

The Knights vs the KKK

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Everett Kendall sulked.

In the far corner of the diner, he stirred a strawberry milkshake with the over-wide straw, sneering a bit at the comfort food. Under the vibrant lights of the diner, everything seemed washed out and detailed, like the diner was some high-definition photograph and all movement and life within was captured in unerring quality, to the point of vulgar honesty. The heavily lacquered tabletop with the faux-marble affect glared back at Everett, the reflection of his brown skin contrasting with the black speckles and the white alike.

Everett sipped his snack, looking up when the bell over the door jangled. Ledger Richards walked in, dressed in a red shirt with a black coat and pants, just like Everett. The knight saw his friend and approached, scanning the empty diner as he walked, checking his surroundings with subtle paranoia. "You want something?" Everett offered.

"Yeah, to not sit next to the windows," Ledger said, standing by Everett and facing out through the floor-to-ceiling windows next to the booth.

Everett didn't argue but just grabbed Ledger by his red shirt and pulled him into the booth without resistance. He looked surprised for a second and asked Ledger, "Are you going heeled?"

"We're knights; we're always under arms," Ledger remarked, as if surprised. "Do you not have your sword?"

"No, I've—I just mean, you usually carry your shotgun; you don't usually carry that much spare ammo," Everett marveled. He lightly slapped at Ledger's pockets, feeling the shells. "Geez, man, are you going to take over a small country? If you fall over, you'll explode."

"It's not that much," Ledger lied. Everett scowled in disbelief and went back to his milkshake. Ledger scratched nervous at his narrow jaw and looked out through the window. "Seriously, everybody can see in. Somebody could—" Everett expressed his disinterest without words, by removing the milkshake's straw. He licked the chunky bits off the side before he cleared the straw from the other end. "You gun' be like that?" Ledger asked.

"I'm just not in the mood," Everett said, sipping his milkshake again. He gave up on the straw and tilted his head back, using the straw to shovel forward some of the strawberry chunks. Ledger scoffed but said nothing more.

The door jangled again and in came Armand Gessetti. Dressed in red and black like his friends, his trench coat pulled to one side as he nodded to the diner's proprietor behind the counter. He headed towards the two at the

back, his almond-colored skin of Indian heritage clashing against Everett's mid-brown and Ledger's deeper black. "What's up guys?" he asked as he sat down opposite them.

"Hey," they both said.

"Why'd you want to come here? It's like ten minutes from the nearest metro station," Armand asked immediately. "I don't get the whole retro-50s vibe." He looked at Ledger. "I figured you'd oppose coming here on general principle."

Ledger confirmed with a nod, telling Everett, "He ain't wrong."

Everett told them both, "It had five-stars and most of the reviews cited their milkshakes."

The youngest of the three caught one whiff of Everett's snack and winced. "Milkshake. Crap." He looked cautiously at Everett. "What happened?"

Everett just rubbed his eyes, tired of the whole matter. "Nothing. It's not..."

"What happened?" Ledger pushed in his default aloof-yet-vaguely-intense tone.

Everett wrote off the question with, "A grant I was contracted to write got declined." It was clear he was summarizing an entire essay of complex and tragic issues with the single sentence.

"Sucks," said Ledger as the afternoon glare off a passing car flashed over his face. "I'm sorry, man. Austerity. Whatchyu gonna do?"

Everett turned his head on a swivel. "Insist my friends all vote next time." Ledger just averted his eyes.

Armand tried to keep from chuckling. He turned to Ledger and asked, "What about you? What's got you down?" Ledger sneered predatorily but kept his eyes hidden. "No, really man, what's up?" He laughed a bit. "You're less...militantly confident and more...more depressed-paranoid." Everett cracked a smile at the distinction.

Now it was Ledger's turn to face out the window. "It's just that girl I've been seeing."

Armand had to bite his lips to keep from laughing. He and Everett shared a smirk. "The one you met online?" asked the youngest knight, his eyes bright at the chance to dole out some snark for once.

"The one none of us have seen, met, or even have any contact with?" Everett further teased.

