

A Fast Gun Named Jesse

By : Cherie Arlavine

Jesse is a man, and he had plans to be on his own after moving with his sister Lucy and her husband Jeff. Jesse was known as a fast gun, was a feared man to those who knew him, and was respected by those who loved him. How could one girl change his whole life? When Jesse spots Jenny at the first town meet, he knows he's expected to watch her, to take care of her. And God help him if he didn't. Since her father and her brothers had gone to fight the Yankees, Jenny was on her own at an early age and at sixteen still farmed her land, hardly making enough money to live. Jesse had dreams of moving to Tennessee after helping his sister and his brother-in-law settle down. And he knows Jenny could stand in the way. But maybe Tennessee just wasn't too important anymore. But things aren't as simple as Jesse's distraught emotions for Jenny. At that same town meet, he learns Yankees are heading their way, and this particular group is known for stealing food and money, raping innocent women, and burning down houses. It would be better for him to move on while he can. But a real man won't leave his sister and a poor girl alone. And Jesse is a real man.



Published on
Booksie

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Chapter 1: The Town Meet

Jeff Campbell, his wife Lucy and her younger brother Jesse were new to town. They'd just gotten married then moved to Indian territory, but just on the border, away from most tribes. It had been a long journey from California, and they had Indians to avoid the whole time. Jesse had already almost lost his scalp. If it weren't for Jesse's fast gun they'd probably all be dead.

Jeff and his brother were at their first town meeting. The man of every house was supposed to come. Jeff had forgotten that some houses were out of men to run it. Mrs. Taylor was a widow, and her only son was eight. Not quite old enough to be the man of the house, though he was here with his mother, learning the trade so it seemed. They had come for their fatherless family. She had six more daughters at home. And her son Samuel was the oldest.

And Jenny Land, she was young, only sixteen. Her father was young too. He and her brothers had gone to fight with the rebels. Word had come around that all three were dead. The girl was left to farm and work the house by herself. She had no blood family here. Her father had only just moved them here when they had to go to war. And Jenny was too busy to make friends.

There was silly folk talk that she never slept. Neighbors saw her working day and night. But tonight she was here, representing her land and her deceased family. Jenny had silver, blonde hair that was braided neatly behind her head. She wore a clean green dress and a yellow bonnet. She had clear green eyes and a small nose and full, red lips.

Talk was that she was the envy of all the young men in town. Jeff felt sorry for her. She couldn't be a pretty girl. She had to work and wouldn't really get the chance to court with other young men. He wondered what it was like for a young girl to have to take care of herself like that.

Everyone knew why the meeting had been called. Word was that soldiers were coming...Yanks. And what their intentions were was unknown. Were they here in peace or in war? The town was afraid that the Yanks were vengeful. War had been hard around these parts. Jeff hoped he wouldn't have to move again.

War was the reason they had to move from California. Even though the war wasn't as strong there, it was still dangerous. It wasn't the war about the states, but about land. A gang was riding and burning houses and claiming the lands for their own. There was rumors that James Carter Mitchell was behind it. He'd been trying to buy the lands for years.

A few men wandered over to Jeff and introduced themselves. Jesse joined them shortly. Jeff introduced his brother and the men grinned.

"Is there a reason you men are all smiling so big?" Jesse asked.

"Yeah, talk is that the pastor likes you." Mr. Darkens said, the men chuckled at the comment.

"Well I do reckon that is something to grin about. I suppose it is a mighty fine thing that a man of God thinks I'm a good man." he replied.

"Son, it's more than that. When Jenny was fifteen and her Pops and brothers left, well the pastor done took it on himself to find her a good husband. You're only a few years older, and the pastor only has you and Markey to choose from. Well, let's face it, Markey just ain't a good match fer Jenny cause of his temper." Mr. Darkens explained.

"Well, Jenny sure is a lovely lady, but I won't be staying long. I'm not lookin' for a wife just yet. I plan to move on to Tennessee once my sister and her faithful husband get settled down."

"That's just too bad. That girl works so hard. She deserves a man to help her run the farm."

"Well there ain't no reason you can't help Jenny before you move to Tennessee. Your sister would think mighty high of you for it." Jeff said.

"I think that's up to Jenny. She probably don't like to be imposed on." Jesse muttered.

"It's like he already knows her." Danny Saul teased. "She don't like that the pastor is trying to marry her either. I overheard her talking to Sherry, my wife, saying she didn't have time for a husband because she was too busy at night. My Sherry about fainted.

I was howling with laughter all the way home. Sherry likes to bring her food every once in the while. Something about being a good neighbor and God damning us to hell if she don't."

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Jesse laughed. "Well, I commend her for working so hard. But like I said, I'm not going to be here for long. Besides, I might have to join the war in a year. It would be a shame to put her through what she just went through."

"Amen." Mr. Darkens agreed. "But she still needs a man."

Jesse shook his head.

"Is that right Mister Darkens?" a musical voice asked. It sounded so young. "I think I'd know if I needed a man. Far as I can tell, I'm managing just fine on my own." Jenny said.

Mr. Darkens put a friendly arm around her shoulders. "I'm just worrying about ya as always."

"Oh really? I figured you were just looking for more gossip to pass on to Sherry. The whole town would be buzzin' to discover I'm getting married." she replied. She kissed him on the cheek and smiled. "I tell you what, every man I meet just wants to get me married anymore. Can't a woman work herself to the bone this day and age?"

"It's more than the work, Jenny. You need a man to protect you when those Yanks come around." Danny said.

"I do have a man for that." she replied.

"Since when?" Mr. Darkens asked.

"Since I learned how to shoot my Daddy's six gun." she replied. The men laughed.

Jesse could see how mature the girl was. Though she seemed young and her voice was young, she was a woman beneath. He wondered how much she had to face on her own. He knew a little about womanhood from his sister. He wondered if Jenny had to face those kinds of things by herself. He felt a deep pity for her.

"Well Miss Land," Jesse said and tipped his hat. "They've only said good things about you as far as I can tell." She smiled and nodded her head. "Well Mister Thomas, thank you for easing my worries. I don't think I could bear having folk talk bad about me." she said then grinned.

"All right folks, let's get settled down and start this meeting." Doctor James said. He was the one who held the town meetings and called them to order.

The crowd got settled down and Doc took his place at the front of the church. Jesse was suddenly taken with Miss Jenny Land. He'd never met another woman like her. His sister had a similar spirit, but not quite the same. Jenny was used to being the man of her house.

She acted like she was just another cowboy making a hard day's pay. It intrigued Jesse more than he liked. He didn't want to grow attached to anyone, especially not a girl. He was young and not ready to settle down. Yet, he was already falling for the stranger. Jesse shook his head and looked over at Jeff to see him grinning.

"What?" Jesse asked.

"You like her, that's what." he replied. "Can't wait to tell Lucy. We should invite her over for dinner. We are her new neighbors after all."

Jesse shook his head. "Brother, I think you're going to fit into this town after all. You're already trying to find her a husband."

"No, brother, I'm trying to find you a wife." Jeff replied. "Think how happy your sister would be with me if I did just that."

"Trying to kick me out, Jeff?"

"Something like that. Your sister and I never did get to go on a honeymoon." he murmured.

Jesse laughed as the Doc called the meeting to begin. "I think we all know why we're here." he started. "The Yanks are coming this way and the paper says they're burning houses and raping women." All eyes flew to Jenny and Mrs. Taylor then flickered back to Doc. "They're killing innocent men and stealing food. They're claiming the third amendment." he sighed.

"What does the third amendment have to do with burning houses and killing men?" Gregory Smith yelled.

"Nothing." The Doc replied. "They're grasping at straws, trying to justify what they're doing. It's war, and the Yanks are reminding us of that. Either we pack up and leave or we fight. There's not much choice." he sighed.

"Then we fight." Jenny said. "If any of my family is still alive I'm not letting them come home to Yankees. I'm willing to fight. I can kill a man. I can bury him too." she said.

Jesse looked at her, amazed. That's it, he was in love.

