

OVER THE RIVER:
THE LAST OF THE ILLINOIS

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Over the River: The Last of the Illinois

Belief is a mysterious thing. It is the only healer of the soul's wounds...

The Red Man is dead, disbelieving in us. He is dead and unappeased. Do not imagine him happy in his Happy Hunting Ground...Only those that die in belief die happy. Those that are pushed out of life in chagrin come back unappeased, for revenge.

A curious thing about the Spirit of Place is the fact that no place exerts its full influence upon a newcomer until the old inhabitant is dead or absorbed. So America... The moment the last nuclei of Red life break up in America, then the white men will have to reckon with the full force of the demon of the continent.

(D.H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature)

i

Polly Hickok stood at the open kitchen window and tried--with little success--to brush aside the graying strands that clung to her damp forehead. The air in the kitchen was stifling, but outside it was even worse; though it was already early October, summer had fastened on the land like a thirsty leech and refused to die.

Some, however, are more oppressed by the heat than others.

Not one hundred yards from the window, William Hickok, Polly's husband, sat unprotected in the deceptive shimmer of the sun's heat. A gangling, loose-jointed man, he was hunched against the barn wall like a discarded scarecrow, tirelessly poring over the book in his hands, oblivious to all around him. He'd been there since early morning. Polly knew that if she asked why he now sat in the sun, he would claim it was the shade that had moved, not he; and thus vindicating his action, he would quietly continue reading.

William had told his wife that the book, which had arrived from back east just three days earlier, was about some place called Brook Farm. Polly assumed it was another one of those "Utopia books." In any case, William and his "guest" had been talking of little else since its arrival. Perhaps even at this moment, as William sat apparently alone in the sun, they were engaged in a learned discussion. If so, Polly hoped they would soon finish and William's guest would leave.

As she had many times in the past few days, Polly again scanned the horizon for a break in the weather. But the sky was still the same unrelenting blue, and the air still settled like a despairing sigh. In the distance, a dark indolent bird spiraled downward. As Polly watched, vaguely intrigued, the bird's wings stretched out and caught the full glare of the sun, and, as they did, the bird seemed to pick up speed; for a moment it seemed that a tiny ball of fire raced earthward. Polly winced and closed her eyes. The air was too heavy she finally decided: a storm couldn't be far off.

"It's going to storm before nightfall," Polly announced through clenched teeth. Her eyes were still closed.

The boy who sat behind her lifted his eyes for a moment and then, almost as if embarrassed, looked away. He had heard the same hopeful words for the past three days.

Turning from the window, Polly opened her eyes and was startled by the unsmiling face which suddenly confronted her. Pallid skin stretched tight over starkly severe cheeks. Gray-black hair, carelessly pinned in a bun, sat like an untidy nest on the stranger's head. Sunken, lustreless eyes fastened on Polly with a reproachful stare, as if reminding her of some forgotten betrayal. There was the trace of a mustache. For a fleeting second, Polly imagined the face to be that of some avenging witch. Certainly it was the face of a very old woman.

Polly Hickok sighed wearily and reminded herself to tell Celinda not to leave her mirror hanging on the coat-hook by the door. With downcast eyes Polly turned the mirror's face to the wall.

Polly Butler Hickok had not always had such an aversion to mirrors. At one time--and not so very long ago at that--they had presented a much more pleasant image. She still sometimes remembered how when she was a very little girl her father would pick her up, swirl her in delightful orbits, and declare admiringly to anyone who would listen: "My little Princess is going to break some hearts, she is. She's going to have her pick of all the young men." Of course fathers often say such silly things, and

of course they very seldom turn out to be true. It so happened that in Polly's case they did.

For Polly Butler grew up to be locally famous as "the prettiest girl in Bennington, Vermont," and did indeed, as her father had predicted, have her "pick of all the young men." But, for better or worse, Polly's standards in young men were unusually high. Though she couldn't have said exactly what those standards were, she did know that the rather common young men of Bennington didn't come close to meeting them.

It wasn't until she was twenty-two and spending the summer with her brother in up-state New York that--seemingly quite by chance--the "little Princess" found the young man to meet her still undefined standards: William Alonzo Hickok, a tall, aristocratically handsome former seminary student with dark, incessantly searching eyes, and a tongue that sang with his plans for the future. He couldn't have been more different from the young farmers and shop-keepers of Bennington. Five minutes after meeting him, Polly Butler had picked her young man and gone out of the heart breaking business for good. On June 23, 1829, less than a month after they'd met, Polly Butler and William Hickok were married.

William Alonzo Hickok had been a New England college man, and, like most New England college men, William enthusiastically cultivated ideas. He would collect the seeds from wherever he could: from wild New England hillsides, from the simulated jungles of steam heated hothouses, from store bought packets with labels in large block print, from neatly hoed gardens of

Unitarian spinsters, from the promiscuous teeth of the wind itself. He would plant them; he would water them; he would watch in wonder when they grew; he would cry when they shriveled and died with the blight; he would cross-breed them in every imaginable way. Rarely could he bring himself to prune their tangled excess growth.

But though he once nurtured a multitude of ideas, after awhile William began to specialize. His own very special field which he eventually cultivated to the exclusion of all others was that of the ideal social organization: the Utopian field. More specifically: together with several of his apostate friends from seminary school, William planned to set up God's Kingdom on Earth--in accordance of course with the most progressive socialist models. Even before William met Polly, he'd gone so far as to make plans to move to the tiny village of North Hero, Vermont, the location from which he and his co-planners planned to refine their plans for The Kingdom.

To Polly, who was further from Bennington than she'd ever been before, this was rather strange but very exciting. None of the young men she'd known in Bennington had ever spoken to her of God's Kingdom on Earth--much less promised to build it. None had ever had such plans; none had ever had such vision.

It was only later, after they'd arrived at North Hero and after Polly was six months pregnant, that she learned that the searching visionary eyes which had originally so attracted her had actually given up searching some time ago. They were eyes that literally "saw" God, and on a fairly regular basis at that.

God, William calmly told his distraught young wife after God had departed one evening, was about 5' 11" and a bit on the portly side. He had bushy muttonchops and thinning gray-white hair which he combed straight back. Contrary to the beliefs of ignorant people, God was a generally amiable, even-tempered, and above all learned fellow; he spoke with an accent that would surely have marked him for a Harvard man were he not God. William was sure He and Polly would get along.

The doctors said William's communion with God was the result of "brain fever"--and indeed his health was shattered by this particular month long visit. However, as Polly soon discovered, this had not been the first time William had exchanged ideas with the deity (and it would certainly not be the last). It was only their most in-depth interview to date.

Though God, speaking with his Harvard accent, had high praise for William's plans for His Kingdom, He did propose some modifications which He and William discussed in detail. (William's model for God's Kingdom borrowed heavily from Fourier, and though God expressed sympathy with Fourier's basic humanitarian intentions, He also confided His opinion that the man was "unsound" and many of his ideas far too radical for implementation in His Kingdom.) But God never absolutely ruled out any possibilities; he was always amenable to sound rational arguments, to the discoveries of modern science. In the Mind of God, everything was open to discussion, to further consideration. God had been unfairly maligned on this point, William claimed again and again to whomever would listen. He was not really a pigheaded dogmatist.

Even His conception of His Kingdom on Earth was constantly evolving, and any well intentioned input of ideas was welcome.

Polly, however, was not impressed at all. She would later say that, from the first time she'd heard of Him, God had struck her as a grotesque hybrid: an ill-conceived cross between Saint Nicholas and John Quincy Adams. But then Polly's opinion was hardly a disinterested one. It had been an unnerving and humiliating blow for her to discover that she was destined to be the distant and nearly forgotten corner of a very oddly shaped love triangle when less than a year earlier she'd had her pick of the young men of Bennington, Vermont. And though the irrational jealousy she first felt toward God grew quieter over the years, it also grew ^{stronger} and more ingrained.

Polly, whose first year of marriage spilled over with unwanted revelations, made only one discovery of any significance during the next seventeen years. She discovered--or rather continually rediscovered--that with the world as it was her husband would never be a worldly man. Try as he would in fits and starts, he was simply unable to accomodate himself to any society except that of his as yet unrealized Utopia. Helplessly growing old, Polly looked on as her own life grew further and further from even the more modest Utopia her father had once promised his little Princess.

Still, when he was not cloistered in a private seminar with God, William, to his credit, at least tried to function in the imperfectly structured world around him. If by nothing else, these periodic attempts were permanently and incontrovertibly

attested to by the birth of no less than seven Hickok children: (in order) Oliver, Lorenzo Butler #1 (who died in infancy), Lorenzo Butler #2, Horace, James Butler, Celinda, and Lydia, And William not only did his part to populate his section of God's Kingdom on Earth, but, for awhile at least, he did his best to keep its members from starving once they were born. For whenever God was not visiting, he diligently looked for work and frequently found it. Though he always lost it again after a short time, no child of his ever actually starved.

One day early in 1833, when William was between jobs and Polly between pregnancies, God casually mentioned the vast opportunities that existed "out west." "Out west," God observed (only once would God ever speak to William in the imperative mood), there was cheap land, clean water, fewer government regulations, lower taxes. All in all "out west" seemed like the best place to start building His Kingdom, God said. So unless William had a better idea....

Hopelessly obtuse in many ways, William could take a hint when it came from God. "Out west," William eagerly told Polly after the deity had departed, was where he was finally going to establish God's Kingdom on Earth. No more dilly-dallying with the plans of his friends from seminary school. The Time had come. Polly stifled a sob, for despite what her husband said, she knew that it was in fact fruitless to argue with the word of God. However, as she packed to go "out west," she couldn't help thinking of the uncounted hearts she'd left broken back in Bennington; and sometimes she dreamed of the more conventional life that

would have been hers had she broken one heart less.

William, Polly, Oliver, and Lorenzo #2 left for "out west" later in 1833. But William soon learned that "out west" was a much larger area than he'd anticipated; and God never provided any more specific coordinates. Thus it was not until 1836--two years after Horace was born--that William, never overly decisive, finally decided to settle in the village of Homer, about ten miles north of the Illinois River in north central Illinois. He'd noticed the name on a map and it struck him as an appropriate place to conclude an odyssey.*

God was along time catching up with William Hickok; if He did have any special spot in mind for His Kingdom, Homer, Illinois was apparently not it. Or then again, perhaps He was only testing the loyalty of His chosen servant. In any case, His presence was not immediately missed. William easily established credit and began to work quite hard at some non-Utopian tasks. He built a small house in Homer, which comfortably housed his family, and proceeded to open the first general store in the village--which did surprisingly well, all things considered. For over a year after settling in Homer, William Hickok neither saw nor spoke to God, and Polly began to believe her prayers had finally been answered. Indeed, when his first Homeric son, James Butler Hickok, was born on May 27, 1837, it seemed that William Hickok,

*Twenty-seven years later, in the midst of the Civil War, the persistently Homeric but perversely defeatist citizens of the village would rename it "Troy Grove," apparently in memory of the fated losers in Homer's other epic. The reason for this bizarre change has never been explained.

the socialist visionary and confidant of God, was well on his way toward becoming Homer's foremost capitalist. If things had continued to go well, perhaps God would have permanently abandoned William to his growing wealth, James would have grown up to inherit a part of his father's expanding enterprise, and a James Butler Hickok IV would--even unto this day--be an anonymously prosperous smalltown businessman, Rotarian, Optimist, and past president of a local Illinois Jaycee chapter.

But whatever William's God might have had in mind, the ^{overruling} Fates--already with their six eyes lasciviously set on baby James--had other plans: the financial panic of 1837 was born less than a month after James Butler, the two events seemingly connected by some invisible and intentionally unsevered cord. Despite his destined renown, James, like his father, was never to be a wealthy man.