"Man, she's real," Ledger insisted along well-worn lines.

"Yeah, so was that woman on the Wheaties box," Armand reminded him, making Everett giggle. "That doesn't mean you were dating."

"I really met Breanna Stewart!" Ledger exclaimed to them and the heavens. "It was at the airport. We had a drink. We hit it off."

"Yeah, plus my girlfriend lives in Canada; you don't know her but she's a model," Armand told Everett, just before getting kicked in the shin by Ledger. The two laughed while Ledger sulked.

"Anyway," said the knight, pushing through his friends' ribbing. "She was all 'I'm going through some stuff' and 'I need support'."

"Ah," Everett nodded. "She was trying to sleep with you." Ledger only nodded and looked away again, wounded by the emotions he was used to keep buried deep inside.

The instant Ledger's eyes turned, Armand's hand shot out and grabbed Everett with an iron grip. His face slowly turned to Everett's, his eyes absolutely wide with astonishment. He mouthed 'he's a virgin?'. Everett nodded with some sarcasm. "Did you take a vow of celibacy on top of vowing to Chivalry?" Armand asked Ledger.

Ledger sucked his teeth at Armand. "Man, shut up."

"Oh my god, you did!" Armand marveled. "I mean, we all swore to Chivalry. That's what makes us knights. But celibacy, that's...I didn't think you were that traditional."

"I'm not, I didn't 'swear' to celibacy," Ledger refuted. He shook his head and looked down. "I just, you know...you're there, you're with a person. I mean, WITH them. That's scary. I ain't just doing that. I'm saving myself."

"For marriage?" Armand asked. Ledger just shrugged.

Everett came to his friend's aid. "For the right one," he clarified.

"No," said Ledger. "I mean, not the right one-right one. But just... I want it to mean something. Not even my first time, just...just at all." His predator's eyes looked strange to Armand, so soft with introspection. "Anyway, she was all 'I got needs' and...it went from there."

"Yeah," was all Everett said. He looked out the window, facing his own reflection and not sure what to think. "I don't know," he sighed. A long moment passed. "I need to, to get out. Stretch my legs. Something"

"Hmmp," Ledger grunted. "I hear that." He took Everett's milkshake and had a sip. "Damn, that's good," he realized to himself.

Across from the two, Armand thought for a moment, then looked up with a revelation. He fished out his phone and began to search online. After a moment, he shared, "There's a KKK rally in Southpoint."

Everett was taken aback by Armand. "That's a bit of a drive, isn't it?" Armand shrugged. "When's it start?"

"Like, 9pm or something."

Everett thought for a moment before looking to Ledger. "Two black dudes and an Indian-American go to a KKK rally?"

Staring forward, Ledger shared, "I don't have any plans tonight."

Southpoint was a small town, forty-five minutes from the nearest metropolitan area, accessible only by a single two-lane highway and a handful of backroads. A tiny town of little more than a main street and a traffic circle, it had no commercial buildings over two stories except a single church. Only a few name-brand fast food restaurant chains dotted the town. The rest of the blip on the county map was made up of local businesses with more history than patronage. Flags of the next holiday hung from the iron street lamps that lined brick sidewalks.

At the very center of town was a large iron statue of Captain Jonathan Beauregard Sampson, Confederate idealist and commander of a battalion of soldiers whose only claim to fame was exterminating Confederate slaves so the Union couldn't free them and, so it was feared, mobilize them against the South. Captain Sampson never saw direct combat against the Union nor really even any armed opposition. That didn't stop him from being considered a hero by many who flew the Confederate flag.

Everett, Armand, and Ledger all stood on the brick circle around the statue. All three in red shirts and otherwise black attire, Everett and Armand almost matched with black trench coats and slacks. Ledger, in the middle, contrasted them in a puffed V-neck jacket and cargo pants. They were all staring in confused disapproval at the heroically-positioned military man astride a giant horse with its front hoof raised.

"Doesn't that mean he was wounded in battle?" Armand asked, pointing at the raised leg of the statue dotted with patches of rust. "The front leg of the horse." He dug out his phone to look for the answer online.