"Jenny, no one expects you to fight." Doc said.

"My father would. He wouldn't have taught me to shoot otherwise." she said, her chin up.

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"We haven't decided yet, Jenny." he reminded.

His eyes flew to Jesse and the other eyes followed his. Jesse sighed. He'd already known it was him who was expected to protect Jenny. He was, after all, her new neighbor. He realized somewhere in his mind he'd already decided that for himself. Jenny was his new responsibility. Great.

He wondered if he could teach Jeff how to fast gun. It would come in handy when the Yanks came around, and there would be war in town. He'd do that too.

Maybe even teach Jenny how to fast gun. Though women weren't usually good at that type of thing. Jeff put a hand on his shoulder knowingly. He was reminding him not to worry so much. Jesse was famous for that. He pursed his lips.

"I'm not leaving my land." Mr. Darkens said. "I'm going to fight, and I'd like to get those Yankees before they have the chance to burn down my home. I say we take them out as soon as they set foot in town."

"I suppose we don't have much choice. We have about three days to plan for the Yanks. Any man who can fight is welcome to help." Doc held up a hand before Jenny could open her mouth. "You know what I mean Jenny. You're welcome to help, but you really should stay home."

"You need all the help you can get. In fact, do you have any idea how many Yanks are coming?" she asked.

"How many are we up against?"

"We're not sure. At least seventy."

"I'll ride out to the Yanks as a spy and find out the numbers. If I ride hard I should be able to make it back in time and give you a good estimate."

"No." Jesse said. He stood. "I'll go. If a spy is captured they'll be hanged the next morning. A woman will be raped too. It's too dangerous."

Jenny stood. "Just because I'm a woman-"

"Because you are a woman no man will take you seriously. We know you, because we're your town. But to soldiers you're just a girl. I'll go." Jesse said.

"I can do this!" Jenny argued.

He glared at her. "Sit down." he snapped. God, women tested his nerves.

He and Jenny glared at each other for a moment. Finally, she slowly sat down and crossed her arms.

"I'll go." he repeated. "And I'll fight when I come back."

Jeff stood up beside him. "Where we come from Jesse was known as a fast gun. He can draw and fire in under one second."

The men laughed. "That's impossible." one of the men sputtered. He was a big, burly man, and looked pretty cocky.

"I'm not here to prove anything. Just know I can shoot and I'll fight." Jesse said.

"Any man who can stand up to Jenny is a fighter in my book." Doc said and the men erupted in laughter.

Jesse looked at Jenny and tipped his hat. "I apologize. But maybe you'd better remember you are a woman and that if you're father and brothers return they'd like to find you here alive and unharmed." he said then sat down. He wasn't in the mood to fight with a woman. A girl too, he reminded himself.

Chapter 2: Dinner

It was decided that Jesse and Danny would ride out to discover numbers and the rest of the men would make plans for the Yanks. Jesse and Danny would leave first thing in the morning. Jeff wanted to go but Jesse insisted he stay behind and keep Lucy company.

Jeff wasn't too put up with that idea. He and Lucy had barely had time to constimate their marriage. He treasured his time alone with his new bride. Besides, Jeff's strategies would come in handy for planning for the Yanks.

As Jesse and Jeff left the church, a hand caught Jesse's arm. "Mister Thomas. I'm coming with you and Danny." Jenny said.

Jesse turned and faced her abruptly. "No." he repeated. "You go home and help find supplies for the men. You're needed here for support."

"I'm going and you can't stop me." she snapped.

"Wanna bet?" he asked.

Jeff put a hand on Jesse's arm. "Easy Jesse. Jenny, why don't you come over for dinner and we can discuss this civil and like adults. I'd like to get Jesse's gun away from him before he loses his temper."

"Yes sir. That sounds like a fine idea." Jenny replied. "I'll follow you there on my horse."

Jesse watched with a grimace on his face as Jenny walked over to her horse and swung up into the saddle with ease. "She's not going." Jesse snapped.

"I know." Jeff replied. "But let's try to talk her out of it gently so she doesn't try to follow you."

"I've never met such a stubborn woman in my life." Jesse growled. "She needs to learn a woman's place in this world."

Jeff laughed. "Oh c'mon, Jesse. You know you wouldn't like her if she was like every other woman."

"I think you've got it backwards, Jeff." he said and climbed into their wagon.

The clicking of Jenny's horse's hooves against the ground unnerved Jesse. He didn't know why but knowing she was behind them irritated and excited him at the same time. As they reached their new home Jesse hopped out of the wagon and waited for Jenny. Trying to remember his manners after snapping at her. He grabbed her by her hips and helped her down from her horse.

"Jeff, go ahead and take Jenny inside and I'll put the horses away." he said and tipped his hat to Jenny.

Jeff held out his arm for Jenny and she looped hers through his and let him lead her inside. Jesse put the horses away, washed up, and went inside the house. Lucy smiled at him. "Ah, you're just in time for prayers. Would you like to do the honors Jesse?"

"How about our guest does the honors?" Jesse asked.

"Do you mind Jenny?" Lucy asked.

"Not at all Mrs. Campbell."

"Oh, call me Lucy dear."

They all sat down and bowed their heads. "Dear Lord. Please keep the town safe when the Yanks come to visit us in a few days. Let our guns be steady and well fired. Have our men be brave. And please give Danny, Jesse, and I courage and protection when we ride out tomorrow to spy on the Yanks." Jesse looked up and glared at her. "Amen."

"I said you're not going dammit and I'll hear no more of this nonsense. You're a girl and you will stay home where you belong. And if I think you're going to follow us like and ignorant woman would do then I swear I'll hand you over to the Yanks myself. Just so we can make the process shorter." Jesse snapped. "I don't like to baby-sit and I don't intend on starting."

"You need me." she replied. "I can do what you can't to get information out of men."

"What would that be?" he growled.

"A woman's duty. That would be showing them a good time in bed."

"I'll be damned before that happens. Now the whole town is looking to me to watch out for you-"

"You just said you'd throw me to the Yanks." she reminded.

"Dammit! You're not going and I don't want to hear another damn word about this! You understand me girl?"

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"Mr. Thomas, I'd suggest you control that temper of yours. It's quite ugly." Jenny murmured. Jesse fumed.

"Sit down Jesse and eat your dinner." Lucy said calmly. "You have to quit getting so worked up all the time. It's unhealthy."

"Sorry Lucy." he replied and sat down slowly. He glared at Jenny as she placed a fork full of greens in her mouth.

"This is wonderful, Lucy." she complimented. She bit into the corn bread and chewed. After she swallowed she added, "Maybe we could bring some of this corn bread on the trip."

Jesse stabbed at his food with a fork and gritted his teeth. It was silent for a moment until she said, "I can't wait to see the look on those Yank's faces when we shoot 'em down."

"You'll be at home where it's safe." Jesse replied, his voice was one long growl.

"I'll fight." Jenny replied.

Jesse glared at her again. "I ain't afraid to take you around the side of the barn and whip you girl. You're acting like a child and you'll be treated as one around here."

"This ain't your property, boy." she snapped. "This is Mr. Campbell's land. I think it's up to him how things run around here."

Jeff nodded. "Thank you Jenny for making that clear. But Jesse is right. You're too young to fight. I know you want revenge on your family, but in the Bible God does say vengeance is his own.

And Jesse was right about our rules. You act like a child and you'll be treated as one. Guest or not. I know it sounds rude and that's why I'm giving you a warning. You are welcome to leave. But I won't stop Jesse from giving you a whipping if you deserve one while you're on this land."

Jenny looked at Jeff, measuring his patience then swallowed her corn. "Then I suppose I should be on my way." she said and stood.

"Wait!" Lucy said. "Before you go home I need you to take some corn bread and jam off my hands. I've done made enough for an entire army. Wont you help me?"

"Yes ma'am."

Lucy began to stand.

"Ladies," Jeff sighed. "Why don't you finish your dinner? It will only take a few moments and that way you don't have to come back to a cold dinner."

"That sounds like a good idea Jeff." Lucy said and sat down.

