and I also remember to check the altimeter and telegraph transmitter, and from the bag grab Mr. Edward's notebook, though I remember pretty much everything he has been saying about aeronautics and balloons and flying since we got here—

—While all around me the sky is churning between silver and mother-of-pearl, and below the rigid grid of the federal capital, circling it on all sides verdant countryside, the hills and meadows, the farms and homesteads, the bends of the ochre river, some of it Virginia and some of it Maryland, one direction straight to Pennsylvania and the other to the Carolinas, one to the Atlantic Ocean and the other to the Bull Run and Blue Ridge Mountains, I can barely hear Mr. Edward, Ulysses, and the others calling out to me, their voices growing ever more distant, "Theodore, Theodore," and I sit in the center of the basket as it grows colder, knowing now that I am tethered to nothing at all, the basket and me now in a free float, a drift, a soar—

—And I stand and remember, can see out there all the forts and encampments and troops massed like tumors along the river banks, the ramparts and howitzers arming the hills, the works teething at the edge of the foliage, the terrible danger snaking through the vast green and brown rolling land, and I feel something not quite fear and not quite elation, I can't put a name to it, I try to utter it but cannot. I place my hand on the valve string, then reach over and check that the sandbags are in place, pat my winter coat, feeling not only the weight of my papers and my pocketwatch but my heart, when my throat finally relaxes as if something, sound, will issue from it, to say Mama, and Jonathan, and Horatio, and Nedly, and Ulysses, and Nimrod, and Daddy Zenzibia Zephira Lucius Professor Lowe President Lincoln, Hansome, somebody HELP ME, but only the gas hisses in assent as I pull on the string, as I open my mouth even wider and remember to—

What I'd like to hear about, the reporter starts in, is the time you and that little boy ... and I silence him again with a turn of my head, thinking to myself that this is supposed to be an interview about the war and my service in it, from the day I enlisted despite being almost a score years too old, having several mouths to feed, and running a tavern under my own name a grasshopper's jump from the riverfront, to the day we were sent by wagon and train down to Brazos de Santiago, where we launched the fight that ended on that spring day, ten years ago, along the Río Grande on the meadows of Palmito Ranch, which, we learned later from a scout we captured from the other side was the final battle in the first great war for our freedom, or between the states as they like to call it these days, so I ain't about to devote a minute to those sense-defying events of forty years before.

Yet the mere mention of that boy's name, one I seldom think about, not even in dreams or nightmares, retrieves the sole two times since those years that I saw his face. That first time the name and face had become molded to the measure of a man, still young and with a decade before him but rendered gaunt and taut by struggles unknown to me and perhaps to that writer, also from Hannibal, who had made him, both of us, briefly famous. That face with its narrow angles and sharp agate eyes, with the sandy tufts of hair now framing it at the cheeks and chin, that glanced past me on Chouteau near the Pacific railroad tracks as I passed it and that other one I knew so well, on my way back to the public house where I worked, near the waterfront, ten years after that voyage down the Mississippi—my folly, when I could have crossed with my wife of those years, and my children, then still little, right there at Alton, and made my way east and we all would have been truly free—ten years before the conflagration that would cleave the country in two.
The other face, the Sawyer boy's, froze as it glimpsed mine, and
when it had passed several steps beyond me said loudly to its com-
panion, "Whoa, Huck, I think that was your old boy from Hannibal!"
and then, "Old buck, hold up, now," and "Ain't you Jim Watson, you,
that keeps on walking with out stepping to the side when you see two
gentlemen approaching, like you ain't heard one of 'em call out your
name?" So I paused and turned around, and faced them. There they
were, Huckleberry, now in his early 20s, and Sawyer, same in years,
both taller than me now, still lean in their youthful frames, each one
looking from their clothing alone fairly prosperous as so many were
during those charging years, though in Huck's mien I could see that
all the gold they had gotten from that mess in the caves had not al-
leviated whatever inner torments afflicted him. "Well, now," Sawyer
said, brushing the sleeves of his worsted suit coat as he approached
me, Huck behind him, "I should have figured we would come across
you one day down here."