"Yeah," Everett confirmed before Armand could get to Google.

"I heard if it's the left leg, he was injured below the waist, and the right leg means above the waist," Ledger remarked. Everett shook his head. "What, that's not true?"

"If it is, I never heard that," he shrugged.

Back to the statue, Armand shook his head. "The dude slaughtered slaves," he tried to understand. "How do you get injured doing that?"

"Friendly fire?" Everett guessed.

"Incompetence?" suggested Ledger.

"They were all drunk?" Everett further offered.

"Incompetence?" Ledger doubled-down.

Not wishing to dispute the matter further, Everett turned around. The statue was at the heart of a small park at the very center of town. Made up of a sparse circle of trees with four brick paths leading in the cardinal directions, it was little more than a giant median in a traffic circle around which the town was built. "Alright, we saw the gathering on the east end of town. They're supposed to march down this way at 9pm and hold a vigil to protect their heritage." Ledger and Armand both scoffed at that. "How do you guys want to do this?"

"Well, we want to avoid a bloodbath," Ledger said, almost like he was complaining about the needed restraint. He surveyed the area. He pointed at a small crowd of people milling about to the north. "We got some counter-protestors over there."

"That's cool," Armand said with an approving nod at the picket-wielding locals.

"Yeah, but you think they can handle themselves if punches start getting thrown?" Everett asked of the soft-looking group. A group of half a dozen, their might didn't look too mighty.

"And they may just be pacifists. We don't know which side they'll join if punches start getting thrown." Ledger further queried.

Everett snorted at Ledger. "If?"

"Are punches getting definitively thrown?" Ledger asked. Everett and Armand turned at him, surprised he was the voice of reason for once. "I'm just trying to decide how to plan my evening. Are we picking a fight, or are we just here if a fight starts?"

"We are not picking a fight," Everett maintained. "We're just ending the fight once somebody else picks it." He allowed with some aggression, "The fight is when, not if."

"Okay. But then how do we guarantee somebody else is going to pick a fight?" asked Ledger. "I mean, I don't give a damn about the moral high ground. I'll punch a Nazi in the face in front of Buddha, Mohammed, Jesus, and the Green Man."

"They're KKK, not Nazis," Armand distinguished.

Ledger glowered at him for a moment, then made abundantly clear, "There is no functional difference to me."

"Me either," agreed Everett as he looked around. He gave up on the park and looked up at the statue. "I wonder how heavy this thing is?" The three knights all studied the statue for a moment, giving it equal thought. Ledger stepped onto the shoulder-high pedestal and pushed on the statue. He seemed a bit impressed with its weight and sturdiness.

"Let's go ask some of the locals," suggested Armand. "Most of the businesses are still open. Maybe somebody knows how it was constructed."

"Good call," Ledger said, Everett nodding. The three turned from the statue and headed out of the park. An evening breeze blew through, turning the leaves and carrying the scent of torches and the calls of night birds.

"Maybe you can write a grant for taking down more Confederate statues," Armand joked as they passed through the archway of branches onto the traffic roundabout.

"Guys, it's not that big of a deal," Everett insisted, lamenting his predictability. "I've got three other grants in consideration. And, you know, a savings account."

"Yeah, but if all those grants get turned down, he's homeless," Ledger said with a nod at Armand as they flanked Everett.

"Yeah, and Ledger loses his checking account that's under your name," Armand retorted.

Ledger went on the defensive. "They track you using your financial history."

"You give way too much credit to government agencies," Armand returned. "You are NOT that interesting."

"Yeah, if you were, your date wouldn't have broken it off," Everett further teased.

"You both can burn in a fire," Ledger denounced them as they walked on.

As they headed south across the road, streetlights came on, creating a Rockwellian glow to the Mainstreet town. Everett took one look at the storefronts, his vision sweeping from the drug store named after the proprietor to the furniture store whose sign said 'Gallery Furniture' but still had the sun-bleached shadow reading 'Sears & Roebuck'. After that one survey of the block of shops, he decided immediately. "Ice cream parlor."

