

Old Ways Die Hard

**HOSTILE TERRITORY #3**

# OLD WAYS DIE HARD

A Classic Western Adventure

By  
**GERALD L. GUY**



[WWW.STORIESBYGUY.COM](http://WWW.STORIESBYGUY.COM)

Palm Coast, FL

# COPYRIGHT

## **OLD WAYS DIE HARD**

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ISBN: 9798753941664

Printed in the United States of America

AUTHOR: Gerald L. Guy

EDITOR: Martha Shad

COVER ART: [www.bigstock.com](http://www.bigstock.com)

COVER DESIGN: Gerald L. Guy

PUBLISHER: [www.storiesbyguy.com](http://www.storiesbyguy.com)

## ACCLAIM FOR GERALD L. GUY

**RUN LIKE THE WIND** – “I love Gus McIntyre! Gus, a 14-year-old boy traveling with his father to gold rush territory after they lost everything at home, is ambushed. His father is murdered. All their belongings are stolen. Gus is left for dead. Alone in the Wild West, Gus must depend on his personal strength and skills to survive in this lawless land. “Run Like the Wind” pulls you into this western coming of age story while entertaining and scaring you at the same time. This needs to be a TV show.”

**Carol Ann Kauffman, Niles OH**

**RUN TO DANGER** — “I like this kid, Gus McIntyre! I love the way Gerald L. Guy draws you into a story and you can't leave until it's done. Gus stumbles upon a gang of rustlers that threaten the livelihood of the ranch he owes his life to. He sets out to return the cattle to the Circle H Ranch but needs the help of an old Apache Chief who befriends him. Times were tough. Gus has a maturity about him that even the old chief noticed and admired. They begin the journey together. A lot of twists and turns will keep you glued to the pages. A great read for teens and adults alike. I'm reading the third installment in this series and enjoying it every bit as much as the first two books! Thank you, Mr. Guy, for sharing your excellent story with us!”

**Juliette Douglas, Benton KY**

**CHASING GOLD** — “I thoroughly enjoyed “Chasing Gold.” It was even more of a page-turner than your previous works, definitely your best offering yet. Some of the twists and turns you put in there reminded me of another one of my favorite authors, Robert Ludlum. I also have read all of his works.

I'm anxiously awaiting continuing the adventures of young Gus. I'll be checking your web site frequently so I can get signed up for pre-ordering as soon as possible.”

**Charlie Major, Palm Coast FL**

**CHASING THE PAST** — “This is the fourth book I have read from the Gus McIntyre series, and it just keeps getting better. This action-packed, page-turner will keep you entertained from the beginning to the very end. A great story of our forefathers. I highly recommend it to any western fans.”

— **Amazon submission**

**WOLF PACE: THE NEW ORDER** – “Gerald L. Guy had the reputation of a hard-hitting newsman, not a guy who figures out how the appendix can explain his creatures’ ability to transform from human to wolf. But he does so with a panache for fun with his novel, “Wolf Pact: The New Order.”

**Dean Poling, The Valdosta Daily Times**

**WOLF PACT: ESCAPE FROM CAPTIVITY** — “I loved the whole Cossibye clan! I can’t wait for the movie version to come out.”

**Gayla Smith, Flint MI**

**WOLF PACT: DREAM CATCHERS** — “My husband read and re-read this book. It brought back memories of his service aboard the Saratoga. He never talked much about his WWII experiences until "Sara" but then as he read, he explained so much. The book is like an old friend with whom he can relive experiences they shared.”

**Ami Lane, Palm Coast FL**

**ACT OF KINDNESS** – “I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The characters are well developed, and the connected stories are a pleasure to read. I hope Guy writes more like this.”

**Lynn Myers Freedman, Benicia, CA**

**TREE OF WONDERS** — “A great read. Take an hour or so and read a most uplifting book. You might even come out a little smarter for doing so.”

**Richard Thompson, Warren OH**

**ALTERED LIVES** — “Altered Lives by Gerald Guy is a great read. If you love character driven mysteries in the tradition of Agatha Christie, you will love this novel as much as I do. Guy not only unfolds the stories and personalities of the main subjects but also the character of a small innocent town. He shows the impact one heinous crime has on its corporate DNA, resulting in the negative transformation of its history. Add a great twist at the end and voila, a perfect cozy rainy day read.”