God reappeared to William Hickok shortly after the foreclosure on the Hickok home and general store in order to inform him that He was very disappointed. The 1837 panic (so He claimed) had been his punishment for abandoning His Kingdom to chase after Mammon. Meekly William acknowledged the justice of his punishment and sincerely repented. It was then that God employed the imperative for the one and only time in his dealings with William Hickok. "Return to the soil," He said, in a tone of voice that clearly invited no scholarly debate.

William couldn't actually return to the soil because he'd never been there before. But he did rent a little farm just north of Homer from which (with considerable help) he managed to scrape

out a living for his family. There he lived for another fifteen years and never again chased after Mammon even a little bit. Thus it came to pass that James (who as "Wild Bill" would ironically be saddled with his father's name long after William's death) grew up listening to inspired rhapsodies about the spiritual value of "honest work" done "close to the soil." As Wild Bill (speaking in the crude frontier dialect he later donned with his fame) was to tell his Chronicler, Michael Williams: "Pa had a heap a ideas on the subject a work, but if it hadn't been fer Ma and Oliver I reckon we all coulda starved listnin' to him talk about it."

This statement was probably hyperbolic--as were many of the things Hickok told the unusually gullible Michael Williams. However it also contained an important and pivotal truth: Oliver, the oldest boy, was forced to grow up far too fast. For all practical purposes, by the time Oliver was ten years old he shared the head of the household with his mother, while William was kicked upstairs into a largely cosmetic advisory position. William, however, was not as unaware of what was happening as the rest of the family thought. In fact, the manner in which Oliver "took to the soil" nicely corroborated one of Fourier's most important theorems. For Fourier had maintained that children (the "Little Hordes" as he called them) have a natural love of dirt and filth. Thus a society had only to properly channel this love and the Little Hordes would take to the most repulsive tasks with the joy of piglets playing in the mud. Even God was impressed as he watched little Oliver (and later little Lorenzo

and little Horace) trudging long hours behind an oversized plow or industriously shoveling manure from the stalls in the barn. Grudgingly God conceded that perhaps Fourier's insight had been more acute than He'd believed--at least on this one point. Tentatively He agreed to incorporate the industrious play of the Little Hordes into His Kingdom's labor policy.

Meanwhile, somber little Oliver grew into a six foot tall but permanently dwarfed teen-age adult who despised his father--not to mention God and Fourier. The next two boys, Lorenzo and Horace, looked up to Oliver and, like him, grew up far too quickly. None of the three ever really had a childhood, and neither Lorenzo nor Horace ever had more than a rudimentary sense of humor; Oliver had none. All three became highly respectable young men.

So respectable were they even as children that "Why can't you be more like the Hickok boys?" soon became standard Homeric rhetoric of parents whose children expressed their love of dirt in more conventional but less productive ways. William and Polly were frequently complimented on the admirable "discipline" they had instilled in their three oldest children. Some of the neighbors even paid attention as William expounded on Fourier's doctrine of the Little Hordes.

As Jim grew older, the compliments persisted but somewhat pointedly continued to refer only to the three oldest Hickok boys. Jim, it was commonly understood, was "different." His early interests did not seem to conform to Fourier's theory; he was not one of the Little Hordes for whom playing in the dirt con-

stituted a primal joy. Though someone was always trying to get him to clean out the chicken house or the cattle stalls, he would lay down his shovel and wander away the moment he knew he wasn't watched. While the Hickok farm was able to operate smoothly enough without Jim's assistance, his lack of interest in "playing" did force William and God to seriously rethink the ground rules for God's Kingdom on Earth. Fourier temporarily fell out of favor.

Polly Hickok had for years taken a quiet pride in the way her three oldest boys were growing up. They had been quite a consolation to her. Even more than William, she had basked in the neighbors' praise. On the other hand, like William and God, she had, for a time, begun to worry about the obviously wayward ways of her youngest son. But all that had recently changed; not too long ago, Polly had made another important discovery, her first in a long while. One day it suddenly struck her that Oliver, Lorenzo, and Horace all bore a disturbing resemblance to the memory she carried of the stolid young men of Bennington whose hearts she had once so cruelly broken. And despite the occasional fantasies she indulged in (especially when God made an extended visit), Polly found this discovery oddly disagreeable; for with disturbing clarity she remembered again why she'd broken those Bennington hearts in the first place. Despite everything, the former little Princess's still undefined standards in young men really hadn't changed that much. She now found it a sort of consolation to know she had produced at least one son who would never be at home in Bennington, Vermont.

"Yes," Polly said again, "I do think it's going to storm before nightfall."

"Yeah, Ma," Jim Hickok mumbled with his mouth full, "I suppose so. A storm's got to be coming sooner or later."

It was only mid-afternoon and the boy ate alone; like most everything else in the Hickok household, mealtimes were not especially orderly occasions. An avid hunter, Jim had brought home two squirrels and one rabbit which he'd deposited outside the door with the quiet pride of a well fed cat that disdains eating its prey. He would skin and dress them later that evening, but as soon as he finished eating he planned to go out hunting again.

From outside a shrill voice called for attention: "Mother!!"

Both Jim and his mother winced.

Seconds later Celinda Hickok, her impeccable blonde pigtails bobbing behind her like twin exclamation points, stormed into the kitchen. The screen door slammed angrily and Celinda stamped her right foot; once again she demanded a little law and order. "Mother!!" Celinda repeated, "Lydia played hooky again this afternoon after you told her not to. She's just never going to learn to read if she doesn't study. Mr. Gould said so today in class in front of everyone. And he said for her to mind me at home, too. He said I was supposed to be her tutor."

Celinda was eleven, a year younger than Jim, but already a perennial spelling champion. She also knew the dates of all the presidents, the capitals of all the states, and the books of the Bible (forward and backward); she forever corrected Jim's

grammar and table manners, and was by virtue of her virtue constitutionally incapable of minding her own business. (In later life she would become a leading local force in the drive for prohibition.)

Without thinking, Jim had screwed his face into a caricature of primness and was miming Celinda's complaints.

"Mo-ther!!" Outraged, Celinda stamped her foot again and pointed an accusing finger at the culprit. "Jim's making fun of me again after you told him not to! And he's still got food in his mouth! He looks like a pig, Mother! Make him stop!"

Mechanically, Polly Hickok turned to her son. "Don't make fun of your sister, Jim."

With a struggle, Jim swallowed and tried to look contrite. "Sorry, Ma, I forgot."

"And I'll bet Lydia's off at the Newman Place, too--after you told her to stay away," Celinda said. "Make Jim bring her home, Mother. The only reason she plays hooky all the time anyways is because she's copying him. He never came back to school at all after lunch."

"Go bring her home yourself, tattletale," Jim said.

"Mo-ther!! Jim called me a tattletale again."

Polly Hickok sighed and sat down at the table across from Jim.

"Mother, you've got to make him go bring Lydia home. Oliver says that if we're not careful, the little gypsy's going to grow up to be just like....him." Celinda, who in citing her favorite authority had been on the verge of saying, "just like Father," sensed that that would have been going just a bit too far and

concluded instead by levelling her finger at Jim in theatrical disgust.

"That'll be enough, Celinda," Polly said. "I'll thank you and Oliver to let me worry about how to raise my own child. And I thought I told you not to call your sister the little gypsy."

Acutely conscious of the unjustified nature of her injury, Celinda exited the kitchen in dignified martyrdom, her only comment: "I'm going to study."

Polly Hickok shook her head tiredly as she watched her elder daughter depart. She'd forgotten to tell her about the mirror.

"I suppose Lydia is over at the Newman Place," Polly said, after Celinda had left.

"Yeah, I suppose so."

"You know, Jim," Polly said slowly. "I really do worry about Lydia going over there--especially by herself. She could fall through one of the floorboards and be trapped out there for hours. And I'm sure there're rats."

"Ma, I told you a hundred times Lydia never goes in the house anymore. I told you she promised."

"But...." Polly's glance drifted toward the window. A bird had glided dreamily into the framed field of blue and then was lost again; Polly vaguely wondered whether it was the same one she'd seen earlier, arisen from its fiery descent. She got up and went again to the window. "But it's going to storm," she said at last, unable to sight the bird. "Lydia'll be caught out in the storm. Besides, she shouldn't be allowed to play hooky."

"Well what do you want me to do," Jim said, "carry her home by the scruff of the neck? The main reason she's so weird anyhow is 'cause you let Celinda drag her around so long like one of her kittens."

Struggling to be firm, to reassert the vestige of an authority she never had, Polly said, "All I want you to do, Jim, is just go out there and tell her to come home. You know she'll listen to you."

After a moment, Jim acquiesced. "Okay, Ma. I'll stop out there and talk to her. But I'm not going to make her come home."

Grateful for small concessions, Polly walked over and gave her son a quick kiss on the brow. "You're a good boy, Jim," she said--the unspoken assumption being, "I don't care what everyone says."

Polly Hickok stood sweltering at the doorway and watched as Jim cut across the field to the Newman Place. Though she didn't worry too much about him anymore, Lydia she found to be a very disturbing child. For while she wouldn't let Oliver or Celinda talk about it in her presence, in fact, Polly herself often fretted that "the little gypsy" would indeed turn out "just like Father." But Polly no longer had the energy or the will to do much more than fret; twenty years of marriage to the would-be architect of God's Kingdom on Earth had cast a cruel and debilitating spell on the onetime little Princess.

And though he never mentioned his fears either, Jim too worried about Lydia. For as only he knew, she was already much more "like Father" than even Oliver or his mother suspected: she

not only compulsively played at the Newman Place, her companions were "the Newmans" themselves.

ii

Many centuries earlier some irresistible underworld power had forced its way upward into the placid Illinois savannah, rudely disturbing the future heart of middle America. The imposing cliffs that rose from the south side of the Illinois River marked its major outlet. The south bank of the Illinois was still a wilderness, untamed, its mysterious network of tree-shrouded cliffs and canyons seemingly untouched by man. Even hunters and trappers seldom ventured into the game-rich region anymore. History and local legends had combined with nature to keep the area inviolate.

In 1770 an obscure Indian tribe which was under attack reportedly had retreated to the highest cliff along the river. Though their position, a natural fortress, was unassailable, they had no access to food or water; and their attackers had unexpected patience. An entire tribe--men, women, and children--either died miserably of hunger and dehydration, or hurled themselves into the Illinois River below; none ever received a burial. Hair-raising tales quickly grew up about encounters with vindictive spirits of the "Starved Rock" Indians. More formidable in death than in life, the Starved Rock Indians were said to still defend the land they had died on almost eighty years earlier.

But the disruptive force that had formed the Starved Rock

region had not immediately spent itself. Less violently but perhaps even more incongruously, it broke through again, ten miles to the north. There it merely created a gently sloping rise; but in the otherwise drearily flat farmland around Homer, Illinois, this unimpressive incline had come to be known as "Newman Hill." Heavily wooded, Newman Hill was, by 1837, the only large uncleared area for miles around. Even though this second eruption was much milder, there was still evidence of a powerful force at work. Over the very top of the "hill," jagged outcroppings of rock were strewn about like the carelessly discarded incisors of some slaughtered Titan, and all of Newman Hill was covered by a bare and tenuously clinging layer of topsoil. Nowhere was bedrock far from poking to the surface.

That fact alone might have explained why no one in the past seventeen years had again tried farming it. It was invariably the reason given by would-be buyers. However, in truth, Newman Hill had become the center of its own superstitious legend, and this probably did more than anything to keep the land uncleared. Like the Indians of Starved Rock, "the Newmans" did not die quietly. Though no one presently living in La Salle County had ever even met them, it was said that the Newmans had settled in 1831, less than a year before the beginning of the Blackhawk War. Most of the few area settlers had fled with the outbreak of hostilities, but (though no one could say for sure) it was universally believed that the Newmans had stubbornly stayed on--only to be massacred. For while their remains had never been found, the Newmans--alone out of the handful of original area

settlers--had never returned to reclaim their land, even if only to immediately sell it again. Even the least superstitious of potential buyers were not pleased at the prospect of turning up the foot or skull of a little Newman during spring plowing; and, though few admitted it, local rumors of midnight whispering by the former owners were a consideration in the minds of most.