"If it's all the same Mr. Campbell, I think I should be going. There's always work to be done and I've wasted enough of my night. I'll take the jam and bread off your hands tomorrow Lucy."

"I'll escort you home." Jesse said and stood.

Jenny nodded and looked at Lucy and Jeff then smiled. "It was nice meeting the two of you."

Lucy stood and hugged her. "As well, Jenny. I hope to see you again soon."

"As well." Jenny replied.

Jesse rode beside Jenny, carrying the basket Lucy had hastily put together before they left. It was silent between the two of them.

Jenny sighed. "This weather has been dry. My crops are failing. I've tried irrigating them but it's a lot of work and I think it's going to be a long, penniless year ahead." she explained.

"It's a lot of work for one person." Jesse agreed. "We'd be happy to help you out any time you need it."

Like any stubborn, self independent person would, Jenny stuck her chin in the air and replied, "I think I'll do alright on my own thank you."

Jesse shook his head. "You are one stubborn woman aren't you?"

"I have to be." she replied. "I'd like to hire some women to come stay and help me farm, but there aren't any near by and I don't really have the money. And of course I can't hire men on. The rumors that would go around I can only imagine. I don't usually care what people say about me but I do have my pride."

Jesse was thoughtful. "Well, I think I do have a solution to your problem." he said.

"What would that be?" she asked. "You got a magic wand on you?"

"No ma'am, but I got two hands. Now the thing is, you live a little ways off from us. It would be a long ride to

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make every day. But then the rumors about me coming over with you and being alone would affect your pride, am I right?"

"Yes. I'm not seeing your solution." she murmured.

"Well, you need someone to help you farm, and Jeff and Lucy want to be on their own, though they'd never admit it. I say we get married. That way no one can gossip about your womanhood."

Jenny snorted. "Why would I marry the likes of you?" she asked.

He huffed out a breath. "I just told ya why. I'm not sayin' we're gonna sleep together and such. Just get married for a while until I move on to Tennessee."

She was quiet for a long moment. "I see. Though I hate to admit it, it makes sense and I need the help. But what if the Yanks take over the town?" she asked.

Jesse looked at her. "You really believe they will?"

"No, I suppose not. But with all the chaos that will be going on when do you propose we get married?"

"Well, I reckon it's about seven ain't it?"

"About." she replied.

"We're not far from the house. I say we head back, tell Lucy and Jeff our plans, and have them ride into town with us to be witnesses. We'll get married tonight then handle everything else. If we get the ceremony out of the way we can worry about other stuff instead. It just makes sense."

"I suppose it does." she replied. "It sounds alright to me. Let's be going then."

They turned the horses around and headed back to the house.

Jeff was sitting on the porch when they returned, smoking a pipe. "Jenny, did you forget something?" He asked.

Chapter 3: The Marriage

The ceremony was short, quick, and to the point. Jeff and Lucy had objected to the idea a little at first, but then decided it wasn't so bad when Jesse and Jenny explained their reasoning.

Lucy even insisted that Jenny wear her veil. Jenny explained that it wasn't really a wedding, but Lucy, being the woman she was, still insisted until Jenny said yes.

Jesse had kissed her on the cheek when the preacher pronounced them married though.

Jesse and Jenny had decided to go straight home and being as late as it was Jeff and Lucy said goodnight then went their separate ways. As Jesse arrived at the house he'd never seen, he lifted Jenny down from the wagon.

"You said you know how to shoot a six gun?" Jesse asked.

"I'm not too bad a shot." she replied.

"While I'm gone you'll be staying with Jeff and Lucy. In case any Yanks come along I think you should be able to shoot. Jeff isn't too bad a shot, and Lucy can shoot a can from six feet away, but I want to make sure my...that you can shoot."

"Making sure your wife can defend herself isn't a crime." Jenny agreed. "I can shoot a can from about ten feet. That's the best I got."

"Here," Jesse pulled out his gun and put it in her hands. He then turned her to face a scarecrow she had put up a while back. "Shoot him in the heart."

The scarecrow was about thirty feet away. Jenny bit her lip but raised the gun and aimed.

She missed by at least six inches.

Jesse licked his lips then stepped behind her. He took her small hands in his then aimed the gun. "You're afraid of the gun. But this gun ain't gonna hurt you unless you turn it on yourself." he murmured, his lips at her ear. Jenny's breath caught slightly. He didn't know why. "When you're shootin' all you need to worry about is winning. Now raise your arms, close one eye if you need to, and win. You control the gun. It's only a piece of metal without you." He pressed her finger down on the trigger and the bullet went through the center of the chest. "You see?"

Jenny nodded. "I see. Alright, let me try." She raised the gun for the third time and shot it. The bullet went right through the chest again. She grinned. "Not too bad don't ya say?"

Jesse smiled. "Not too bad at all. Well, I gotta get an early start in the morning. I say we get to bed."

"Yeah, I suppose it is getting late." Jenny sighed. "It all starts tomorrow doesn't it?"

"Sure does." He replied. "Let's get some sleep. And don't worry, I think things will turn out for the better in the end."

Jenny couldn't believe herself, but nor could she help herself. She sat up in the small cabin and cried. She'd quietly made herself some tea to ease the nerves, but it didn't help much.

She had tried to be strong, and she was sure she fooled everyone else. But deep inside, she was terrified. It was unnerving to think of the Yanks coming to town. A tear fell into her tea.

"Oh Bloody Hell." she whispered. She wiped away the tears on her cheeks and sniffled.

Jesse walked into the room then. He was shirtless and looked tired.

"Why aren't you sleeping?" He asked and yawned.

She shrugged. "I guess I'm just not tired."

He studied her and pursed his lips. "Are you scared?" he murmured.

She sighed. "I don't want to be, but I guess it's all just coming on at once. I can be strong, but I can be a cry baby too." she whispered. She rubbed her eyes. "I'd better try to get to sleep or I'll never get up in the morning."

"Good night." Jesse whispered then watched her go into her room. Then he went back into his own room.

Jesse fell asleep after a while but was awoken when he heard Jenny sniffing. Half asleep, he got up and went to her room. "C'mon Jenny." he sighed.

"What?" she mumbled.

"Just, c'mon." he urged and took her hand. When she pulled against him he said, "Listen to your husband." in

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a firm voice.

Jenny sighed and let him lead her to his bedroom. They laid down and he put an arm around her. Then he whispered in her ear, "When I was young, I used to be afraid of thunder storms. My mother would sing to me when my father was away. I can't sing," he mused. "But it was nice to have her there to protect me. I figure it's the best I can do."

And with that Jenny wriggled closer to him and fell asleep.

Jesse packed some food and supplies then woke up Jenny to take her to Jeff's. The girl could hardly keep her eyes open. She leaned against Jesse on the way there. Jesse had noticed that there was hardly a scrap of food in the house.

After the fight with the Yanks was over he'd take Jenny into town with him so they could get some food and supplies. Jesse learned he could make a lot of money at poker when he was about fourteen.

He had a knack at it and had enough money to last him more than a life time by now. Though he didn't flaunt it. But it was how he'd always taken care of his sister when their parents were killed by Indians.

They arrived at Jeff's and Jesse ended up having to carry Jenny into the house she was so exhausted. Lucy told him to put her in his old room. She was kind of cute, Jesse mused.

Lucy had teared up a bit before he left and insisted that he take some food with him though he already had more than enough. Then Jesse was off on his way.

He met Danny in the middle of town. "Good morning," he said.

"Same to you." Danny replied. "How was your night?"

"Long." Jesse replied. "I'll tell you all about it on the way there. But we'd better get riding. We don't have much time left.

"I know. I heard the number of Yanks doubled."

"Damn." Jesse sighed. "Well I suppose there's only one way to know for sure."

Lucy decided Jenny had slept long enough and strolled into the bedroom to wake her new sister-in-law. "Up and at 'em Jenny..." She saw Jenny wasn't there. "Jenny?" she called. She didn't see her come through the livingroom. She would have heard her. She checked the entire cabin and couldn't find the girl. "Jenny, are you here?"

