

Cross perched his hand on the barrel of the single cannon that was placed there to represent the 8th New York artillery, the bronze barrel was ice-cold against his palm. But in 1864 it had brimmed with fire and smoke sending shot bounding through the trees toward his trench on the right flank of Lee's line.

That wasn't the worst of it. Case-shot exploded in the air above him and pelted the men with musket balls, splintering tree trunks and men's bodies. He clenched his eyes shut and shook his head, at thirty-seven he could still not leave the memories of his youth behind. A warm hand gently slid over his.

"Maybe we should see the cemetery honey," said his wife Jenny.

She knew being back on the battlefield was too much for him. Her arm that was now looped in his, gently tugged him back in the direction of the town of Mechanicsville. In her other arm she cradled a five year-old girl with the same downy blond hair of both parents. She fidgeted in her mother's grasp.

"Put me down," demanded the girl.

"You can sit in the wagon Becky. Hush."

She huffed and leaned against her mother.

Cross climbed into the wagon and bucked the reins; the only sound on the journey was the creak of the wagon as it rattled along. Cross was absorbed in his thoughts. He remembered how Union troops had been camped near Mechanicsville and how it had been a mad race after the Battle of Wilderness to get back to the town before the union troops arrived.

The wagon halted in front the cemetery; this is what he'd come for. A low brown brick wall fenced in the graveyard; a large two-story wooden house with dual redbrick chimneys dotted the skyline just behind the cemetery.

He carefully opened the iron gate of the cemetery and stepped inside. There were columns of graves, each nine headstones deep. The headstones were enrobed in a skirt of bluegrass, which rippled in the light breeze. Despite the unkempt lawn, each stone stood proudly, the name of a fallen Union soldier cut deep into its marble face. Cross stared between the gaps in the tombstones and spied the thing that had called him there.

Against the back wall there stood a marble platform. Resting on top it was a marble sarcophagus, etched into the monument were the words: near this stone rests the remains of 889 Union Soldiers. The tablet had been erected the year before and Cross felt drawn to the place. He wanted to know that the sacrifice that he and his comrades made at Cold Harbor would not be forgotten, that it had made some impact on the world.

Cross stood there with his arms folded taking in the hunk of stone. It did not stand as a reminder of the fortnight he had spent in Cold Harbor. No Confederate graves graced the grounds. The tablet was a celebration of victory; the defeated were cast aside where they met their deaths, like broken rag dolls. Cross knew, only he could remember them.

Jenny saw a mixture of anguish and loathing flash across his face. The longer he stood there, the more anger built inside him. Jenny set Becky down who immediately began trying to climb on of top one of the graves. Jenny lightly touched her husband's arm.

"Is everything alright?" asked Jenny, her fingers curling around his.

"They don't even care about us," he spat at the rows of graves. "We don't matter to the Yankees, we're just rebels to them! No one cares we died!"

"Honey," she cooed, squeezing his hand. "Maybe we should head back to the hotel."

"No," he said, trying to swallow his anger before it edged into his voice. "I need you to see something."

She gave a nod and scooped up Becky who was picking wild flowers that were sprinkled among the graves. This is something he needs to do, she thought. Lifting Becky into the wagon she glanced at the burial plot. She thought she understood he had watched men fall here, even her own father, and society had shunned their memories, trapping them in mass graves right where they fell. As if sweeping a time America wished to forget under the soil.

They drove out of the town back toward the battlefield, finding themselves in dense woods. It was not as Cross remembered. The slim trees that lined the path, which he walked, were lush with life; in 1864 their leaves were flicked with brown, seared by the summer heat. The woods were alive with the chirping of birds, the rattle of musketry having long rolled away like the changing of seasons.

Cross kept his eyes on the scenery around the path searching for something. His eyes swept the ground until he found it. It was a shallow divot covered by grass, the built earth wall long having crumbled away. It had once been the trench that had been his home in June of 1864. You couldn't even kneel in it now.

In 1864 he had felt fear seep through his veins as he crouched against the piled earth, mini-balls thumping into it, spraying little geysers of dirt along the lip. But now, he felt nothing as he gazed on the old relic.

Except for the tiny slash in the ground, the land bore no testimony to what had happened there on that June day. Where were the bodies of the Union eighteenth corps that had littered the ground in front of the trench? Where were the ruts from the wheels of the Confederate cannon that had pounded the Union troops into disfigurement? Where was the blood that had trickled down the floor of the trench making it slippery and coloring the dirt the color of clay? Where was the body of Sergeant Walsh that he had wept over? Where were his rolled back eyes and his lips drawn in tight grimace, the expression of man forced to face mortality? It only swirled in his memory.

"This is where it happened," he said, not daring to meet his wife's gaze. "This is where your Pa died."

Jenny gave a nod, chewing on her lip for a moment. The place of his death seemed so lonely. The two great armies after two weeks had lumbered away towards Petersburg, but here her father remained. She stooped down and brushed the grass that covered the trench with her hand, as tenderly as if it were his whiskers. It was all she had left of him.

A tear slipped down her cheek and then another, each seeping into the earth. Cross bent down and draped his arm around her. Becky stared at them confused.

"Mama, why are you crying into a hole?"