But rumors of mere ghosts were not enough to deter Jim Hickok. As far back as Jim could remember--long before he actually went there--the isolated forest on the horizon had captured his imagination. It alone crowned a flat reality with the promise of something more. And James Butler Hickok had early on found the strained reality of the Hickok home more threatening than any vague rumors of ghosts could possibly be.

For reality had laden young Jim with an outrageous and oppressive surplus of fathers and father-surrogates: Oliver, William, Fourier, God--even Lorenzo and Horace felt compelled to play the role from time to time. The atmosphere of the Hickok farm was one in which would-be patriarchs seemed to thrive. To young Jim it was all, not only very threatening, but also very confusing. But while their methods and motives were often radically dissimilar, all of Jim's "fathers" did have one thing in common: in one way or another, all tried to coerce him into the thriving league of the Little Hordes.

His blunt and unphilosophical brothers would simply stick a hoe or (more often) a shovel in Jim's hands, show him what they wanted done with it, and beat him up if they caught him trying to sneak away. On the other hand, William, via long

morally uplifting talks and occasional bribes, attempted to instill in young Jim the "unitary religious spirit" as well as the "corporative honor" whereby, according to Fourier, "repugnant occupations will become games, having INDIRECT COMPOSITE attraction." However, even at the relatively advanced age of six years, Jim Hickok never developed sufficient "unitary religious spirit" or "corporative honor" to make shit-shoveling seem an attractive game--even in an "INDIRECT COMPOSITE" sort of way. (Much later, Wild Bill's eccentric habits of regularly changing his linen and bathing almost daily would gain him the reputation of a fastidious "dandy." For many years he had an aversion to dirt otherwise unheard of among the gun-carrying hordes of the post Civil War frontier.)

Despite bribes and beatings, neither William nor Jim's brothers could keep him busy for long. Only William's comment that "God is watching you" had any effect at all. When Jim was very young, he would sometimes work long hours in the stalls and in the chicken house, looking nervously over his shoulder as he shoveled away. Gradually, however, Jim had begun to get suspicious, having never actually seen--or even heard the Harvard accent of--William's frequent guest; and by the time he was seven, he had sullenly resolved that, until he did, he would shovel as little as possible.

Thus did James Butler Hickok begin in earnest the almost hopelessly convoluted Oedipal project that he would work at for the rest of his life. Even during the brief period when he himself was an arm of the law, "Wild Bill" would never have more

than an uneasy truce with the ubiquitous father-figures of the world.

It was only after turning his back on even the eye of God that Jim Hickok finally made his first escape to Newman Hill. Once he'd gathered enough courage to try, the escape itself was easier than he'd imagined. Sneaking away under the cover of a tall field of summer hay, he nimbly dodged the plodding figures of his brothers who toiled with rusty scythes that glistened like blood beneath a blazing sun. They never saw him. Half an hour later, when Jim finally slipped from the ploughed symmetry of a neighboring field into the surrounding scrub and then on into the darkly shadowed woods beyond, it was as if he had entered another world. To him, the woods of Newman Hill were alive with limitless possibilities. All about him the tiny mysterious sounds of the woods seemed to speak, promising heroic adventure forever closed to the peacefully toiling Little Hordes. And the voices of Newman Hill didn't lie. Over the next few years, savage Indians, vicious French trappers, and traitorous Redcoats fell in countless numbers while scores of grateful maidens were saved: neither Dan'l, Davy, Deerslayer, nor even Jim's favorite hero, Kit Carson, could have done better.

Though Jim still shoveled from time to time, both his father and his brothers grudgingly became accustomed to his frequent absences. Jim's freedom was seriously threatened only once more. Shortly after he turned ten, an age when even boys less industrious than the eldest Hickoks are expected to assume certain responsibilities, Oliver swallowed his pride and actually com-

plained to William about Jim's loafing.

"It ain't right, Pa. Me and Lorenzo and Horace do all the work and he," Oliver said, pointing at Jim, "hardly helps out at all."

"Hmm," William said, nodding his head thoughtfully and stroking his chin--a gesture God himself habitually used in His talks with William and one which William had practised countless times alone, anticipating the day when one of his sons would come to him for guidance. "Hmm," he said again. "What do you say about that, Jim?"

Jim shrugged. "I don't see why I got to do everything he tells me," he mumbled.

William had hoped to draw Jim out a little more than that. For years he had imagined that when his sons got older he and they would engage in the same sort of intellectual give and take that marked his own meetings with God. His sons, however, had never seemed to develop his fascination with ideas, at least not yet. He had thought for a moment that this little disagreement might stimulate a fairly elevated discussion.

William sighed. "Have you got any ideas, Oliver?" he said, without too much hope.

"Damn right I do," Oliver said. "Tell the little shit he either starts pulling his weight or he don't eat."

"Hmm," William said, as he again stroked his chin and nodded thoughtfully. "Well, that's an idea. Yes, sir, I do think that is an idea; every member of a society does need to do his part," he said to Jim, oblivious of the obvious irony. "What do you say, Jim?"

"Okay. I'll start helping out," Jim said, thus putting an end to a promising discussion of the labor question.

Both William and Oliver were amazed at this sudden turnabout. William, for his part, had anticipated several credible arguments to counter Oliver's "idea." In case Jim forgot to mention it, William himself would have pointed out that, according to Fourier, everyone should possess "a guarantee of minimum well-being regardless of his personal contribution to society." But it hardly seemed relevant now.

Though William and Oliver were amazed when Jim agreed to help out, they were even more amazed when for nearly two months Jim actually worked just like one of "the Hickok boys" and did nearly everything Oliver told him to do. Not once in that time did he set foot on Newman Hill. And not only did he do his part at home, but what little spare time he had he spent working for a neighbor. No one had the faintest idea what had brought about this seemingly miraculous burst of ambition. William and God began to revive Fourier's partially discredited theory of the Little Hordes. Jim's brothers began to feel more brotherly toward him. A few of the neighbors even began to expand the expression about "the Hickok boys" to include Jim. They were all premature.

Jim worked for the neighbor only long enough to pay for a supply of shells and an old shotgun the neighbor had. And as soon as he became reasonably proficient with it, his brief interlude as one of "the Hickok boys" came to an abrupt end. For with his own shotgun, Jim Hickok was able to return to Newman Hill as a hunter--a real hunter--a supplier of meat, a marginally legiti-

mate social role that William and God tentatively agreed had a place in God's Kingdom on Earth.

In truth, both did express a few misgivings about the violence of hunting being somehow non-Utopian in nature. (Fourier, a radical and dogmatic pacifist who envisioned the "anti-lion" and the "anti-shark" as the ultimate in non-violence, clearly had no place for hunters in his Utopia. But for once William did not quote Fourier to God.) Together, William and God finally decided the pragmatic approach was best. They concluded that allowing hunters a place in The Kingdom at least solved the most serious flaw yet to appear in their labor model: Jim Hickok's persistent refusal to join the Little Hordes. By defining hunting as a "branch of labor," William and God figured to co-opt the troublesome youngster into an active participation in The Kingdom. Perhaps, T/they thought, he might gradually develop a little "corporative honor" and "unitary religious spirit" after all. And then, too, William discovered he had a fondness for fried rabbit.

Oliver's renewed objections were over-ruled, and any recently germinated brotherly feelings toward Jim were nipped in the bud.

Though hunting provided Jim a workable compromise with the world--a way to "put food on the table," to borrow Oliver's phrase--it also caused the shrinking of Newman Hill. For as soon as the novelty wore off, slaughtering squirrels and rabbits and possums seemed considerably less adventurous than being an Indian--a grizzly--or even a "deer-slayer." And of course "the Newmans" themselves never appeared to Jim--before or after he

he became a hunter.

That was to be an honor reserved for Lydia.

It so happened that by the time Lydia was born, Celinda was five, and her one and only doll crippled from incessant use. Jim had already begun to make fun of her. Polly, whose attacks of depression were worsening, often left her long hours alone. William, whose plans for the Little Hordes was at the time being undermined by Jim's behavior, spent more and more time in private conversation with God and didn't seriously attempt to recruit Celinda. Even the newborn kittens that Celinda tried to cuddle always grew wild and escaped her over-zealous attentions after a few weeks--if they survived that long. Thus, to Celinda, whom the callous world did not love, the birth of a real live baby sister seemed a godsend (which of course in a way it was, since Lydia, like all the Hickok children, literally owed her very existence to one of God's discreet and timely temporary absences.)

Unfortunately for Lydia, neither the premature demise of her sister's doll nor the deaths of numerous kittens had taught Celinda much about the way small malleable things are to be handled. And from the time she was weaned, Lydia became, in effect Celinda's new doll. When Celinda wished to be a teacher, Lydia was strapped into a seat and a book shoved in her face, while Celinda "lectured." When Celinda wished to be a nurse, strange concoctions were forced down Lydia's throat, and she was often "bandaged" in bundles of rags until she looked like a mummy. When Celinda wished to be a mother, Lydia was dressed and undressed, bathed and dried, spanked and cuddled, force-fed and

burped--all in perfect disregard to Lydia's wishes. "Mother knows best," Celinda would say, if she bothered to acknowledge Lydia's grievances at all.

Meanwhile, Polly Hickok occasionally objected to her elder daughter's most abusive excesses, but for the most part she was pleased with the "affection" Celinda showed for her little sister. One of the things that Polly fretted about even then was that "affection" seemed unnaturally absent in the inter-relationships of her children. And William Hickok, so beyond daily perturbations that he seldom reprimanded any of his children had begun to subscribe to tracts from back east detailing recent Utopian experiments. These he spent most his time discussing with God, who also failed to come to Lydia's aid.

Lydia soon discovered that protesting seldom improved her plight. No one was listening. She grew into a quiet, passive, at times almost catatonic little girl. Sometimes she seemed to have no more personality or will than the crippled doll that collected dust beneath Celinda's bed, and considerably less than the kittens who had lived long enough to avoid Celinda's grasping hands.

Indeed, for a long time that was pretty much the way that Jim thought of Lydia--when he thought of her at all. Though he sometimes felt vaguely sorry for her, it was with the passing concern which he gave to the kittens that Celinda still occasionally oppressed. They mostly all grew up and learned to escape her; he figured Lydia would eventually do the same.

When Lydia was younger, there had been several times when

she'd temporarily escaped Celinda and approached Jim, always just as he was leaving for Newman Hill. Pulling somberly on his pant-leg to make sure she had his attention, she'd say, "Where ya goin'?" or, more to the point, "Take me,too." But great hunters and frontiersmen cannot very well have little girls tagging along on their adventures. Jim's answer had always been, "Nah, you're too little." After awhile Lydia no longer asked.

Then one day, just that last spring, Jim had heard faint cries of distress coming from the barn. The sound was something of a shock. Newman Hill was so well tamed by then that cries of distress had become a thing of the past, their exotic memory partially buried beneath innumerable carcasses of rabbits, possums, and other small beasts.

When Jim looked in the barn, he saw that Celinda was again playing teacher. Her classroom was a temporarily unused stall, one of those in which Jim had labored many hours, shovel in hand, nervously awaiting--and dreading--a sign of God. But the stall was clean now, covered with fresh hay. Three small crates sat facing a much larger one which had a fourth small crate behind it. Two of the crates, however, were just for show. As always, Celinda had only one pupil, who at this moment was not at her crate, but turned over Celinda's knee, being "disciplined."

"Let her go, Celinda," said Jim Hickok, speaking in the unadorned yet dignified manner he thought Kit Carson might have used.

"Who says?" Celinda stopped hitting Lydia but still held her down. Lydia stopped her half-hearted screams and looked

over her shoulder at her would-be rescuer.