"Howdy now, Jim," Huck said, and extended his adult hand.

"Howdy, Huckleberry, howdy, Tom," I answered, tipping my hat
ever so slightly and taking his palm only momentarily in mine.

Sawyer leaned against a stile and proceeded to tell me all about
himself, how he was working during the day in the law offices of Judge
Thatcher's brother and after spending a year at Centre College in
Kentucky and another at the University of Virginia, President Jeff-
cerson's school he proudly pointed out, he was studying law at night
at Reverend Eliot's new seminary not far from here, though he re-
minded me neither he and Huck had to work and that I certainly
should not have forgotten why. He told me he had traveled down the
Mississippi on a steamboat several times, including by himself, all the
way to New Orleans, which is where he thought he might eventually
settle if he didn't stay in St. Louis, since the culture and people down
there appealed to him, and that he would probably write about it
all when he was past the bar and in an equitable position. He kept
talking for a good while longer but I confess that though my eyes
never left his mouth I rapidly quit listening.

After Sawyer had finished his personal resume he spoke about
Huck, who he said had gotten himself some schooling too up in
Cambridge, Illinois, near Rock Island, where he had gone to stay
with some distant relatives of his late father's, and between stints in
the cooler for "minor infractions," which he did not detail and about
which I wasn't going to ask, he said that Huck liked to sample a little
of every kind of job. Tom chuckled as he spoke, Huck for his part
peering off into the roadway, as though he was searching for a way
out of the story Tom was telling and a new path into himself. Such a
'river rat,' Tom continued, his words bubbling with laughter, Huck
was that he now served as an assistant foreman in the river salvage
company run by Captain Eads. Just before this new position, Huck,
Tom concluded, his laughter evaporating like mid-morning dew, had
just returned from Kansas. "He went out there to see what the trou-
blemakers were up to, the ones from New England and the East and
Iowa and here as well, who want to overthrow centuries of civiliza-
tion and take away our way of life and liberty and tell us what we can
and cannot do and own."

I said nothing, looking intently at him and then at Huck, who fi-
nally said, "This winter I gone out to Lawrence, which is a good ways
past the state border. I got up to a few scrapes but nothing serious," and
then, "I don't think old Jim wants to be bothered with hearing
about any of that."

"Hearing about it and us ain't no bother to Jim," Tom said, and
trained his gaze on me.

"All the same, he don't want to hear some scuffle with a trouble-
maker. He sure looks like he been minding his business and it's good
to see him."

"Thank you, Huck," I said, and nodded at Tom, who frowned.

"He ain't got no business that's more important than what we're
doing, does he?" Tom said. "Can't be likely, can it?"

"Not certainly," Huck said, and when Tom turned away from him,
he shrugged his shoulders for me. "Then again I don't know nothing
about his business these days."

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“When did you get yourself down this way?” Sawyer said, his razor lips cutting me a smile. “Cause I reckon soon as you knew you had got your freedom we all woke up to find you gone.”

I thought to tell the boy that although once Huck and I got back and I learned Miss Watson’s will had freed me, a man in town, LaFleur, and his brothers, all later to take up arms for the Confederate cause, would come into the stables where I worked and keep on making jokes about selling me back into bondage since Washington had cut off the trade and our bodies were a premium further south down the Mississippi, so I planned out resolving the matter once and for all by crossing to the other side, practicing a number of times when I knew the tide was low, since I knew how to swim and even a blind man in a blindfold behind a high blind wall could see Illinois from Hannibal. One night when I was waist-deep in the water I had to remind a white patrolman strolling the levee I was emancipated and showed him my papers which I kept in a waterproof metal locket that hung around my neck, though they were also on file down in the main courthouse of Marion County, Missouri, and he said he ought to lock me up just for talking so freely, like I was equal to a white person, but since I had belonged to the late Miss Watson, God Rest Her Soul, he would let me go, which I knew well enough to nod to, before I crept carefully back to my little room in the black section of town, and resolved even more to flee.