**Kathi Oates, Mammoth Lake, CA**

**SECRETS OF THE HEART** — “I normally don’t read romance stories, but this book was suggested by a friend, and I was pleasantly surprised. Not only does the story flow smoothly but it is a heart-warming look at the possibilities of happiness late in life. A true story of resurrection and devotion makes this a must-read, especially in times such as these.”

**Amazon submission**

**IROQUOIS AWAKENING** — “This book was nothing like I thought it would be and I loved it! This was a true can't put it down book. Please write more like this.”

**Michael Kozlick, Amazon**

## NOVELS BY GERALD L. GUY

Gerald L. Guy is an independent author. His novels are available in multiple formats at online bookstores and his personal website. They include:

### **The McIntyre Adventures**

Run Like the Wind

Run to Danger

PAYBACK: Eye for an Eye (Boxed set)

Chasing Gold

Chasing the Past

### **Coastal Capers**

Act of Kindness

Act of Mercy

Act of Recall

### **Wolf Pact saga**

Wolf Pact: The New Order

Wolf Pact: Escape from Captivity

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### **Hostile Territory**

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## DEDICATION

To my old friend Harry Bobco, who reminds me all things are possible with faith and determination.

## FOREWORD

One of life's most excruciating experiences can be the loss of a loved one. While heart wrenching, it is how individuals cope with grief that guides their wellbeing.

The Covid-19 pandemic of recent months has brought grief to the forefront of minds across the planet because so many of us have lost loved ones.

Everyone deals with grief differently. It can be debilitating if allowed to fester. Fifty years ago, experts realized there were five stages of grief — denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

Anyone coping with loss must understand grieving is a natural reactions to the human condition. However, it is important to guard against prolonged feelings of isolation, anger and depression because they can trigger more harmful emotions, such as sadness, denial, guilt and self-loathing.

For Moses Conway, the main character in “Old Ways Die Hard,” life was fraught with feelings of abandonment and loss from his youth to adulthood. He struck out violently in nineteenth century America. The murderous behavior was a byproduct of the grief he was unable to control after the tragic loss of all he held dear.

Grief counselors offer these tips:

**It's okay to hurt** — Don't try to suffocate the pain you feel from loss. It's okay to cry. It's okay to be angry. It's okay to hurt. They are all important steps toward healing.

**Signs of depression** — Recognize the fact depression can be a byproduct of prolonged grief. It is a medical illness that can negatively affect everything you do — eating, sleeping, relationships and your ability to function normally. If you feel the “old you” slipping away, seek help.

**Stay active** — Sorrow is unavoidable. As you mourn, don't forget to take care of yourself. Your physical condition is what fuels your emotional stamina. Eat well, exercise, take walks, breath in fresh air.

**It's all right to write** — Some grief counselors recommend making a written timeline, placing positive memories of interactions with a loved one above the timeline and negative interactions below. Usually, this channels the grief from an emotional nebulous state to a concrete realistic place in a person's life. By the end of the process, the initial intensity of the loss subsides.

Finally, understand there is no time clock for grief; it comes and goes as the human condition changes. Loving someone is wholesome. Grieving their loss is too.

“Old Ways Die Hard” is a tale of reformation. Although Moses Conway (a.k.a. Walter Purcell) leaves a trail of dead bodies in his wake, he finds a pathway to peace and happiness.

You can too.

## PREFACE

*“The man who is consumed by hate is not only a misery to himself, but a source of misery to all around him, not because of the menace he offers to our interests but because he defiles the atmosphere we breathe and debases the currency of our kind.”*

**A.G. GARDINER**  
*Journalist & Editor*

\* \* \*

Moses Conway, the main character in “Old Ways Die Hard,” is one of the most fascinating characters I have created.

He is walking, talking oxymoron and jack of all trades. He was an orphan and a family man, a murderer who attended weekly church services. He was a gunfighter and a peacekeeper. He could be a caring friend or dreaded adversary, a protector one day and a vigilante the next.

Ultimately, early Americans had to master many skills in order to survive in the Wild West. The hostile territories west of the Missouri River claimed many promising lives because naïve settlers underestimated their surroundings, misjudged their capabilities or failed to react to change. Moses Conway wasn’t one of them. He survived because he adapted quickly and acted on instinct.