Then she saw a note on the table. It was from Jenny. She read over it and her eyes widened. "Jeff!" she called. "Jenny's gone after them!"

Chapter 4: Honeymoon

They were being followed. Jesse could feel it. He knew the tingling on his back meant they were being followed. He rested his hand on the but of his gun.

"You and Jenny huh?" Danny was saying. "I mean, I figured the two of you were gonna get hitched, but not so fast."

"It's just so I can help her with the farm. A girl doesn't need to be alone so much. And if we weren't wed and I came over all the time...well, you know how rumors spread and she was worried about her pride and such. Do you feel that?" Jesse asked.

"What, that we're being followed? Of course I do. I ain't stupid." Danny replied lightly, not sounding offended, just stating a fact.

"I didn't think you were Danny. I say we jump on them. It's probably a Yank."

"No, I think a Yank would be more sneaky. Maybe an outlaw or Indian."

"No, you've got it backwards. I've played with Indians and outlaws. They know how to be quiet, it's their job. Yanks are cocky. Let's ambush him. I think it's only one. He's probably young, thought he could sneak up on us.

The idiot. Going off by himself. Who the hell is training these soldiers? Let's hide out and wait for him."

"Can't wait." Danny said and grinned.

They pulled their horses to the side and wiped away foot and hoof prints then waited. A few minutes later they heard another horse's feet beating in the ground and Danny and Jesse drew their guns. Danny peeked his head out behind the boulder they were hiding behind, then began laughing.

"What the hell are you doing?" Jesse whispered.

"I don't think we're in much danger. And I know when to step out of issues. Looks like this is about to become a hassle between a man and his wife."

"What?" Jesse hissed and looked at the rider and saw Jenny, her face covered in sweat, trying to figure out what happened. She had a rifle in her saddle bag and a canteen around her neck, which she opened and drank from.

"Dammit Jenny!" Jesse shouted.

Jenny's eyes widened and she choked on the water. Jesse shoved his gun back in the holster and stomped over to her then pulled her abruptly off her horse. He made her face him to yell at her but she was still coughing. He gritted his teeth and patted her back, with a little more force than necessary, until she calmed down. When she stopped coughing he grabbed her arms and shook her. "What the hell do you think you're doing girl? I told you to stay with Jeff!" he roared.

"This is my war too. It was my idea to ride out here in the first place." she yelled back.

Jesse gritted his teeth and felt the urge to give her a good whipping. He might have if he weren't pressed for time. He couldn't send her home, the Yanks would be close on her tail and he couldn't risk it.

But he'd definitely teach her a lesson about disobeying him later. Didn't she realize he was only worried about her safety? If he'd thought she could do the job he wouldn't have objected as much.

But she was only sixteen and could hardly shoot. He knew she didn't have the skills to protect herself.

"Get on your horse, Jenny. But you better understand now. You do what I say, when I say it and if I hear any back talk there will be hell to pay. You understand?" he asked then shook her again, harder this time to show he wasn't joking.

She gritted her teeth then hissed, "Yes sir."

He grabbed her by the hips and lifted her onto the horse, doing it purposely because he knew how much she hated to be manhandled. He sat her in the saddle and grabbed the reins for her. She snatched them away when he offered them.

"Jenny, I want you-" when she wouldn't look at him he grabbed her jaw and yanked her face toward him so she was looking at him. "I want you to stay between me and Danny. And don't do anything stupid. You listen to us and if you disobey, so help me God."

"I ain't scared of you." she snapped and tried to look away again.

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He snatched her face back and looked her dead in the eye. "I ain't given you a reason to be scared of me yet. But I'll put the chill in your bones if you do anything other than what I say. You don't ride without permission, you don't talk without permission, you don't eat without permission and you don't even piss without permission. You understand?" he asked, his voice hard.

Jenny had never had a man speak to her that way, and though her temper told her to snap back at him, her fear told her to just do what she was told. "Yes."

"What was that?" he asked and tightened his grip on her chin and deepened his stare, like her father used to do when she didn't answer correctly.

"Yes sir." she replied.

"That's what I thought." He let go of her jaw and walked over to his horse and swung on. "Let's ride." he said to Danny.

Danny talked on and Jesse responded at times while Jenny was silent, and angry as hell. How dare he speak to her that way? What gave him the right...

She huffed out a breath in remembering that he was her husband, if only temporarily, and at the moment he had every right. But he just didn't understand why she needed to do this. She had to have her revenge.

She had to make up for her father and her brothers' lives.

They'd gone to fight for the south and the Yanks had demolished them. Jenny didn't believe in slavery, but she believed in war. In the beginning she had understood the Yanks and why they waged war.

The only reason her family fought against them was to defend their land. And soon afterward the Yanks had gone from being right in her mind to being murderers. And she had to have her vengeance.

She wouldn't rest until she had.

"So how many would you think there is?" Danny asked. "The paper likes to exaggerate you know. Maybe there ain't nearly as many as we imagine."

"Maybe." Jesse agreed. "And maybe not. We just won't know until we get there."

"What should we do with Jenny?" he asked.

"Hell if I know. I suppose we'll have to tie her up." Jenny opened her mouth. He held out a hand. "Say anything and you'll regret it." he snapped.

She exhaled sharply then clamped her teeth together. She knew Jesse would have no problem with bending her over his knee and whipping her, and she would not be humiliated like that. At least not in front of Danny. So she remained silent and clung to the dignity she had left. Besides, she wouldn't appreciate the pain either. One look at his calloused and strong hands had her nearly shuddering. And she did shudder when she glanced down at his waist and saw the thick leather belt wrapped around him. Ouch.

She chewed on the inside of her cheek and listened to the two men discuss battle strategies. She could see Danny waiting for her to jump in or start screaming. And she could see the amusement in his eyes at knowing that Jesse had shut her up.

And that just really ticked her off.

She had an itch to grab her rifle and blow a hole through Jesse's leg. But she wasn't anywhere near fast enough to manage that. So she sat in the saddle quietly and dreamed of different ways to torture Jesse.

Her dreams were interrupted when she heard Jesse and Danny venture back to the subject of what they were going to do with her. Tie her up, knock her out, strip her down and push her into a cave where she'd have to hide because she wouldn't go out into the daylight in her bloomers.

They didn't know her very well then. It didn't matter what the Yanks saw. They would be dead seconds later anyway. Jenny listened and grinded her teeth. Their imaginations went wild and she knew now they were only trying to irritate her.

And that just wasn't fair.

Her hands itched to grab the gun and show them a thing or two. But again she reminded her self that was impossible. And she wouldn't shoot a man unless he was a... Yankee.

Her eyes widened. "Jesse-"

"Didn't I tell you not to speak?" he snapped. And pulled on the reins and stopped the horse to glare at her, to her relief.

A Fast Gun Named Jesse

She lifted her hand and pointed ahead. "Yankees."

Jesse looked where she pointed, and his heart pattered. The Yanks were much closer than he thought. It should have taken them at least a day and a half to reach them. It was only noon.

They were camped. They were planning an attack, being camped so close to town. Oh hell. He looked at Danny and saw the fear in his eyes, thinking the same thing he was.

Jenny stared ahead and Jesse saw her hands tighten on the reins. "Not yet." he warned her. "Not yet. Look Jenny, we may need your help. But if you go now and they catch you they're going to move. And every one who dies today because the town wasn't warned will be on your hands.

There was a cave back there. We'll make camp, and tonight we'll sneak into the camp and find out when they plan to move and what their strategies are. They're not going to think much of us because they're bigger and they have trained soldiers.

We have an upper hand in surprise. You go now and you ruin that. And you may never have your revenge."

Jenny's grip loosened and Jesse sighed with relief. Then they rode back to make camp.

Chapter 5: Family Feud

Jesse slept with Jenny under his arm, for precautionary reasons. He knew well that Jenny was likely to try to sneak away while he slept. Danny was keeping watch while they napped, resting for later in the evening. The plans were set and they would be ready to go when they awoke. Jesse was shirtless but his gun still rested beside his hip, on the opposite side of Jenny. The belt was a bit uncomfortable, but it would be much less comfortable to be caught in fire and not be able to pull out his gun if need be.

