

# In the name of the father

1901, New Mexico.

A pale orange glow slithered across the horizon as night's darkness dissolved before the approaching dawn. The desert emanated with the screams of vultures and the hums of crickets, the corpses however, didn't hum. Six men dared attack James Macready now five were dead, the last wished he was.

James sauntered over to the wriggling man, kicked him on his side and rested a revolver between his eyes, in a calm voice he spoke "Mad Mullens, you know him?".

"I..I..don-" James cocked his gun and pressed harder against the squabbling rodent's forehead. "Reckon you might wanna start talking. Mad Mullens, scum of a man, where is he?". "I worked with em' a few years back, got himself shot during the Delacroix train heist, rode off to a town, uhh.. Copperfield, was sweet on a girl there, he's a pastor now". James glanced around the barren wastes, before he could respond the man squealed "It's just past them mountains there see? I don't know why you is looking for em', he's retired now, ain't one for killing no more either, has a family now". "Then I'll kill 'em all" James said, lazily raising his gun. The man whimpered, pleading for his sorry soul, James sighed, out of his pocket he pulled a pair of dice, briefly he stirred them in his hand before casting them on the desert floor. James whistled "two sixes, looks like fate has suffered you to live, now how about you get out of here before I take luck into my own hands". Confused, the man scampered to his feet and bolted for the hills leaving a trail of dust in his wake. James mounted his horse, turning his back against the rising sun he galloped towards the mountains. His business lied west.

More than anything James hated the quiet country roads, it left him alone with the one person he feared most, himself. Soft droplets of rain pelted onto his leather jacket and bled into the

fabrics beneath, he shivered with the cold. Reaching across his saddle he pulled out a canteen and drank deeply. Whiskey, the last enticement in an otherwise cruel world, the liquor ran through his throat like liquid fire, warming him to his core.

Further down the road James pulled out his pair of dice and studied them deeply, their once white form now stained brown from years of blood, sweat, dirt.. and even tears. They were his father's dice, he was an avid gambler. James had no illusions of his father, but deep down he was a good man, no one deserved to die like that, shot in the back by a cowardly crook. Tears welled in James' eyes, his heart beat in trumpeting fury, his hands tightened around the dice until they nearly bled. His sorrow's saviour was a simple sign that read "**welcome to Copperfield**". Purpose was restored to his fragile mind, years of searching was coming to an end. From New York to New Mexico he had travelled and now all that remained to complete his quest was searching a couple mottled, wooden shacks. "Count your hours Mullens" whispered James. It may be God's job to judge Mad Mullens in Hell, but it was damn well his job to send him there, James had a sermon to attend.

James Macready rode into town in the dead of night. Not a single soul stirred save for the faint ambience of laughter radiating from what could only be the inn. James dismounted his horse and climbed the slippery porch steps. Through the window a couple men could be seen playing cards, they looked none too friendly. Slowly James opened the creaking door, all eyes were on him, save for the innkeeper, who smiled as he plunged a soiled rag into a dirty glass. Calmly James crawled to the nearest bar-side stool and called for the innkeeper. He was young, not yet eighteen James figured. "Whiskey please, strongest you got" said James, the boy nodded and returned minutes later with the bubbling, brown liquid. "So what brings you here?" the boy said in an inquisitive tone. "Church" James grumbled, clearly not interested. The boy continued. "So you come all the way out here to go to church?" James ignored him but the boy was stubborn. "So why're you here?". James sighed " If I tell you

will you leave me alone?”. The boy nodded enthusiastically. “Revenge” James muttered. The boy scratched his head “ Pa always said revenge was like a two-headed snake, when one head bites the other they both get poisoned”. “ That’s great kid” James said dismissively as he moved to the far stool. “Keep these whiskies coming too.” Soon James fell into drunken despair - a usual Tuesday night - , silence dominated the inn, the only sound being raindrops smashing against the roof above like gunfire. From his satchel James whipped out a shred of faded newspaper he’d brought with him from New York. It bore writing but more importantly to him a picture of the man he was going to kill. Dark hair, neat combed beard and gaunt cheeks. A handsome man no doubt, but no less worthy of death. Moments later a large man barged through the door. The behemoth stomped over to the bar and grabbed the boy by the scruff of his collar “You have my money kid?”. The boy wheezed, through measured, raspy breaths he squeaked out “No Pete I can ge-”. the man roared and threw him against a wine rack. James had seen enough, he stood up and made for the door, opened it and stared into the dark,rainy abyss beyond. He couldn't leave, the final shreds of good within his hardened soul called him back inside to help the wimpy kid. “Hey you” James yelled, Pete turned to him “What ya’ want?”. James stared at the frightened boy behind the bar “I don't know” he screamed before cascading his fist against Pete’s face. The man toppled to the hardwood floor, but quickly he rose, looming over James like a giant, his body large, corded with fat and muscle, his face round and red, his jowls quivered as he snarled like a feral dog. Before Pete could retaliate James headbutted him. As he staggered backwards James made a start for the door but the towering man jostled into him, both crashed through the window and onto the damp outdoor porch. The bandit was quick but James was quicker, he leapt to his feet and kicked the man square in the chest, he smashed against the porch bannister and toppled to muddy road below. James leapt on the man and the two began exchanging lethargic punches, a crowd gathered around as they brawled, patrons of the inn shouted and

