



NEWS  
OF THE  
WORLD

*a novel*

PAULETTE JILES

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
OF ENEMY WOMEN

## CHAPTER ONE

Wichita Falls, Texas, Winter 1870

Captain Kidd laid out the *Boston Morning Journal* on the lectern and began to read from the article on the Fifteenth Amendment. He had been born in 1798 and the third war of his lifetime had ended five years ago and he hoped never to see another but now the news of the world aged him more than time itself. Still he stayed his rounds, even during the cold spring rains. He had been at one time a printer but the war had taken his press and everything else, the economy of the Confederacy had fallen apart even before the surrender and so he now made his living in this drifting from one town to another in North Texas with his newspapers and journals in a waterproof portfolio and his coat collar turned up against the weather. He rode a very good horse and was concerned that someone might try to take the horse from him but so far so good. So he had arrived in Wichita Falls on February 26<sup>th</sup> and tacked up his posters and put on his reading clothes in the stable. There was a hard rain outside and it was noisy but he had a good strong voice.

He shook out the *Journal's* pages.

The Fifteenth Amendment, he read, which has just been signed between the several states February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1870, allows the vote to all men qualified to vote without regard to race or color or previous condition of servitude. He looked up from the text. His reading glasses caught the light. He bent slightly forward over the lectern. That means colored gentlemen, he said. Let us have no vaporings or girlish shrieks. He turned his head to search the crowd of faces turned up to him. I can hear you muttering, he said. Stop it. I hate muttering.

He glared at them and then said, Next. The Captain shook out another newspaper. The latest from the New York *Herald Tribune* states that the polar exploration ship *Hansa* is reported by a whaler as being crushed in sunk in the pack ice in its attempt to reach the North Pole; sunk at seventy degrees north latitude off Greenland. There is nothing in this article about survivors. He flipped the page impatiently.

The Captain had a clean-shaven face with runic angles, his hair was perfectly white and he was still six feet tall. His hair shone in the single hot ray from the bull's-eye lantern. He carried a short-barreled Slocum revolver in his waistband at the back. It was a five-shot, thirty-two caliber and he had never liked it all that much but then he had rarely used it.

Over all the bare heads he saw Britt Johnson and his men, Paint Crawford and Dennis Vesey, at the back wall. They were free black men. Britt was a freighter and the other two were his driving crew. They held their hats in their hands, each with one booted foot cocked up against the wall behind them. The hall was full. It was a broad open space used for wool storage and community meetings and for people like himself. The crowd was almost all men, almost all white. The lantern lights were harsh, the air was dark. Captain Kidd traveled from town to town in north Texas with his newspapers and read aloud the news of the day to assemblies like this in halls or churches for a dime a head. He traveled alone and had no one to collect the dimes for him but not many people cheated and if they did somebody caught them at it and grabbed them by the lapels and wrenched them up in a knot and said *You really ought to pay your Goddamned dime, you know, like everybody else.*

And then the coin would ring in the paint can.

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He glanced up to see Britt Johnson lift a forefinger to him. Captain Kidd gave one brief nod,

and completed his reading with an article from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* concerning the British physicist James Maxwell and his theories of electromagnetic disturbances in the ether whose wavelengths were longer than infrared radiation. This was to bore people and calm them down and put them into a state of impatience to leave; leave quietly. He had become impatient of trouble and other people's emotions. His life had lately seemed to him thin and sour, a bit spoiled, and it was something that had only come upon him lately. A slow dullness had seeped into him like coal gas and he did not know what to do about it except seek out quiet and solitude. He was always impatient to get the readings over with now.

The Captain folded the papers, put them in his portfolio. He bent to his left and blew out the bull's eye lantern. As he walked through the crowd people reached out to him and shook his hand. A pale-haired man sat watching him. With him were two Indians or half-Indians that the Captain knew for Caddoes and not people of a commendable reputation. The man with the blond hair turned in his chair to stare at Britt. Then others came to thank the Captain for his readings, asked after his grown children. Kidd nodded, said *tolerable, tolerable*, and made his way back to Britt and his men to see what it was Britt wanted.

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Captain Kidd thought it was going to be about the Fifteenth Amendment but it was not.

Yes sir, Captain Kidd, would you come with me? Britt straightened and lifted his hat to his head and so did Dennis and Paint. Britt said, I got a problem in my wagon.

She seemed to be about ten years old, dressed in the horse Indians' manner in a deerskin shift with four rows of elk teeth sewn across the front. A thick blanket was pulled over her shoulders. Her hair was the color of maple sugar and in it she wore two down puffs bound onto a lock of

her hair by their minute spines and also bound with a thin thread was a wing-feather from a golden eagle slanting between them. She sat perfectly composed, wearing the feather and a necklace of glass beads as if they were costly adornments. Her eyes were blue and her skin that odd bright color that occurs when fair skin has been burnt and weathered by the sun. She had no more expression than an egg.