Throughout his journey, he struggles with right and wrong, but quickly adjusts his behavior to cope with whatever situation he faces. He feels no remorse when he guns down strangers who wander into his night camp and then weeps when he has to bury a family of four, murdered by marauding Indians.

Ultimately, it was men like Moses Conway — a.k.a. Walter Purcell — who make tales of the Wild West so interesting.

Gerald L. Guy

“Old Ways Die Hard” is the third entry in the Hostile Territory series. All three have been dramatically different.

In “Iroquois Awakening,” an Ohio farmer wanders into a time warp and finds himself trapped in the violent wilderness of the Northwest Territory shortly after the American Revolution.

Henry Walker avenges the loss of his family in Bloody Kansas as the nation teeters on the verge of Civil War. He finds new life along the Santa Fe Trail in “Bloody & Afflicted.”

Read on. I think you’re going to love the tale that follows.

*“There is no tragedy in life like the death  
of a child. Things never get back  
to the way they were.”*

**Dwight D. Eisenhower**  
*U.S. President*









# CHAPTER



# 1

The morning started like any other. Moses Conway was up early in preparation for business at his popular mercantile in Weldon, North Carolina. This day would be like no other, though.

He felt no discomfort when his fingers slipped around the handle of the shiny, new Colt pistol that had been a favorite of customers. The pistol felt balanced in his hand. He liked the way the folding trigger emerged from the housing when he cocked it. He selected two and loaded each to capacity with five .36-caliber bullets. He put a leather holster on each hip, slid the pistols into them, and headed for the door.

With the CLOSED sign still in the window. He walked out into the morning. His mare, Lucky; was saddled, hitched to the railing and waiting on him.

Conway climbed into the leather and reined the horse into the minimal traffic of the early morning. A whispery breeze greeted him as sunlight broke through the grayness of the early morning.

The aroma of bacon frying and biscuits baking at Sally's Restaurant wafted on the air as he meandered down the dusty roadway to the Portsmouth & Roanoke Railroad depot.

It was going to be another hot and humid day. Already he could feel the shirt sticking to his back as Lucky ambled the four blocks to the edge of town where he hitched Lucky to another railing and walked into the P&R Railroad Station. Like Conway, Manager

Buford Brownleaf always arrived early to his office. He was shuffling dispatches and receipts at his desk when Conway entered.

The newly constructed building still smelled of paint and varnish. Coal oil lanterns illuminated the windows in the early hours, making the interior brighter than the dawn outside. It was hours before the train arrived, and the depot was empty except for the manager. A tiny bell signaled Conway's entry.

Brownleaf stood when he saw the shop owner approach and immediately offered his condolences for the loss of his family.

"I'm so sorry, Moses. I haven't seen you since that tragic day. What? Was it a year ago? How have you been and what can I do for you at this early hour?" Brownleaf asked.

"I think you've done quite enough already, Buford," said his stern-faced friend. When his right hand retrieved the Colt from its confinement, shock bloomed across Brownleaf's long face. Moses smiled as he pulled back the hammer and the trigger emerged. The clicking of the metal in the empty depot seemed louder than normal and accompanied the hardened expression on the visitor's face.

Recognizing the danger, Brownleaf took a step back, tripped on his chair and fell backward onto the floor. When he looked up, Conway was standing over him. The Colt Paterson was three feet away and pointing directly at his abdomen.

Urine flowed beyond Buford's control as terror seized his mind and body. He held his hands up and whispered, "It wasn't my fault."

"Easy for you to say, Buford. I buried them a year ago today, and you didn't even attend my girls' funeral," Conway said and pulled the trigger.

The first bullet tore through the flesh of Brownleaf's thigh. The station manager screamed in pain. Blood splattered against Conway's boots and pant legs as it mixed with the depot manager's urine.

"I had nothing to do with it, Moses!" he screamed.

The smell of gun smoke covered the stench of the man's bodily fluids and Conway said, "The first bullet is for Kristine, my firstborn. She was Elizabeth's favorite."

The second shot bore through the muscle and bone of the man's shoulder and buried itself in the wooden floor.

Brownleaf, riddled with pain, begged his tormentor to stop.

"It was an accident!" the manager pleaded painfully.

His pleas went unheeded.

"That bullet was for Betsy, the most lovable of my three girls," Conway said.

Surrounded in a cloud of smoke, Conway pulled back the hammer one more time. As he waited for the cloud of blue smoke to dissipate, he said, "This last one is for Carmine, my baby."