Jenny began to move slowly under his arm, as if trying not to wake him. He was this close to strangling the girl. "Jenny, rest now or you ain't gonna go with us." he snapped.

She huffed out a breath through her nostrils then turned over onto her back and stared at the ceiling of the cave. He opened his eyes and smiled at her defiant face. He slowly propped himself up on his elbow so he was leaning over her.

Quickly, she averted her eyes, afraid she'd stare at his broad chest instead of his face and give him all the more satisfaction. So she stared at the wall of the cave. He gently cupped her jaw with his hand and turned her head like he'd done earlier. "You need to be well rested for tonight Jenny. This is your one chance to have your revenge. Your chance to help." he leaned his face a little bit closer. "Don't screw it up by being pigheaded and making me change my mind." He glanced over to see Danny wasn't in the cave. He leaned his head down and gently kissed her on the lips. "For luck." he whispered.

Oh, she could literally feel the blood slowly fill her cheeks and forehead as she blushed. Her green eyes were wide and Jesse grinned at the girl's face, pasted with horror.

Just to amuse himself, he leaned down and kissed her again. But this time he moved his lips against hers, and found his hand running behind her head and into her loose golden hair.

And then her hands came under his chest and she gave him one hard shove and sat up, shocked and dismayed. Her breathing was deep and rough, and only made Jesse all the more fascinated. She slapped him.

It didn't hurt, and he didn't blame her. If he were her, he might have done the same thing. As a lady.

But because he was a man, he saw the gesture as provoking, and shoved his fingers into her hair again, and pulled her face to his. And to finally teach her a lesson about disobeying him, plunged his tongue into her mouth to rile her.

She tried to push him away so he wrapped his arms around her back and pulled her close to him, and kept her locked in place. She mumbled protests and tried to get away, and he only held onto her all the more tighter.

Eventually she simply stopped, so he would stop, she told herself. Not because she liked it. She didn't like it. Just because he was her husband didn't mean she liked kissing him.

Lying to herself wasn't so hard.

And it worked. He eventually let go, grinning, and let her pull away. "Are you quite finished?" she asked between gritted teeth. "Are you done having your fun? There are more serious things going on at the moment and you choose to tease me and anger me by kissing me? And you say I am the immature one."

Man, he didn't see it coming, she'd been smart at hiding it. But her fist was suddenly smacking straight into his jaw and he tasted the blood almost immediately. He fell onto his back and his hand flew up to his mouth.

Angrily, Jenny stood and stomped toward her saddle bag as Jesse wiped the blood from his lips. She gathered her things and began stomping toward the cave entrance, when there was a gunshot. Jesse jumped up and grabbed his gun from his hip, then ran quietly until he was in front of Jenny.

He signaled for her to be quiet and edged toward the mouth of the cave. Just then Danny appeared, holding a dead rabbit and grinning. "I've got dinner."

Chapter 6: Traitors

Jesse's eyes kept flickering to Jenny. He couldn't help worrying about her. She was so young, and though she was a wise woman beneath, she could also be careless.

All three knew well which tent would hold the plans. The General. And that just twisted Jesse's stomach. There were at least a hundred men there, give or take a few, but their town was small and the numbers would be uneven. They would need good strategies to defeat them.

They snuck around to the General's tent. There were lights on inside. Though in most tents the soldiers were sleeping. After a moment Jesse heard talking and all three of them knelt down to listen.

"We'll rest in the next town for a few days then head on. There will be no fighting, no killing, no burning houses. These are good people and I won't have them bothered. I'll go with a group of men and explain. If we all go together they'll try to kill us. Trust me, these people are protective over their lands and their families." Jenny looked at Danny with big eyes, and he looked back at her with the same surprised expression. Jesse watched as the two of them had a conversation with their eyes and expressions and hands. He didn't understand most of it, but at the end he understood that Jenny was asking Danny if she should go into the tent. And saw Danny nod.

He grabbed Jenny's arm, and she pulled Jesse up with her. "It's alright." she whispered. "Danny, you might as well come with us. We have some answers to get."

"What are you doing?" Jesse hissed.

"It's alright, Jesse." Danny whispered. "They won't hurt her. She'll be fine. We all will."

"How could you know?"

"Jesse, just trust us." Danny said, sounding so sure.

"C'mon Jesse, we'll need you." Jenny said and pulled him toward the tent, with Danny following right behind them. And she walked right into the tent with no fear in her eyes, her shotgun firm in her hands.

But she didn't attempt to raise it. Danny came into the tent and she looked directly at the man with the general's stars on his shoulder. "You have some explaining to do." she explained with acid thick in her voice.

"Jenny," he whispered. "Danny. What are the two of you doing here?"

"Might ask you the same thing." Jenny said and eyed his Yankee uniform.

He stepped toward Jenny and Jesse pulled her behind him and drew his gun. The General drew his gun almost as quickly and narrowed his eyes. "Who is this?"

"It's nobody, Pa." Jenny replied and shoved Jesse's hand down then stepped in front of him to confront the man. "I thought you were dead."

And now Jesse understood, but felt the shock rip through him. "Pa?" he asked. He was staring at his father-in-law?

"Yeah, this is my Pa. Or his ghost." she replied and Jesse saw her grip tighten on the shotgun.

Two more men suddenly entered the tent, guns drawn. "General, is everything alright in here?" One of them asked. Jesse saw they both looked like Jenny.

"Well, it looks like there's three ghosts haunting this army. Oh and look, they're both Captains, Danny. Although I remember quite clearly that when they left town they were fighting for the Rebels." Jenny said, the acid only growing in her voice.

They both turned and stared at her, their eyes wide. "Jenny?" they asked in unison.

"I am glad I don't carry the Land name anymore. It's been poisoned and I would be ashamed to have it." she spat. "My own family, traitors."

Despite her words, both of the men wrapped their arms around Jenny until she shoved them away using her gun. Jesse then took the gun before she got the nerve to shoot her own kin. Jenny was too busy glaring at her family to turn and glare at her husband.

Danny put a hand on her shoulder. "Jenny, maybe we should just go home. You've got crops to take care of and you know Jeff and Lucy are probably worried sick about you."

Jenny realized Danny was giving her a way out if she wanted it. But she still had something to say. "You're right, Danny. But before we do I just want to tell the three of you that I hope you go to-"

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"Jenny." Jesse snapped. "Watch your mouth."

Jenny huffed out a breath. "Well, you've got the idea. Now we can go, Danny. Now Jesse, as I was saying the other day, I've tried irrigating the crops but they're not wanting to take in the water. I think the soil is too dry and the water is just falling straight through..."

Jesse let her talk, answered fluidly, and knew they were being followed outside the tent and outside the camp. When they reached just outside the boundaries of the camp Jenny spun around. "I won't be staying with you." she snapped. "I have to get home. As you've heard the crops are failing and drying out. You can just go back to your new friends." she hissed.

"Jenny Land, you'll not-" The General started.

"It's Thomas now." Jenny interrupted. "Didn't you hear me? I said I don't carry the Land name anymore. And I'm damn glad I don't." she said and ignored Jesse's glare. "Danny, Jesse, and I will be on our way."

"Why did you come if you didn't know we were here?" one of her brothers asked.

"A few reasons. Revenge. I thought the Yanks had killed you a while back. I wasn't supposed to come. I had to follow Jesse and Danny. And when they knew they couldn't send me back, to be a spy.

We had a town meeting last night and it was decided that Jesse and Danny would ride out just to find out the numbers. I came along then they discovered me about an hour after. When we discovered that the army was so close we thought you were planning an attack so we devised a plan to sneak into your tent and try to find out the plans.

A good one. Then we were listening and Danny and I recognized your voice. Now you know the story. And one more thing." she looked at the three of them.

"You'd better keep those men under control. If anyone get's hurt, killed, or raped, there will be war. And I'll be in the front lines ready to kill whoever gets in my way. Get in and get out."