I see, said Captain Kidd. I see.

He had his black coat collar turned up against the rain and the cold and a thick wool muffler around his neck. His breath moved out of his nose in clouds. He bit his lower lip on the left side and thought about what he was looking at in the light of the kerosene hurricane lantern Britt held up. In some strange way it made his skin crawl.

I am astonished, he said. The child seems artificial as well as malign.

Britt had backed one of his wagons under the roof of the fairway at the livery stable. It didn't fit all the way in. The front half of the wagon and the driver's seat was wild with the drumming noise of the rain and a bright lift of rain-spray surrounded it. The back end was under shelter and they all stood there and regarded the girl the way people do when they come upon something strange they have caught in a trap, something alien whose taxonomy is utterly unknown and probably dangerous. The girl sat on a bale of Army shirts. In the light of the lantern her eyes reflected a thin and glassy blue. She watched them, she watched every movement, every lift of a hand. Her eyes moved but her head was still.

Yes sir, said Britt. She's jumped out of the wagon twice between Fort Sill and here. As far as Agent Hammond can figure out she is Johanna Leonberger, captured at age six four years ago, from near Castroville. Down near San Antonio.

I know where it is, said Captain Kidd.

Yes sir. The Agent had all the particulars. If that's her, she's about ten.

Britt Johnson was a tall, strong man but he watched the girl with a dubious and mistrusting expression. He was cautious of her.

*My name is Cicada. My father's name is Turning Water. My mother's name is Three Spotted. I want to go home.*

But they could not hear her because she had not spoken aloud but the Kiowa words in all their tonal music lived in her head like bees.

Captain Kidd said, Do they know who her parents are?

Yes sir, they do. Or, as much as he can figure out from the date she was taken. The Agent, here, I'm talking about. Her parents and her little sister were killed in the raid. He had a paper from her relatives, Wilhelm and Anna Leonberger, an aunt and uncle. And he gave me a fifty-dollar gold piece to deliver her back to Castroville. The family sent it up to him by a Major from San Antonio, transferred north. He was to give it to somebody to transport her home. I said I would get her out of Indian Territory and across the Red. It wasn't easy. We like to drowned. That was yesterday.

The Captain said, It's come up two foot since yesterday.

I know it. Britt stood with one foot on the drawbar. The hurricane lantern burnt with its irresolute light on the tailgate and shone into the interior of the freight wagon as if revealing some alien figure in a tomb.

Captain Kidd took off his hat and shook water from it. Britt Johnson had rescued at least four captives from the red men. From the Comanche, from the Kiowa, and once from the Cheyenne up north in Kansas. Britt's own wife and two children had been taken captive three years ago, in 1867, and he had gone out and got them back. Nobody knew quite how he had done it. He

seemed to have some celestial protection about him. He usually went alone. Britt was a rescuing angel, a dark man of the Red Rolling Plains, cunning and strong and fast like a nightjar in the midnight air. But Britt was not going to return this girl to her parents, not even for fifty dollars in gold.

Why won't you go? said Captain Kidd. You have come this far already. Fifty dollars in gold is a considerable amount.

I figured I could find somebody to hand her off to here, Britt said. It's a three-week journey down there. Then three weeks back. I have no haulage to carry down there.

Behind him Paint and Dennis nodded. They crossed their arms in their heavy waxed-canvas slickers. Long bright crawls of water slid across the livery stable floor and took up the light of the lantern like a luminous stain and the roof shook with the percussion of drops as big as nickels.

Dennis Crawford, thin as a spider, said, We wouldn't make a dime the whole six weeks.

Unless we could get something to haul back up here, said Paint.

Shut up, Paint, said Dennis. You know people down there?

Well all right, said Paint. I can hear you.

Britt said, There it is. I can't leave my freighting that long. I have orders to deliver. And the other thing is, if I'm caught carrying that girl it would be bad trouble. He looked the Captain straight in the eye and said, She's a white girl. You take her.

Captain Kidd felt in his breast pocket for his tobacco. He didn't find it. Britt rolled a cigarette for him and handed it to him and then snapped a match in his big hand. Captain Kidd had not lost any sons in the war and that was because he had all daughters. Two of them. He knew girls. He didn't know Indians but he knew girls, and what was on that girl's face was contempt.

He said, Find a family going that way, Britt. Somebody to drown her in sweetness and light and improving lectures on deportment.

Good idea, said Britt. I thought of it already.

And so? Captain Kidd blew out smoke. The girl's eyes did not follow it. Nothing could move her gaze from the men's faces, the men's hands. She had a drizzle of freckles across her cheekbones and her fingers were blunt as noses with short nails lined in black.

Can't locate any. Hard to find somebody to trust with this.

Captain Kidd nodded. But you've delivered girls before now, he said. The Blainey girl, you got her back.