"I say. Let her go, tattle-tale," Jim said, quickly forgetting the dignity his assumed role demanded.

"I don't have to listen to you. And I'll tell Oliver if you call me that name again."

"Oliver isn't here," Jim observed. "And if you don't let her go, right now, I'll smash your face in. That way you'll have a lot to tell Oliver about, tattle-tale."

Letting Lydia go, Celinda stood up, threw back her head, and assumed her most impeccably pedantic posture as Lydia scurried behind Jim. "'Spare the rod and spoil the child. That's what Oliver says. He says that's why you turned out to be such a brat."

"Yeah," Jim said, "well you know what Oliver can do with it."

Actually Celinda didn't have the faintest idea, but she wasn't about to admit to ignorance on ~~any~~ subject. "I'm telling Oliver," she said.

"I'm telling Oliver," Jim mimicked.

"I'm telling Oliver. I'm telling Oliver." A somewhat squeaky and vindictively gleeful voice that Jim had never heard before echoed from behind him. He could feel Lydia jumping up and down as she held onto his leg.

"I'll take care of you later, smarty," said Celinda, pointing a threatening finger at Lydia before she departed.

Lydia's glee vanished as quickly as it had surfaced. Nervously she began chewing a thumbnail already bitten to the quick. Celinda, she knew, doubtlessly would take care of her

later. "I hate her," Lydia announced after Celinda had left. "Just wait 'til I grow up."

For the first time, Jim really looked at Lydia. She had an awfully long wait ahead of her, he thought. A frail, dark-haired girl, even at five she was small for her age. Her eyes, a startling shade of green, seemed far too large for her delicate face--as if all her body's growth had somehow been mis-directed into those two organs. They stared, unblinking, like the wide distrustful eyes of the half-grown half-wild kittens Jim sometimes saw peeking from the cluttered shadows of the tool shed or from the loft in the barn. Yet in some ways Lydia looked not kittenish at all, but unnaturally old--like a scale model spinster: her mouth permanently set in a slight frown; faint but still unchildlike half moons shadowing each eye. Even her eyes themselves, in vigilance so like those of a frightened kitten, lacked the kitten's tireless curiosity and wonder. Already they seemed to have seen enough.

"Probably wouldn't be a good idea for me to be here if Celinda brings Oliver back," Jim observed.

"Nope," Lydia said. She looked up sadly but without reproach. Lydia seemed to have no illusions about her rescuer's relative standing in inter-sibling power politics.

"So I suppose I better get going," Jim said.

"Suppose so." Lydia's expression didn't change.

"Probably wouldn't be a good idea for you to be here when Celinda gets back, either."

"Nope."

Jim, who was resting his foot on the corner of one of the small crates, gave a sudden kick. The crate bounded to the far side of the "classroom." "Wouldn't want to come with me, would you?" he said.

Lydia's eyes widened even further. Magically she seemed transformed again into the five year old who had briefly mimicked Celinda. "Where to?"

"Someplace Celinda's scared to go."

Thus, first attracted merely by its being "someplace Celinda's scared to go," Lydia was first introduced to Newman Hill. With Lydia either riding "lookout" on his shoulders or trailing close behind, Jim guided her through the intricate wooded pathways. Already flourishing the hyperbole which was to mark his later story telling, he related the heroic adventures of Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Natty Bumppo, and Kit Carson--but always with James Butler Hickok cast as the central figure. Behind every tree there lurked a tomahawk-wielding savage, a redcoat with his musket leveled, a bear ready to leap out and attack. All were vanquished in the nick of time. Lydia gazed in wonder at the illusory terrors her brother described and shrieked in delight when he acted out his own heroic role. And as she did, the fading magic of Newman Hill took hold again, even for Jim.

Later in the day, as dusk approached, Lydia and Jim lay back resting before making the long walk home. Lydia watched as a flock of birds descended on the quivering green roof above. The leaves, the branches, even the air seemed to be alive, vibrating with energy. Lydia had never even imagined such a thing.

"How come you never took me here before?" Lydia suddenly asked her new friend, with maybe just a little reproach in her voice this time.

But Jim, who had his eyes closed and no very good answer, pretended he was sleeping and hadn't heard.

It was another question that Lydia didn't repeat.

Though Lydia continued to applaud Jim's more exalted stories, she turned her face from the actual rabbit and squirrel corpses that often accompanied them. From the first she never really shared her brother's need to see the unruly forces of the woods subdued. And from the moment she saw them, the ruins of the Newman Place itself were what intrigued her most.

"Who lives there?" she'd asked the first time she saw the ramshackle buildings.

"Well, everyone says ghosts live there," Jim said, trying to sound as eerie as possible. "That's why Celinda's afraid to come around here."

"Celinda's stupid," Lydia observed matter-of-factly. Then, after a moment's thought, she said, "I don't believe in ghosts. Who really lives there?"

"Nobody anymore," Jim said. "A family by the name of Newman used to."

"Where are they now?"

"They all got cut up and scalped and tortured and shot and burned at the stake and buried alive and covered with honey and tied over a giant ant hill by a bunch of Indians."

Lydia shivered. "Where's their graves?"

"Well now--let's see-- I think one of the graves is...."
Jim paused to look around before suddenly pointing to a spot about three feet behind Lydia. "....right there."

Lydia jumped. But after examining the ground behind her to make sure nothing very grave-like was there, she turned back and punched her brother in the stomach. "There isn't graves there," she said. "Where's the Newmans at really?"

"Really," Jim said, mimicking Lydia's insistent search for truth, "I don't know. But wherever it is, they aren't coming back."

But Lydia would not accept even her brother's authority where the Newmans were concerned. "They will so come back," she announced quietly.

Over the next few days, Jim would take Lydia with him every afternoon when he went hunting. Pretty soon she was walking the mile and a half by herself and meeting Jim at Newman Hill. (Though Celinda hadn't bothered her since her first escape, Lydia still wanted to keep their contacts to a minimum.) Nevertheless, it wasn't long before Celinda found out where Lydia was spending so much of her time; predictably, she felt bound to warn Lydia of the error of her ways. "You better not go out to Newman Hill anymore, Lydia," she said. "Ghosts and gypsies are out there. Oliver said."

"Scaredy-cat," said Lydia, who was becoming considerably spunkier.

When Celinda reached for her ever-ready ruler, Lydia warned her: "I'll tell Jim!"

And when that threat didn't have much effect, she added,
"I'll tell the Newmans--and they'll get you."

"The ghosts can't leave Newman Hill, stupid."

"The Newmans can, if I ask them."

"They can not."

"Can so."

"They can not! Oliver said!" Celinda, however, let the ruler drop her side, unused. "You're just too stupid to bother with," she said as she walked away.

The next afternoon, Jim met Lydia out at the Newman Place as usual. "You sure got one over on Celinda," he said, admiringly. "She's telling everyone you talk with ghosts. You've got her scared

"Celinda is so stupid," Lydia said, looking up with a wry smile.

"You ready to go hunting?" Jim said.

"Nah. Not today."

"What are you going to do?"

"Wait around."

Jim frowned. "That doesn't sound like much fun."

Lydia explained: "The Newmans said they'd be right back. I promised I'd wait."

"Hey, I'm not Celinda," Jim said. "I don't believe in ghosts, remember?"

Lydia shrugged. "Neither do I. I said the Newmans, not their ghosts, stupid. They came back, just like I said."

"Okay," said Jim the debunker, "then I'll wait around for them, too."

Not at all upset, Lydia just shook her head. "Nope. You can't see them."

"Why not?"

"'Cause you think they're dead."

"The Newmans are dead, dummy!"

"See!"

Not really in the mood to challenge Lydia's fantasy world any further, Jim covered his retreat with a knowing smile and said, "You say hello to the Newmans for me, okay, Lydia? Tell them I'd like to meet them sometime."

But Lydia stubbornly shook her head. She didn't seem so much angry at being patronized as she did sorry for her brother and his limited perception. "I'll say hello, but you can't see them 'cause you think they're dead."

From then on, Lydia spent most of her time at the Newman Place--playing with the Newmans. Though the Newmans were invariably gone whenever Jim arrived, he soon did become something of an intimate at second-hand; as if making up for her years of silence, Lydia would spend hours at a time telling her brother about the Newman family. The Newmans seemed about as close to a perfect family as Lydia could imagine. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Newman, there was Fred, who was eleven years old at the time, and Jane, who was five. Mr. Newman, who shaved everyday, never spoke of Utopian societies or conversations with God. Mrs. Newman, who was young and very pretty, never sighed or broke into mysterious silent tears. Fred never made fun of Jane for being little and always had time to play with her. And best of all, from

Lydia's point of view, Jane did not have an older sister. Sometimes the whole family would go on picnics together and sometimes they would just sit around and sing. Mr. Newman played the guitar and Mrs. Newman had a splendid voice--"like a beautiful beautiful bird," was the way Lydia put it. When Mr. Newman was working and Fred was at school, Mrs. Newman and the girls (the Newmans treated Lydia like one of the family) would make all kinds of wonderful things: shirts for Mr. Newman and Fred, a bonnet for Mrs. Newman, a pink dress with white lace for Jane.

Once Jim rather cynically asked why they never made anything for Lydia, since she spent so much time helping them and all. But Lydia just shook her head, quietly mumbled she didn't want anything, and refused to talk to Jim the rest of the day. Similar reactions followed such questions as where Mr. Newman worked, how the Newmans survived in such a dilapidated house, and why the land had never been cleared. Jim soon came to understand that if he wanted to remain friends with Lydia, certain questions were not to be asked. And Jim, who harbored a guilty jealousy of that brotherly paragon, "Fred," wanted to remain friends with Lydia very much.

"If I promise to believe they're alive, couldn't you have the Newmans stay around sometime when I'm here?" Jim asked one day.

Lydia looked up at him helplessly. I'd like to. But I can't make them do things. Then she added, as if there were the faintest chance her brother might be saved from eternal Newmanlessness after all, "Do you believe they're alive?"

"Well, yeah--I mean if I saw them I would," Jim fudged.

Lydia thought about that for a bit. "I'll ask," she said.

But for the Newmans, unquestioning belief was apparently a precondition of personal revelation. They were never at home while Jim was with Lydia. And though Lydia was never as crushingly impolite to Jim as he had once been to her, she made it plain after awhile that she really didn't want him hanging around too much, keeping the Newmans away.

Over the last several months, Jim worried more and more about Lydia becoming (to directly quote Oliver) "like the old man." He even felt a little guilty about listening so uncritically to her Newman stories--but that was about the only way he could get her to talk to him at all. Up until fall, he'd reassured himself by thinking that as soon as Lydia made friends at school she'd kind of drift away from the Newman family. But she'd been at school over three weeks now and her drifting had clearly not been in that direction. From the first day, her nickname had been "the little gypsy"--courtesy of Celinda; and "the little gypsy" was not socializing well at all. At school she hardly ever spoke and when she did her voice was never above a whisper. Every chance she got, she wandered away from school and back to the Newman Place.

Strangely enough, the change of weather that Polly Hickok had so long predicted seemed to be actually on the way. Just before he entered the woods, Jim could make out a distant but distinct wall of black, growing from the northwest horizon. Quickly he hurried along the path that led to the ruins of the Newman Place.

Even though the Indians had sacked the Newman buildings, they hadn't burned them. Doors were torn aside and windows broken; rusting pieces of stove-pipe littered the kitchen and front porch; any personal belongings were long gone. Yet the house itself, the barn, and the tool shed still stood: unpainted, weatherbeaten, and rotting, but persistent ghosts of what once briefly held the dreams of the Newman family.

However, even the most persistent of ghosts are fated to fade away. Giant thistles and clumps of young box-elders cluttered what was left of the clearing. Grass and weeds could be seen taking hold through the rotting floorboards of the house itself. The east side of the barn roof sank precariously in the middle and seemed on the verge of collapse.

