



## JOURNAL ENTRY THREE

Monday, May 2, 1864

Planting and a prayer . . .

**The story so far:** Part outlaw and part soldier, roaming bands of irregular Confederate cavalry were a daily terror in Tennessee. Our narrator and his best friend, John, the son of a freed slave, encounter unexpected violence when John is pistol-whipped by a member of one of these bands.

Rain fell soft and gentle in the night.  
Now the fields wake beneath a blanket of gray mist,  
moon still a ghost, faint first light of day  
laced across the hills. I went yesterday  
to visit John, who's doing better by the day.

His head was wrapped in bandages.

"Just a nasty bump," he said,  
and I could see again the twisted face  
of that man in faded gray, smiling  
through his yellow teeth as he  
holstered his pistol and rode away.

There's a full day's work ahead of me  
but for now, Ma's got biscuits ready and we eat them,  
spread with wildberry jam she put up in the fall.  
She sits stone still, hands cupped  
around a mug of steaming chicory,  
her eyes far off, the way she gets  
when she's thinking about Pa.

"You'll get the seed in," she says,  
her eyes still somewhere else. It's not  
a question, but a statement borne of need.

"I'll get the seed in," I reply, my fingers  
already curling toward the act  
of placing and then covering.

"Your pa always..." she begins,  
then her voice just trails off.

I think about the work of living,  
the sweat of crops, all the things  
Pa would have done, but  
it's no use: there's nothing left for me  
except to get the crops in, let the weather  
do its best, and hope come fall the corn  
is tall and rich, enough to feed us all.

•

My old dog Charley digs at something in the yard,  
then sits back and lifts his head and howls.  
I swing the barn door open and step  
into the cool shade, the musty smell of hay.  
Old Jed backs into his stall and snorts.  
Betty shoves her nose at me to rub.

I throw hay for Jed and Betty,  
then sit and put my head into my hands.  
It's times like these I hear Pa's footsteps,  
can smell the perfume of tobacco  
in his faded denim overalls.  
I know I ain't supposed to cry,  
but there's so much work  
and I am frightened.

Ma is quiet but I know  
she wishes everything would stop,  
that he could  
ride up out of fog,  
shake the rain from his beard,  
call us all around,  
tell us stories like he used to,  
bank the fire,  
close the door,  
and let the evening settle down around us like a glove.

•

Before I harness Jed, I climb into the hayloft,  
lift the board that hides my treasure box,  
and bring it out. Carefully, I raise the lid  
and run my fingers through what's there,  
until I find my grandpa's knife,

the one I took to Gettysburg,  
that I put back when I came home,  
that cut Pa's name into a tree  
somewhere in northern Virginia,  
that also cut this lock of his brown hair  
I pull out now  
and hold  
between my fingers.

Dying on the battlefield,  
he couldn't talk, but shook his head  
as if to say,  
take some piece of me and keep it;  
hold the memory when I am gone.

When he had breathed his last,  
with one quick swipe I cut a knotted  
rope of his mussed and bloody hair  
and I stuck it in my pocket. And then,  
before his finger stiffened,  
I pulled his wedding ring  
and buried it deep inside  
the saddlebag to take  
back home to Ma.

I watched grim soldiers  
collect his body and pile it  
along with others on a straining wagon,  
and then move off down the rutted road  
with their awful, gruesome load.

By then the rain had started, first  
a mist, then steady as a summer storm.  
I pulled off my hat and leaned my head,  
rain soaking my hair and running  
down my face until I couldn't tell  
what was rain and what was tears.

"God," I said. "You're gonna have to see me home."

And then I turned to go.

**Next Week: What God . . .**

---

*Text copyright © 2004 by Craig Crist-Evans*  
*Illustrations copyright © 2004 by Anna Rich*  
Reprinted by permission of Breakfast Serials, Inc.

*Breakfast Serials*  
Good Books Unbound