Then, he pulled the trigger one final time.

The .36-calibre bullet took off the top of Brownleaf's head. Blood and brain matter exploded from the impact.

He paid no attention. He just slipped the smoking pistol back into his holster, turned and walked toward the exit.

He stopped to look back at the carnage left behind and said, "I reckon Satan will be smiling when he sees you approaching, Buford. When it is my time to enter that fiery hell, the two of you best be frowning again, because I plan on emptying both revolvers on you the next time we meet."

Satisfied he had claimed restitution for his great loss, Moses walked outside, climbed aboard Lucky and headed out of town, leaving behind all of his worldly-possessions.

Trevor Watson, who owned the livery across the way, heard the shots and pushed open the door to his establishment. He saw Moses riding by and said, "Morning, Moses! Where did those shots come from?"

Lost in a world of vengeful hate, Conway didn't respond. He kicked Lucky into a lope and never looked back.

\* \* \*

MOSES CONWAY DIDN'T have a worry in the world in August of 1838. A single father of three daughters and owner of a small but prosperous mercantile in the hill country of North Carolina, he and his girls were returning home after a two-day excursion to Portsmouth, Virginia. His daughters were laughing and having fun in the train seat across from his, and he was going over account ledgers for July sales at Conway's Mercantile & Dry Goods.

Their trip to Portsmouth was something the family sorely needed after the sudden death of the family matriarch, Elizabeth. It marked the end of mourning for the loving wife and mother who was killed by a team of runaway horses on the street in front of the mercantile fifteen months earlier.

Her passing was devastating. She was the glue that held everything Moses cherished together, family and business alike. Not yet forty years old, her beauty, intelligence and savvy business sense made her and Moses a perfect team. The trip marked the end of the worst of the grieving.

The family was traveling north on a sightseeing tour aboard the innovative Portsmouth & Roanoke Railroad, one of the true marvels of the nineteenth century. Initially, the low-pressure steam engines were used to move only freight and commodities from one point to another. They were cumbersome, slow moving iron horses. With the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, engines were improved and trains attracted passengers because they moved at the break-neck speed of up to twenty-five miles per hour.

His friend, Buford Brownleaf, manager of the depot in Weldon, had encouraged him to take his girls on a sightseeing trip.

"Just about every family in town has made the trip except y'all. You and the girls ought to get away and spend a day in the city," Brownleaf urged.

The passenger train that connected North Carolina and Virginia pulled thirteen coach-style cars and cruised the 80-mile stretch of track at an average speed of about fifteen miles per hour, cutting the normal twelve-hour trip to four or five hours, depending upon how many stops it made between destinations.

When Moses and his girls arrived in Portsmouth, they booked passage on a steamboat that toured the harbor and skirted Fort Monroe and Norfolk. His girls had never seen such sights. It was the first trip outside of their tiny North Carolina home.

The Conway family shared a fine meal and stayed overnight in a hotel, another first for the girls. They were on their way home when disaster struck. Krissy, his oldest, had just marveled at the fact they would return to Weldon in time for supper when a sudden crash catapulted everyone from their seats.

The girls were laughing and watching the scenery go by when they suddenly were jerked upward and over the top of the seat they were sitting on. All three landed awkwardly and suffered broken necks. Death was immediate.

Moses was catapulted forward. He twisted and landed against the seat on which his daughters had been seated. His head slammed against a metal support and rendered him unconscious. The bolts that held the seat to the floor were severed by the crash that occurred without warning. The bench seat accordioned into those behind it.

Moses awoke to the sounds of pain and agony around him. He wiped blood from his forehead and tried to recall where he was. When the fog cleared, he frantically began the search for his girls. By the time he found them, it was too late.

The girls' death left him inconsolable.

The crash was the first of its kind on U.S. soil. An eastbound lumber train, racing down a grade at a high rate of speed, rounded a curve and slammed head-on into the passenger train. The locomotive and the first three of the thirteen passenger cars were smashed, killing

the three Conway daughters and injuring dozens more. The train was loaded with more than two hundred passengers.

The victims of the horrific accident were transported to Suffolk, Virginia, where the grief-stricken father arranged for his daughters' bodies to be carted home. A small, private ceremony took place before the girls were laid to rest next to their mother. Most the townspeople attended to pay their respects to the grieving father and prominent businessman. Among the missing was good friend Buford Brownleaf, who had encouraged Conway to make the trip aboard the new, high-speed rail.

