

## **'The end' by Cian O'Farrell**

Richard didn't know where it had all gone wrong. Sure, he wasn't the best person but, in this world, who even qualified as good? He had never gone out of his way to hurt anyone, or tried to swindle anyone. He had always held himself to a higher standard than most could claim to have ever considered. And yet good men die first.

Richard knew he was retreating into his own mind, but there wasn't really much else to do in his current situation. He remembered growing up in the shattered remains of the old world. He remembered his mother and father scraping together a living in the mountains of Utah. They were decent folks who treated everyone right, worked for the land they made their home and worked twice as hard to keep it. When they died, Richard had taken over the family farm. A local town had sprung up so he had sold them any excess food he had. It wasn't much but it was an honest living.

Everything had been just fine and then... Well, Richard supposed it was the way of the broken world. The town was burned and looted by bandits, and of course once they were finished, it was Richard's farm next. The bastards had come in the night, and here Richard knelt in the dust. Bound with his own rope, there wasn't much that he could do except wait for his captors to decide his fate. Richard could hear them talking inside. "You know we got a pretty good haul from that town, and this place could be a nice area to settle down," one of them said; hope evident in his voice. "O yeah, that's a darn smart idea Carl, move into this place after we just butchered the neighbours." There came a laugh from inside as the bandits continued to discuss.

Richard scanned the horizon, looking at the beauty of the area he had called his home all his life. The sun had just started to rise over the mountains, and Richard thought that maybe it wouldn't be so bad. At least he would die in a familiar place surrounded by the surreal beauty of the broken world that he lived in. As he continued to look, Richard noticed something odd. He swore he saw a figure down on one knee on a nearby hill. Perhaps it was just his mind playing tricks on him. After all, why would anyone be out here crouching on a hill. Just as Richard looked back towards where he had seen the figure, they were gone.

A few moments later, three of the bandits emerged from within Richard's home, all armed with

pistols and machetes, and dressed in mix-matched pants and jackets; no uniform or discipline to speak of. One of them, an imposing woman with blond hair, stood in front of him pointing a pistol in his face. “Well old man, looks like it time for you to go. Sorry about this but it has to be done.” Richard looked to her as she smiled, thinking about how she was full of it. Just then he heard something in the distance, what sounded like the breaking of a twig. It was probably his mind playing tricks on him... And then it happened, a shot rang out followed in quick succession by two more. The three in front of Richard dropped dead, as blood sprayed into his face. He heard the sound of boots running towards him as more shots rang out, all aimed towards his home.

It was over before Richard knew it. All he could hear as he opened his eyes was the sound of boots walking towards him. Richard was still, eyes facing forward, as someone behind him cut the rope binding him. Richard quickly turned looking up to see a man dressed in trousers and a shirt, with some sort of vest covered in black paint over his chest and various pieces of armour strapped onto his form. The man who couldn't have been over twenty smiled down at Richard as he slung his rifle over his back and raised his arm signalling to someone. Suddenly from the bushes behind him another figure, clad fully in black armour, emerged with a high-powered sniper on his back. The young man offered his arm to Richard. “Well, old man. No need to thank us, happy to help and all the rest...” Richard despite it all actually managed to crack a smile before tearing up.

“I can't thank you enough for what ya'av done for me,” Richard began, before the man in black held up his hand, cutting Richard off. “We said no need. Now, were there anymore of them?” Richard shook his head, and the armoured man nodded to his partner who soon spoke. “Right well then, mind if we stay here for a bit? We've been on the road for a while and could use some rest.” Richard again nodded quickly thinking of how it would be good to have these two to help him for a little while. Hopefully things would begin to look up, but as always destiny was in flux.