Despite the growing threat of a storm, when Jim finally reached the clearing he couldn't help pausing just behind the treeline to watch. In front of the Newman porch, just about where he'd expected to find her, an unusually distracted Lydia paced back and forth. Just like a little gypsy, Jim thought: long dark hair still in a tangled mess from the flowers "Mrs. Newman" had woven into it; cheeks flushed like those of a junior bacchante; soundless sea-green eyes peering out from a placid face; childish lips quivering in a secret silent incantation.

"The little gypsy": even if Celinda coined it, Jim had to admit that at the moment there was something apt about the name. He'd readily conceded that Lydia was "weird" sometimes, but he'd never seen her like this before. Had he finally caught her in the company of the Newmans? Was this the way she spent her time

with them? If it were, Jim thought, her visits with her friends were certainly more joyful in the re-telling.

Attempting to break whatever spell held his sister, Jim hollered loudly as he stepped into the partial clearing: "Hey Lydia, what you doing?"

But the spell that gripped Lydia was not to be so easily broken. Hesitantly she looked toward the intruder--as if her eyes couldn't quite focus, or as if she were having trouble telling which one of her worlds this figure belonged in.

"Hey, Lydia," Jim went on, as he walked up to her, "did I finally catch the Newmans at home?"

"Nope." Lydia's voice sounded oddly remote. She continued to hold Jim in quizzical examination.

"Who were you talking to just now then, dummy?" Jim asked, giving Lydia a playful nudge.

But Lydia was not feeling playful. "I wasn't talking to nobody," she mumbled.

"What were you doing then?"

"Thinking."

"What about?"

"About the Newmans not coming back no more."

Despite his dislike for Fred, Jim felt almost sorry to hear about the Newmans departing--at least in such an abrupt fashion. "Finally decided they weren't real, huh?" he asked gently.

"They is so real!" Lydia said.

"But you just said...."

"I said they wasn't coming back. They's still real."

"Well how come they're not coming back all of a sudden?"

" 'Cause they's not. Leave me alone." Stubbornly, Lydia crossed her arms and turned away.

"Lydia," Jim said, "I wish you'd make some sense."

"I am making sense. Leave me alone."

A little irritated, Jim had begun absently kicking on the last rotting support beneath the handrail to the Newman porch. How do you know the Newmans aren't coming back, Lydia?" he said, as patiently as possible.

" 'Cause the Perfect Man told me!" Lydia shouted without turning around. "And leave me alone!"

"The Perfect Man, huh? What's he, one of the Newmans' friends? Maybe a long lost cousin out on a visit?" With a compulsive rhythm, Jim punctuated each question with another kick, each one more violent than the one before.

"Shut up!" Lydia screamed.

With one last kick, the support suddenly snapped and the bottom of the handrail crashed to the ground. Though Lydia flinched at the sound, she didn't turn around. Jim picked up a splinter of the broken support. Bits of the wood flaked away beneath his fingers, seemed almost to crumble in his hands like dirt.

"Come on, Lydia," Jim said at last. "Let's go home." Still without turning around, Lydia answered by shaking her body from side to side like a limp rag doll. "Hey, I'll let you ride lookout like you used to," Jim added. "And maybe the Newmans'll be back after all."

But Lydia slipped away when Jim tried to boost her on his

shoulders. "Leave me alone. They won't never be back. Anyways you don't even believe they was real. You think I'm crazy as Pa."

"No I don't, Lydia," Jim said, kneeling in front of her. "And I believe the Newmans are real, too. But it's just.... there's a difference between real and really real, you know?"

Lydia looked away. If she somehow understood her brother's rather confusing distinction, she wasn't letting on.

The thunder sounded again. Jim could feel the air almost come alive as the storm neared. "Come on, Lydia," he said. "It's going to rain. Let's go."

"I can't. I got to go find the Perfect Man again."

Jim sighed. "Lydia, whoever he is, you can find him tomorrow."

"Uh-uh!" Lydia said. She had the terrified look of a kitten too small to have escaped the grasp of Celinda. "If I don't find him again, he'll die. He's all alone and he said if someone don't help him he'll die. And I could help him too, if I could find him again. If he told me his story again I could understand. I could. I'm not just a baby!"

While Lydia talked, Jim had taken hold of her hand. Startled, he reached up and touched her forehead. "Jeeze, Lydia," he said, "you're burning up."

"I am not!" Lydia said.

"I'm taking you home right now, Lydia--if you want to go or not."

"Leave me alone! I'm not a baby!" Lydia shouted as Jim picked her up. But she didn't have the strength to protest for

too long. In a few minutes her kicking and punching stopped and Jim felt her relax. He easily cradled her in his arms while holding his rifle in front of him. She seemed even lighter than he'd remembered.

Even before Jim and Lydia were free of the woods, the sky overhead had blackened and the air had suddenly chilled. Then, almost as soon as they were in the open, a frigid rain overtook them--as if it had been out there all along, waiting in ambush. The icy, wind-driven droplets felt like an incessant barrage of tiny arrows: reality raining down with a vengeful insistence.

As he ran, Jim bent forward as much as possible, trying to shield Lydia from the driving rain, until, her chest pressed tightly to his, her feverish heat almost seemed his own. But in a few minutes even Lydia was soaked and shivering, her teeth chattering as she mumbled about "the Perfect Man," her inner fire no defense against the freezing rain.

When Jim finally got Lydia home, she was delirious. To Polly Hickok the symptoms were all too familiar; God had had a similar effect on her husband when He'd made His first extended visit. And to her also, the Perfect Man that Lydia raved about sounded far too much like a refugee from God's Kingdom on Earth. Like father, like daughter, Polly thought with a weary fatality; it was amazing that it had been only one out of six, so far.

Celinda, who had been blamed for the deaths of several small felines and whose tutorial influence over her sister had ended so unceremoniously just months earlier, wasted no time in informing Jim: "If Lydia dies, it's your fault."

The doctor, whom Oliver himself had summoned from town, merely affirmed Polly's diagnosis. "Brain fever," he said. There wasn't much any of them could do, he said, except to keep Lydia as quiet as possible and hope for the best. They also might pray, he said; but as all the Hickok family knew, God--at that moment in the barn engaged in a learned discussion with William--was not available for consultation.

Lydia would not stay quiet for long. Early in the evening she awoke from a brief uneasy sleep and loudly demanded to see Jim. The consensus of the family was that it was a request that shouldn't be honored. "Better to let her scream all night than to let him go in to see her," was the way Oliver phrased it.

But Polly was the one who actually had to listen to Lydia's screaming; as usual she gave in. "But only for a minute," she told Jim. "And try," she pleaded, "not to do anything to get her more excited than she already is."

"Fat chance," said Celinda.

Jim entered the room softly. The only light came from a single candle on the table next to Lydia's bed. Though Lydia's eyes were closed and she was quiet again when Jim entered, she didn't seem to be sleeping. Jim could see her lips moving, and he heard her breath come in rapid, irregular gasps. With her still damp and tangled hair fanned out on either side of her head like wings, Lydia's half-conscious flutterings seemed like those of some exotic bird, tremulously poised for flight.

Not wanting to excite Lydia if he could help it, Jim waited quietly by the door, watching from the shadows. Nevertheless,

Lydia suddenly half raised herself, opened her eyes wide and searched the darkness. For an instant, her already flushed face seemed ignited by the candle-light. "Who's there?" she whispered.

"Just me," Jim said, gently pushing her back against the pillow. "Try to get some sleep, will you?"

Lydia began violently thrashing from side to side, pounding her fists into the bed. "Uh-uh. I got to go back and find the Perfect Man."

"Come on, Lydia, calm down." Jim took the washcloth from the bowl of water on the table, folded it, and placed it on Lydia's forehead. Her fever seemed, if anything, to have worsened.

"He's really real," Lydia said, after she stopped attacking the bed. "I even heard him calling just now. You believe me don't you? Nobody else believes me."

"Yeah, sure, I believe you," Jim said. "We can talk about him all you want when you get better."

"Uh-uh!" Lydia started to thrash again, dislodging the washcloth. "He's waiting for me. He's on top of the rock, waiting. And he's going to die if someone doesn't help him."

"Okay, okay, Lydia," Jim said, "Calm down. How 'bout if I go help him?"

Lydia eyed her brother suspiciously. "Honest? You'll really go help him?"

"Honest," Jim said, brushing a strand of hair off her chin. "I'll go help him and you get some sleep. I'll tell you all about it tomorrow."

"You don't even know where he's at," Lydia said suddenly.

"Sure I do. He's on top of the rock."

Lydia nodded. Then after a moment her eyes narrowed and she asked, "What rock?"

His attempted fraud uncovered, Jim sighed and sat rather stupidly on the edge of the bed.

"See!" Lydia said. "You don't know. You was lyin'."

"All right," Jim said. "You tell me where he's at and I'll go help him."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

"Stand up and let me see both hands so I know you're not crossing."

After her brother had "passed," Lydia finally said, "He's at Starved Rock--" "You promised," she added quickly, seeing the look of shock on Jim's face.

Jim, who had never crossed the Illinois, had only seen Starved Rock two or three times--and then from a considerable distance; he knew Lydia had never seen it at all. Without thinking, he asked, "Where'd you hear about Starved Rock?"

"From the Perfect Man, stupid! You said you believed me! You promised you'd go! You got to now!" With a sudden change in tactics, Lydia added, "I'll die if you don't. I'll stop breathing and I'll die."

She made the threat with such a quiet resolution, and her breathing was already such a labored affair, that Jim could picture her actually trapping a last lungful of air in her tiny chest and never letting go. "Okay," Jim said, utterly defeated,

"I'll go up to Starved Rock."

"Tonight!" Lydia screamed.

"All right tonight!" Jim screamed back. "I'll go right now!"

Polly Hickok had heard enough screaming. Shaking her head wearily, she entered the room and held the door open for Jim. "You were a great help," she said.

As Jim was leaving, Lydia repeated her threat at the top of her lungs: "I'll know if you don't and I'll die. I'll stop breathing and die!"

The rest of the family (but for William and God) were still gathered in the kitchen and had plainly heard Lydia's final outburst. For the first time, James Butler Hickok knew what it felt like to be looked on as a murderer. Oliver, sitting alone at the table, spat tobacco juice in mute disgust. Lorenzo and Horace, who had not yet mastered the expressive art of chewing tobacco, both shook their heads in silent disapproval. Even Celinda was for once without words and just stared, her oddly idle mouth awkwardly open.

Unfortunately, she stood gaping in front of the very spot where Jim had leaned his shotgun. And Jim had no intention of going to Starved Rock unarmed. None too gently he shoved Celinda out of the way.

Oliver slammed his spittoon down in front of him. Some of the contents slopped over the side. "What the hell do you think you're doing now?" he asked.

Jim, who as Oliver could plainly see, had begun loading his shotgun, ignored the question.

"He's going hunting," Celinda said, her tongue shaken from

its uncharacteristic paralysis. "Lydia's dying and he's going hunting."

"That's great. That's just beautiful," Oliver said. Ominously, Oliver rose and began removing his belt. "Someone should've done this a long time ago, boy," he said.

Without another word, Oliver nodded toward Lorenzo and Horace. Like automatons, the two middle brothers moved toward Jim.

"Don't," Jim said, suddenly leveling the loaded shotgun at Oliver. "Just don't." He tried to sound steady, purposeful, in control of the situation as Kit Carson might have been. But Kit had never become entangled in such an ambiguous situation. Even as he spoke, Jim knew his voice was over loud and oddly high-pitched; he felt the shotgun trembling unheroically in his hands.

But of all that the Fates had in store for Wild Bill, semi-accidental fratricide was not to be included. Despite, or perhaps because of, Jim's obvious nervousness, Oliver, Lorenzo, and Horace were impressed enough not to move. Jim slipped into the night unchallenged.

"Good riddance," he heard Oliver shout after him.

iii

However Jim didn't head straight for Starved Rock. First, after making sure no one had followed him, he doubled back around to the window of Lydia's room; he had to make sure she knew he was actually going. Inside, the single candle still burned.

