

Chapter One

THE EDUCATION OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT

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In his recent biographical study, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America*, historian Douglas Brinkley argues that, during his formative years, the future 26th president of the United States became a devoted Darwinian naturalist. As a child and then as an adolescent living in a fashionable neighborhood of New York City, young TR immersed himself in the wonders of nature and the mysteries of life on earth. Whether collecting many specimens of birds and small mammals, even harboring live mice and garden snakes in his upstairs bedroom of the family home at 28 East 20th Street, or marveling at richly illustrated books depicting wild and exotic animals in far-away places, he cultivated a lifelong interest in what was then termed “natural history.” Perhaps it was altogether fitting, therefore, that TR came into the world shortly before the appearance of Charles Darwin’s seminal study, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), and that he grew to maturity in what might be aptly termed the Age of Darwin (Brinkley 2009, 23–24).

TR also came of age at a time when the industrial revolution and the growth of great cities were fast transforming America, ensuring the transition of an agrarian nation into a manufacturing giant with economic interests stretching around the globe. To understand the mind and motives of the impressionable young man who became President Theodore Roosevelt, the student of history must first consider his meandering journey through both worlds – the new and changing urban-industrial world of the future, and the fast-receding world of the wilderness, which reigning scientific thought now concluded was the product of

evolutionary change. A glimpse into the formative years that shaped the personal values and intellectual worldview of a future American leader reveals that the attitudes, ideals and principles – so identifiable in the makeup of the trust-busting, big stick-wielding president known to history – were all forged from the experience, trial, and adversity of his youth.

It all began in New York City on October 27, 1858, when Theodore and Martha Bulloch Roosevelt welcomed their second child and first son into the world. The elder Roosevelt, tall, handsome and stoic in appearance, had earned his reputation as a successful New York City banker, importer, and philanthropist; his beautiful young wife, a genteel Southern lady with a kind manner and fun-loving spirit, was known for her charm and wit. In so many ways, their eldest son's childhood seemed typical, at least for his patrician class and privileged station in New York society. Like most scions of the Eastern aristocracy, young Theodore (or "Teedie to his parents and siblings) enjoyed the best education that his family's fortune could provide. Precocious and curious beyond his years, the boy benefited from the best private tutors his parents could employ. In summers he enjoyed his time in the country at the Roosevelts' estate at Oyster Bay. Near the spacious, two-story home, known appropriately as *Tranquility*, the child passed countless hours in the outdoors, scrambling along hillsides, playing in the sands, and wading into the surf of Long Island Sound (McCullough 1981, 19–20, 36–37, 39–42, 141–43).

Despite the appearance of a normal childhood, Teedie faced extraordinary challenges. A frail and wheezing asthmatic, the boy suffered frequent attacks of spasmodic coughing and respiratory convulsions that sometimes left him limp and listless. So severe were these gasping spells, so frightening the effects of the "asmer," as the child pronounced it, that his father would often drive him through the dingy, gas-lit streets of New York City in the family's carriage, hoping that the damp evening air might allow his lungs to expand. Worse yet, Teedie's parents learned that their oldest son was diagnosed with a heart murmur, which seemed serious enough that his family physician wondered aloud if the sickly child would ever be able to enjoy a normal life, or if he would even live to see adulthood. If these maladies were not enough, by the age of thirteen the boy's poor eyesight forced him to be fitted with spectacles so thick as to give him a somewhat peculiar, owl-eyed appearance (McCullough 1981, 36, 44, 59, 81–82, 89–108, 110, 113; Morris 1979, 34, 38–57).

Little wonder that the sickly child spent so much of his early years indoors, reading, studying and mostly dreaming. Understandably, the elder Theodore Roosevelt worried about his son, whose pale skin and thin, reedy voice only confirmed that he suffered from chronically poor health. Theodore's sister Corinne recalled the day when their father challenged Teedie to prepare himself for manhood. "Theodore, you have the mind but not the body, and without the body the mind cannot go as far as it should,"

the father urged. "You must make your body." So the boy looked up and vowed defiantly, "I'll make my body." To encourage him to increase his physical strength and stamina, Theodore, Sr. purchased barbells and other exercise equipment and converted the roof of the home into a private gymnasium (Robinson 1921, 34, 36, 39, 50; Roosevelt 1926a, 7, 12, 27; Morison, Blum, and Chandler 1951–1954, 1: 10–11; Roosevelt 1926b, 237, 243, 246–58).