I thought to say that I had sworn to my then-wife Sadie, who had taken up with another man when she thought I had murdered that white boy, Huck, that I would buy the children’s freedom and hers, which I intended to hold fast to, but when I told her I was leaving she convinced me to take her and our children with me, though I was not about to bring her new man along, she could send for him later, and as for my children, at that time there was only two of them, Elizabeth, who was deaf and mute, though sharp as a whip saw, and Johnny, who looked like a little me, and I was going to fetch them to their freedom soon as I had gotten settled in. When all the signs confirmed the time had come I brought us to the farthest end of the levee, where I had identified a raft I would commandeer, and we stuffed all our necessities in one small sack and a canvas traveling bag I borrowed from the stables where I worked, I say borrowed since I eventually mailed it back, postage paid, and I could see Sadie was looking around as if that man of hers was going to steal away with us so I told her she could go with me and the little ones or continue in her bliss with him. I was prepared to carry those children on my back like St. Christopher all the way to the other side, and her too if it came to that, but not her lover, yet we reached Illinois easily on that cool spring night, landing far north of where the main docks in Alton were since I knew there were patrolmen to ensure none of us made it, and I had been warned to watch out for a notorious Negro who would run straightaway and alert the white constable, but that Rastus wasn’t anywhere to be found.

I thought to say I did spot the person who knew where to take us and put us on a wagon bound straight north along the river for Quincy, where Dr. Eells lived. We spoke in what they call our gibberish but to us it was a language full of secret keys, and that person guided us to another person, in these days despite the daily terror against us we are still free and I can tell the truth because nobody can prosecute them or punish them now, so I can say they were both colored women, the first one carrying herself in disguise like she had no home in the world and the second was clothed like a male night watchman’s assistant. The second woman guided us to the wagon that brought us to Dr. Eells. Have you ever tried to keep a small child from laughing or crying because your life depended upon it? Have you ever hid with a spouse and two children, which was actually too many for Dr. Eells, and I had to cajole him not to turn us away, recounting at least twenty times for him how I was already manumitted but explaining the danger my wife, since that she still was, and my poor children, faced, so for a week I implored him in his attic, which is where we stayed, mostly lying down in silence until he would come
to question me periodically, because the slave catchers particularly trolled that city, which was notorious for harboring fugitives, and I was sure the people who had laid claim to Sadie and the children, along with her spurned male friend, had sounded an alarm.

I thought to recount that finally after dawn on a Sunday a white woman came to Dr. Eells’ house seeking the cargo to Elgin and points east, and Dr. Eells stowed us all under a false floor which my wife was convinced would be our coffin until I reassured her that was the only way we would be able to travel while eluding the catchers’ grasp. We traveled in that shallow grave on metal wheels for what felt like days, riding the worst roads I imagine exist in the state of Illinois, though it was not even a whole twenty-four hours, and we stopped in a roadside grove along the way for water and to relieve ourselves and eat some cold porridge with walnuts and hardtack biscuits, then returned to our hiding place and when we climbed out we were in the city of Chicago, which was an impressive sight, to say the least, far more impressive than Hannibal, though Chicago wasn’t even as pretty or built up as old St. Louis, and so not as impressive then as it is today.

I thought to narrate that there is where we settled, and as soon as we could I made sure Sadie and the little ones each got their Certificates of Freedom from the State of Illinois, Cook County, as I got mine, making sure mine read James Alton Rivers, since I kept the name I had always been known by but added the town where I first breathed in real liberty, and since we had finally reached the other side of the big snaking muddy river which had been the dividing line our whole lives up until then, our long bondage on the one side in Missouri and that goal we sought on the other, then we crossed the Illinois River which we had reached at Peoria, and finally the forking river in Chicago which takes you out to the sea-like lake, and I didn’t feel a single shred of remorse for having dropped the name of Miss Watson, since she wasn’t no great mistress or lady anyhow. I had to learn to say Mr. James Alton Rivers instead of just Jim as white folks always called me, or Jim Watson, which everyone had taken to saying, like this Sawyer boy now, just as Sadie had to learn to say Sadis May Rivers, May the middle name she took to acknowledge the month that we arrived, though she was not so fond of the last name Rivers, and kept calling herself simply Sadie May, and Elizabeth went by Bessie Amelia Rivers, to honor her late baby sister, Amelia, who died in infancy on that farm off Bear Creek where she was born, and Johnny whose middle name became Obi after my grandfather I never met named Obi, who was a pure African they used to say, as well as the old faith I had kept alive, even in Hannibal, was quickly saying Johnny O. Rivers without missing a beat.