Ledger rolled his eyes so hard, he nearly fell over. "Man, what is it with you?"

"I'm depressed, I want ice cream," Everett defended.

"I'm going to start calling you dame," Ledger insisted.

Everett scoffed a laugh. "That's fine with me. Being called a woman isn't an insult. I think Dame Everett Kendall's got a nice ring to it." Ledger mouthed it out and then nodded in agreement.

"We could abbreviate you 'DEK'," Armand said.

Everett soured. "It's less fine with me now. You ruined it."

"It's his gift," remarked Ledger.

They arrived at the parlor. Inside, behind the serving counter, an old man with a big belly and skinny arms, dressed in an apron just barely paler than his skin, called very casually, "Mind the step." He spoke just a second before Everett stumbled forward, just barely catching himself.

"You okay?" asked Armand while Ledger chuckled.

"Yeah, I just needed a head start," Everett played up, resuming his path. Chilly air and the smell of sweet ice cream saturated them. Fans churned the brisk, sweet air as the freezers hummed slightly. "Oh yeah," Everett said, going right for the glass cases. He leaned over and considered the tubs of multi-colored ice cream like a child.

"We're not here for...damn it," Armand called, too late to stop Everett from ordering. Ledger walked right past him. "What are you doing?"

"I'm getting some rocky road; I don't know what you're doing," Ledger said without breaking stride.

Three waffle cones later, Everett was paying at the register. He handed a card over to the skinny older man with leather pale skin and stringy white hair, like Santa Claus on a bad diet. "Y'all staying for the rally?" asked the round man as he handed back Everett's card. He sounded certain the answer would be no.

"Yeah," Everett said.

That gave the jolly man graven pause. "Not sure you should," he said genuinely. "They say it's for the statue, but I think they got other ideas in mind. I didn't see no sheets, but I saw a few crosses."

"Well, we were curious," Armand jumped in. "Is that statue in the park, like, iron? Is it one big block or hollow or..." He wasn't sure what the other alternatives were.

"It's iron," confirmed the store owner as he handed over Everett's receipt. "It's hollow, though. You can knock on it and hear the reverberation." His stark accent warped the word a bit. "But it's bolted in there. Otherwise, we'd have taken it down by now, I'm sure."

Everett turned subtly towards where Ledger had been, only to find him at the entrance of the store. "What are you doing?"

"Recon," said Ledger. He took from a small rack of not-so-nearby attractions a map of the town. A waffle cone in one hand, he laid the map on one of the few tables and smoothed it out as Ledger and Armand joined him. "So we're here," he said, holding the map down with his finger. "The Nazis are over here." His finger traced to the far eastern side of town.

"They're passed the school," Everett recalled. "How far's the school from here?" he called to the parlor owner.

"Half mile," the man guessed with only a bit of thought.

Everett nodded, going back to the map. "Going back to the statue, if we found a welding torch, do you think you could cut it down?"

"We couldn't get the gas in time," Ledger assured him sadly. Everett returned to considering ideas.

"Look, boys, I don't..." The man paused, suddenly worried about his choice of colloquialisms.

Everett put his worries to rest, saying, "You're older than all three of us. It's fine."

The man didn't seem ungrateful for the pass. "You know your affairs," he said, "but them's dangerous people."

"So are we," Ledger earnestly assured him. "Thanks for the ice cream," he said with a bit of a salute using his waffle cone.

Exiting the store, Ledger suggested, "Maybe I could blow the legs off?"

"Iron statue," Everett reminded him with ice cream on his upper lip. He licked it off unflatteringly.

"Shoot the cement maybe?" suggested Armand.

Ledger tossed the idea around for a second as they stood before the door. "I think it was granite," he lamented.

"Why don't you guys go find out?" Everett suggested. "I'm going to coordinate with some of the protestors. See who's here to demonstrate and who's here to fight."

"Meet us at the statue?" Ledger asked. Everett nodded, so the two other knights headed across the street, back into the park.

