

A man wearing a cowboy hat and a light-colored shirt is riding a brown horse on a dark, grassy hill. The background is a warm, golden sunset over a range of mountains. The sky is filled with horizontal bands of orange and yellow light. The overall mood is dramatic and atmospheric.

TERROR NEAR TOWN

James R. Wilder
A Harbison Mystery

Please enjoy this excerpt from *Terror Near Town*, by
James R. Wilder.

Terror Near Town is available through [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).
To purchase, please visit www.terrorneartown.com

TERROR NEAR TOWN

A Harbison Mystery

James R. Wilder

Copyright © 2017 by James R. Wilder. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review. This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental

terrorneartown.com

jamesrwilder.com

[facebook.com/jamesrwilder53](https://www.facebook.com/jamesrwilder53)

james.r.wilder@att.net

ISBN-13: 978-1977747679

ISBN-10: 1977747671

Both boys, along with Pete McKinney, were sitting on worn wooden kitchen chairs around the stove as Wheeler filled three coffee cups.

“Wheeler, pour me a cup of that varnish you call coffee,” Byron said with a grin on his face. “Boys, those oats will have to wait a spell. And Wheeler, you can kiss that twenty bucks from Nelson goodbye because I just nailed the biggest deer I’ve ever see in in my life—must be pert’ near four hundred pounds with the biggest rack I’ve ever seen.”

“Well, we’ll have to see about that,” Wheeler said as he paused and viewed the ten or twelve antler racks mounted on the walls of his store.

“The damn thing is stuck between two boulders and I couldn’t have lifted it anyways if it weren’t,” Byron said.

Byron sipped on his hot coffee waiting to hear some type of snide remark from his best friend the storeowner, but Wheeler had nothing more to say. Cody and Chet finished their coffee about the same time as their father and put on their coats. Pete acknowledged he’d join them in a minute. For once the brothers were having a hard time keeping up with their father who was as jumpy as a young pup. Wheeler decided to follow.

Pops stopped in his tracks as he exited the feed store. He spotted the gigantic buck atop the large scale that was situated on the loading dock of Nelson’s general store. Wheeler and Nelson bought it together several years ago to weigh planting seed, livestock grain, and slaughtered beef and pork. Walking

closer to the scale, Byron saw the needle pointing to the numbers indicating that the brute weighed in at 377 pounds.

Chet's eyes were not on the scale. He noticed the tall pinto mare with a Mexican saddle tied up along the hitching rail, and then turned to see two other riders on scruffy-looking horses heading north out of town.

"That son of a bitch Spragg has finally done it," Chet said. "He's not pulling this shit with us anymore!"

"Calm down, son," Pops said. "Believe it or not, I've got this under control. But I think you, Cody, and Wheeler, might want to watch."

Cody scratched his head in disbelief, rolled his eyes and followed the others into the general store where they found Nelson fiddling with his like-new Kodak Brownie box camera.

"Now Dutch, you might not get your picture in the paper for a while after I make it for you. The instructions here from Eastman Kodak says this thing will make a hundred pictures and I've only taken twenty-three since I bought it last spring," Nelson said.

"I don't need no picture, old man," Dutch Spragg said as he slammed his fist onto the countertop. "I need my damn money so I can get out of this hell hole you call a town."

Nelson began counting out a couple of five-dollar bills and then some ones as Byron walked up to the cash register.

"Better hold onto that money for a spell Nelson," Byron said. "That buck out front is mine. I shot it less than an hour

ago down on Jones Creek. The boys were just going to retrieve it for me.”

“You’re lying old man!” Dutch said. “I shot that deer on the way up here from Big River right at daylight. And you can’t prove otherwise. Now step aside, you worthless cripple.”

George Timmons, who also was inside the store, stood in disbelief. Why would anyone say something to be so mean to a man as nice as Mr. Harbison?

Chet had had enough and was about to tear into the eldest of the Spragg boys, but Pops held out his arm. “Calm down Chet. I’ve got this under control.”

“Trust your pa,” Wheeler whispered while keeping a big grin on his face. “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet.”

“Boy, I’ve been called a lot worse by a lot better than the likes of you and I’ll bet that twenty dollars Nelson’s got in his hands against the twenty in my back pocket that that buck is mine and you’re nothin’ but a ornery liar yourself. First of all, you don’t even have a rifle with you or on that fancy horse of your’n.”

“You can’t prove nothin’, old man! My brothers just left with my rifle for more hunting. I want my twenty bucks now!”

Nelson stepped back, away as far as he could, leaning against the canned goods on the shelf behind him to the point that a can of peaches got bumped and fell to the floor.

Byron walked up closer to the counter, reached into his coat pocket and slammed a deer's tongue onto the counter, splattering blood onto Dutch's sleeve. Alice Hoffman who was watching from behind the potato bin gasped, "Oh, how disgusting!"

"Chet, I told ya' your pa had him to rights," Wheeler said.