Lydia lay with her eyes opened wide, seemingly entranced by the twisting shadows overhead, her face luminous in the candle light. As before, her lips were in a slight but unceasing motion--though plainly she was not talking to Polly, who sat patiently at her side, her back to the window.

Just as Jim was about to tap on the window to attract Lydia's attention, she turned her head as if she had been expecting him to appear, acknowledged his presence with a trace of a smile, and turned back again. Though Jim remained at the window only long enough to see Lydia's lips stop moving and her eyes close, it was long enough for him to notice the faint and painfully distorted image of a man's face which lingered, suspended in air over Lydia's bed--as if whatever waking dream that once haunted Lydia had now become Jim's.

"How is she?" a voice said.

Shaken, Jim turned from the window. But it seemed he couldn't escape Lydia's vision: behind him stood his father, his emaciated face a reflection of the one Jim had seen through the glass, darkly hovering over Lydia's bed.

"Lydia--how is she?" William repeated.

He obviously found nothing remarkable about either him or his youngest son staring through the window of his sick daughter on a very cold night. He might have been asking the professional opinion of a doctor who had just come from Lydia's room.

"She's still pretty sick," Jim said. "But I think at least she's sleeping now."

"Ahh." William Hickok nodded somberly at the news. He had a

three-day stubble of beard and his eyes were bloodshot. God's visits always took their toll, but tonight he looked even more haggard than usual.

"Um, is God with you right now, Pa?" Jim asked after a moment.

William was, as usual, irritated by this sort of stupid question. Why didn't people just look for themselves? "No, of course not," he said, pointing to the obvious empty space all around him. "He left over five minutes ago."

Jim breathed easier at the news. Knowledge of God's presence always brought back unpleasant memories of his shoveling days.

"Don't think he'll be back for awhile, either," William went on. "We had a bit of a disagreement tonight, He and I. I asked him to do something for Lydia, don't you know. And He told me miracles were out of the question. He just didn't have the time, He said. And of course I already knew that. I was just asking for some medical advice, I told Him. And He said medicine was not really His specialty, but he suggested that since Lydia has a fever, the best thing might be to set her out in the cold for the night--to cool her off, don't you know. Well I told Him I didn't think too much of that idea! No sir. Not too much at all. Told Him right to His face I thought it was about the stupidest thing I ever heard tell of. What do you say, Jim?"

"I think you did right, Pa," Jim said. "It sounds like a real poor idea to me, too. Why don't you go on inside now, Pa? Maybe you can help Ma with Lydia or something."

"Matter of fact, I was just about to do that, Jim. I would have gone in earlier, but you know how your mother feels about

God--just won't have Him in the house. I couldn't hardly leave Him alone in the barn, could I? Him being my guest and all?"

Jim shook his head. "Nope, don't suppose you could have, Pa. I got to go now. See you later, Pa."

"Kind of late to be hunting, isn't it Jim?"

"I'm not hunting, Pa. I'm going up to Starved Rock."

"Ahh," William said, as he slowly nodded and stroked his chin. Apparently that explained things to his full satisfaction. "Well, you be careful, Jim. That's a long ways--especially at night."

"I will. See you, Pa."

It was indeed a long way from the Hickok farm to Starved Rock--in some ways even further than the distance between North Hero and Homer. And after walking through the cold, drenched countryside for hours, Jim would have to cross the swollen Illinois and then climb Starved Rock itself. The injunction to "be careful" was hardly misplaced.

But at least there was little chance of Jim Hickok becoming lost. The storm itself had passed, and now, in its wake, rain-beaded fields shimmered like crystal sculpture in the starlight. It seemed as though the blinding glare of noontime had been cooled by the filter of a dark and soothing lens. Hickok would later recall what must have been at least a four-hour journey to Starved Rock as a series of vivid, yet disconnected, images, a silent succession of well-preserved but faintly surreal tintypes: the dark glistening of the fields he passed through; the bluffs

on the south side of the Illinois as they loomed larger and larger; Starved Rock itself becoming distinct, a massive that jutted from the surrounding bluffs into the Illinois; the steep and slippery path that twisted tortuously up the back of Starved Rock....

Twenty-two years later, Michael Williams, after patiently listening to Wild Bill recreate some of the memorable scenes of that night's journey, would interrupt to ask the obvious question: "Why did you actually go to Starved Rock, Marshal? Wasn't it enough that your sister believed you were going?"

"Chronicler," Wild Bill said ("seemingly a little distressed at the interruption," Williams notes in retrospect), "'ain't you ever let someone else's nightmare get into yer bonnet and jest kinda take over fer awhile?"

At the time this exchange took place, in August, 1871, Michael Williams was feeling rather foolish about certain recently abandoned supernatural presuppositions of his own. "Just for the sake of argument," he agreed that sometime in the distant past his own "bonnet" may have been similarly occupied.

"Well now," Wild Bill said, "that's jest how it was with me. I reckon I half believed Lydia actually saw something really real. And I anyways wasn't about to take a chance on her somehow findin' out I didn't go."

"You don't mean to say you thought Lydia could have willed herself to stop breathing, just like she said?" Williams asked.

Hickok looked at Williams with the expression of disgust

he employed whenever his overly talkative "Chronicler" answered his own question while asking it. It was a familiar expression Williams had grown to recognize. Wild Bill let the uncomfortable silence stretch out a bit more--long enough to take a theatric-ally menacing drink from the quart of whiskey he was nursing. Finally he said: "Now, if ya reckon yer done askin' questions, Chronicler, ya want to let me finish my story?"

The top of Starved Rock is a circular plateau less than thirty yards in diameter. Jim found a small but hardy cluster of trees in the center and some scragglier small trees and bushes clinging for life to the rocky edges--but that was about all. He poked around half-heartedly for a few minutes just to salve his conscience. Though he would have been extremely surprised had he actually discovered anyone else on top of Starved Rock, Jim nevertheless felt let down. Suddenly he was aware that the night was cold and he was soaking wet and exhausted. Shivering, Jim settled against one of the trees, hugged his knees to his chest, and determined to wait out the night.

Jim didn't know how long he'd slept, though it couldn't have been too long--perhaps only minutes. But the cold, which soon flowed in a hard current between the ground and his body, awakened him and, for the first time since he'd left, he actually asked himself the very question Michael Williams would ask twenty-two years later. At the time, he could not provide himself with a satisfactory answer.

And then a voice said, "What the hell are you doing out here?"

It took Jim several seconds to realize he was not listening to his own thoughts.

"You must be crazy." The voice was hoarse, an old man's voice, and though it had no noticeable accent, it sounded with the careful precision peculiar to the well practiced non-native speaker of English.

Jim stood up, looked around, saw nothing.

"And deaf," the voice added. It seemed to be coming from behind Jim.

Jim picked up his shotgun and whirled around. "Who's there? Where are you?" he said.

The voice chuckled in a dry rasp. Again Jim sensed the voice was coming from behind him. "Ahh, you are a hunter, I see. Maybe a scout. Or even a soldier. Very good. Very good." The dry laugh sounded again. "A winner of the west. It has been some time since I met a real winner of the west."

After a few more seconds, Jim finally noticed the figure of a man who stood near the front edge of Starved Rock, looking out over the river. He had not been there a half minute before. A single feather rose over his head, silhouetted against the night sky. An Indian, Jim thought. A real live Indian.

"You can put your gun down," the Indian said, without turning around. "I emptied it while you were sleeping. As a winner of the west you have much to learn."

Jim Hickok had read of the wily ways of Indians and was not about to be taken in by such a cheap trick. Just to show he wasn't fooled, he raised his gun and fired into the air.

The hammer clicked.

"You are not very trusting," the Indian observed, concluding with his rasping laugh. "Come here now," he went on. "I said, come here. You did not come all this way for nothing, and I am too old to waste time. If I wanted to kill you, you know, I could have done it easily enough already."

Slowly, Jim Hickok walked up behind the Indian. From behind he did not look too formidable. He was dressed in badly worn buckskin, his back was stooped, and he leaned heavily on the walking stick he held in his right hand. Thin, snow-white hair fell down below his shoulders. He still didn't turn around, but just stood looking over the edge, as motionless as a statue. With one push, Jim knew he could send the Indian plummeting into the Illinois River below.

"Look!" the Indian said. Suddenly animate, he dramatically swept out with his left hand to gather in the horizon. "Everything you see--and more--everything for miles around, on both sides of the river, once belonged to my people, the Illinois of the Rock."

"Who are you?" Jim repeated.

But the Indian just paused, still without bothering to turn around. He went on: "It was the land given us by the creator. Everything we needed, we had--fish, game, fruit, berries, fresh water, land across the river to grow our corn and squash, magic herbs that could cure any disease. No one in our tribe died of anything but old age. There was no hunger, no fighting between our braves, no need for a chief to keep order. And in case of

attack," he said, tapping the ground with his stick, "we had the Rock itself, our fortress--only we were never attacked. The other tribes all knew that we were the Illinois, that our land had been our gift from the creator. And anyway, they had no need to attack. Anything they wanted, we gave them --food, skins, magic herbs. Whatever they needed, they had only to ask the Illinois."

"Who are you?" Jim asked again, as the Indian stopped speaking.

This time the Indian turned around, as if now the question were a cue he'd been waiting for. His face was a fissured mask, a barely living canvass mapped by the runes of too much life. His right eye, dark and oddly youthful, focused acutely on Jim. But it was his left eye that immediately commanded the boy's attention: a milky vacuity, it focused on nothing before it, yet stared in an unblinking and un-nerving vigilance.

"I am the last of the Illinois," the Indian said. "Or in your language, the last of the Perfect Men." He began the pronouncement somberly enough, but by the time he finished translating the Algonquin, his face seemed to bear the trace of a smile. "You think I am a strange sort of Perfect Man?" he said, as if he were sharing an old, private joke.

Jim did indeed. But all he could manage to say was: "You were the one Lydia saw?"

The Perfect Man nodded, the pattern on his face going through a series of subtle realignments until it settled on a frown.

"Old men talk too much," he said. "They do not know when to shut

up. Tell the little girl I am sorry I bothered her--I should have known she was too young to understand. And tell her I am sorry about her friends...."

The gaze of the Perfect Man drifted over Jim's head, as if he were looking for something he'd almost forgotten. "But it is just that there are so few who might keep the ghosts alive, so few who can remember....Only the children who are born old can sometimes remember them, and then, too, the old who...." The Perfect Man, whose gaze was by this time far, far over the head of young Jim Hickok, suddenly looked sharply down at the boy. In another rapid shift of mood and subject, he declared, "Most people think I am crazy, you know....What about you?"

Jim didn't really want to be rude to this rather strange Perfect Man, but honesty prevailed. "Yeah, I guess so, kind of," he said.

"You do believe in ghosts?" the Perfect Man said.

"Ghosts? No, of course not."

The Perfect Man again laughed his rasping laugh. "A cynic, huh? So the young winner of the west is a cynic. I thought so all along....I was a cynic once, too," he added.

The Perfect Man half turned so that his right eye could again look out over the Illinois River. Following the gaze of the Perfect Man, Jim saw a rejuvenated river at his feet, fat and glistening now after the rain, slithering westward in its fresh new skin. The Perfect Man had stopped laughing.

"By my time," the Perfect Man said, continuing his story, "we had lost our knowledge of the magic herbs. The animals and

the fish no longer leapt into our fires. Our crops no longer flourished. Many winters our people starved. We no longer even had peace. By my time the other tribes had begun to laugh at the name of the Illinois. The Iroquois, the Fox, the Ottawa, the Kickapoo, the Sac, the Pottowatomi--one by one they were pushed from their own lands by the white men, and one by one they invaded the land of the Perfect Men."