Everett remained outside the ice cream parlor door for a moment, reflecting on the situation. He paid close attention to the arrangement of younger trees in the park, mindful of their proximity to each other and the possibility of them being lit ablaze. He weighed the tactical benefits versus

the liabilities. Less than a moment passed, however, when he heard, "Move, boy."

The tone made Everett turn very slowly as three men approached, dressed in biker attire adorned with Klan imagery. Coming down the sidewalk along the roundabout, they walked with a young elementary school-aged girl in front. Everett tried to keep from smiling and he side-stepped out of the way of the door. "Excuse me."

The big man with the little girl by his side sneered at Everett's very existence. They walked passed without a word, the man playfully lifting the girl by one hand to help her clear the step up into the parlor. The two others, lankier than their paternal partner, lingered at the door. Leathery skin and stringy blonde hair was matched with denim and leather. "Why don't you go on home?" asked the one with a bushy Winnfield beard.

"I've got business to attend to in town," Everett said, still focusing on his ice cream cone, like the conversation was barely worth acknowledging.

"Not tonight you don't," said the racist.

Winnfield's shorter partner added, "You stick around tonight, you're liable to get your ass kicked."

Everett just nodded. "Well, that's an ass kicking I'm going to take." He turned and looked the pair dead-on. "Why don't you come give it to me?"

With confidence born of numbers, the two abandoned their plans for ice cream and went right for Everett. Faster than they could see, Everett threw his ice cream in the clean-shaven guy's face and followed it quickly with a punch that drew blood. His hands crossed as a result, Everett lunged at Winnfield and chopped him in the neck with both forearms, scissoring his throat in the process. Both men stumbled back and Everett kicked ice cream face in the stomach, knocking him against the door, rending his consciousness momentarily.

Winnfield coughed and fell to his knee, allowing Everett plenty of time to step behind him and put him in a rear naked choke. Before the guy could even process what had happened, consciousness faded from him and he went limp. Everett placed him on the sidewalk with more gentleness than he deserved.

As Everett rose from putting down the body of his foe, he discovered the larger man and his daughter exiting the ice cream parlor. "That was real dumb, boy," said the man, taking off a riding vest he'd worn over a heavy blue t-shirt. "Baby, hold this," he told his little girl as he handed it over. He took the bandana off his bald head, then clinched his fists tight, tattooed

knuckles popping. Everett gestured very casually for him to approach at his leisure.

For a man built like a weather-discolored medicine ball and with a similar complexion, he moved a lot faster than Everett expected. He practically exploded at Everett, leaping into his punch. Swinging with his right hand, the biker's strike was only a feint as he popped Everett on the side of the head with his left palm. With surprising kung fu-like strikes, the man began to slap at Everett, hitting with punch-worthy strikes without risk to his own bones.

Covered up like a boxer and turning into the strikes to mitigate their force, Everett was forced back. Whenever he tried to cut an angle on his attacker, the big man forced him back a step instead. Everett backpedaled without an option, retreating into the street as the man kept on with the hard barrage. Behind the fight, Ledger and Armand emerged from the park and saw Everett's fight. Ledger lunged to help but Armand caught his arm, keeping him in place.

The instant the racist paused, Everett burst forth from his turtled-up defensive stance and knelt the big man right in his epic belly. The strike had minimal effect and the giant entangled Everett around the arms. With a burst, he hoisted Everett over his hip to slam him onto the pavement. Without any way to break the fall, Everett had to accept the impact, only able to tuck his chin. The big man began to rise, confident the body slam was enough. It wasn't.

Reversing the big man's entanglement, Everett wrapped up his left arm and rolled over, pulling the man face-first into the pavement. He hit hard onto the asphalt and Everett spun on his foe's arm, twisting it between his legs into a shoulder lock. He pinned the hand of the chicken-winged arm against his body to add a wrist-lock to the shoulder pain. Reaching across his disoriented opponent's face, Everett drew back with his other hand, readying a strike for the back of his skull. But just before the blow was let loose, Everett's hand was grabbed.

"Leave my daddy alone!"

