
THIS BLOODIED LAND

A STORY OF THE NORTH ALABAMA UNIONISTS

BY

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CHAPTER I

FLAMING SKIES AND FALLING STARS

The setting sun was shining through bands of clouds, sometimes a big ball of bright flame and sometimes invisible but reflected off flaming clouds. Will Duncan stopped his horse in the dirt road to study the sunset through the bare branches of the wintry deciduous trees. It might be beautiful to some people, but to him it looked like fire and blood and war. Or maybe that was result of the morbid mood he was in. He experienced a chill and shudder that he didn't think had anything to do with the crisp cold of the January day. The year was eighteen and sixty-one, as Will would have called it.

Finally, as the fiery sky subsided to gray and pink, he urged the horse on and with little puffing sounds as its feet pressed into the dust, the animal trotted up to the gate of the farm where Will lived. His sons, Will Jr. and Jason came out to meet him and take the horse as he slid down. They wore identical home-made deerskin boots with several layers of cowhide for soles and homespun pants. Growley, the Duncan family dog, a chunky yellow mongrel, followed This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists then out.

The family made almost all of the things they used themselves, although they permitted themselves the luxury of store-bought gingham check fabric for their shirts. Will Jr. wore a frayed straw hat that his Ma had woven him, and Jason had a strip of gingham left over from his shirt wrapped around his head. Will was dressed the same himself with another frayed straw hat on his head. All three wore deerskin jackets with the collars turned up against the cold. His wife Elizabeth in a homespun dress This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists and their 15-year-old daughter Sally, dressed like her brothers, were waiting on the porch.

"Those goldurn fools in Mon'gom'ry gone and done it!" This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists he shouted in ire to the rest of the family, as he waved the little newspaper printed in the county seat of Blountsville. "They done pulled outta the Union!"

"Will, watch your language," Elizabeth chided.

"They make me so mad I could spit!" Will continued by way of explanation. "Accordin' to them, Alabama is now an independent country, the same as Spain or France."

The family was silent, shaken, as Will and the womenfolk This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists went into the house. Will pulled off his battered straw hat and stroked his hair and beard, both showing a few gray hairs. Will Jr. and This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists Jason came later after seeing to the This Bloodied Land: a

story of North Alabama Unionists horse. Their dwelling was a dog-run, two-story structure of squared logs with a porch reaching completely across the front and another in This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists back. The cracks between the logs were plastered with the iron-stained red clay of North Alabama, which had baked almost to brick in the hot sun. The roof was constructed of overlapping slabs of This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists wood to shed the rain. The whole structure was weathered to an honorable gray by years of hot sun and heavy rains, including an occasional hurricane, which it had withstood like the rock of ages with only a roof slab or two out of place.

There was a large kitchen and a large sitting-room downstairs, one on either side of the dog-run, and there were bedrooms This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists above. There were large fireplaces in This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists the kitchen and sitting rooms at the farthest ends of the house. The house was built on piers of the flattest rocks they could find, cemented together by more clay. There was a crawl space between the piers and under the house. There were still loopholes in the shutters for defense from the days when renegade Indiana and renegade whites still made trouble. They were merely a decoration and tradition now with small squares of wood that could be placed over them to close them off altogether.

In hot weather they cooked outdoors in a cauldron hanging from a tripod over a fire or in a pit with hot coals at the bottom, but this was winter, and they used the fire place for heat and light, as well as cooking. The This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists shutters were closed against the cold, as the windows had no glass. It was a dismal semi-dark inside This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists even in the brightest sun, but... well, that's the way it was. Occasionally, they used candles or kerosene lamps for light.

Most life went on in the kitchen or outdoors; the sitting room was for the Parson and other important visitors. Will's mother and father had been laid out there in preparation for their funerals, and Will expected to be laid out there This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists someday himself. There were stairways up each side of the dog-run to balconies that connected the pair of bedrooms on each side, all built of logs that Will, his father, and his grandfather had hewed in the nearby woods over the years.

Elizabeth and Sally had dinner This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists ready, and Will said Grace, the same words he had used ever since he had married Elizabeth with variations depending on circumstances. "Lord, this food was not provided for our benefit, This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists but for Yours. It is intended to nourish our bodies for Your service. May we always remember that what seems a great blessing to us is really given to us to glorify and serve You. Amen.

They ate silently for a time, and then Jason brought up the subject on everyone's mind. "What does this mean, being out of the Union and independent?"

"This means war, doesn't it?" Will Jr. added.

"I'm afraid it does," Will replied. "The Federal Government ain't about to let states just break away without any attempt to hold onto them."

"But the states joined together voluntarily," Jason argued. "We gotta right to leave the Union if we want, don't we?"

"The Constitution doan say one way or t'other," Will replied. "Sometimes, rights don't make a snit o' difference. "It's who's got the most guns that counts."

"Well, what are we gonna do," Will Jr. asked.

