

**Gold Fever**

**Part 2 of Fever Season**

**Chapter 1**

**“Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there,  
wondering, fearing- doubting dreaming; dreams no  
mortal ever dared to dream before.”**

**Edgar Allan Poe**

**“The Raven”**

## **Philadelphia, January 1870**

John Raymond cried out in the dark, jerking himself from his nightmare in a fever sweat. His heart was pounding like a drum. Rolling to his back, he stared at the dark ceiling as he caught his breath, willing his heartbeat to return to normal. Pressing his palms into his eyes, he drew several long measured breaths. He never grew accustomed to these dreams. About the time he hoped perhaps they were behind him- one would creep in, like bind weed pushing through a narrow crack.

Tonight's unsettling exercise was similar to others he had experienced. Once again, a familiar male voice was heard in the dark calling urgently, "Massa Raymond! Massa Raymond!" Though the name struck no chord within him,

with each call, John desperately tried to make himself heard or run toward the voice in the deep darkness. Every single time he found himself irretrievably stuck and helpless to answer back.

This recurring nightmare was his sole identifier. His doctors assumed the man must be calling to him and therefore his sir name must be Raymond. That mournful searcher always moved further away leaving John Raymond behind.

In another frequent dream, he found himself on a murky river, alone in a small sailboat. A faraway voice called out, "Papa! Papa, where are you?" He knew that little girl was calling to him, but no matter how intently he looked into the moss hung trees on the dark shadowed shoreline he

couldn't find her. He tried to turn the sailboat and hurry back, but the rigging was snarled, the current too fast.

He had at least one child out there, of this he was certain. It crushed John's heart that he couldn't remember. What if there were a faithful wife who mourned him? A family watching the road, awaiting their prodigal soldier?

Angrily, he threw aside the covers and got out of bed. He shoved an arm into the sleeve of his heavy winter robe, tying the sash and stepping into warm slippers. Nightmares were bad. However, if he were honest, the moments of drowning panic which occasionally overtook him were much more fearsome. They were the unexpected guerilla attacks which lurked in his shadows. The mere thought made John shudder.

While he couldn't remember the Civil War, it surely remembered him. John ran an unsteady hand through his sleep-mussed hair. Blindly, he patted around on the side table for his glasses so he could see to light the lamp. He needed a light in the darkness.

Consulting his pocket watch, he discovered it was 4 am. It was futile to try to get back to sleep. The hotel room he called home was frigid. John shoveled coal into the stove and waited for meaningful heat to generate.

Waiting. He was an expert at waiting. Since awakening in a Philadelphia hospital after Gettysburg, he had done little but wait. John had a broken leg which wasn't too serious and a concussion which apparently was. None of the other wounded recognized him. His ruined uniform had revealed

him to be a colonel in the Confederate Cavalry. That knowledge sparked no memories. A survivor, he had come through with no papers, no recollections, and no name. The staff dubbed him Johnny. Once his dreams were revealed, this moniker was amended to John Raymond.

John waited to heal. Initially the doctors prognosticated that his memory would begin to return. Over time, such predictions awkwardly evaporated, while the poisonous dreams remained his faithful companions for nearly seven years.

Ice crusted the water in the ewer. John punched through it, poured some into the matching China bowl and splashed icy water on his face. These wretched dreams always left him rattled. The hand towel rasped against his

whiskers as he dried his face. Running an exploratory hand over his chin, John tossed the towel carelessly next to the pitcher deciding caffeine a higher priority than shaving.

He kept a small pot in his room and set about measuring grinds from a cannister to get some coffee made. It would be hours before the restaurant downstairs served breakfast.

Closing his eyes as he opened the coffee tin, John deeply inhaled the marvelous aroma. Ironic, he thought, that his nose never forgot this scent-this ambrosia of the gods. He filled the pot with cold water and set it atop the parlor stove. Set now, he shoved his frozen hands into his deep pockets and began to think about the day ahead and waited for things to heat up.

Once Colonel Raymond rebounded from his wounds, the hospital staff noticed this patient had skills. While unable to recall his particulars, instinctive leadership qualities which once made him a fine officer and administrator had been retained. His speech, good manners and bearing made it clear that he was educated, intelligent and capable. Soon he became an asset to both hospital staff and administration, a liaison for CSA prisoner patients which led to introductions to General Abner Banks who oversaw the hospital corps in the Eastern sector.

Others, like Raymond, who had been captured or wounded at Gettysburg, were shipped out to prisoner of war camps or paroled home. John stayed. Lee surrendered at Appomattox and the war ended. By then, John was indispensable to General Banks' staff.

Invited to a lunch meeting, Banks introduced John, with lofty praise, to his long-time friend General William Jackson Palmer. Prior to the war, Palmer, a civil engineer, had greatly expanded Pennsylvania's railroad networks. In a country full of old war generals, Palmer had been an actual hero for defeating a superior force at Red Hill, Alabama, late in the war. Still a colonel, he was able to capture the enemy's fieldpiece and took 100 prisoners without losing a man.

When the conflict ended, Palmer parlayed his experience and notoriety and got back to work. Heading west in 1867 he helped put together the Kansas Pacific Railway which was proving extremely profitable. America was on the move again.

It seemed the interminable war chaos and its vindictive aftermath was coasting to a slow, skidding halt. Business opportunities abounded. Expansion, fresh fortunes and a restorative feeling of America's unbridled potential hung sweetly in the air. Manifest Destiny and the fruit thereof, was a brass ring to be grasped by the boldest rider on capitalism's carousel.

General Palmer returned to his old stomping grounds in Philadelphia to build a team and drum up investors for new projects in the Colorado Territories. Huge gold and silver strikes there were reportedly unprecedented. What was needed, he shared, was an efficient way to move precious ore out of the mountains and to the stamp mills for processing and then onward to where it was needed.

Palmer, a vibrant, good looking man in his middle years, persuasively spoke of boom towns, hot springs and ideas for luxurious hotels and future growth of tourism. Statehood, of course, was a foregone conclusion. Boldness was needed to meet these opportunities while the iron was hot. Palmer deemed Colorado ripe for investment. His greater plans hinged upon development of his new Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. First, Palmer needed a fresh flow of capital and a solid, capable team.

John had no investment capital, but he did have winning skills and administrative abilities Banks and Palmer considered invaluable in a Vice President to his bold venture out west. The salary was generous, the potential great. However, John would have taken the position even had the prospects been less rosy. It was time.

Pushing aside the heavy draperies, the lonely man stood at the upper window and stared into the shadowy street. It reminded him of an empty theater stage. The snow whispered down in the hazy glow of ornate gas streetlamps. All sound was muffled by the snow as dawn hesitated, waiting in the wings for music to build and actors to appear.

John recalled a line of poetry by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *“A few feathery flakes are scattered widely through the air, and hover downward with uncertain flight.”*

Just like those snowflakes, he too was set for uncertain flight. John was more than ready for a new page and fresh adventures. It was 1870- a new decade after all.

Aside from damnable dreams, John had come to grips with the fact he wasn't going to remember his previous life.

As a Confederate officer, odds were good he wasn't from anywhere near Philadelphia. It was time to go. He and Palmer were going West to build a narrow gauge railroad. John was optimistic and excited for the first time in a long time.

His wait was over. The nightmare forgotten; John grinned in heady expectation. He may have no recollection of identity or where he was from- but for the first time, he knew exactly where he was bound.