The little girl had thrown aside caution and come to save her father. She'd grabbed Everett's hand and was fighting in vain against his posture. She squealed loudly, trying as best she could to unseat the knight. Everett made no move to hurt her, even acquiescing when she changed tactics and shoved him off. Everett rolled back to his feet, grimacing from the soreness he'd earned from being slammed onto the road.

The little girl rushed between Everett and her father, her arms held wide. "Don't you hurt him anymore!" she yelled, little blonde braids swaying as she stood defensively and defiantly.

"Your dad wants me dead," Everett told her clearly. He glanced over at the other two who were rousting. The racist he'd choked out was getting to his feet and he drew a combat knife from a sheath behind his back. Everett responded with only a step to the side, but doing so revealed the katana he wore inside his trench coat. The two men froze in stunned terror.

"You beat him up," the girl argued.

"Baby," her father said, getting to his hands and knees. His face was flushed in pain and embarrassment.

"He wanted me dead before he even started the fight," Everett told her. He nodded at the tiny patch she wore on her dress. She looked down at the small patch with the letters 'WPWW'. She looked again at Everett and her consternation was obvious.

"Baby, get away from him," her father gasped. He grabbed her around the waist and tried to guide her away from Everett.

"Your father's the bad guy," Everett told her without hesitation. Anything more he might have wanted to say was lost in the distance as the girl's father rushed off with her under his arm, his two lackeys following. Everett looked to his two friends and announced, "Let's take it down." Into the park he stormed, all business.

Only a moment later and back at the statue, Ledger leaned on the rear horse's iron leg, half-dangling off the column elevating the Confederate icon off the ground. "I'm guessing six bolts," he said down to Armand and Everett. He gestured at his guesses where they were. "We're going to need some serious torque to rip this thing out."

Everett walked towards the front of the statue, keeping an eye to the east. Darkness had descended quickly and the lights of the mob of white supremacists was becoming even more visible. "Can you shoot it out?"

"Granite, man," Ledger said. "Maybe if I use all my shells, but we'd be about as successful just grabbing some sledgehammers and going John Henry on it."

Everett glanced between the statue and the east a few times, desperation threatening to set in. "We can't fight and tear this thing down at the same time."

"We're not tearing this down," Ledger told him certainly. "It's too sturdy."

"Rednecks build 'em tough," said a deeply southern voice. The three knights all looked to the far side of the statue to see a portly white guy with a John Deere cap, denim overalls, and a 'Black Lives Matter' t-shirt underneath heavy gravy stains. "You guys want to knock this thing over?"

"We want to destroy it, but we'll settle for knocking it over," answered Armand.

"Well I got a dually truck," said the man, thumbing back to the north. Behind him, a few of the counter-protestors were watching the curious exchange from the street. Armed with protest signs and good intentions, their social assertiveness was not matched by their timid presence.

Ledger looked at the statue's secured spots. "Well?" asked Armand. Ledger didn't look convinced.

"That thing comes down, them boys up there gonna be pissed," said the volunteer.

"That's kind of the plan," Ledger said absently as he continued to ponder the structural options. He seemed to be thinking more about where to place the rope.

"Well, shoot, I can't fight good," he said, his accent thickening nervously. "I get winded just watching UFC."

"We'll take care of the fighting," Everett promised him.

"We need to take care of it soon," Armand remarked as he checked his phone. "According to Twitter, they're starting their march." He put his phone away and checked the position of his sword inside his trench coat.

The redneck looked at the three knights. "There's a couple a dozen of them," he warned them.

Everett nodded, facing forward. "Which means we've got them outnumbered."

"Outclassed," Ledger corrected.

"Whatever," Everett dismissed with juvenile irritation. He stared at the east for only a moment, then turned back to the monument, all business. "Go get the rest of the protestors," he told their new friend. "Get your truck and tear this thing down. When it falls, just keep driving. Haul ass and get out of here. All of you."

The man looked at the statue, then at Ledger. The two nodded and he rushed off back towards the other counter-protestors, shouting the plan. Ledger hopped down and took from his oversized puffer jacket a sawed-off shotgun. He checked the shells within, then returned it to the hidden pocket. "We doing this?" he asked the others.

