

Foster, Eddy, Reed

FOSTER. Think what you like, I am no coward! I have no fear of Lewis Keseberg!

EDDY. Then take the stand! Speak out!

FOSTER. Where does it end? Didn't I make the ride to notify Fallon? Surely he can do the rest.

REED. Fallon may not get here in time. May not come at all. Bill, you were there when they took Keseberg out—

FOSTER. So was the Sheriff. Put *him* on the stand.

EDDY. McKinstry is with the court. He can't get involved.

FOSTER. Neither can I.

EDDY. Without your testimony, Bill, what you witnessed on that Final Relief, Keseberg is likely to walk away free.

FOSTER. I say let him go—and good riddance.

EDDY. We lost our young ones back there—our boys—or have you forgotten?

FOSTER. I don't seem able to forget *anything*, Eddy, much as I keep trying. Excuse me for saying it straight out, Reed, but except for you and yourn, we all lost loved ones. Keseberg included. Christ, making our way over them mountains that last time, I was with the German when—

EDDY. None of this matters.

FOSTER. It does!

REED. Hold on. If it's something you think I should know, Bill, let's have it.

FOSTER. Coming out with Fallon just a couple of weeks ago, we stopped to rest at a place used as a campground by one of the earlier parties. Keseberg decided to make some coffee. He started a fire and filled his coffee-pot with snow. Me and the Sheriff, we were waiting for the water to heat up. Then we noticed it—

REED. Noticed *what*?

FOSTER. Just a bit of cloth, a torn strip sticking out of a snowbank. Keseberg seemed to recognize it from somewhere. I watched him as he went over to it, this crazy look on his face. He took hold of the cloth and gave it a strong pull. Jesus, it fell right into his arms!

REED. What did?

FOSTER. The body of his little girl . . . left there by his wife when she come out long before.

REED. That's how he found out!

FOSTER. He just held onto her . . . like a block of ice . . . rocking her in his arms. ]

EDDY. I consider that God's will.

FOSTER. However much *we* lost, Eddy, so did *he*!

EDDY. This kind of talk only weakens us. We're forgetting why we are here: To destroy that Vulture.

FOSTER. How do we know we're any better? What if, underneath it all, there's no difference between us? What if we're all the same!

REED. We require your testimony, Bill, and in these times you have no right to refuse.

FOSTER. I have reasons, Mister.

EDDY. Let Tamsen Donner be your reason.

REED. (*To Foster.*) You, more than anyone, have powerful cause to hate the German!

FOSTER. My reasons are my own.

REED. Have you no feeling about your boy—the way he died! That monster slaughtered—

FOSTER. Mister, you go too far! Stop there! (*Enter Keseberg from one way, Sutter and the Sheriff from another.*)

SHERIFF. This court here at Sutter's Fort is in session again. Let the trial proceed.

SUTTER. Mr. Keseberg, your next witness . . .

KESEBERG. Let the court summon a character witness . . . Mrs. Reed. (*Reed is surprised and taken aback.*)

SHERIFF. Mrs. Margaret Reed!

EDDY. (*To Reed.*) Your wife! Here to help him!

REED. Without my knowledge, believe me. (*Enter Margaret Reed, a clever, strong-willed woman of unprepossessing appearance. Loyal to her husband and yet just as uncompromising in her devotion to the truth. Mrs. Reed moves to the witness stand where she is immediately sworn to oath.*)

MRS. REED. Of course the whole truth—it's never been worth much piecemeal.

SUTTER. Dear lady, please declare your name.

MRS. REED. The sheriff just did that better than I ever could.

SUTTER. For the record . . . what is your connection with the plaintiff?

MRS. REED. Connection?

SUTTER. Are you here out of personal concern as a friend?

MRS. REED. Not exactly. This man's family and my own, we made the overland journey together. You might say we were neighbors while moving on.