The demise of his family was more than Moses Conway could accept. After a month of grieving, he reopened the mercantile but he was only a shadow of himself. He was sharp with customers and unresponsive to the needs of close friends. He quit going to church and withdrew from society as heartbreak turned to hatred during the year following the awful tragedy.

Brownleaf learned the true depth of Moses' despair a year later on an August morning in 1839.



## CHAPTER



Conway and Lucky slowly amble along a rutted path that meandered south and west. The mare could sense her owner's somber mood. They'd been partners for more than a dozen years and the horse could tell he was in no rush to reach his destination. Conway was wearing the same black business attire he wore each day when he attended customers at his mercantile. He easily could have been mistaken for an undertaker or preacher in his black jacket and slacks. His white shirt, splattered with Buford's blood, was heavily starched and tightly buttoned to the top. A string tie hung perfectly from his collar and a bowler hat sat atop his head.

Conway did not know where he was going. He just wanted to get away from Weldon and the horrific accidents that had claimed every person he loved. They had changed him profoundly. His mild-mannered demeanor reverted to the nefarious and intolerant temperament of Conway's volatile youth.

Moses was abandoned at a young age and learned to fend for himself on the mean streets of Boston. He swindled, picked pockets and fought to survive. He fled arrest and eventually discarded his lawless ways when he was befriended by a kind couple in Weldon.

Now, the past and present created a conflict of emotions. Right and wrong pulled him in opposite directions. He knew the difference between the two; one came easy and the other more difficult. So, he let the survival tactics of his youth resurfaced as sorrow and hate swamped his judgment. He relied on the three tenants that guided his survival as an orphan on the streets of Boston:

1. If someone intends to smite you, strike first.
2. No one gets a second chance to do you harm.
3. An eye for an eye is just.

The rules he had lived by through the formative years of his life did not bring him peace, but they allowed him to release the anger that boiled within. He struck out because fate had delivered a horrendous blow to everything he held dear. He was starting over and following the same path that led him to Weldon in the first place. The rules of survival served him well then, and they would serve him well now as he sought to start anew. Nobody would stand in his way.

So, he and Lucky plodded lazily forward.

The mare followed the road southwest and padded along without a word of encouragement from her owner. He neither booted her into a canter nor reined her to a stop. She endured the blistering heat of the day, the damp coolness of the night and never faltered.

Lucky finally stopped at a creek for an overdue drink of water. It was the first time in two days Conway talked to her.

“Drink all you want, old girl, but then we have to move on. We’ve got to get farther away from Weldon. Too many graves are there, and I’m out of tears,” he whispered.

They traveled non-stop for three more days until Lucky finally gave out. She collapsed in the dirt unable to go on. Moses bid her farewell and put her out of her misery well past midnight of their fifth evening on the road. Again, tears moistened his cheeks as he bid farewell to his old friend. While abuse and neglect led to Lucky’s demise, Moses credited it to the Weldon curse.

The natural sounds of the nighttime trail were silenced by the blast of his Colt revolver. It echoed through the countryside. Crickets stopped chirping, birds took flight and predators of the night fled to safer hunting grounds.

It was eighty miles from Weldon to Raleigh. Conway covered the last ten on foot, carrying his saddle on his shoulder and a sorrow

bigger than the Roanoke River in his heart. When he happened upon a small general store on the outskirts of the city, it was fifteen minutes past the noon hour, and all Moses could taste was trail dust and self-pity. His eyes burned from sweat and lack of sleep. He had discarded his tie and shed his collar and jacket. His feet were sore, and his disposition sour.

He threw his saddle across the hitching rail out front, walked to a pump and soaked his head in cool water from a deep well. It was invigorating and gave him the energy to charge through the front door of Darrow's General Store. He guessed it catered to the farmers and ranchers who operated spreads outside of the growing city.

With water dripping from his black hair, Conway looked more like a drifter down on his luck than a prosperous storeowner as he barged through the entrance. His nose was assaulted by the familiar smell of seed, tobacco, textiles and coffee.

"Jumpin' Jehoshaphat! Mister, where'd you come from?" asked owner Jack Darrow, who had been stacking boxes of bullets on a shelf behind a well-waxed counter. He was a rail of a man who looked over his spectacles when he talked.