"I didn't come all this way to be nonviolent with racists," Armand told his two friends. Everett just answered by offering chewing gum.

With the roar of the engine, tires squealed and steel ropes pulled tight. A dozen protestors stood pensively around the Confederate statue as the massive six-wheeled pickup truck revved powerfully. The off-white beast with mud stains on the wheel wells dug huge tires into the ground, kicking up grass and mud, splattering against the granite column. "Come on, man, floor it!" Armand yelled, grinning like a school delinquent. The big volunteer shifted the truck into yet a lower gear and set to the task. An arm over the back of the truck bench, he didn't quite share Armand's enthusiasm but close.

At the front of the park, Everett watched the lights of the KKK moving closer. "They're a block away!" he yelled back into the park. "Do it now!"

"It's not moving," said one of the protestors. The statue groaned and a creak came from deep within the pedestal, but otherwise, no progress was made beyond the shower of grass and dirt. Other protestors shouted ideas. "Try a different angle!" "Lengthen the ropes."

"Guys!" Ledger yelled. "We can't get any—screw it." To the dismay of the others, the knight took out his shotgun and blasted the corner of the statue. Steel rent and the damaged granite cracked further.

"Did he use a shotgun?!" exclaimed the driver.

"Took longer than I thought it would," Armand quipped with a chuckle. He followed the mumble by yelling, "Get back!" as he drove back the other protestors from the statue. The driver of the truck hollered like he was riding a bronco and stood on the gas. A horse's leg bent and the granite chipped. A loud crack tore up the side of the pedestal. The top wavered and then with one final groan, the statue came tumbling off the pedestal with a loud, metallic crash, collapsing into the dirt and sending up a wave of grass and sediment. The truck lurched forward only a bit while the counter-protestors cheered and applauded.

"Tell that honky 'good job!'" Ledger yelled to Armand. Before the youngest knight could relay the message, the driver's fist came out with a grand thumbs up.

"Alright, go!" Everett yelled to the others. "Go!" he waved everyone out of the park, sending them running for safety. Armand and Ledger remained and joined Everett at the eastern head of the statue's pedestal. Up ahead, the lights of torches flickered at the head of the park, making the shadows dance. "We're going to war," he told them.

"Some of them might have been able to help us fight," Armand suggested to his mentor.

Everett only shook his head. "I didn't want to share." Ledger looked beyond Everett and nodded ahead. Everett turned and saw the KKK coming

marching around the corner. They came striding into the park, torches burning, the light from the flames reflecting off a few sporadic automatic weapons in their midst. White sheets and Nazi flags seemed to glow in the torchlight.

The leader of the parade, a tall man in a white uniform, though with the bravery to not wear the hood, looked at the statue driven face-first into the dirt. He didn't seem shocked, or even that disappointed. Like Everett, he almost seemed pleased to be given the excuse for violence. He asked almost civilly, "You boys do that?"

Everett and Ledger didn't respond. Armand did; smiling and nodding enthusiastically.

The man smirked in sadistic delight. "We didn't come planning on lynching," said the leader of the white supremacists, "but we brought rope all the same." There were some chuckles from behind him.

To that, Everett did smile with just a twinge of anger. "Oh, you are welcome to try." He pushed back his trench coat, exposing the katana he wore hidden within. Armand did the same, revealing the massive warbrand he carried ready. Ledger just stuck his hands in his pockets, readying his own surprise.

Everett popped his knuckles and rolled his shoulders back as he began walking towards the crowd of armed men. Ledger and Armand were a mere step behind, eagerly accompanying him into battle.

Dawn in the small town of Southpoint.

Roosters crowed in the rural distance while the small streets were mostly empty, the morning crowd already come and gone by the time the sun had made it fully into the sky. The worn brick and white paint of middle America gleamed in the morning.