"Boy, on your way out—without that money, mind you—you'll find that buck is missing his tongue, and the knife cuts on this tongue will be a perfect match to what's missing from what's left in that critter's mouth. You have a good day now, boy."

Dutch's face turned red as everyone in the store began to laugh. Cody slapped his father on the shoulder for the move he had made before leaving the deer behind.

But Dutch wasn't through. He reached over the counter, yanking the paper bills from Nelson's hands. Then he plowed into Byron, knocking him off balance and causing the older Harbison's head to hit the corner of the counter before he stumbled to the wooden floor of the general store.

As Cody bent over to help his father up, Chet lunged for Dutch, who by now had reached the threshold of the door.

Pete McKinney was just walking up the steps to the store, chomping on an apple, when he jumped back, seeing Spragg and his best friend come sliding out the door on their bellies with Chet's arms wrapped around Dutch's calves.

"Looks like I got here just in time," Pete said as Cody and a disheveled Pops peered out the door.

Sliding off the dock and into the mud both men jumped to their feet with fists in the air.

“This is the last time I want to see you in this town you hunk of shit!” With that Chet took a swing, clipping Dutch’s chin.

“Well, soldier boy, you don’t seem too tough to me. Maybe you ought to go help your old man home to his rockin’ chair.”

The next left hook connected, hitting Dutch square in the jaw, but was returned with a deep punch into Chet’s side, knocking him to the ground. A moan of pain came from Chet’s mouth as he curled his body and held his stomach with both hands. Cody, who was more equal in size to Dutch, decided to enter the fray, but Pops held him back, stretching his cane out in front of his oldest son.

“Chet’s got to have some pride one way or the other. Let him be,” Pops said. The elder Harbison clenched his teeth, hoping he had made the right decision in stopping his older son from putting an end to the fight.

By now both men were rolling in the mud and, much to the dismay of the crowd that was forming around the centerpiece of town, the Spragg boy was winning the battle. Dutch, kneeling in the mud alongside of Chet landed another blow, this time square into his left jaw. Losing his balance after the punch, Dutch picked himself up and staggered back a few paces to evaluate the damage he had done to the much smaller fighter.

Just as nearly everyone thought Chet was done-for, he rolled to his feet and charged an off-balanced Dutch into one of the mules hitched to the hay wagon. The mules lurched and kicked up their rear hooves, missing Dutch's head. As he stood and regained his balance, Dutch reached toward the backside of his belt and returned with a ten-inch hunting knife in his hand. "I'm goin' slice you to pieces soldier boy!"

Dutch turned for a split second after Mrs. Hoffman screamed at the sight of the knife, giving Chet just enough time to grab Dutch's wrist with both hands and then slam his knee high and hard into Dutch's groin. Once wasn't enough as far as Chet was concerned. He now took aim three more times, hitting the target. The big oaf dropped the knife and fell onto his side into a muddy puddle, curling up into such excruciating pain that spectators could only see the whites of his eyes but not his pupils.

"I'll show you how a soldier boy survives in Cuba!" Chet said as he jumped atop of the mud-caked river rat. He clenched his right fist and continually pounded Dutch's face, blow after blow after blow. Within seconds blood was gushing from Dutch's nose, lips and even an ear.

"Enough, Chet, enough old buddy!" Pete shouted as he and Cody pulled him off from the bloody pulp of a man. "You proved your point! You proved your point," Pete repeated.

Chet staggered to his feet, holding his side, coughing and gagging. His nose and his lower lip were bleeding and he had another cut over his right eye. He staggered over to the well in front of Wheeler's and pumped water into one hand held

close to his face to get a drink while holding his side with his other hand. After a few gulps, he sat down on the wooden planks of the feed store porch and put his hands up under his chin. He hadn't been this exhausted since San Juan Hill.

Cody and Nelson lifted Dutch out of the mud and leaned him up against a hitching rail post. Pete doused him with a bucket of cold water and the man with the shredded face came-to. After several minutes Cody and Pete let Dutch drink from the horse trough and then lifted the beaten man up onto his horse and handed him the reins.

Cold and wet, and still dazed, Dutch looked down to the wooden walkway and stared at Chet, who was now taking another drink of water, this time from a dipper.

"I'm a wishin' you dead, Harbison, and it's goin' be soon." Then he turned and looked down at Pete. "And that goes for you too, Skinny McKinney!"

"You do all the wishin' you want, river trash," Pete said. "I'm a wishin' the hair on your ass turns into fish hooks on your way back to Cedar Hill, but it don't mean it's ever goin' ta happen!"

Dutch reined the horse to head north at a slow walk. Some in the crowd wondered if the Spragg boy could make it back to his river shanty without falling from the saddle. Nelson felt sorry for him, even though he despised him, and handed him a worn horse blanket to put over his shoulders for warmth. Dutch failed to thank him or even nod to acknowledge Nelson's act of kindness.