I think to conclude to the Sawyer boy and Huckleberry, all adulted now, that I keep that certificate at all times and in all places against my chest in a leather pouch I bought for myself and it reads JAMES ALTON RIVERS, FREE PERSON OF COLOR, a resident or citizen of the State of Illinois, at all times in all places, and entitled to be respected accordingly, in Person and Property, at all times in all places, in the due prosecution of his—my—concerns, at all times in all places, signed with the Seal of said Court, at Chicago, on the 23rd of November in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty-two, and I have carried it all the way up to and through the time I returned to Missouri, settling here in St. Louis since I was not ever going to set feet again in Hannibal if I could help it, and even when some of the Hannibal people including those LaFleurs have happened upon me down here there is not a thing they could say or do because I had the states of Missouri, Illinois and the federal government on my side, though I’ve always made sure to have an escape route and a safehouse on the other side of the river ready to flee to given the trials the courts are putting Mr. Dred and Mrs. Lizzie Scott through.

Instead I said, "I was living in Chicago for a few years then I decided to come back home. I posted my bond to stay here, have been working steadily and decided to settle down."
“Chicago,” Sawyer said, looking at Huckleberry, “sounds like our old friend has gone and got pretty fancy on us. What do you think about that, Huck?”

“I been as far south as Mississippi and over to Louisville, Kentucky but I never been to Chicago myself,” Huck replied.

“All kinds of things going on up in Chicago,” Tom said.

“Jim ain’t said nothing about all that, just that he been there and come back here,” Huck said.

“Some go to Chicago and get ideas,” Tom said.

The angles of that face, like broken porcelain, pulled apart and recombined until I almost did not recognize him. “Well, sounds to me like Jim is keeping himself out of trouble, and the worst thing for anybody these days is getting caught up in all that trouble, getting involved with people like Lovejoy or Torrey or that new agitator writer Mrs. Stowe what likes to stir up a whole heap of trouble too.”

I remained silent, thinking I should tell these two that two years ago, I consulted the omens and auguries, which told me that I should head down to St. Louis, perhaps continuing on to Kansas or Oklahoma territory, so I said goodbye to my children, promising I would write them every other week and send money for food and books and clothes, and goodbye to Sadie May, who could move to Tumbuttoo with her new lovers for all I cared so long as she did not take my children there. I left Chicago first thing in the morning to walk back and hitch my way to my native state, though this time with my papers on me, saying Alton Rivers, free in all places and at all times, determined nobody, LaFleur or anyone else, was going to put me under bond. Eventually I reached the city after crossing around the Indian mounds in Cahokia and lodged with my half-brother Ezekiel, who had been manumitted and left Hannibal first second he could, running around with the last name Carillon after the family that had held him, though I eventually convinced him to change it Rivers too. Through him I secured a job cleaning up and doing repairs on a tavern building owned by an older gentleman named Mr. Wallace

Wallace, who had gained his freedom in the 1830s and was said, because of his silver eyes, to be the unacknowledged son of one of the oldest families in the county. Soon I was running that tavern since Mr. Wallace had so much other business, involving numbers and cards and palliatives, and sometimes ladies and studs, to attend to. There was a good number of those white men in the city who liked the delights that Mr. Wallace Wallace provided, but you always have to be careful when you get too deep in the cut with those kinds of folks, because you can turn up like Mr. Wallace Wallace, with his silks and ruby studded pocketwatch and silver eyes and pearl-handled pistol, which he did not hesitate to brandish if needed, floating face down in the Des Peres River, with no cut at all.