Not surprisingly, in the eyes of his son, the elder Roosevelt stood as a paragon of strength and courage. "He was the most wise and loving father that ever lived. I owe everything to him," the younger Roosevelt remembered fondly. "My father was the best man I ever knew," he later recalled in his autobiography, "the only man of whom I was ever really afraid." "He was a big, powerful man, with a leonine face" but a "heart filled with gentleness for those who needed help or protection." Aside from instilling in the child an understanding of civic responsibility, Theodore, Sr. also imparted to him an abiding reverence for nature as well as an almost romantic sense of adventure. During summer vacations on the family's leased country estate in New Jersey, at Oyster Bay, and on camping trips to upstate New York, the elder Theodore led his children on "tramping" expeditions into the woods. In the evening he read aloud from the timeless *Leatherstocking Tales* of James Fenimore Cooper. Around a nightly campfire, or during story times beside the family hearth, he also regaled the children with the exploits of such legendary frontiersmen as Daniel Boone and David Crockett (Harbaugh 1978, 16–17; Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress, series 7, reel 429, February 15, March 29, 1878; Roosevelt 1926a, 7).

During these summer sojourns into the woods Theodore learned to listen to the voices of the wilderness. No longer were the deer, elk and bear mere images depicted on the pages of books, or silent trophy heads on the walls of museums. No more were the smallest of mammals and wild birds petrified specimens that stank of formaldehyde. In the dark forests of the Adirondacks they all came to life before his very eyes, the eyes that squinted behind glasses as the boy struggled to observe them in all the richness of their bright colors and brilliant hues. Intently, with an innate curiosity and a keen eye for detail, he learned to identify literally hundreds of different species of birds simply by their movements in flight, their distinct plumage, and their identifiable songs. In all, his early experiences in the woods kindled a reverence for nature, one that would remain with him all of his days (Brinkley 2009, 22–23).

In contrast to Theodore, Sr., whose Dutch patroon heritage instilled in the Roosevelt children a practical, common sense approach to life, Martha ("Mittie") remained the romantic, and in many ways the center of that love and devotion that bonded together a most remarkable family. "My mother ... was a sweet, gracious, beautiful Southern woman, a delightful companion and

beloved by everybody,” the future president recalled with affection. Her Southern charm and genteel manner reminded the children, and indeed everyone she met, of her Georgia roots. As for her wit and warmth, they seemed always of the greatest comfort to the children, especially the delicate and sickly son whose future well-being seemed so uncertain (Roosevelt 1926a, 11).

In the spring of 1869, at the age of ten, Teedie accompanied his parents and siblings on a Grand Tour of Europe and the Mediterranean. Voyaging first to London and Edinburgh, then on to Antwerp, Cologne, Paris and Vienna, the boy viewed the Old World with polite indifference. “I do not think I gained anything from this particular trip,” he remembered years later. “I cordially hated it, as did my younger brother and sister.” Indeed, while the eldest child Anna, or “Bamie,” tolerated the trip well enough, little “Thee,” Elliot (or “Ellie”) and Corinne (“Conie”) longed for home. “Our one desire was to get back to America,” Theodore recalled (Roosevelt 1926a, 13).

When Theodore and Martha Roosevelt returned to Europe with their children in the winter of 1872–1873, the results would be different for their oldest son. Old enough to enjoy this trip, and to learn and benefit from the experience, the 14-year-old Theodore toured Rome, viewing with interest the ancient ruins and historic sites of the Eternal City. From there it was on to Egypt. With awe and wonder, he gazed upon the Pyramids of Giza, then sailed up the eternal Nile to witness the great Temple at Karnak, journeying on from there to the Holy Land and the sacred city of Jerusalem, and finally Constantinople and Greece. After traveling back to Western Europe again, he enrolled in a private school in Dresden to study the German language and culture. When the family sailed back to New York in late 1873, therefore, Teddie had already gained a global perspective that few of his generation would ever possess (Pringle 1931, 13–23; Roosevelt 1926a, 19–21; Roosevelt 1926b, 229–37, 277–90).