"I am your father, Jenny. You will not speak to me that way." he snapped and grabbed her arm and gave her a good smack on the face.

Jesse pulled out his gun and held it out steady toward his face. "And I'm her husband. I'll have to ask you to get your hands off my wife." he said, his voice hard and very dark.

The General let go and Jesse pulled her behind him and Danny stood beside him, glancing between the General and Jesse, picking a side. He sighed and stood his ground beside Jesse. "Mark, I'm gonna have to side with Jenny. I've heard some bad things about your army and if anything happens to my wife or someone I care about I'm gonna fight with my town."

He nodded. "My men will be kept under control."

"Murderer." Jenny hissed under her breath as Jesse sheathed his gun.

He sent her a hard look over his shoulder. "Remember what I told you about keeping your mouth shut Jenny? Well, just because this happened doesn't mean that I don't still mean it. Shut up."

Jenny pressed her lips together and crossed her arms in annoyance. But she kept quiet.

Jesse looked back at the General and his two sons and saw the surprise on their faces. Could no one control the girl? Not even her father? Was Jesse really the first? Well, he didn't know whether to feel proud or like an ass.

"We'll be going. I think Jenny's ready to get home. I'll let the others know about your coming through when we get back so no one will attack any of you. I understand that the house is yours so Jenny and I will stay with my sister and her husband."

The General held up a hand. "The two of you are welcome to stay where you are."

Jesse nodded. "Thank you. But I think we'll be more comfortable staying with my sister."

Danny and Jenny's family looked at her, expecting her to run her mouth and yell and scream that a man was deciding for her. But she remained silent as Jesse trusted she would. Though he could feel her agitation.

"We'll be on our way." Jesse said.

"The three of you are welcome to stay in a tent for the night. If you're too tired to ride out-"

"No thank you." Danny interrupted. "I have to be getting home to Sherry."

The General nodded and the three of them turned to get their horses. "Jenny," the General said and she stopped, but didn't turn back to him. "Please, stay. We need to talk."

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She shook her head. "You heard my husband. He said we're leaving, so we're leaving." she said and began walking again, cutting in front of Danny and Jesse, walking faster than the two of them had intended to. The three of them swung up onto their horses. They rode back to the cave and as Jesse and Danny slid off their horses, Jenny slumped down in her seat then covered her face with her hands. Danny glanced at Jesse warily and Jesse signaled for him to go on. Danny nodded and went into the cave. Jesse walked to Jenny and grabbed her by the hips and pulled her off her horse. She leaned on him and he wrapped his arms around her in comfort. She let her head fall onto his shoulder then began sobbing. "They're traitors, and tomorrow every one will know what they are." she whispered. Jesse didn't know what to say, so he just held her.

Chapter 7: Campfire

Jesse woke up when he heard Danny talking to someone. He looked at Jenny and saw she was awake, staring at the ceiling of the cave, still under his arm. She glanced over at him but didn't say anything. Her eyes were still red from crying. She looked so tired, he thought.

Jesse sat up and looked at the four men sitting by the fire. It was still dark outside, so he figured he'd only been sleeping for a few hours. Again, he looked at Jenny. She had closed her eyes. He leaned down and kissed her temple then stood and covered her with the blanket.

Then he walked over to where the men were sitting. Danny offered him some whiskey but Jesse shook his head. Yawning, he sat down next to Danny and faced his in-laws.

"Jesse." Jenny's Pa said and nodded at him.

"General Land." Jesse replied.

Jesse saw Jenny's brothers smiling at him like he was a hero. Then they clapped. "Never met a man who could shut her up." One of them said. "My name is Jerald Land and let me just say, you're my hero. This is my brother Robby."

Jesse studied Jenny's oldest brother, Jerald. His hair was light like hers and he sported green eyes like his father. His younger brother also favored his father's looks. Dark brown hair and green eyes.

The General's hair was graying, but there was still a hint of brown in it.

"Jenny knows to listen to her husband." he replied calmly, knowing she was listening. "To an extent. She did follow us against my order."

They smirked at him. "How long have the two of you been married?" Robby asked.

"About twenty-four hours." he replied. "We've known each other for about the same amount of time."

They stared at him with shock. "Jenny married a stranger?" Jerald asked.

"We just got married so I could help her with the crops and farming. We made an adult decision. I'll be heading to Tennessee before long. I'm just going to help her out this year then be on my way. I'll be helping my brother-in-law and my sister too."

Jesse glanced back to where Jenny lay and saw her watching them. Their eyes met and he saw the hurt in hers. He realized that she might look at his leaving as abandonment. "But, that will be discussed later. I'm sure Jenny won't be joining the three of you in the army, so I'll be sure that she's looked after before I leave."

"What's in Tennessee?" the General asked him.

Nothing that really interested him anymore. "Ranching, cowboy work. Maybe some law work." he replied.

The General nodded in approval. "Sounds steady. Why not start your own farm?"

"I figure I'll do that when I settle down." He looked at Jenny again and she met his eyes again. This time he didn't look away.

Jerald looked at him then turned to see what he was looking at. Jenny shut her eyes before he looked at her. He grinned then turned back toward the fire. "Why don't you join us Jenny?" he said aloud.

Jesse watched her open her eyes again. She looked at him and he nodded. Slowly, she sat up then stood and walked over to the fire and sat down next to Jesse and leaned against him sleepily. He put an arm around her to hold her up so she didn't fall over.

"You look tired." The General said to her.

She didn't reply. Jesse sighed. "She didn't get much sleep last night." he explained.

She cuddled closer to him, shivering a little as a wind blew in the cave. Jesse ran his hand over her arm, trying to warm her up.

Her family watched with curiosity and confusion. They were probably wondering how Jenny could be so comfortable with a stranger. Jesse pulled her legs over his lap and she rested her head against his chest, her eyes drooping. Danny stood and walked over where she was lying and picked up the blanket.

He brought it to Jesse. "Thank you." he murmured and wrapped it securely around Jenny.

She drifted off to sleep against his chest.

"How old are you, Jesse?" Robby asked.

"Nineteen." Jesse replied.

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He nodded and looked at his sister. The rest of the hour continued with mindless chatter and soon the General and Jenny's brothers decided it was time to get back to camp. Jesse carried Jenny over to the pallet he'd made and laid her down gently then fell asleep next to her.

Chapter 8: Jesse's Wife

Jenny didn't say much on the ride back to town. Jesse understood why. He watched her but tried to be inconspicuous about it. He was also trying to think about leaving Jenny. The idea just didn't suit him. He shook his head. How had he become this obsessed with her in just over two days? They rode into town and found everyone was waiting for them.

Jenny looked at Jesse with a sadness in her eyes. "I suppose it's time. We don't want them to worry." she said softly.

Jesse nodded then looked at Danny. "Maybe it would be best if you tell it. I'm going to take Jenny home."

Danny nodded then waited for them to get some good distance before he told the town everything.

Jenny stared ahead and Jesse just wasn't sure what to do. "Maybe some sleep will do you good." he suggested. "In your own bed."

"I don't want to sleep there." she replied.

"We have to take care of the crops." he reminded.

"I didn't say I won't sleep there, I just don't want to." She took a deep breath. "I don't think I can, really. It was hard enough sleeping there when I thought they were dead. How am I supposed to stay in a home owned by traitors?"

He sighed. "Let's just go to Jeff's." he said and pulled his horse into another direction.

Jenny followed silently and without one word of argument. He wanted to enjoy her cooperation while he could but knew that he was too worried about her to do so.

They arrived at Jeff's and Jesse helped Jenny down from her horse. He told her to go inside and lay down while he put the horses away.

But when he got inside she was sitting at the table. She looked up at him. "Why are you my husband Jesse?" she asked.

He sighed and sat down across from her. "You know why."

"Was that the only reason?" she asked.

He studied her. Then he understood. She wanted to know if there was anyone left for her. And helping her with crops hadn't been the only reason for him marrying her.