Not that far a trip. Besides I don't know those people down there. You do.

Yes, I see.

Captain Kidd had spent years in San Antonio. He knew the way, knew the people. In North and West Texas there were many free black men, they were freighters and scouts and now after the war, the 10th US Cavalry, all black. However, the general population had not settled the matter of free black people in their minds yet. All was in flux. Flux; a soldering aid that promotes the fusion of two surfaces, an unstable substance that catches fire.

The Captain said, You could ask the Army to deliver her. They take charge of captives.

Not any more, said Britt.

What would you have done if you hadn't come across me?

I don't know.

I just got here from Bowie. I could have gone south to Jacksboro.

I saw your posters when we pulled in, Britt said. It was meant.

One last thing, said Captain Kidd. Maybe she should go back to the Indians. What tribe took

her?

Kiowa.

Britt was smoking as well. His foot on the drawbar was jiggling. He snorted blue fumes from his nostrils and glanced at the girl. She stared back at him. They were like two mortal enemies who could not take their eyes from one another. The endless rain hissed in a ground-spray out in the street and every roof in Wichita Falls was a haze of shattered water.

And so?

Britt said, The Kiowa don't want her. They finally woke up to the fact that having a white captive gets you run down by the cav. The Agent said to bring all the captives in or he was cutting off their rations and sending the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> out after them. They brought her in and sold her for fifteen Hudson's Bay four-stripe blankets and a set of silver dinnerware. German coin silver. They'll beat it up into bracelets. It was Aperia Crow's band brought her in. Her mother cut her arms to pieces and you could hear her crying for a mile.

Her Indian mother.

Yes, said Britt.

Were you there?

Britt nodded.

I wonder if she remembers anything. From when she was six.

No, said Britt. Nothing.

The girl still did not move. It takes a lot of strength to sit that still for that long. She sat upright on the bale of Army shirts which were wrapped in burlap, marked in stencil for Fork Belknap. Around her were wooden boxes of enamel wash basins and nails and smoked deer tongues packed in fat, a sewing machine in a crate, fifty-pound sacks of sugar. Her round face was flat in

the light of the lamp and without shadows, or softness. She seemed carved.

Doesn't speak any English?

Not a word, said Britt.

So how do you know she doesn't remember anything?

My boy speaks Kiowa. He was captive with them a year.

Yes, that's right. Captain Kidd shifted his shoulders under the heavy dreadnaught overcoat. It was black, like his frock coat and vest and his trousers and his hat and his blunt boots. His shirt had last been boiled and bleached and ironed in Bowie; a fine white cotton with the figure of a lyre in white silk. It was holding out so far. It was one of the little things that had been depressing him. The way it frayed gently on every edge.

He said, Your boy spoke with her.

Yes, said Britt. For as much as she'd talk to him.

Is he with you?

Yes. Better on the road with me than at home. He's good on the road. They are different when they come back. My boy nearly didn't want to come back to me.

Is that so? The Captain was surprised.

Yes sir. He was on the way to becoming a warrior. Learned the language. It's a hard language.

He was with them how long?

Less than a year.

Britt! How can that be?

I don't know. Britt smoked and turned to lean on the wagon tailgate and looked back into the dark spaces of the stable with the noise of horses and mules eating, eating, their teeth like

grindstones moving one on another and the occasional snort as hay dust got up their noses, the shifting of their great cannonball feet. The good smell of oiled leather harness and grain. Britt said, I just don't know. But he came back different.

In what way?

Roofs bother him. Inside places bother him. He can't settle down and learn his letters. He's afraid a lot and then he turns around arrogant. Britt threw down his smoke and stepped on it. So, gist of it is, the Kiowa won't take her back.

Captain Kidd knew, besides the other reasons, that Britt trusted to return her to her people because he was an old man.

Well, he said.

I knew you would, said Britt.

Yes, said the Captain. So.

Britt's skin was saddle-colored but now paler than it usually was because the rainy winter had kept the sun from his face for months. He reached into the pocket of his worn ducking coat and brought out the coin. It was a shining sulky color, a Spanish coin of eight escudos in twenty-two carat, and all the edge still milled, not shaved. A good deal of money; everyone in Texas was counting their nickels and dimes and glad to have them since the finances of the state had collapsed and both news and hard money were difficult to come by. Especially here in North Texas, near the banks of the Red River, on the edge of Indian Territory.

Britt said, That's what the family sent up to the Agent. Her parents names were Jan and Greta. They were killed when they captured her. Take it, he said. And be careful of her.

As they watched the girl slid down between the freight boxes and bales as if fainting and pulled the thick blanket over her head. She was weary of being stared at.

Britt said, She'll stay there the night. She's got nowhere to go. She can't get hold of any weapons that I can think of. He took up the lamp and stepped back. Be really careful.