Back home amid the bustle and clamor of New York City, young Theodore often retreated into his bedroom, losing himself in the pages of the many books that filled the downstairs family library. Among his favorites were the adventure novels of an Irish-American schoolmaster-turned soldier of fortune, Captain Mayne Reid, whose stories seemed to carry Teedie into the remote wilds of the trans-Mississippi West. With the turning of every page, the boy traveled through his imagination with the fictional characters of *The Scalp Hunters* (1851) and *The Boy Hunters* (1853). No doubt, Reid’s romantic and stirring narrations would serve as TR’s literary model in years to come. Surely too, the indelible images of adventuresome young men stalking wild animals and fighting menacing “savages” on the borderlands remained as real to young Roosevelt as those of any chronicles of history that his tutors assigned. Just as fascinating to Teddie were the works of the great John J. Audubon, who opened the boy’s eyes to the skies filled with flying creatures as diverse as those on land and in the sea (Roosevelt 1926a, 14).

At the age of 15, Theodore – by now his bouts with asthma less severe and more infrequent – began serious preparation to enter Harvard. Under the tutelage of schoolmaster Arthur Cutler, he threw himself into his studies with the unceasing energy that was to become his trademark. “I could not go to school because I knew so much less than most boys of my age in some subjects and so much more in others.” Steeped in the sciences, letters, and history, he nevertheless remained woefully lacking in Latin and mathematics (Roosevelt 1926a, 21).

Without doubt, while TR’s years at Harvard were ones of intellectual ferment, they also proved to be something of a disappointment. Although he excelled in his studies and attempted to fit in socially, joining in most every extracurricular activity available, he found most of the faculty to be distant and aloof, and the student body divided into two castes, the patrician scions of the Boston Brahmin and everyone else – in other words the haves and have mores. Despite the fact that he attempted to burnish his image with expensive clothes and family connections, most evidence suggests that Theodore would be remembered by classmates and mentors – if remembered at all – as an awkward, bookish young man with a shrill, piping voice, a peculiar “bundle of eccentricities” as William Roscoe Thayer recalled. Or as friend John Woodbury put it, he seemed oddly out of place and “some thought he was crazy.” Pursuing with a passion the sciences, earning high marks on exams, the budding ornithologist and field naturalist felt confined, even stifled in laboratories surrounded by microscopes and Petri dishes. In the end, he left Harvard unceremoniously, seemingly believing that he had not learned much more there than he could have learned back home in New York City. As he penned in his autobiography 33 years later, “I thoroughly enjoyed Harvard, and I am sure it did me good, but only in the general effect, for there was very little in my actual studies which helped me [later] in ... life.” Instead of extending the horizons of his mind, his professors had mostly confirmed the reigning ideologies of the day, particularly the dual dogmas of *laissez faire* and Social Darwinism. In future years, TR spoke little of his college experiences, other than his pride at being a “Harvard man” (Thayer 1919, 21; Roosevelt 1926a, 22–26; McCullough 1981, 195–208).

The education of TR continued well beyond the halls of academe and far from the Ivy-covered walls surrounding Harvard Yard. In September 1878, and again in the winter of 1879, the robust young Roosevelt, accompanied by cousins Emlen and James West Roosevelt, ventured into the woods of Northern Maine to commune with nature. These two trips proved to be among the most significant formative experiences of TR’s youth. Vanishing into the primeval forests of the Aroostook country on the borders of New Brunswick, he gloried in the fresh air of the wilderness, where his lungs could breathe freely among the spectacular evergreens and white rivers of this remote region.

Just as important, on his first trek into the wilds of the Aroostook country, some ninety miles north of Bangor, Theodore forged a friendship with two Maine woodsmen who would come to influence his perception of the manly world that awaited beyond the borders of settlement. For three weeks in September of 1878, TR and his cousins stayed at the Island Falls hunting lodge of William “Bill” Sewall, a bearded, Bible-toting Yankee who seemed to know as much about Norse mythology or the poetry of Longfellow and Keats as any Harvard scholar. For eighteen days the stoic woodsman and his quiet, boyish-looking nephew Wilmot Dow guided the three Roosevelts deep into the dark forests of the North Country. Although Sewall found young Roosevelt to be “a different fellow to guide than any I had ever seen,” he liked and even admired him, as did young Dow. In fact, when their charismatic friend invited both men to join him in the Dakota Badlands six years later as his partners in the cattle business, neither hesitated. None realized it at the time, but their bond would last a lifetime (Sewall 1919, 5; Roosevelt 1926a, 30–31; Brinkley 2009, 111–20).

