant provost marshal. He remembered his lawyer coming to him and whispering in his ear to accept the proposal. He had frowned begrudgingly at the words but nodded. He knew the board of investigation could hand out the death warrant if they were so determined.

The board had recommended that he resign his commission and leave with no marks against his career. The murder charges against him for the death of the Union prisoner patrol in Central Kentucky would be dropped, and new charges would be made against a man known as the Kentucky Squirrel. The other accusations against him would be suspended due to a lack of evidence. He knew the evidence was there, but he knew his lawyer had done a remarkable job. The documentation against him had been

heavy. After agreeing to the terms, Frank had smiled his contemptuous smile at each officer. They avoided his scornful expression. After he had accepted their decision, he and his lawyer had immediately departed Nashville before there was any backlash to the decision. His father was ill and was awaiting his arrival. He did not notify his wife or anyone else but left town at dawn on the train to Chattanooga.

There had been an immediate backlash, but it came days later. Levi Brown, the brigadier general who was directly responsible for this military hearing, was livid when he heard what the board had ruled. He stomped around his Washington office in an angry tirade and fired off several telegrams warning the individuals involved in the arrest and capture of Frank McGrew to be on watch for their lives. He knew that Frank McGrew would not let the matter rest. He then thought of John Lee Johnson back in Texas enjoying domesticity with his wife. He hated to warn him of his immediate danger and destroy his merited rest, but he had no choice.

Frank had no way of knowing the heated vigilance of his nemesis, the dogged Levi Brown. But even if he had known, it would not have deterred his intent on seeking revenge on the list of names before him. He began circling with a red pen the ones with high priority. He paused and let his eyes move as though they were looking behind at his father's portrait. His father had died a little each day when Ira was killed, and he died shortly after Frank returned home after the trial. His father had taught him about loyalty. His father had also instructed him about retribution. Frank was determined to kill each man who had been involved in his downfall. His eyes immediately went to the top of the list. There in bold letters he had written "John Lee Johnson." Beneath his name were many others, but the name of the big Texan seemed to hold his attention.

At that moment, Frank suddenly thought of Levi Brown. He knew his ever-present adversary would be irritatingly snooping around his bank records and activities, but he calculated in time to bring him down too when the opportunity came. He sighed as he leaned back in his chair and dipped the nib of his pen again in the ink bottle. A deep, feral smile spread across his handsome features. He would come calling on Brigadier General Levi Brown, only after he destroyed John Lee Johnson. He was determined to kill them both. But most of all he wanted the big Texan to be killed. He would get around to Levi all in good time. The confidence and hatred in

his eyes burned as he placed his pen to the parchment again. The scratchy sounds seemed to work in concert with his mind as he made his plans.

He had already assembled his old gang, and they were ready to act on his justice—McGrew justice. He had a sizable war chest and intended to empty it if necessary to pursue each and every individual on the list. He would show the world that you did not mess with Frank McGrew. He would kill them all, including his faithless and vapid wife. He then would pursue John Lee Johnson as his final prize.

He laid his pen aside and looked over at the snow whipping against the glass panes. He could see his orange reflection fed by the coruscating fire behind him. He liked his image. He was handsome and powerful and rich. He had it all except for one thing—he wanted satisfaction in deadly revenge. Everyone who had betrayed him or who had thwarted his efforts in any manner was earmarked to die. He was determined to mete out his brand of justice to all, from those who had done the smallest deeds against him to those who had committed the greatest offenses. What his unsuspecting victims hardly knew was that the wheels were already in motion.

THREE DAYS LATER AND MILES AWAY, in Providence, Rhode Island, Jesse Baugh, who had taken on the guise of a dimwit in order to bring down Frank McGrew, now stood shaking the hand of the president of Brown College. He had just accepted the job as head of the Thespian Department and had signed on to teach Greek and Roman mythology.

The president and two dowdy board members raised glasses of champagne and nodded their approval at their recent hire. They made small talk, and Jesse, seeing the hour was late, made his good-byes. He cheerfully shut the door behind himself and made his way down the creaky wooden hallway to the even creakier wooden steps that would take him to ground level and out the door into the cold air. He felt good. He would go to his apartment, and the next day he would telegraph his brother to inform him about his good fortune. After going down the worn limestone steps, he took a deep breath and surveyed Providence's nightlights. He liked New England and especially this city. He started to take his first step when a dark form appeared from the shadows. The man asked for a match. Jesse strained to take in the stranger's face as he warily reached into his vest

pocket for a match. As his fingers found a match, he heard the metallic sound of a Derringer being cocked. He stood transfixed as he saw the two dark bores of the pistol aimed at him. He saw two orange flashes, and he felt the pain and collapsed on the cold walkway.

The next morning, his brother, Chuck Baugh, a burly man with blond features, rose from his bed in his hotel on Church Street in Nashville, Tennessee. He sat on the edge of the bed readying for another day. He had no knowledge that his brother had been killed in Rhode Island. The telegram sent to him was still in the officers' mess hall, pigeonholed in his mail slot in the wooden frame on the wall. He, along with his brother, had been instrumental in arresting Frank McGrew in central Kentucky. Chuck had helped in wresting the recalcitrant McGrew to the ground, all the while enduring his endless tirade of anger and threats. Like his brother, he figured the rogue general had reached the end of the line. He had no idea of how wrong he was.

He stood and stretched and was reaching for his pants, which were draped over the end of the bed. He heard a quiet knock on the door—the kind of knock that was apologetic and not really wanting to bother. At first, he thought it was his imagination, and he shook it off and pulled on his pants. He heard the knock again, and it was more insistent. He frowned as he took his pocket watch from the near washbasin and checked the time. It was five fifty-six. He frowned and said, “Who is it?”

A muffled voice stated that he was from Fort Negley and had a message for him. Chuck sighed and said, “Just a moment.” He put on his shirt and shoulder holster and opened the door. Standing there were two men with .44s aimed at him. The stocky man in front pushed him back and pulled his weapon from his shoulder holster. They entered the room quietly, and then the taller man behind went to the window and pushed the curtains together. Chuck watched them warily as the taller man searched the room while his shorter comrade held the silver-plated pistol toward Chuck's head. The taller one shook his head, apparently not finding what he was searching for.

Chuck watched in morbid fascination as the taller one took off his coat and reversed it. He then placed on a stage actor's mustache and smoothed it out. He then pulled out his weapon and guarded Chuck while his short