The Perfect Man suddenly dropped his walking stick and reached out to grab Jim's arm. He was quicker and much less feeble than he looked; his grip was actually painful. "We knew of the winners of the west even before they came among us," he said grimly. "Many of our people died in driving the invaders away."

Still gripping Jim's arm, the Perfect Man went on: "By my time the ghosts had almost been forgotten. Only the old men claimed to remember them, and very few Illinois lived to be old. No one at all--not even the old men--really believed our land had ever been the land of the Perfect Men. It was only an empty name. Even those that saw the ghosts said that they, too, looked sickly."

Shivering and looking to young Jim Hickok something like a sick ghost himself, the Perfect Man paused to take a long swallow from a flask he pulled from his belt. But still he didn't let go of Jim's arm. "But Pontiac, a great chief of the Ottawa, saw ghosts--the healthy ghosts. Even though he was not an Illinois, he was an Illinois in spirit, and the ghosts came to him. They told him of the time of the magic herbs and of the time when

food was plentiful and there was no fighting. They said he could bring back those times. He had only to drive the English from the land they had stolen.

"Pontiac listened to all that the ghosts told him. He banded the Indian nations together for the first time. And with him as their leader, they went on the warpath. I was too young to fight with Pontiac, but I heard of his many great victories over the English. It was a time of glory for the Perfect Men. For awhile it seemed Pontiac would really drive the English away. For awhile it seemed Pontiac would make us into the winners of the west. And for awhile the Illinois remembered they were once the Perfect Men in more than name.

"But in the end, even Pontiac was defeated. And we were forced to give up our dreams and make peace with the English."

"Is that what you were telling Lydia about?" Jim asked. It seemed to him a very odd story to force on a six year old girl--- or even on a twelve year old boy for that matter.

The Perfect Man nodded slowly, as if he had only half heard. Again he seemed almost in a trance. Even his right eye had taken on a glazed look. But whatever else about the Perfect Man was loose, his grip on Jim's arm was still painfully tight. Compulsively, he continued his story: "Years later Pontiac again tried to form a confederation, but by then the English were even stronger. Some of them were even living among us, building on the land of the Perfect Men. They gave us food and whiskey. We even depended on their guns when we hunted. It was too late by then to even think of driving them out. The time for such dreaming

was past. None of the Illinois wanted him stirring up trouble.

"But none of our braves had the courage to tell Pontiac to stay away. It was only because of this," the Perfect Man said, bending over Jim Hickok and pointing to his left eye, "that our chief sent me. He thought no one would argue against one marked by the Manitou--he thought even Pontiac would be afraid." The Perfect Man laughed. "I was barely older than you are now."

Closing both his eyes, the Perfect Man shivered and took another drink from his flask before he could go on. "I met Pontiac far to the south, at Cahokia--before he had a chance to come up our river. But when I finally found the great Pontiac, he did not look like a chief who could wage war. He seemed a sickly, tired old man--as old as I am now." The Perfect Man paused to smile a self-mocking smile of rotten brown pegs and wide gaps. "I thought myself a smart young brave, a proud ambassador to the once great Pontiac, and I could see in him only a superstitious old man who believed in ghosts."

"But when I told him our people had had enough of his dreams and wished to live in peace with the English, he did not honor me as an ambassador, and he did not honor me as one marked by the Manitou. He only spat on me and called me a blind pup from a race of dogs. He said the Perfect Men had never been anything but dogs."

"Even the English had never said such a thing to me." Grimly purposeful, his smile gone and the glazed look gone from his right eye, the Perfect Man took out his knife and touched it lightly to the chest of Jim Hickok. "That is when I raised my

knife and cut out the heart of Pontiac." As he spoke, the Perfect Man made a sudden slashing motion, cutting through the cloth of Jim's shirt and actually drawing a thin ribbon of blood.

The boy was too shocked to make a sound.

In a moment, when he saw what he'd done, the Perfect Man took great pains to apologize, though he seemed to wear the trace of a smile as his eyes lingered on the blood that he'd drawn. "Oh, I am sorry," he said, shaking his head. "Like I said, I am an old man and I do get carried away with my stories. I really did not mean to hurt you. It is just that I wanted to make an impression--people forget words so easily, you know. You are not really hurt, are you?"

Jim, who probably couldn't tell if he were really hurt or not, shook his head.

Despite his expression of concern for Jim's health, the Perfect Man still did not relax his hold on the boy's arm. "When I saw what I had done," he went on, "I ran. I knew the Ottawas would not rest until they avenged the death of their chief. I did not return to my village until over a year later. And by then...." The Perfect Man shrugged. "And by then there was no more village. Right where we stand, a whole people died for the murder of Pontiac--everyone except the one who actually slaughtered him.

"It was only then--after I returned--that I began to see the ghosts for the first time. At first they were only the sickly ghosts--the ghosts of my family and the others who had died on Starved Rock. But soon the ghost of those I had never known in

life began to appear--and more and more--until finally I was visited by ghosts who had lived when the Illinois really were the Perfect Men."

The bulk of his story told, the Perfect Man at last relaxed, and released Jim Hickok's arm. "It is not that the ghosts especially liked me," he went on, more calmly. "They did not, not at all. They even called me a murderer and a traitor. Even the ghost of the chief who had called Pontiac an old fool now said Pontiac had been a great man.

"But you see," he said, his rotting teeth within inches of Jim's face, "I was the last Perfect Man. I was the only one left to keep the ghosts alive. They could not afford to be choosy."

As he turned to look up river, the Perfect Man again began to laugh, though this time he laughed more quietly. Up river, the sky seemed to be growing light. The night was almost over. "And I cannot afford to be choosy, either," the Perfect Man said. "I am an old man. Death can come very suddenly to old men, you know. Soon I will join the ghosts of my people, and then there will be no Perfect Men left to keep the ghosts alive....none to keep even my ghost alive."

Abruptly turning back to face Jim, he said, "I have a deal for you, my young winner of the west. How would you like to be an adopted Perfect Man?"

Jim Hickok had read books about such ritual alliances of the Indian. "You mean like blood brothers?" he said.

But the Perfect Man had apparently not read the same books. He smiled at the expression "blood brothers," looking with his

good eye at the shallow wound in the boy's chest. "Yes, 'blood brothers,' very good. Very true. You can be a 'blood brother' to the Illinois."

Without giving Jim a chance to reply, the Perfect Man hurriedly outlined the advantages of being such a "blood brother." "No matter what they may think of you personally, as long as you are the only one who remembers them, they will look out for their 'blood brother.' I promise you," the Perfect Man said, "that as long as you keep them alive, they will keep you alive. They will even help you become a winner of the west, if you like--only you must look for them. They will not come to you at first--at least the healthy ghosts will not, the ghosts of the true Perfect Men. You must promise to keep coming back until they trust you enough to appear."

Jim considered the "deal" for a moment. "Can the ghosts make sure Lydia'll be all right?" he asked.

The Perfect Man closed his right eye. But his left stayed tirelessly open, as if studying some complex, ubiquitous void. After several minutes of study, he finally opened his right eye again. "Yes, they could do that," he said.

"Here." The Perfect Man removed the single feather from his headband and handed it to Jim. "Give this to the little girl when you get back."

In the growing light, Jim could see that the feather was an odd shade of burnt orange--and very large. He couldn't imagine what kind of bird it was from. Nor could he imagine what good it would do Lydia. Nor did the Perfect Man attempt to explain.

"I want you to see one more thing," the Perfect Man said, "and then you will be a 'blood brother' to the Illinois. Watch carefully and remember everything I told you."

Jim nodded.

"Remember, you promised to return until the Perfect Men appear."

Jim nodded again.

"Are you watching, now?" the Perfect Man asked.

Yet again Jim nodded, impatient for this impending revelation.

Without another word, the Perfect Man took three steps backward and walked off of Starved Rock. Jim half expected that, ghost-like, he would hang in mid-air, at least for a moment, long enough for some final parting word or sign. He didn't, though. He only fell--and in a very prosaic manner at that--scraping once off the face of the Rock and then bouncing into the Illinois River with a faint, delayed splash.

For a long time after the fall of the Perfect Man, Jim Hickok stood facing down river, seeking a glimpse of the body. He never saw it. Soon, despite the feather he still held, he began to doubt that his bizarre encounter with the Perfect Man had been "really real." But finally, shortly after sunrise, Jim spotted a bird that was circling far down river. Slowly moving westward with the Illinois, the bird continued circling until it at last disappeared from sight: a vulture, Jim told himself, hovering over the body of the Perfect Man. It was an oddly comforting thought.

When Wild Bill had finished telling about the Perfect Man, even Michael Williams was inclined to be a little incredulous. Laughing nervously, and unintentionally adopting the tone of Lydia Hickok, Williams said, "You don't mean to say that this 'Perfect Man' was really real, do you, Marshal?"

Hickok had withdrawn his own bowie knife while dramatizing his meeting with the Perfect Man. Now he began to tap it on the table in a manner uncomfortably familiar to Michael Williams. "You ain't callin' me a liar now, are ya, Chronicler?" Wild Bill said.

"No--no--certainly not, Marshal. But it's just...."

"It's jest what, Chronicler?"

"Well, it's just that yours is an awfully....unusual story, Marshal. And as your Heroic Chronicler, I would rather, if at all possible, avoid the appearance of any....of any unnecessary exaggerations in your Heroic Chronicle that might tend in any way to cast doubts upon its overall veracity."

Hickok smiled. "Don't you worry, now, Chronicler," he said. "It all happened jest like I told ya. I even woke up the next day with a big ole bruise on my right arm from where the Perfect Man had a hold on me.

"Ya know, Chronicler," Hickok went on, still smiling, "you better believe me. Yer the only one I ever told that story to in twenty-two years, and I ain't gettin' any younger. Ifn I should take it into my head to go jump off some cliff'r other, them ghosts won't have no one to depend on but you."

In recording his own response to this prospect, Michael

Williams says: "Having in the last few weeks met with enough 'ghosts' in Abilene to last me a lifetime, I found even the fanciful prospect of becoming the solitary support of the 'Perfect Men' rather disturbing. But perhaps even more disturbing to me was the possibility of prematurely 'calling the bluff' of Marshal Hickok. For even though I strongly suspected the story of the 'Perfect Man' to be yet another example of the Marshal's seemingly inexhaustible supply of crude 'frontier humor,' I wasn't absolutely sure he wasn't dead serious this time. My countenance no doubt belied my discomfiture (a state of mine the recurrence of which Marshal Hickok takes an inexplicable pleasure in observing), for, with a hearty laugh, the Marshal said, 'I reckon you done jest about enough Chroniclin' fer one night, pard. Ya look like yer feelin' a mite peaked.'

I couldn't have agreed more, and told him I 'reckoned' he was correct about that."

iv

It was well past noon by the time Jim Hickok finally made his way back home--nearly twenty-four hours since he'd left to find Lydia. Once again the sun shone out of a cloudless sky; but this day the air was seasonably crisp, and the moderate warmth of the sun welcome. Though it had taken several hours, the sun had finally finished drying Jim's clothes, soaked again after his re-crossing of the Illinois.

When he got back to the house, all was quiet; Celinda was, as usual, still at school, and Jim's three brothers were, as usual, working. Entering Lydia's room, Jim saw his mother seated and sleeping with her head in her arms, bent over the small table by Lydia's bed. Lydia lay quietly on her back with her eyes closed; she, too, seemed to be sleeping. Only William Hickok, ever vigilant, was awake; with his arms crossed behind his back, he stood at the window, looking outside.

Jim walked up behind his father and whispered, "How is she, Pa?"

Turning with a start from the window, William seemed to have only half heard the question. "Who?" he said.

"Lydia. How is she?" Jim repeated.

William shook his head. He hadn't slept since Jim had left and, if possible, looked even worse than he had then. "I don't know, Jim," he said. "I just don't know. She's been asleep since you left. I suppose that's a good sign...." He shrugged helplessly; he had no theory, no firm starting point to work from in solving this problem. Even the prolific Fourier (like God a life-long bachelor) had not seen fit to provide guidelines for the care of sick children. (William Hickok knew. Reading feverishly by the flickering candle at Lydia's bedside, he had searched Fourier throughout the night to no avail.)