You could say Mr. Wallace Wallace left a waltz, I want to tell these two, if you are trying to be both cruel and truthful, but he had fathered a number of children by different wives and girlfriends, some free and some still in bondage, some on the Missouri side and some over in Brooklin, right next to East St. Louis, and I heard tell that he had left another brood all along the river far north as Minnesota from the time he gained his papers up till now. As it was, I spoke to several people of the kind who could resolve the question of the building's title while I took to running the tavern, though I had to flinggle to get it into my name. As soon as I did I sold it to a white man who planned to tear it and every other building on the block down so he could throw up a warehouse, since in those days white people from every corner of their world, some from all across the free states and some from the Southern states, some from Ireland and some from Germany, were showing up as if the wind brought them, and they like to make money and take care of each other and that tiny tavern was in their way. I took the money, which was more than a servant's wages, and bought another tavern cheap from a man leaving for Kansas, even closer to the river near the railroad tracks on Sycamore, from the roof you could even see Duncan's Island where they carried out executions and Lynchings. Ezekiel painted the sign with my name on
it, Rivers Tavern, and I got down to business, always making sure that I watered down the liquor and allowed few tabs or borders, borrowing only when absolutely necessary, and I eventually found myself and Ezekiel a pistol each, mine nesting in the back of my trousers, to ensure nobody rolled us, though I regularly paid off the police and a representative of my ward's alderman every other Thursday, always in the morning and a few cents more than they asked for, which meant I never had any trouble, no trouble at all.

For all my success in business, I have never had any luck with women, which I would never dare share with these two, and the first one I took up with in St. Louis, just to have a woman more so than I really liked her, had something going with another woman at the same time. I broke it off but she sent the second woman to come talk to me, saying they could make accommodations if I could. The way it happens in the Bible the man would take several wives and not the other way around, but this woman, Augustine, had a way about her that could bend you to her will. The woman who came calling, with her tight curls and skin as black as mine and her limp, was named Louisa, and I ended up moving in with the two of them and Augustine's two girls who were halfway to adult age and not so amenable to their mother's guidance, especially since she was too caught up with her own business, a sure disaster when dealing with young people. Louisa was interested in learning about healing and reading the signs, and after a while I found myself growing quite fond of Louisa herself, and she confessed she had told Augustine she'd better keep me on as soon as she laid eyes on me, so she could get to know me, with my shoulders of coal and hairy legs and skillful way around a bar and a ledger book, and I found myself taken with this short skinny woman with skin the color of midnight and lips always parted as if posing a rhetorical question and her love of books, midnight eyes, and that leg broken during her bondage and never properly set, and that was how all that began. Still I warned her we ought to be careful, not just because of Augustine, who it turns out had other things happening on the side herself and was fine to let us have our own, but with her girls, and because of the law which saw fit to jail or send people down the Mississippi who didn't follow the rules and conventions. Louisa, in her fashion, said several weeks later, having joined me in running the tavern, don't worry about all that, we live in a frontier area, nobody cares about what we're doing, and if the law comes we can always flee west and request to live among the Indians, and there's nothing the law could do to us then.

Instead I said, "My business, Huckleberry, is just working hard and living my life, and I don't know nothing about no Lovejoy or Torrey"—though I knew good and well who they both were, what free man didn't know the names of the abolitionist heroes—"or the Mrs. Stowe lady"—and who in the last year hadn't ever heard of her or her book?—"and I haven't even considered going west."

Huckleberry nodded, but Sawyer was watching me closely. He said nothing for a while, until I moved to take my leave and walk away. As soon as I stirred he laughed, more a cackle than an expression of humor, leaned close to me and said loudly, as passersby looked on, "You'd better watch yourself, Jim, you hear me? Good thing we know you but you walking these streets like they belong to you, and they don't to no nigger, no matter what some of you might think these days, so you watch it, cause the time'll come when even the good people like me and Huck here have had enough." He clapped me hard on the shoulder as he said this, and I thought to cock him cold in his wire-lipped mouth, but I did not want to do anything to lose my tavern or my freedom, so I said, "I hear that, Tom," and he said, losing his laugh, though Huckleberry was almost smiling now, "You call me Mr. Tom Sawyer, Sir, old man," and I said, "Yes, Miss Tom Sawyer," so fast it wasn't clear whether I'd left out the "Mr." or the "Sir" or added the "Old Man," and he looked hard at me, almost smiling, reminding me in a firm, cold voice, "Boy, I'm warning you, you had better watch yourself."