"I've come a way," Moses said. "Horse died on me a few miles back; I walked here and am plumb tuckered out."

"Must be his blood on your shirt, aye?" the storeowner said.

"Yep! Had to put him out of his misery. Loved that old mare."

"What can we do for you?" the storekeeper asked.

"I need a new set of clothes, a slicker, boots, a stake for my trip out of this miserable state and a horse. Do you sell horses or own one you'd be willing to part with?"

"We can fix you up with everything but the horse, mister. I've got an old mare out back, but she'd give out long before you got to wherever you're headed. What you need is one of them Appaloosas Robert Barley raises at the Rocking B. It's about five miles south of here."

“Well, that presents a problem. I don’t think I’ve got another five miles in this tired old body,” Moses said. “Do you think I might rent that old mare of yours so I can ride over to the Barley place and secure a proper ride?”

“I’ve never rented out Ole Bessie,” Jack said.

“I’m a man of means and a man of my word. I promise to return with your prized mare before nightfall.”

“I reckon you can have her for two bits for the afternoon, as long as you brush her down and feed her at the end of the day,” Darrow explained.

“Sounds like a deal, Mr. Darrow, one I promise you will not regret,” Moses said. “Now, I’m going to grab me some new duds. While I do that would you kindly put together a sack of trail vittles — coffee, beans, a slab of bacon and some flour?”

“You should find all you need in the back corner, Mr...”

“Conway. Moses Conway’s the name. That’d be right fine of you, Mr. Darrow.”

When Conway got to the back of the store, he found everything he needed. He grabbed two of everything except the boots and black Stetson that fit his head perfectly and would protect him from the sun. Boots and hats were expensive commodities, more so the closer one got to Raleigh than they were in Weldon. He stripped out of his trail-soiled clothes and pulled on his new duds. He emerged from the back of the store wearing one set of clothing and carrying another in his arms.”

He slapped the clothing on the counter and very slowly adjusted the holsters that hugged his hips. He pulled each of the Colts out to make sure they were in the right position and placed one of the pistols on the counter in front of Darrow.

“I’ll need some cartridges for these, too,” he added, not noticing the look of surprise on the storeowner’s face.

“Ain’t that one of them new Paterson pistols put out by the Colt Company,” Darrow asked.

“Best pistol on the market today,” Conway confirmed. “Problem is they only hold five shots and you’ve got to dang near take the gun apart to reload. That’s why I carry two. You never want to run out of bullets on the trail.”

Darrow set a box of cartridges on the counter and asked, “Is that going to be all?”

“Yeah, what do I owe you, pardner?”

“That will be \$28.78, Mr. Conway, and I thank you for doing business with us on this fine day.”

“Does that include the rental of your mare?” he asked.

“Sure enough.”

“Sounds like a fair price. What’s your first name, Mr. Darrow?”

“I’m Jack... Jack Darrow,” he answered with a pleasant smile.

“Well, Jack, here in lies a problem. You see, I do not have a penny on me, but I’m willing to make you a deal that will change your life.”

“I don’t know, sir. We barely make enough to get by out here. I don’t think I can make any deals,” Jack said, suddenly becoming nervous about losing the week’s biggest sale.

“Hear me out, sir.”

“I’m listening,” Darrow said.

“Have you ever had an occasion to stop in the fine town of Weldon, Mr. Darrow?”

“I most certainly have. It’s an appealing community with a great mercantile in a perfect location.”

“Do you recall the name of that mercantile, sir?”

Jack scratched his scalp and looked up to the ceiling before answering.

“I believe it’s Connor Mercantile & Dry Goods,” he said.

“Close, Darrow. You almost got it. The name on the marquee is Conway. Does that ring a bell for you?” Moses asked.

“Yes! Yes, I believe you a right.”

“I am Moses Conway, owner of the property in question. I assure you it is a profitable venture and worthy of your consideration.”

“What do you mean consideration?” Darrow asked, his eyes narrowing with concern. He felt a swindle coming his way.

“I’m willing to sign that property over to you — lock, stock, and barrel — in trade for these goods and a one-hundred-dollar voucher I can hand to your Mr. Barley in exchange for one of his fine horses.”

“I don’t think so,” Darrow said flatly. “I’ve never seen you before and that would be a terrible risk for me to take. Why...”