The experience of tramping through the backwoods of Northern Maine proved to be everything that Theodore could have hoped for. Whether canoeing down the rushing waters of the Mattawamkeag, observing the habits of the moose and caribou, studying the behavior of the bears and bats, marveling at the many birds soaring overhead, or just stretching out around a campfire and swapping stories under the stars, TR had found his niche. And he may have also found a faith in his own physical stamina, a confidence that had eluded him for the first two decades of his life.

Back at Harvard for his junior year, the brilliant though contentious TR seemed energized as he continued to apply himself with tremendous vigor. Suddenly, however, tragedy struck, interrupting not only his studies but also changing his life. On February 9, 1878, word came that his beloved father, “Thee” as Martha called him, was dying. The elder Roosevelt – at the age of 46 – had succumbed after a lengthy battle with stomach cancer. He died in the family’s new home at 6 West 57th Street, just hours before his oldest son reached his bedside. Young Theodore recorded that it was the “blackest day of my life.” His father’s funeral and burial in Brooklyn’s Greenwood Cemetery seemed to him a “hideous dream.” As he confided to classmate Henry Davis Minot, “it seems that part of my life had been taken away.” The pain and grief seemed overwhelming, even unbearable. “When I heard the sound of the first clod dropping on the coffin holding the one I loved dearest on earth,” Theodore recorded in his diary, “I felt that I should almost perish” (Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress, series 7, reel 429, February 9, 12, 13, March 9, 21, 1878; Morison, Blum, and Chandler 1951–1954, 1: 31).

As his father wished, young Roosevelt returned to Harvard to finish what he had started. Grieving the loss and insisting that “no one will ever be able to take his place,” he looked forward to his senior year, to graduation, and

a future yet uncertain. What Theodore never planned was a chance meeting with an angelic, blue-eyed beauty from Boston's Chestnut Hill. While visiting the home of classmate Richard Saltonstall on October 18, 1878, he was introduced to 17-year-old Alice Hathaway Lee, daughter of prominent banker George Cabot Lee. Statuesque, with soft features and a pretty smile, she not only caught the eye of the restive Mr. Roosevelt but also quickly captured his affection. After a courtship lasting more than a year, they married at the Unitarian Church in nearby Brookline, Massachusetts, on October 27, 1880 – Theodore's 22nd birthday (Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress, series 7, reel 429, March 9, 21, 1878; McCullough 1981, 218–30).

In the meantime, TR had graduated from Harvard the previous June. His honors included *magna cum laude* and membership in *Phi Beta Kappa*. Even with his college days behind him and his life with Alice yet ahead, another call beckoned him: the call to enter politics. First enrolling in Columbia Law School, believing the legal profession to be the proper gateway to a career in public service, TR announced his candidacy for the New York State Assembly. Campaigning with a frenetic energy and feverish passion, he announced his allegiance to the Republican Party and to the causes of “good government.” On November 8, 1881, TR won election to the assembly, representing Manhattan's 21st District, otherwise known as the “Brownstone District.” At the age of 23, he thus became the youngest man ever elected to the assembly. Despite his youth and inexperience, TR quickly stormed the legislature by introducing a whirlwind of reform measures aimed at undermining the spoils system and, specifically, limiting the power of the machine politicians and their control of the New York City Board of Aldermen. Espousing the simple virtues of honesty and efficiency in government, he relentlessly railed out against the corrupting influence of the partisan patronage system. By the end of his first term in Albany he was leading the fight for a state civil service reform bill modeled after the Pendleton Act passed by Congress in 1883. In the process he learned among his earliest political lessons that what the party bosses and corrupt spoilsmen feared most was an honest man. Fittingly, the press dubbed him the “Cyclone Assemblyman” (Morris 1979, 151–201).

Elected that November to a second term, he soon rose to the position of Minority Leader. To most observers, he appeared to be headed to greater political heights. He denounced the unbridled power of both railroads and manufacturers and even took up the cause of women garment workers, pressing for reforms to improve conditions in the infamous “sweatshops.” He decried the disgrace of child labor. Still, he fell short of his own lofty goal of bringing justice to exploited women and children in the state's factories. Meanwhile, back in New York City, Alice awaited the birth of their child (Morris 1979, 151–201).