Huckleberry seized my hand, clasping it so tight he brought back
in a quick flood of feelings those years with the Widow Watson, and whispered as if he wanted only me and not his friend to hear, "You take care of yourself, Jim, and keep out of all that trouble, please, cause this world is about ready to break wide open, and I sure don't want to see you get swallowed up."

I told him I would not get involved in any such things, though I was going to do whatever I wanted within reason especially if it was going to ensure that no other person would ever be enslaved, and not a single thing except maybe death was going to swallow me up or see that happen to me, certainly nothing involving him or that other one. I offered the two my good wishes and farewells, not moving yet watching as they walked away, Sawyer's head and arms gyring like a nickelodeon picture, Huck nodding but never glancing back, until they vanished into the horizon near Mill Creek.

I never came across either one of them over the next few years, not even once, then the war began so perhaps both had moved away to some other place, Sawyer to Nevada or Oregon, where some of the local people were heading, Huckleberry to Kansas, or perhaps they had already headed off to fight on the Confederate side. There was a pressing question about which way Missouri would go since Governor Claiborne had sided with the insurrectionists, then General Lyon came and the Germans faced down and fired on the insurrectionists, all those scruffy Dutch with their rifles from the federal arsenal, though nobody knew what kind of white people would fire on other white people en masse like that. But they did and that was only the opening of the war here, as well as the sum of the fighting, at least for the people who stayed in St. Louis. By this time Johnny O. had come to live with me, and at first didn't take so well to Louisa, though he stayed with us for about a year, finding work down on the levee with all the steamboats bringing goods to provision the troops, and in his off-time studied the healing arts with me when I wasn't working the bar. He fell in love with a girl who was still bound to a family out in Bellefontaine, so I gave him money to go back to Chicago, so she could become free and they could marry. He left late one night and I was wrecked to see him go, but he wrote to tell me that after being stopped by the river patrols they got through, and he wrote me letters every other week, like I used to do with his sister and him, promising he was going to come back and fight.

Right around the middle of the summer of 1863 the army announced that we could sign up, at the Schofield Barracks, and though I was over 40 now, 46 to be exact, I felt it was my duty to contribute directly to the struggle, though I was sure they would say, Mr. Rivers, you are far too old, but rumor was an old black man had been the first casualty when the battles began in Washington, so if he was willing and able to serve why couldn't I, and I walked over there anyhow. Louisa protested my decision but, without conceding that what I was doing was right, agreed to stay in town and run the tavern while I was gone. It tore me apart to say goodbye to her, us never having left the other's side since we had taken up house together, but I knew both from all the signs at my disposal and deep in my core that at war's end I would walk through that tavern door and see her standing there.

They took me and we, the First Missouri Colored Troops, men mostly young but some old from in state and some from points north, west and south, mustered out not long thereafter, and I will tell the reporter about all of this, about each battle from the time we crossed the Meramec, then headed to Helena, and the entire journey, with every battle and firefight all the way down to Texas, but only once I have finished telling him about the second time I saw that face, which was after we had already reached Los Brazos de Santiago, near Brownsville. Have you ever noticed how on the decisive day the light comes through the trees a certain way, how the patterns of the future reveal themselves as a ghost language and you got to do more than just pay attention but use all the knowledge and wisdom you have ever gained to interpret it? Because I had been studying on just that when Sydnor, from my company, ran right up to me hollering, all out of breath, "Colonel talking about how despite the cease-fire we
might scrap it up one more time with the rebels," repeating himself until Bergamire and the rest of them closed his trap with their glares. I listened to him since the light that morning was not shining like on the morning that I chose to cross the Mississippi with Sadie May and the children all those years before, the sun's beams not drawing a path to the shore, not touching and catching and caressing the bluewood branches there in Texas just so, though in Hannibal it had been crab apples and cherries, the gleaming dressing the leaves with its omens and auguries, printing clues in shadowed patterns in the grass and soil you just needed to discern if you could, because the real test is always to go beyond mere guessing to following the map the world around you sets forth.

