

## LISTEN ALL YOU BULLETS: CHAPTER 8

The weeks went by slowly and soon it seemed I had always been with these characters. I was getting to like the work they did, the work I helped them with. But it was getting tougher and tougher to think of Joe as my friend, in the daylight-he was more like my boss. But the evenings were fine.

Every night after work was done, we sat in the kitchen and talked. Some nights I listened and some nights I talked. Sometimes Billy's mother and father would want to be alone, so Billy would come sit out at the barn and ask me to tell him a story. He even told me some of his own. One was in first person. The boy had a great imagination.

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I STAYED IN THE DARKER SHADOWS and waited until I saw him leave the barn. He was dressed in his gunfighter's uniform and he came to the house. My dad was fixing to go to town and settle a score. He said he wouldn't be a man if he didn't and my mother was worried. I wasn't.

- Why?

- Why would I be. I knew that Shane would get there first. I knew my father would still be a man if Shane got there first.

He came into the house and told my father. He said Joe, I am going to-

- Joe's your father's name.

- He's the only one who didn't change his name.

- What?

- Except the last name. That's all of us. Joe Pilgrim. Comes from a war book, or a John Wayne story or something.

Anway, he came into the house to tell my father, I thought. He said Joe, I am going to town and straighten this out. I want to thank you and Marion-but my father wouldn't listen and Shane wasn't there to talk to him anyway. He was there talking to my mother. The way they looked at each other was obscene. My father was right in the room. I was right in the room. I don't care if all the old-time ranchers send people to beat us up. We took him into our home.

My father stood-he could walk then-and as he did his chair pushed back from the table. He was getting angry, you see. He was upset over the you-sir-pation, what he saw as the usurpation of his role. I guess. But my mother was watching the air between the men, and she wasn't prepared for the chair. It surprised her and the back of the chair hit her in the leg.

"Are you alright?" Shane asked, taking a step toward her. She smiled weakly and shook her head to dismiss his concern. She looked as pretty as she ever looked. Her cheeks were red and she was agitated, but her whole spirit seemed focused on the space between the men. Her body was solid and not there at the same time. She

folded her arms across her chest and didn't say a word, but continued to smile in a helpless way. I didn't like it one bit. I was just a boy then. I didn't know a fucking thing.

- Easy, Billy. Take it easy. You're still a boy.

- Thanks, mister. You're a boy too.

- What?

- Then my father said "No man will take my place, I don't care what you've done for us, Shane."

"This is the thing I do," Shane said. "This is the kind of thing I was born to do. I am the kind of guy who does these things."

I didn't want to see Shane and my father fight. I thought of Shane, until then, as a good man.

"What kinds of things, Shane?" I asked. "The thing where you ride in here and look at my mother like that. The thing where the salesman says he knows you, he's heard of you, and watch out?"

The men just stared at me but my mother took a step back and turned really red,. When she moved back, Shane took a step toward her. She said "no" and my father turned to look at her. Then she did take her eyes off the gunfighter and looked at her husband, whose own eyes were wide and terrified. Shane, though, took another step toward my mother, toward my father's back.

"Shane," my father said. "This don't concern you."

But it did concern him. It did and he hit my father on the back of his head with the butt of his pistol

"Are you doing this for me?" my mother asked Shane, as they looked at each other over the my father who was slumped to the floor. How could she do that? My father looked dead. They embraced and I ran as fast as I could, thinking my father was dead.

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SHANE THOUGHT HE WAS MY HERO. I watched him kill in that saloon, then he came out and reached down to pat my head, but I wasn't his friend. You can't kill a man's father and hold his mother. You can't do that.

He thought he was my hero and he told me there's no going back from a killing. I knew that, but I knew the killing was there in your heart even if it wasn't in that strange world around me. The world had changed. Something was knocked loose. And there was killing in my heart and I knew that and he didn't.

I followed him with a gun I'd picked up. He rode slowly out of town but I kept chasing after him. He thought he was my hero and after he saw I wouldn't stop following he turned back. He leaned down to me and there was sweat all over his face. He was working hard to stay alive. I'm not sure he even saw me; he was just playing the part of the wounded cowboy, talking big to a kid he thinks don't know better.

I shot him in the ear and rode his horse home. We used his body in the garden and my dad kept his gun.

- That's quite a story, Billy. You read that somewhere?

- I can't read.

- Well, that's quite a story.