"No." he replied truthfully. "It wasn't. I'm not the kind of man who marries strangers without a good reason. I think the night before last I was convinced that I needed to care for you. But now that we know your family is alive, I still want to be married to you."

She smiled a little, and he was relieved to see it. "Me too." she whispered.

"You need to get some sleep Jenny. You're exhausted."

"As are you. We should both sleep."

"I'll be alright. I have things to do around here. I've gone without sleep before."

"So have I. It doesn't mean that we're not both tired." She stood and held out her hand to him. "Let's get some sleep. No one will be sleeping tonight. Not with the Yankees in town. We can stay up then."

Jesse took her hand and stood. He followed her to his bedroom and felt his gut tighten as he looked at the bed. "I can sleep on the floor-"

"I'm a big girl Jesse. And no one can say anything about us sleeping in the same bed. We are married. And we shared a bed last night." She sat down on the bed and looked up at him.

He saw her vulnerability and knew that he might do something he regretted if she gave him the chance. His mind spun as he tried to decide what he needed to do and what he wanted to do. "The bed is kind of small..." he began.

"Please, Jesse." she whispered. She looked at him with begging eyes and it made his heart twist.

"It's too soon." he replied softly. "You're not ready for that, Jenny. We both know it."

She frowned and looked at the ground. "I'm sorry. Why would you want a child anyway?" she replied then lay down and turned away from him.

Then he couldn't help himself. He kneeled down on the bed and turned her onto her back.

He kissed her and was relieved when she kissed him back. He wrapped his arms around her and pressed his

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chest against hers. They kissed intensely and he knew what he wanted and needed at that moment. He straddled her legs and kissed her lips, then pulled away to kiss her neck so she could breathe for a moment. Neither of them had even taken off their boots, so he sat up and pulled her leg up to work off her right boot. He tore it off then did the same with the next one, throwing them both to the floor. Then he kissed her again, and wound his hands into her lovely hair. He used his feet to push off his own boots while he kissed her.

"Jesse, Jenny? Are you here?" he heard his sister call.

He pulled his lips from hers and sighed. "Dammit." he hissed. He got off the bed and ran a hand through his hair. "We're in here, Lucy." he called.

She walked to the entry then stopped and looked at Jenny. "I'm sorry." she whispered. "You must feel so hurt and confused."

"Lucy, she's tired. Let her sleep." Jesse said to his sister.

Lucy met his eyes with hers for a moment, then nodded. "I'll let the two of you rest." she whispered then backed out of the room, closing the door behind her.

Jesse sighed then looked at Jenny. Her hair surrounded her head and was filled with dirt and grit from the past day of riding and walking. But Jesse didn't care about any of that.

He lay down next to her, feeling his exhaustion. He looked at her in the eye then stroked his hand over her cheek. "Let's get some sleep." he whispered.

Chapter 9: General Land

"It's the soil." The General explained. "Erosion. She should have planted east this year."

Jesse nodded. "There's only so much a sixteen-year-old girl can do by herself. I'll see what I can do. Some manure should help."

The General nodded thoughtfully. "Dan is very generous with his manure. I would go to him. He seems to like you."

"It seems a lot of people are happy I married Jenny. Apparently the only other suitor was a man named Markey, and he has a bad temper."

General Land shook his head. "Ain't no lie." he replied. "That boy has always been ill-tempered and after my daughter. Thank the Lord you got to her first."

Jesse grinned. "I'm thankful too, General. She's something else."

"Most stubborn woman you ever did meet." he grumbled.

He shrugged. "She's been getting' along so far. She was stubborn at first, but I think she's comin' around. Ya know, General, I don't see why she was so hard to control all those years. She's really an angel once you get down to it."

"Amazing." The General muttered. "You've gotten to know her better in the last two days than I have in the last sixteen years."

Jesse pursed his lips. "She's not all that complicated. She's a good woman."

"Jesse Thomas!" Jenny shouted. She came riding up on her horse, a big grin on her face. She pulled back on the reigns quickly as she reached them, jumped off the horse before Jesse could help her down. She wrapped her arms around his neck and gave him a big kiss on the lips. "You'll never guess!" she cheered. "It's just so great!"

Jesse chuckled. "What is it?"

"Lucy's pregnant! You're going to have a nephew or niece soon! It's just so exciting! I'm going to make her a baby blanket and everything! Jeff even promised to let me help make the baby's cradle!" She kissed him again, squealed. "I can't wait until we have a baby Jesse! I just can't wait! I had to ride over and tell you, but I can't stay. I promised to ride into town and buy some flour-

"Jenny." Jesse said, frowning. "You can't go by yourself. Not with the Yankees in town."

"Oh, but I promised!" she whined.

"Lucy will understand. Until the Yanks leave, neither of you need to go into town without a man. Understand?"

She sighed, then smiled. "Alright. I understand."

"Jerald or Robby could go with you." General Land suggested.

Her face went from happy to hard. "That's alright, Pa. I can wait." She turned to the horse and mounted it. "I promised to help Lucy with dinner too. Is that alright? Should I stay here and help?"

"It's alright, go on." Jesse replied.

She leaned down and kissed him in the lips. "I love you Jesse."

"I love you too Jenny." He smiled.

She grinned then kicked the horse and rode off.

The General shook his head. "She'll never forgive us."

"General, if you want to be in her life, then be in her life. You're her Pa, she'll always love you even if she wants to hate you. She's still just a child, only sixteen. She'll come around. Try explaining to her why you joined the Union."

"She wouldn't understand my reasoning." he sighed.

"If you want her to stop this nonsense, then tell her to stop. But don't lay a hand on her, General. I won't accept any man hitting my wife."

The General nodded. "I understand. Jesse, Jenny's so young. I know she's excited but for her to have a baby so youngâ!"

"She is young General, trust me I know. But Jenny is finally getting to live a life she's wanted. Lucy is already

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like a mother to her, she's not alone anymore. She knows she has us as family. I can't take any of that away from her."

"You're in love." he General replied, looked Jesse over.

Jesse looked down, then looked up at the General. "I am. I know it's only been a few days. I don't want to leave Jenny. I don't care about Tennessee, General. I suppose I'm going to get our own home soon."

"Land is expensive." The General pointed out.

Jesse smiled. "Money isn't a problem for me General. Jenny will be well taken care of. In fact, we need to head down to the store and get some food. I'll get the manure tomorrow. Pardon me General. I better catch up with Jenny."

Chapter 10: Meet Markey

"We'll need a wagon." Jesse told Jenny. "We're going to need a plow too. That other one is getting wore out."
"We'll have to wait a few years for that, Jesse. The crops aren't doing so well and-"
"Jenny, I hate to tell you but you married a wealthy man. We won't need to wait." He walked over to some boots, looking them over, and deciding they just weren't as good as the ones he already had.
"What do you mean?" Jenny asked. "You have some money to get started?"
Jesse looked over at her. "Is this makin' you uncomfortable Jenny?" he asked.
"I didn't marry for money." she replied.
He smiled. "I know that."
"I've never had money and I've never expected to have it." she replied. "I guess it does make me uncomfortable."
He laughed. "I wasn't trying to flaunt it, Jenny, I never have. I played a lot of poker when I was younger to earn money to take care of Lucy when our parents died. I was very good at it. I earned more than I needed every time. It all added up. I just had the bank empty my money and brought it with me. It's all honest money. Well, honest enough."
Jenny nodded. "It will just take some getting used to."
He leaned down. "If you want, we don't have to spend any of it."
She rolled her eyes. "Don't be silly."
He took her hand and kissed it. "Jenny, about what you said earlier. A baby is a lot to take on. Are you sure that's what you want?"
She looked at him, looked into his eyes. "As long as it's your baby Jesse it's exactly what I want."
He pulled her face up and kissed her. "You're still a baby yourself Jenny."
"I'm not." she replied.
"You know what I mean." he whispered.
"Jenny." another voice cut in. "What's going on? I heard you got married."
Jenny looked over and rolled her eyes again. A man, well more of a boy, was standing about Jesse's height, with a bit of a crazy gleam in his dark mud brown eyes. He was dressed in a fading red checkered shirt and holey dark blue pants. "Markey, it's none of your concern." she replied, then went to turn away.
He grabbed her arm. "I thought we was gonna get married." he snapped.
Jesse drew his gun. "Get your damn filthy hands off my wife." he ordered. "I ain't afraid to blow your head off boy."
Markey let her go and sized Jesse up. "So you're the fast gun everyone is talking about. The one who married Jenny. She's mine."
Jesse knocked the butt of his gun against Markey's skull. Markey fell to the ground unconscious. "I don't like him." Jesse muttered then pulled Jenny away. "Would you like a new dress?" he asked.
"I don't have time to make one Jesse. There's too much to be done. Besides I can never choose between the fabrics-" she stopped when he cocked an eyebrow at her. "Oh." she murmured. "No, I'm fine."
He stuck his finger in a hole that was in her skirt. "Are you?"
"I was getting around to patching it." she said, defensive.
"What about this one." Jesse asked, fingering the one in her sleeve.
"I will patch that too-"
"Jenny," Jesse whispered, leaning down towards her ear. "Get a new dress."
"I'm not going to get some fancy dress just to ruin it." She spoke with her chin in the air.
"Jenny, shut your mouth, and get a new dress. I want to get out of here before Markey comes to. Now if you want to argue so we can stick around and fight him when he wakes up then so be it. But I think we both know you should just listen to me and get a new dress." His voice was cool and calm, smooth as honey.
She opened her mouth but Jesse deepened his stare to a don't-even-think-about-winning-this look. He gestured toward the dresses.
With a huff she walked over to the dresses, and Jesse waited until she wasn't looking to smile. But the smile