Soon enough here came Anderson, stomping over from the area of the officers' tents, grinning broadly like the lottery man had called his name, but unlike Sydnor he knew not to mess with me when I was studying or something, so he stood beside me as my eyes followed the lights shafts down into the greenery, tracing it with my fingers, smelling it, listening to the aforesuonds and the silence enfolding it and only then did he utter anything, only when he was pretty sure I was done, Sydnor watching me too until he couldn't sit no more and hurried over to hear what Anderson had to say. Excuse me but what news you got for us, Pop James? is what this young man, once in bondage yet who knew how to write out notes like a schoolmaster and recite chapter and verse from the Bible and Longfellow without mixing up a single word, and who behaved like a gentleman when he spoke to an elder like me, asked me.

I answered, "I got to think about it for a little while more, but if you look at this sign here"—and I pointed to the cross of light with the faint shape of a heart hovering just above its center, a forewarning and lament—"and here, to the way the blades is bending outward on either side like an invisible arrow"—urging us to stay right where we were—"and to here," a patch so dusty it was as if the desert of solitary death had already laid claim to it, "this is not the time to attack, I can almost assure you on my parents' and my grandparents' graves of that." DeVeaux, who had also walked over, countered without even acknowledging me that my mumbo jumbo and hoodoo claptrap couldn't be right, that what we needed to do is fight our way to the next line, lay those Confederates and their French and Mexican infantrymen low like the reaper, and they all commenced to smiling and clapping, Johnson, Scott, Shepard, Morris who had his sisters kidnapped into Arkansas well before the first shot down at Sumter, Wilson, Patterson, Renard, Kelley, even Bergamire, nearly every last one of them. DeVeaux was on a roll now, his voice a common preacher's, which is what his father was, Anderson told me the first time I witnessed him going on like this, soon as he got free the daddy took up the Good Book and the son intended to follow that profession, these folks from the far northwestern corner of the state, near Nebraska, though he had shifted into testifying about how we all needed to go beyond shooting them down, we needed to kill at least ten a piece, have a slaughter to send a message to Price and Bedford and all the rest. When he had finally quieted down, Anderson reminded everyone we had orders to take them prisoner rather than go on a spree.

When he said this last word a few of them guffawed because they hadn't ever heard that word before, but Anderson was wont to speak real proper at times, like a dictionary would if a dictionary could talk, which made me think of my old lady back home. He and Bergamire and a few of the others would take turns teaching classes early in the morning and by the campfire, on spelling and speaking and math, not the kind of learning people learned in the fields or in the store rooms in country towns, but the right way so that you can pen your name when the time came, and understand what your documents were saying, and count your pay before and after it hit your pocket, instead of having to rely on them other folks to do so for you. I found myself growing close to Anderson, and would tell him what I was picking up so that he could convey it to the rest as if he had somehow assessed it himself, since they were more likely to listen to him.
But that day was not propitious, and yet Colonel Barrett ordered us to ready ourselves and proceed against the gray traitors, which meant eight companies of our United States Colored Troops, which is what we became when the Army federalized our Missouri brigade, would head with the white and Texas Cavalry Battalion under the command of Lt. Colonel Branson through Boca Chica Pass to engage the enemy, driving them back to Brownsville and capturing any we could along the way. All day we prepared for the evening march, though it was already clear that four dozen of the white men would have to proceed horseless, but both Anderson and Bergamire circulated among all the companies to say that as soon as we overtook the insurrectionists we were to requisition as many of their mounts as we could. Between readying and packing equipment I sat and composed brief letters, which Anderson wrote out in his steady hand, to Johnny O., who was with a regiment still stationed in Tennessee, and to Bessie Amelia, who was raising money for the troops all across Minnesota and Wisconsin, and to Louisa, who loved hearing about nothing more than the tedium of my daily military life. A fine rain began falling in the late morning, and I pointed this out to Anderson, who thought it might let up, but by the time we had reached the pass, the downpour had thickened into batteries of water, and the sky cracked open with thunder and foreboding light. Our progress was glacial through the high, wet grass, which now hid all its secrets, giving off strange waterlogged sounds and odors, the cattails fizzing like flares, the figwort emitting their noxious fragrance, the nightshade extending its mortal embrace, but we followed the curves of the river throughout the night and caught a brigade of the Confederates unawares. The Texans took three of the traitors prisoner, and sent some of our men to husband the supplies from their bivouac, though Anderson had me help set up camp for the night and read the surroundings for any clues about the following day.