On January 1, 1884, the *New York World* reported on TR's frustrations in Albany and even prophesied that "this will not be a Happy New Year ... for the exquisite Mr. Roosevelt." Little could anyone have known at the time just how prophetic the statement would be. On February 13, 1884, at his office in Albany, State Assemblyman Roosevelt received two telegrams, the first announcing the joyous news of the birth of a daughter, the second, more urgent, explaining that Alice suffered from complications, was gravely ill, and that he should hasten home. Rushing to New York City on the first available train, he arrived at Grand Central Station shortly before midnight. A numbing chill and freezing mist hung in the air as TR's carriage pulled up in front of the two-story brownstone mansion. Theodore gazed up through the haze and caught sight of a single lamp that flickered faintly through the window of Alice's upstairs bedroom. It was an eerie scene, TR must have sensed, an ominous portent of something dreadful (*New York Times*, February 13, 1884; Putnam 1958, 383–86; Morris 1979, 240–41).

As he entered his family home on West 57th Street, Elliott informed his brother that both Alice and mother "Mittie" were dying. "There is a curse on this house," TR mumbled, echoing his brother's lament. Dazed and in shock, he first rushed upstairs to the bedside of his sweet Alice. Later that night he was called downstairs to say goodbye to his mother, who lay near death, a victim of typhoid. Shortly after 3:00 a.m. the next morning Martha expired, six years and five days after her husband had died in the same house, in the same room, in the same bed. His eyes reddened and swollen, TR maintained a death vigil beside his wife, who was fast failing as a result of Bright's disease. At 2:00 the following afternoon – St. Valentine's Day – Alice died in his arms. She was only 21 (*New York Times*, February 14–15, 1884; Morris 1979, 241; Putnam 1958, 383–86).

"The light has gone out of my life," TR scribbled in his diary. A heavy fog continued to cover New York City, and intermittent rain fell as TR prepared to bury his wife and mother. "It was a grim and evil fate," he aptly wrote. On Saturday morning, February 16, TR sat silently and in disbelief in the first pew of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, staring at the two matching rosewood coffins covered with sprays of flowers. He seemed completely unaware of the overflowing crowd that filled the sanctuary. Following the eulogy delivered by the Reverend John Hall, he accompanied two horse-drawn hearses that carried the caskets to Greenwood Cemetery, where Alice and Martha were laid to rest beside Theodore, Sr. (Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress, series 8, reel 430, February 14–17, 1884).

"For joy or sorrow, my life has now been lived out," TR recorded in his diary the day of the funeral. Physically exhausted, emotionally drained, he withdrew from friends and family. "Theodore is in a dazed, stunned state. He does not know what he does or says," mentor and friend Arthur Cutler wrote. Unable to sleep, having little appetite or interest in returning to

work in Albany, he seemed hopelessly lost in his grief. On February 18 he penned a letter to fellow legislator Andrew Dickson White, acknowledging that “there is nothing left for me except to try to live so as not to dishonor the memory of those I loved who have gone before me.” Days passed before the devastating reality settled in upon him: Alice and Mittie were gone (Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress, series 8, reel 430, February 18, 1884; Morison, Blum, and Chandler 1951–1954 1: 63; *New York Times*, February 17, 1884; *New-York Tribune*, February 17, 1884; Sewall 1919, 11–12).

So much has been said and written about TR’s state of mind in the weeks and months following the loss of his wife and mother. While much is conjecture, one thing seems certain. Other than a brief memorial that he authored honoring his “heart’s dearest,” he could not even speak her name again in public – ever. He could hardly look upon his infant daughter, Alice, delivered two days before her mother’s death; he would even refuse to call her by her given name, insisting instead on referring to the child he left in the care of his eldest sister as “Baby Lee.” And in his letters home to Bamie in the months ahead, he avoided any reference to his daughter, not even inquiring about her. It was almost as if he tried to bury all memories of Alice (Roosevelt 1884.).

Brooding, seemingly detached, he returned to work in Albany. But his combative spirit and confident manner had left him. So too had his ambition to achieve a career in public service. On April 30 he confided to newspaper editor Simon North that he held “very little expectation of being able to keep on in politics.” Months later he unburdened himself to sister Bamie: “I am sorry my political career should be over, but ... it makes very little difference” (Morison, Blum, and Chandler 1951–1954, 1:66–67, 82).