Towards the far end of town, out of sight of the main park at the town center, the municipal building stood quietly. The orange brick building had a freshly paved parking lot in the back, only a few cars dotted the vibrantly marked spaces. At the front of the building, just beyond the double-glass doors was the main road through town. On the far side of it stood Edgar Blaine and Roland Smith. Both were dressed in black with red shirts, Edgar in the respectable suit of academia, Roland with subdued fashion. With them stood Marilyn Johnston, in jeans and a white blouse. She looked at the two knights and quipped, "I guess I didn't get the monochrome memo."

"Yours is a beauty single colors can't contain," Edgar waxed as he faced forward, distracted by a multitude of thoughts.

"Yeah, plus, it wouldn't be that appropriate for you to dress like a knight if you haven't sworn to chivalry," Roland asserted.

Edgar challenged him on that. "It's just a red shirt."

"And what happens to be people in red shirts on Star Trek?" Roland countered rhetorically. Edgar surrendered his stance on the grounds of sheer intellectual exhaustion. The quiet morning continued around them, the only noise a distant tractor in some far away field. "Heard it was thirty-six guys," Roland mentioned idly to Edgar.

Edgar balked at that. "No. No more than twenty, I'm sure. They had Armand with them." He spoke of the young knight like his presence was a handicap.

"Come on, really?" Marilyn chastised them both. "They were in a—" She fell instantly silent when the doors of the municipal building opened.

Out came Everett and Ledger who both turned and held the door for Jeanine Blaine, their lawyer. She strode through the doors, accustomed to such treatment, while Armand followed behind her. With their release papers under her arm, the fair-skinned woman in deep brown pantsuit descended the steps from the municipal building while the trio of knights followed. All three sported more-than-minor bruises and a few black eyes. Armand's nose had been broken and reset. Ledger had a vicious cut across his cheek, stitches practically lining from ear to nose. He was trying hard not to smile.

"Oh my god," Marilyn gasped, covering her mouth at the sight of their damage.

"The hell happened to you?" Roland called across the street.

"We fought the KKK," Armand answered.

"The whole thing?" Edgar chuckled.

"They've been released on their own recognizance," Jeanine called ahead as they crossed the empty street. She handed the files to Edgar, for him to peruse for his amusement. "They have to make an appearance in two weeks, but I'm sure I can get them community service."

"You're the best," Edgar said, kissing his wife's cheek.

"What, beating up the KKK isn't community service?" asked Roland, pound-hugging Ledger.

"Sadly, it's not recognized in this state yet," Jeanine answered. "I've arranged to get your sword released," she told Armand. "Everett, Ledger, your weapons will be destroyed."

"Course. Can't give the black guys back their property," Ledger complained.

Armand gawked at Ledger. "Dude, be fair. It's a sawed-off shotgun."

"So what happens now?" Marilyn asked, fearful for the well-being of her friends.

"Like I said, they have a follow-up court date in two weeks, when they'll be sentenced," Jeanine told mostly her. "If it comes to jail time, we'd be looking at a few weeks, but I really don't think that's likely."

"No, I mean, not legally." Marilyn looked to Everett and swallowed fearfully. He tried to keep his heart from racing from her worry for him. "What happens with the KKK?" She looked to the other knights. "Are there going to be reprisals?"

"I'm not planning a reprisal soon, but I got some days I can work one in," Ledger told the group.

Marilyn scowled at him. "You know what I mean."

Everett looked at the other knights. "I think it's unlikely. When's the next rally?" They all shrugged, unsure. Armand checked online but just shook his head, finding nothing definitive. "Then I say we hit up IHOP," he told everyone with some enthusiasm.

"Ooh, yes," Roland exclaimed in approval. The group quickly began to pile into their respective cars.

Marilyn was left slightly stunned by their collective cavalier attitude. She turned and watched them loading up. Jeanine walked past her, patting her supportively on the shoulder before getting into Edgar's SUV. Everett was left outside Roland's car. He held the door open for her, smiling in sympathy for their bizarre habits. Marilyn had nothing to offer but an incredulous smile and a quick "I'm glad you're okay," before she got inside.

Everett walked around to the backseat. Alone for just a moment, just him and the morning, he smiled optimistically before getting into the car. The seven rode off for breakfast.