

CHAPTER THREE

SUNDAY AT FRANKLIN, WASHINGTON 1891

Time is a robber of the way things were, of places, and feelings. I have leaned against the trees, their roots still clinging precariously to the sides of the steep banks, and I remember when I was a boy. I was not there on that Sunday, but I can still hear the voices and feel the excitement and fears. My grandfather John Hale was among the Negroes on that Sunday. My mother Annie Hale was on a train with the women and children riding into Seattle. She was six years old and a bit scared.

Franklin was a new town then. It was the center of the coal mining district situated thirty-two miles southeast of Seattle in the heart of the foothills of the Cascade Range, and 400 feet above the level of the tide water. Its location was beauty in the extreme. The river, a clear swift mountain stream coming from the snows of the Cascades, flowed through a deep canyon with steep rocky walls. The old town of Franklin was built on the edge of the bluff. The new town was built further up the mountainside on a bench 500 feet above the river.

There was a company store with upstairs offices, a meat market, boarding house, and a combination school with church on Sunday. It was a new town in 1891; A model mining town of the northwest. The town was considered a healthy place for youngsters, in spite of the fact that in some places the yards were so steep that the babies at play were sometimes staked out by means of a long rope, one end of which was securely fastened around the child's waist, and the other end to a convenient fence post. The cottages were there — fifty-two arranged in four parallel rows. Each house was neatly fenced, and the streets graded and furnished with cinder footpaths. The company employed 157 miners at Franklin — all white. This was the town John Hale was to work in and raise his children.

There was talk in January 1891 of bringing black coal miners to Franklin, Washington to be used as strike breakers. White miners had sunk a new slope; they did not know of the possibility of "filling it up with darkies." The drama would be put off until May 1891. By the 14th of May the special train left Saint Paul heading west over the Northern Pacific railroad tract. The town talked of "niggers." Great quantities of Winchester rifles were ready in the company store cellar.

The train rolled along and the time seemed endless. "Are we almost there, Mama?" Annie frowned and squirmed restlessly on her seat. "Why did they say the guns were for shooting lots of wild game birds, Daddy?" Claude did not understand, but he had a good mind to find out what was going on.

On Sunday morning, May 17, 1891 the coaches rolled into Palmer, Washington, a few miles from Franklin. They were met by 75 more armed guards who had been routed through Enumclaw, Washington in order to cloak the recruit's arrival in secrecy.

The train stopped at a quarry, and the passengers got out. The attractive offer of a three-year contract at a new mine in Washington with 50 already employed whites had the prospects of a deal blown away like the wind.

Men had gathered in a corner of the dining car, but their thoughts were not on food. The women and children were still sitting on the coach seats with the sleeping children. The men could settle the problems of where to go and what to do.

"Mama!" Claude pulled on the dress of his mother. "Let me go and find out what is going to happen. I can pretend to be playing. I'll let you know right away." Fannie turned to grab his shirt, but he ducked and ran through the coach cars. Claude hated the wide openings between the rail cars. If you fell out — boy! The doors were heavy, but he pulled them open and ducked in back of the seats. He crawled on his knees under several more seats until he was close to the men talking in a group. He laid flat with his chin on his elbows and waited quietly.

It hardly seemed like a Sunday gathering in a train with fire arms. He heard the men talking. "We're supposed to have breakfast here in Tanasket." "So they can feed the 'niggers' before they shoot them?" One man laughed, but his words had no humor. John Hale looked at the man speaking disgustingly. "Well, at least we will die with a full stomach." Claude didn't like the words, but he knew his father was joshing about dying. "After breakfast we're supposed to march into Franklin; the women are riding on into Seattle." Claude heard all he wanted to. He crawled back on his belly under the seats and through the heavy doors to his waiting mother.

A Pinkerton guard in a white felt hat had already started talking to the women. "There will be breakfast here in Tanasket: eggs, toast, and milk for the children. You're going to go on into Seattle — just a short ride. Take care now. Have a good breakfast and feed those young 'uns."

An hour passed and everyone had breakfast. Some didn't feel like eating, but they knew that it would be a while before they saw another meal, so they ate anyway.

John kissed Fannie, and the children hung on to him. Annie looked up at her tall daddy. "It is Sunday, and I will ask the Lord to take care of you all the way." "That's a good girl. You take care of your mother."

The men got off the train and stood back while the train worked up power to move; it then slowly disappeared down the track. Melinda pressed her nose on the window as long as she could, and her daddy became a