In his autobiography TR neglected to mention his first wife, and he made no reference to his mother’s death at the age of 48. But in one poignant passage he revealed as much as he ever would about the overwhelming grief that he had suffered. “There are dreadful moments when death comes ... [to] those we love ... But life is a great adventure, and the worst of all fears is the fear of living” (Roosevelt 1926a, 347).

During these difficult days perhaps no young American could have benefited more from newspaper editor Horace Greeley’s advice than the brooding young TR. “When you have no family or friends to aid you, and no prospect open to you, turn your face to the Great West, and there build up a home and fortune.” On April 30, 1884 – six weeks after that fateful Valentine’s Day – TR confided to friend Simon North that, were it not for his duties as a state assemblyman, he would catch the first train west. The previous September, he had ventured into the Dakota Badlands on a buffalo hunt, and he explained that maybe another trip to the West would allow him an escape, albeit a temporary one, from the wrenching pain that had consumed him. During his two-week sojourn into the Badlands – his

introduction to the unearthly wilderness once likened to “hell with the fires out” – he had hired as his hunting guide a stocky Canadian cowboy named Joe Ferris, who in turn had introduced TR to his older brother, Sylvane Ferris, and his partner in the cattle business, William “Bill” Merrifield. Before departing Dakota Territory, TR had written the elder Ferris and Merrifield a check for \$14,000 for the purpose of buying a herd of 400 cattle “on shares” and purchasing the grazing rights to a spread near Chimney Butte, some seven miles south of the twin hamlets of Little Missouri and Medora. Perhaps another trip to the Badlands would allow him to rediscover some sense of purpose, if only he could find time away from other responsibilities (Hagedorn 1921, 7–24, 28–42; Reavis 1872, 553).

First he had to finish the work that he had started in Albany. With hearings to hold, bills to draft, and reports to write, he threw himself into the work of the people. But now, in his sadness, he seemed more circumspect, more willing to work with others of differing views, more willing to compromise. Not all of his opponents, he understood, were greedy agents of graft. “I looked the ground over and made up my mind that there were ... other excellent people there, with honest opinions,” he explained to author Jacob Riis years later. “I turned in to help them, and they turned and gave me a hand. And so we were able to get things done,” he recalled. “That was my first lesson in real politics” (Riis 1904, 59).

As fortune would have it, the opportunity for another trip to the West soon presented itself. TR soon received word that he had been selected as a delegate to the Republican National Convention, scheduled the first week in June in Chicago. Pledged to support reform-minded Senator George F. Edmunds of Vermont, TR spent four frustrating days in Chicago, during which the party bosses arranged for the nomination of controversial power broker, longtime Halfbreed faction chieftain, and current Secretary of State James G. Blaine. Seemingly disgusted by his party’s choice of the former Speaker of the House from Maine, who stood as the very symbol of the “spoils system” of patronage, young TR walked out of the proceedings, convinced now even more than before that politics might not be in his future. Before the convention officially closed, a disillusioned TR boarded a train bound for the Badlands. There, he hoped, he could somehow conquer his fear of living without those he had so loved, he could retreat into the barren yet hauntingly beautiful land that time seemed to have forgotten. Or as author Owen Wister wrote, he could “disappear into the West” and vanish into a savage though serene wilderness where, as TR wrote, “there are few sounds to break the stillness ... [except] the soft, melancholy cooing of the mourning dove, whose voice always seems so far away and expresses more than any other sound in nature the sadness of gentle, hopeless, never-ending grief” (Roosevelt 1899, 40).

Sometime after nightfall on June 9, the locomotive carrying TR screeched and hissed to a stop at the train depot in the tiny upstart town of Medora,

Dakota Territory. When the sun came up the next morning the young man from the nation's largest city noted little that hinted of civilization. At first appearance the settlement seemed nothing more than an "excessively unattractive little hamlet." Along drab, dust-filled streets stretched rows of weathered clapboard buildings, the most prominent being the local "watering holes," or saloons. But a short walk revealed established businesses, including four general stores, three hotels, a blacksmith shop and stables, a barbershop and apothecary, a newspaper, a railroad station, a slaughterhouse, and even one church. High above the valley and the sprawling little cow town rose a series of barren, denuded bluffs, one aptly named Graveyard Butte owing to the crude tombstones that served as reminders that this was a hard country, surely no place for the weak or timid (Dantz 1904; Dantz 1925).