Looking again at Lydia, Jim could see that she still seemed to be sleeping quietly. And then the thought struck him: perhaps too quietly. He couldn't see her breathing at all.

Jim whispered, "Pa, you're sure Lydia's...."

"What's that Jim?"

"Nothing, I guess, Pa....I was just thinking...."

"Ahh." William nodded half-heartedly but did not stroke his chin. "Well that's good, Jim. Glad to hear it," he said as he turned tiredly back to the window.

Careful not to disturb his mother, Jim walked over to Lydia's bed and looked at her closely. He still couldn't see any sign of her breathing. He was tempted to touch her, to wake her, just to reassure himself. But instead, remembering the feather the Perfect Man had given him, he took it and placed it just over Lydia's mouth. After a moment Jim thought he saw a slight flutter of the feather, but then it seemed to stop and he wasn't sure. He lowered the feather until it actually touched Lydia's lips.

She opened her eyes and smiled. "I dreamed about you," she said, now wholly awake, as if she really hadn't been sleeping at all. "I saw you talk to the Perfect Man. I knew you'd help him all along." She smiled slyly, no doubt fancying herself a clever manipulator for the way her dream had turned out. "And he's all right now, isn't he? The Perfect Man's all right?"

"Yeah, Lydia," Jim said. "The Perfect Man's all right. He's happy now. He even said for me to give you his feather 'cause you were so nice to him."

Lydia's eyes opened wide as she took the feather, but she didn't say anything. Almost religiously she began fingering the feather's vane as she might the beads of a rosary.

Jim rested his hand on Lydia's forehead. "Are you all right

now, Lydia?" he asked.

Almost laughing, Lydia stopped playing with the feather long enough to put a finger to her lips. Then she pointed to Polly, still sleeping, her face completely hidden in her arms. Like a self-consciously protective parent, she whispered, "Not so loud, Jim. You'll wake Ma. And she's tired and it looks like she's havin' a real happy dream."

Critical Apparatus for Over the River

In this critical apparatus I intend to touch on three main points. First of all, I will discuss the frame in which I tentatively plan to place Over the River. Secondly I will briefly outline the pattern I see the entire "Hickok story" taking. Finally I will provide a very brief explication of Over the River itself.

Although I tried to construct Over the River so that it could be intelligibly read as a self-contained unit, it is ultimately a segment of a novel, or series of novels, about Wild Bill Hickok. Since I have been told that the most disturbing facet of Over the River is its oddly "unsure" point of view, I think it best to begin here by summarizing its containing frame, with special attention to how this frame creates a complicated--and perhaps "unsure"--point of view. Briefly, the frame for the entire series is as follows:

An editor (tentatively named Moran) has come into the possession of previously undiscovered manuscripts written in 1871 by one Michael Williams. Williams is known in conventional historical accounts only as an otherwise anonymous "special policeman" of the "Novelty Theater" who was accidentally shot to death by Hickok in Abilene, Kansas, in the summer of 1871. But in fact, as these manuscripts show, he was also the self-styled "Heroic Chronicler" of Wild Bill. Viewing Hickok as a national hero on the epic scale of Achilles, Aeneas, or Arthur, Williams journeyed to Abilene early in 1871 for the purpose of gathering first hand

material for his intended "Heroic Chronicle."

While there, however, he actually compiled two separate manuscripts. One was a day to day diary of his stay in Abilene which focused mostly on his contacts with "Marshal Hickok." Among other things, it records Williams's progression from a naive, jingoistic hero-worship, through a near rejection of Hickok, to a final unsteady acceptance of a qualified heroism in the subject of his "Heroic Chronicle." This diary (tentatively) makes up "chapter one" of my Hickok series and there appears in nearly unedited form. Except for editorial footnotes and clearly marked in-text commentary, Michael Williams's is the narrative voice of "chapter one."

The second manuscript, the rough draft of the projected "Heroic Chronicle" itself, contains the notes from Williams's extensive interviews with Hickok about his past. Over the River and all subsequent segments will be based on this unfinished "Chronicle" manuscript. In contrast to "chapter one," however, all of this material will be told in the narrative voice of your editor, who will delete superfluous "Chronicle" material, add insights from modern Hickok historical scholarship, and sometimes allow himself the heady freedom of an omniscient point. However, the basic events related will for the most part derive from Williams's "Chronicle" notes, which (the editor assumes) for the most part derived from Hickok's own narrative, which (again he assumes) was for the most part accurate. The fuzziness, both of historical "fact" and of ultimate point of view is intentional; for the edited "Chronicle," of which Over the River is a part, is

to be read as a sort of collective imaginative recreation of an archetypal American hero--not as an attempt to unearth the "objective" history of a gunfighter 104 years dead. Hickok, Williams, and your editor may be thought of as engaged in a similar task of discovering a meaningful pattern in--and hence justification for--a particularly unsettling period in American history: an active mythologizing process in which the "history" related is in part a function of the multiple story tellers' need for a significant ordering of the past--even if that ordering necessitates the telling of a few "tall-tales" along the way.

It would take far too much space to outline the plots of the segments that follow Over the River. So perhaps the best way for me to describe what I am about is in terms of the basic pattern I intend to employ, both in each of the more or less self-contained segments and in the Hickok series as a whole. In general terms that pattern could be described as a dialectic movement from a naively confident "world view" or "set of values" (for lack of better terminology); through a shattering of that world view; and at least toward the formulation of either a new, more appropriate world view, or a less naive re-affirmation of the old one. In most (though not all) cases, Hickok himself will be the focal point of this dialectic process.

In addition, most of the episodes will center on Hickok's relationship with a woman who might be conceived of as a "personification of fate" or (to employ even more pretentiously scholarly terminology) as a "personification of the historical moment." Three of the later episodes--all set in either the Civil War or

reconstruction era--will be built around a conflict over this woman between Hickok and a southerner and, in good western fashion, will climax in the inevitable gunfight. Hickok naturally wins. However, for one reason or another, the woman in question, having served as a sort of catalyst for the action, vanishes from the scene. Besides providing a symbolic means of exploring the dialectic process noted above, such conventional western melodrama has at least the potential for remunerative low-brow entertainment (a consideration above which I am not).

By looking at Over the River, the reader can perhaps get a more specific idea of what I mean by "the dialectic process." There we see William Hickok as the end product of a clearly decadent (European) Christian tradition manifesting itself as a self-indulgent utopian socialism. Though he follows God's order to "return to the soil," the elder Hickok is in fact totally estranged from "the earth"--from any truly vital world view.

In their antithetical reaction to their father, Oliver, Lorenzo, Horace, and Celinda certainly all have their feet on the ground; but, in their (however justified) contempt for William's sterile, ineffectual idealism, they ironically cut themselves off from the vitality of "the earth" as surely as he does; or at least that is the way that Jim perceives it. Their unimaginative, materialistic, "practical," approach to life is as threatening to him as is the insanity of his father.

Jim's movement toward some sort of synthesis is symbolized at first by his attraction to "Newman Hill"--which I suggest might profitably be broken down into either new-man or numen, "an

indwelling, guiding force or spirit." The intended implication is that the "new man" of America is to be realized only when the native numena have been successfully assimilated. Of course assimilating these numena is also extremely dangerous, a heroic act of sorts; for doing so means accepting and somehow coming to terms with the communal guilt of the conquering Euro-Americans. And these numena are precisely what The Perfect Man bequeaths to Jim Hickok at Starved Rock.

Other characters: Lydia Hickok assumes a variant form of the "catalyst" role described above; it is she who first imaginatively contacts the "Newmans," and it is she who pushes Jim into his fateful confrontation with The Perfect Man.

Polly Hickok, on the other hand, is essentially passive, a mere mirror of the dialectic process, her dreams for the future being projected successively onto William, Oliver, and finally Jim.

While Celinda is perhaps (or perhaps not) successful as a comic foil, and is fairly well integrated into the plot, she is not really structurally necessary. Lorenzo and Horace are of course absolutely superfluous. However, all three were historical members of Wild Bill Hickok's family; and, for now anyway, I intend to be fairly conscientious about names, dates, etc., unless there is just no way for me to work with the facts at hand.

My primary source on Hickok's life (Michael Williams aside) is the second edition of a very fine biography by Joseph G. Rosa entitled, They Called Him Wild Bill: The Life and Adventures of James Butler Hickok. Over the River made use of infor-

mation found on pages 10-14. In addition, some of the background material on Starved Rock was based on a rather fanciful "historical" booklet I picked up at Starved Rock Illinois State Park.

OVER THE RIVER:
THE LAST OF THE ILLINOIS

by

KEVIN MORAN

B. S., University of Wisconsin, 1975

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Abstract for "Over the River"

"Over the River" is the second section of a novel about James Butler (Wild Bill) Hickok. The first section, which serves as a sort of frame for the rest, dealt with a later period in Hickok's life and was the first person account of one Michael Williams, Hickok's self-styled "Heroic Chronicler." The remainder of the novel (including "Over the River") is largely based on Williams's unpublished "Chronicle," even though I, as editor, have somewhat revised his material and adopted an omniscient point of view.

An important part of "Over the River" is the historical background on Hickok's family. The reader learns that Hickok's father, William, is a rather insane Utopian idealist who for years has been attempting to build "God's Kingdom on Earth," with the Hickok family being the Kingdom's first experimental colony. God (5'11" with thinning gray-white hair and a Harvard accent) is William's closest personal friend and a frequent adviser on the construction of His Kingdom. It was God's casual observation about the advantages of settling "out west" that induced William to take his family on the odyssey that eventually led from North Hero, Vermont to the frontier community of Homer, Illinois.

Polly Butler Hickok, Jim's mother (once the "prettiest girl in Bennington, Vermont and full of bright dreams of the future), is now, after twenty years of disillusioning marriage to William, prematurely aged and in a mental state approaching chronic despair.

In order to keep the family from starving, Jim's three older brothers have had to assume adult responsibilities at far too young an age. Reacting against William, whom they all despise, the three have embraced a secularized Puritan work ethic to become sturdy and industrious but very unimaginative young men.

Jim's self-consciously virtuous sister, Celinda, one year younger than he, is a model student, a compulsive "tattle-tale," and destined to be a local leader in the drive for prohibition. She is, in short, sort of an obnoxious family super-ego. For a long time Celinda had tyrannized over Jim's younger sister, Lydia, until finally, with Jim's help, the waif-like Lydia escaped to the sanctuary of "Newman Hill"--just as Jim had earlier.

The present time action of the story all takes place within a period of 24 hours in October of 1849. Polly, worried about Lydia (six years old at the time), sends Jim to bring her back from "Newman Hill," where, as only Jim knows, she is playing with her imaginary friends, "the Newmans." But when Jim arrives, Lydia, feverish and distraught, informs him that "the Newmans" have left and will never return. Jim eventually learns that the source of this news is "the Perfect Man," whom he at first assumes to be another imaginary friend of Lydia. However, Lydia, by threatening to kill herself, blackmails Jim into making a pilgrimage to Starved Rock, ten miles to the south. There, Jim actually meets Lydia's "Perfect Man." He claims to be the last surviving member of a tribe ("the Perfect Men") that had perished

on Starved Rock nearly eighty years before. After compulsively relating the tale of his own murderous and traitorous guilt, the last "Perfect Man" passes his burden to Jim Hickok, making him a "blood brother" to the "Perfect Men." Thus freed, the old Indian commits suicide by jumping off Starved Rock, leaving Jim as the only surviving "Perfect Man."

The next day Jim takes a feather the "Perfect Man" had given him back to Lydia. She receives the gift as if it were a cherished talisman, and, as "Over the River" concludes, she seems nearly recovered from her fever.