Conway didn’t hesitate. He pulled the Colt from the counter, pointed it at the storeowner and said, “In that case, let me rephrase my proposal. Would you like to die a poor man, standing behind the counter of a store that provides you with so little profit the shirts you sell are better than the one you wear? Or would you prefer to own the most profitable mercantile south of Virginia?”

“Please don’t shoot me, Mr. Conway! Why would you make such a lopsided transaction?” Darrow asked as he backed against the wall with his hands raised over his head.

Moses told him the woeful story of the graves he left behind and his desire to start a new life. When he finished, Conway pulled back the hammer of the Colt. Darrow watched warily as the trigger appeared and the customer placed his forefinger over it.

“I suggest you pull out two pieces of paper, Mr. Darrow. Now!” Conway bristled.

“I’ve never been a gambling man. You’re asking me to take a great risk here,” the storeowner said. He still was shaking but did as he was told. Moses smiled and tried to calm his worry.

“Settle down, Darrow. Nothing bad is going to happen today if you do as you are told. On that first piece of paper, write out the voucher I requested and sign it.”

Darrow complied and handed over the note. Moses folded it and stuck it in his shirt pocket.

“Now, on the second piece, write what I tell you.”

Darrow licked the No.2 pencil and began writing as Moses dictated: “I, Moses Conway, willingly transfer ownership of the Conway Mercantile & Dry Goods to Jack Darrow of Raleigh, North Carolina. With this transaction, he is to receive ownership of all assets and merchandise related to the business.”

Darrow scribbled as fast as he could and passed the note to the gun-toting customer. Moses signed the paper and handed it back to the man.

“All you need to do is present this to Harry Bobco at the Weldon Savings & Loan Bank. He will verify my signature, and everything I worked fifteen years to build in Weldon will become yours. Believe me, Mr. Darrow, this is your lucky day.”

“I don’t know...”

“There is nothing to ponder, Darrow. It’s all here in black and white. You’d be a fool not to seize this opportunity. Let me rephrase that. You will be a dead fool if you don’t.”

“How... How could I refuse, then?” Darrow said with a forced smile.

“Now, if you will please take me to your mare, and our transaction will be complete,” the surly stranger said.

Darrow led him to a small barn at the back of the property. Moses tied the storeowner loosely to a post in the small shelter he used for

the horse and storage. He packed his newly-purchased gear and saddled Bessie.

Before riding off, he said, "It's been a pleasure doing business with you, Jack. You won't be sorry. Hopefully, I will return in a couple of hours with your mare. Then, I will untie you and you can go on to a new and prosperous life, as long as you don't mismanage your new enterprise."

Moses tipped his new Stetson and led Bessie out of the barn. He went back inside the store and hung a CLOSED sign on the entrance. He locked it up securely and rode off.

\* \* \*

CHESTER WHITELAW, foreman at the Rocking B Ranch, saw Conway riding up and was surprised to see him aboard Darrow's mare.

"What can I do for you, friend?" he asked. "You must be a friend of Jack Darrow if he let you ride that old mare out here. I hope everything is all right that way."

"Everything is just fine with Mr. Darrow," Conway replied as he dismounted and led the tired horse to a water trough to drink. He loosened the cinch on his saddle to let the old mare breathe easier as it gulped sustenance.

"My horse gave out north of here and Jack said this would be the best place to replace it. He loaned me Bessie to make the trip. Jack is a good man," Moses explained. He looked around, spotted a corral full of horses and added, "It looks like you've got plenty."

"Sure do. What kind of ride are you looking for, mister?" the foreman asked.

"Something reliable and not too spirited because we've got a long road ahead of us," he replied.

"Where ya headed?" Whitelaw asked as they walked toward the corral.



“West!”

“You and everyone else it seems.”

Whitelaw led him to a five-year-old gelding he claimed was sure-footed and strong. He examined the voucher and accepted it as payment.

“Jack Darrow and my boss are old friends,” Whitelaw said. “If that tight-fisted, old bastard allowed you to ride Bessie here, I reckon the paper is good. Travel safely, my friend.”

Conway thanked the foreman, pulled his saddle from Bessie and secured it atop his new mount. He tipped his hat and rode out toward the horizon.

As promised, Moses returned with Bessie in tow just before nightfall. He loosened Darrow’s bonds enough so he would be able to wiggle free in an hour or so and galloped off for the South Carolina border.