On June 17 TR informed sister Anna that he was having a "glorious time" and that he would soon "put on a thousand more cattle" and make it his "regular business." The clear air and open spaces of the Badlands seemed to agree with him, and he could announce confidently that he had "never been in better health." Riding the open range, scouring the broken plains for strays, at night stretching out under the stars and resting alongside a crackling campfire, he quickly grew in his appreciation of this country, which he described as having "a curious beauty of its own." Even the soft bellowing of the cattle and the peaceful rhapsodies of the prairie fowl seemed to sooth his restless spirit. He assured Anna, "How I do sleep at night now" (Cowles 1924, 57–59; *Bad Lands Cow Boy* (Medora), June 12, June 19, 1884).

TR soon learned, however, that the life of a cowboy was anything but romantic. The daily drudgery and monotony of riding the range and tending to the herd, the long hours in the saddle, the meticulous care of the remuda of horses, the sheer tedium of maintaining the cabin at the Maltese Cross, cutting wood and cooking for the outfit: all these tasks proved to be nothing less than physically demanding, especially since the work began before sunrise and continued well after nightfall. But at the end of the day he could reflect on his future and imagine a new life for himself. "It will be a good many years before I get back into politics," he admitted in a letter home on August 12 (Cowles 1924, 60–61).

The *Bad Lands Cow Boy* reported that summer that the herd of one thousand head of fattened yearlings recently delivered to Roosevelt's Maltese Cross Ranch appeared to be "the best lot of cattle shipped west this year." Not content, however, with the grasslands south of Medora, TR rode alone to the broken ranges forty miles to the north in search of a new ranch site. One hot August afternoon, he came upon a secluded meadow near the waters of the Little Missouri. Beneath the steep cliffs of several barren buttes that towered above, he found two pair of interlocked antlers, with little else remaining to bear witness that two bull elk had fallen together

as a result of a final “duel to the death.” Nearby deer droppings and tracks in the river bed convinced him that the peaceful valley, shielded by the protective walls of bluffs, would be the sight of his new ranch house, the “Elkhorn” (*Bad Lands Cow Boy*, July 31, 1884; Roosevelt 1926a, 96–97; Roosevelt 1926c, 1: 43–45; Sewall 1919, 18–19; Lang 1926, 168).

One day that autumn TR confronted perhaps the most terrifying foe he would ever encounter in the Badlands – a huge bay bronco with the fitting name, “the Devil.” Many good men had attempted to break the wild stallion, and none had succeeded. In fact, most had been injured trying. Understandably, no one wanted even to touch the vicious brute. And no one was crazy enough to try to ride him. No one but TR. One morning while several cowboys gathered around a corral at the Maltese Cross to witness the memorable confrontation, TR and Merrifield climbed the fence and walked toward the horse with lariats twirling. After lassoing the giant brute, both men struggled desperately to place a hood over the horse’s head in hopes of blindfolding him. Moving in a constant circle to prevent the animal from biting them or, worse yet, trampling them, they pulled on the ropes to tighten their hold. For nearly thirty minutes the stubborn stallion fought ferociously, heaving, kicking high into the air, snapping his head violently and stamping his powerful front legs in protest. Finally, after the magnificent beast had nearly strangled himself in the tangle of ropes, he seemed subdued, even calm. TR then approached the horse slowly, offering a bucket of water to gain his trust. As one witness remembered, for “the first time in his life” the much-feared Devil had “accepted a favor from the hand of man.”