I woke that morning and studied the omens, which were ill but not fully open to interpretation, so I kept them to myself. By midday we were creeping on our hands and knees like turtles across green expanse at the base of Palmito Hill when a fusillade, followed by a brigade of Confederates, engaged us. I usually kept to the rear as I was ordered to, but Anderson urged several us to crawl out to the far edge of the field, near the river, where there was a stand of Montezuma cypress, which I did and when I rounded them flat on my stomach, creeping forward like a panther I saw it, that face I could have identified if blind in both eyes, him, in profile, the agate eyes in a squint, that sandy ring of beard collaring the gaunt cheeks, the soiled gray jacket half open and hanging around the sun-reddened throat, him crouching reloading his gun, quickly glancing up and around him so as not to miss anything. I glanced behind to see if Anderson was nearby, but he and most of the rest were proceeding to the north of me, along the open field of battle, a blue line undulating forward in the high grass, their mismatched uniforms behind the white men in their blue undulating like waves on the one side and the gray of the insurrectionists on the other, the gunfire crackling like the announcement of the end of something terrible, and I looked up and he still had not seen me, this face he could have drawn in his sleep, these eyes that had watched his and watched over his, this elder who had been like a brother, a keeper, a second father as he wondered why this child was taking him deeper and deeper into the heart of the terror, why south instead of straight east to liberation, credit his and my youth or ignorance or inexperience, for which I forgive him and myself but I came so close to ending up in a far worse place than I ever was, and I heard Anderson or someone call out in the distance, and raised my gun, bringing it to my eye, the target his hands which were moving quickly with his own gun propped against his shoulder, over his heart, and I steadied the barrel, my finger on the trigger, which is when our gazes finally met, I am going to tell the reporter, and then we can discuss that whole story of the trip down the river with that boy, his gun aimed at me now, other faces behind his now, all of them assuming the contours, the lean, determined hardness.
of his face, that face, there were a hundred of that face, those faces, burnt, determined, hard and thinking only of their own disappearing universe, not ours, which was when the cry broke across the rippling grass, and the gun, the guns, went off.

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Cambridge Journal: October ___, 1890

Fleeting Impressions on an Autumn Afternoon (Harvard)

Of what did this chilly afternoon consist? After lunch with Morgan in Mem. Hall, work and a swift visit to 20 Flagg, I took a round-about way from the Gymnasium for my breather. Past the Square terminus, dodging the chattering crowds and dust and clattering hooves that transform Cambridge at times into something of a miniature metropolis.

I was feeling rather out of sorts, for I once again had to put off Mrs. T[aylor] with a promise to pay in a fortnight and a smile. Throughout the meal I sat and ate, only moderately aware of my companion, Morgan. His jovial self as always, was he recounting to me last Saturday's Hill festivities and his impressions of some new young Ladies on visit from

Ater lecturing on thought and the color-sense, during which I pressed the students to investigate how the context of one's perception shapes mental impressions, I took lunch with one of Royce's students. A robust, poetically-minded young Platonist from New Hampshire, we navigated for an hour around the shoals of idealism and the literal embodiment of the Absolute in the lyric moment, to which he has rather romantically subscribed. Is that not a danger of the current state of the literary arts? He then inquired, sub rosa, whether the body, though withering on the vine of a man's life, might somehow be restored to its most dangerous state of beauty by thought alone. The perils, I thought but dared not