betted on who would win. Soon the man stopped fighting but James continued bashing into him with all his fury, he punched for the mother he never knew, he punched for the father he wish he still had, he punched for the cowering boy and he punched again just for the hell of it. Exhausted, James collapsed beside the beaten man, the rain above washing away blood and sin.

James awoke to the comfort of a cotton bed, the first he'd slept on in months. He was in a small, white room covered in crosses and pictures of Christ. Confused he rose to his feet. The bedroom door creaked open and from it came the boy. "Sir I just wanted to thank you for savin' my life last night, you're my hero". James chuckled "Listen kid, I'm a bad guy, I reckon I've killed more men than there are pages in the bible, I'm no hero". He limped to the front door grabbing his rifle which nestled neatly against the wall. "Pa' said he did bad things once too, he said it's never too late to try do better". James walked down the porch and looked about the bustling town "I think it's too late for me kid". The boy dropped his head in disappointment "well, good luck anyways". James smiled and tipped his hat "you too kid". As James walked on the boy called out "name's Bill by the way, Bill Mullens". James froze in dread apprehension, his limbs fell limp and heavy, taking a deep breath he advanced towards the church.

The morning sun hung low across copperfield, its liquid haze bringing life to the dull, arid world. James camped atop the church steeple, his rifle resting against the narrow windowsill facing the town. His plan was simple, wait for the sermon to end, whilst Mad Mullens left he would shoot him clean in the head as the church bell rang. Below, the monotonous chants of prayers rattled back and forth between Pastor Mullens and his congregation. Waiting to kill a man was tedious work. James took a hearty swig of whiskey, bored, he gazed out to the world beneath. A couple girls in frilly dresses trudged along two pails of water from the well,

beyond them a man and his two sons attempted to calm an affrighted horse, their laughter like sweet poison to James' ears. Through the window of the inn Bill wiped down a no doubt bloody table. Cringing guilt radiated through James, the boy he had saved from pain was now about to endure more by his hands. The things Bill had said to him shook him more than he cared to admit, it was sure as hell the first time anyone had ever called him a hero. Was it too late for him? His quiet reflection was interrupted by the deafening clamour of the church bell. People streamed out of the chapel doors, their conversations muddled in James' ringing ears. Quickly he readied his rifle, resting his eye atop the iron sight. Minutes past before Mad Mullens slowly sauntered out of his chapel, James trembled, his trigger finger itched in compellence. Just before he pulled the trigger Bill ran from the inn and hugged his father, Mad Mullens ruffled his hair in response and gave a lively chuckle. James sat still, his chest heaving, without words he lowered his rifle and leaned it against the wall. Standing up he made his way down the narrow steps of the steeple and onto the outside street. He walked and didn't stop until the town of Copperfield was no more than a bulge on the horizon. James took out his whiskey and tipped it over, the soil drinking it graciously. Then he grabbed his revolver and chucked it into a nearby ditch. Lastly he clutched his father's dice tightly before dropping them on the ground and leaving them where they stood. He walked towards the rising sun a changed man. Perhaps it wasn't too late for James Macready afterall.

The shred of newspaper blew from James' satchel as he walked, landing on the dusty ground, its writing faded but still legible "*The state of New York congratulates local hero Sheriff Mad Mullens on the killing of notorious murderer and outlaw John Macready, the mayor himself will present him with a medal at town hall later this evening. We at the New York times wish Mad a bountiful early retirement to New Mexico after his unfortunate injury whilst heroically stopping the hardened criminal during the Delacroix train heist, truly an exceptional man.*"