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didn't last long when he saw three Yankees come in the store. He only felt little relief when he saw one was Robby. He rested his hand on his gun. Looked over at his wife who was trying to decide between dresses. Robby walked over to him. "Good afternoon, brother." he greeted.

Jesse nodded. "Afternoon."

"Is Jenny with you?"

"She's looking at dresses." Jesse replied, nodding toward where she stood, taking another glance back at her in concern.

Robby held his hands up. "We come in peace." he promised.

"Just looking after Jenny." Jesse replied, his hand not relaxing. "You understand."

"Of course." Robby replied. "It's good to see she's well taken care of." He looked down at Markey. "Your work?"

"He put his hands on Jenny." Jesse replied. "He's lucky I didn't shoot him."

Robby grinned. "She is in good hands. This is Patrick and Tim." he introduced. "This is my brother-in-law, Jesse."

Jesse shook hands, nodded toward Jenny. "Let me introduce you to my wife." He walked over to Jenny, who had picked a dress to his relief. "Jenny, let me introduce you." She turned, her eyes narrowing when she saw Robby. "This is Patrick and Tim."

She nodded to them. "Nice to meet you."

They tipped their hats back, nodding respectively. "Nice to meet you too, ma'am." Tim said.

Jesse slipped an arm around her waist, felt how tense Jenny was. "Well Jenny, let's get you that dress and what else we need. Robby, do you know where we could buy a wagon?"

"I'll look around for you."

"And we'll need a new plow, the other one is worn."

He nodded. "We'll help you carry the stuff."

"Thank you." Jesse said.

Chapter 11: Romance

Since the General and Jenny's brothers were staying in town to keep an eye on their soldiers, it was really the first time Jesse and Jenny had been alone since the night they'd been married.

Jesse had yet to get a bath, so Jenny was heating water on the stove and pouring it into the tub in the bedroom. Jesse had a sudden fantasy about him and Jenny sharing a bath. He was deeply tempted to bring that fantasy to life, but Jenny was so young. She was turning seventeen in just three weeks, he had discovered, still, he wasn't sure.

She had a beautiful innocence in her stubborn eyes, and he was hesitant to take that from her. While his mind was on whether or not to take her to bed, Jenny was humming happily, seeming content and satisfied. Their shelves were fully stocked, and she seemed to be happy about that.

He liked that, making her happy. She said she wanted a baby, she was happy to be married and happy to have this new life. She picked up the pot, using a towel to wrap around the handle, and walked into the other bedroom to pour it into the tub. "It's ready." she announced as she came back out. "I'll get dinner started."

Jesse pulled off his boots, decided not now. He walked into the other room, stripped down, and stepped into the tub. The warm water felt good against his muscles. He leaned back and used his hat to cover his face. He was relaxing, even falling asleep, then heard her enter the room. She seemed to be moving quickly, and when he pulled his hat off to watch her empty dirty water from a washing bowl, he noticed she was intentionally averting her eyes.

For some reason he couldn't understand, that made him angry. He supposed it was because in his way of seeing it, a man and his wife shouldn't be afraid to see each other naked. So he cupped his hands in the water, poured the warm water over his head, washing the dirt from his hair and face.

Jenny turned with the bowl in her hands, keeping her eyes down as she quickly made her way back toward the other room. "Jenny." Jesse said, making her stop.

Her eyes met his quickly then flickered away again.

"Did you need something?" she asked, fighting to smile and not seem so nervous.

Taking his time, he slowly stood, stepping out of the tub, then made his way over to her. Her cheeks were burning red with heat. He thought it funny how the night before she had practically begged him to be her husband in this way.

He brushed her hair aside, and leaned down and kissed her neck. Her heart was beating rapidly against her chest. He took the bowl from her hands and set it aside. He stepped behind her, began unbuttoning her dress slowly, taking his time. He slid it off her shoulders, kissed them.

She was intentionally taking slow breaths, he noticed. He traced his fingers down her back, making her shudder. He felt impatience suddenly, and turned her around and pulled her against him then picked her up. He carried her over to their bed, laid her down carefully, then kissed her on the lips, felt her kiss him back.

Jesse pulled the dress down farther, until he had it off and she was in her under garments. Jesse kissed her again, and heard the knocking on the front door. He sighed in annoyance. Who came to a newlywed's house after dark? Surely people knew better. He got up, grabbed his trousers and pulled them on. "Put on your dress

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Jenny." he muttered then shut the bedroom door behind him.

He opened the door to Jeff and Lucy, raised an eyebrow at them. "Come for a visit?" he asked. "After dark?"

Jeff smiled. "Lucy heard Jenny got a new dress today. She wanted to come see it, and give Jenny some jam."

"Come on in, I'll get a shirt on." Jesse said, and let them in then closed the door once they were inside. He walked into his bedroom, saw Jenny struggling with the buttons on her dress.

He walked over to her, turned her around and finished buttoning the dress himself. He did it with sorrow, wishing to see her out of it instead.

"Thank you Jesse." she whispered, smiling at him.

He frowned back. "Jeff and Lucy stopped by." he explained.

She smiled at his disappointment. "Well, I'm sure they won't stay all night." she assured him then kissed him quickly on the lips. "Now you finish your bath Jesse Thomas before the water gets cold. Jeff and Lucy will just have to wait. I'll have supper ready soon." She left the room, closing the door softly behind her.

Jesse smiled, pulled off his trousers and sank back into the water, listening to Lucy and his wife talk as he washed up. Jenny promised to show Lucy her new dress just as soon as Jesse was done bathing. He felt bad for it, but he was eager for his sister and her husband to leave so he could pick up where he and Jenny left off.

He'd yet to make love to his wife and this was the second time Lucy was responsible for stopping him. So when Jesse finished his bath and dressed, he walked out of the room, straight over to Jenny, and turned her around and kissed her on the mouth deeply, dipping her to show enthusiasm.

Jenny was red with embarrassment but he got his point across to Jeff he knew. So when Lucy asked to have coffee after dinner Jeff told her another time and bade that they go home. She had looked confused and a little upset, but Jeff had only smiled and kept saying it was time to go. Realization had never dawned on her face, but Jesse knew she'd figure it out on the ride home.

When Jeff and Lucy were far from sight, Jesse went back into the house and found Jenny doing the dishes. He closed the front door, walked over to her, and swept her into his arms, making her gasp. He carried Jenny back to their bedroom and continued where they left off, unbuttoning her dress.

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