"We're gonna go right on livin' an' raisin' horses an' crops like we always done," Will told him. "This is Mon'gom'ry's business, not ours. They've never cared what the hill folk wanted or did anyway."

After This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists the rest of the family retired for the night, Will sat on the back steps whittling by the light of a rising, just-past-full moon. He always whittled when he was This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists "reckonin'", and he had a powerful lot of reckonin' to do, despite telling the family that things would continue as they always had. Growley came and sat by him, wagging his tail, hoping for meat scraps This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists or at least a scratch behind the ears. He received both, but they were perfunctory.

Will's whittling was not solely a This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists pointless habit. The shavings would be used to revive This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists the fire in the morning from the coals of the night before buried in the ashes. The cold air smelled of cleanness and new growth. Sitting on the back step, whittling, smelling the Lord's good air, occasionally petting the dog, and looking at the stars overhead always helped to put things in the proper perspective. There was Orion, the mighty hunter, with his two hunting dogs and the wild bull he was hunting.

An unusually bright falling star coursed across the now-clear sky, reminding Will of the great shower of falling stars the year before. The sight had been absolutely awesome. The superstitious had said that the shower presaged war. The Pastor had preached a sermon on it, saying, as Will recalled, "Our Maker gave us the right to choose what we do, including making war and peace. Neither a meteor shower nor anything else compels people to make war, if they don't what to." That was a comforting thought to Will.

The Pastor finished his sermon with the statement, "Perhaps our Maker intended to

warn us of the disaster that will follow, if we make the wrong choice.”

There was a lot of reckoning possible on that subject, thought Will as his pile of wood shavings grew.

Indeed, the secession of Alabama from the Union seemed to make no difference whatsoever to the people of the community of Royal in Blount County in Northern Alabama. The horses still needed to be fed, watered, and let out to This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists pasture. The chickens and pigs still needed to be cared for. The little cotton patch still needed to be chopped, the garden still needed This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists to be hoed, the corn still needed to be ground and cooked into cornbread and grits. The vegetables still needed to be picked and put by for the winter or prepared for the table, the This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists cotton still needed to be spun, woven and sewn into clothing, and the This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists fences and buildings still needed to be fixed up. Some of This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists the gaps between the logs needed to be refilled with clay.

In those days, the family bought a pregnant mare from a man who said he was passing through from Irondale to Chattanooga. She came cheap, she was in good health, and she had a good conformation, but “you never know what you’ll get when you buy a pregnant critter,” Will put it. The name Sadie came with the mare, and what they got for her offspring was a mule! After having a hearty belly laugh, the family named the young colt Secesh, but they often referred to him as This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists Sadie’s Yard Child.

From time to time, Will This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists went into Blountsville, about eight miles away, to buy supplies the farm couldn’t produce and pick up the county seat news. About six weeks after the news of secession, he took the wagon and got a new iron tire for the left rear wheel and a new hat for Elizabeth to wear to church on Sunday. Quite a splurge, but she deserved it.

When he got back, the boys were pitchforking hay in the barn, and Elizabeth and Sally were seated in the dog-run, shelling field peas.

“Ummm!” Will enthused. “Field peas and hot pepper! Ambrosia!”

He This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists brought a newspaper back with him. Many people in North Alabama and the world in general were illiterate, but the Duncans always This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists valued This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists books and education. Among the possessions precious enough to be brought across the mountains from the Carolinas was a small library— the Bible (almost every home had a This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists Bible, even if it was only poorly read), a dictionary, Gibbon's Decline and This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists Fall of the Roman Empire with its wealth of information about other lands and times, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Herodotus, and a few less well known. They were given a special shelf in the sitting room. Will had decided to spark Elizabeth, when he found out she could read and write; he valued education that much.

"The five states that have bolted This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists from the Union have sent representatives to Mon'gom'ry," Will explained over the dinner table. "They have organized a government called the Confederate States of America. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi took the oath of office as President on the front porch of the statehouse in Mon'gom'ry before a tremendous crowd of people."

"Out of one Union; into another," Elizabeth muttered.

"Woman, you have a sharp tongue!" Will criticized.

"Alabama can't go it alone," Will Jr. explained.

"That was the argumint This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists behind formin' a union in the first place," Will countered. "When we had to fight the French and the Indians that they stirred up, and even in the Revolution, the failure of the colonies to cooperate almost cost victory in both wars."

"Yes, but this union isn't dominated by This Bloodied Land: a story of North Alabama Unionists northern money-grubbers," Jason told the others. "It will be responsive to our needs."

Will Jr. argued back, "Northern money-grubbers; black-belt, plantation-owning, slave-bossing money-grubbers. Six of one; half-dozen of the other. Nobody's responsive to the needs of the mountain people. Nothing will change. We'll still be left out in the cold to shift for ourselves."

"Well, what happens now?" Elizabeth wondered out loud.

"Both governments are armin' to the teeth. It will take nothin' more than some dadburn fool pullin' a trigger to set off war between the two," Will asserted. "I doan see how it can be avoided."

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