But the battle was far from over. Merrifield carefully placed a blanket and saddle on the heavily lathered horse, then a bridle and bit. Not hesitating, TR grasped the reins and swung gently into the saddle, much to the amusement of the cowhands. Just then the animal’s nostrils flared and his back arched as he suddenly pulled away from Merrifield’s grasp. Spinning, whirling and bucking “like an antelope fighting a rattlesnake,” as one observer remembered, the big bay stallion coiled and twisted himself in a series of midair maneuvers that astonished even the most seasoned of ranch hands. With almost every leap, the eyewitness remembered, “we would see twelve acres of bottom land between TR and the saddle.” By the observer’s count, the Devil tossed TR to the ground four times. Each time the determined rider dusted himself off and climbed back in the saddle. The contest finally ended with the fiercely competitive rider triumphant and the proud stallion exhausted, or as the witness described, “as meek as a rabbit” (Morison, Blum, and Chandler 1951–1954, 1: 89; Roosevelt 1926c, 1: 7; Roosevelt 1899, 53; Lang 1926, 184–85; Packard 1905, 13–14).

The encounter with the Devil was not to be his last experience breaking wild horses. During the spring of 1885 TR bought some sixty wild horses from artist Frederick Remington’s Laurel Leaf Ranch in the Powder River

region of Montana. TR admitted most of the animals were “incurably vicious.” The meanest of the lot, he remembered, was a tall roan that had been aptly named “Man Killer.” Because of the stallion’s resemblance to a famous Civil War general, TR had nicknamed him Ben Butler. During the fall 1885 roundup TR attempted to break the irrepressible spirit of the menacing horse but instead broke his shoulder when the animal threw him into the air as if he were a straw man, causing him to slam the hard earth (Dantz 1925, 77; Dantz 1904, 1214; Roosevelt 1926a, 106–07).

Perhaps one incident, more than any other, came to define TR’s growing reputation as a man who belied his appearance as a “greenhorn” from the city. In May 1885, while rounding up wild horses near Beaver Creek in far eastern Montana, he rode into the dusty border town of Mingsville (today named Wibaux). After renting a room for the night in Nolan’s Hotel, a dingy establishment known for its absence of amenities, TR tossed his gear in an upstairs loft filled with bunks. Moments after he descended the stairs into the crowded, smoke-filled barroom, a bearded frontiersman smelling of whiskey began to shout obscenities and wave a six-shooter over his head. After placing two shots in the ceiling, the “broad hatted ruffian,” as TR termed him, sent several rounds into a large clock hanging on the wall, then turned around to find another target. Focusing his attention on the bespectacled TR, who sat at a table only a few steps away, the drunken hellion announced that “four eyes” would buy the next round of drinks. “The fact that I wore glasses gave him the impression – a mistaken one – that I would not resent injury,” TR recalled. As the blurry-eyed bully approached, TR smiled nervously. Before the pistol-wielding bad man could react, TR jumped to his feet and pummeled him with a blur of fists to the face and jaw, sending him reeling and crashing into the bar. While a few astonished onlookers picked themselves up off the floor, TR knelt over the sprawling, unconscious figure. Placing a knee on his chest, he retrieved the revolver and handed it to the innkeeper, then dragged the man’s limp frame outside and, with the help of a few timid onlookers, tossed him into a nearby outhouse (Roosevelt 1926a, 121–23; Hagedorn 1921, 152–54; Morison, Blum, and Chandler 1951–1954, 3: 562).

Little wonder that this encounter with the “Mingsville Bully” convinced many that the bespectacled TR had earned their respect. By the end of 1885 spring roundup, 26-year-old TR seemed in several respects a different man than the frail, pathetic-looking “dandy” who had first arrived in the Badlands. In the fifteen months since Alice’s death, he seemed to have transformed himself into a physically strong and self-confident young man. The metamorphosis did not go unnoticed, either in the Dakota country or back home in New York City. “No longer was he the slight and delicate looking young man we had entertained at the Cannonball Creek two years before,” rancher Lincoln Lang recalled. William Sewall agreed that his friend from New York appeared “as husky as almost any man I have ever

seen who wasn't dependent on his arms for his livelihood." Described by a *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reporter as "rugged, bronzed, and in the prime of health," he had gained almost thirty pounds of brawn in the past year. No longer did he resemble the thin, sickly youth who had come west to escape his grief. The toothy grin and squinting eyes were familiar, and so was the reedy voice. But as former Harvard classmate William Roscoe Thayer noted after seeing TR later that year, he now sported "the neck of a Titan ... and broad shoulders and stalwart chest" (Lang 1926, 176, 219; Sewall 1919, 41; Thayer 1919, 51).

During the ensuing months TR divided his time between taking care of his cattle business at the Elkhorn and overseeing the construction of his new home at Sagamore Hill. The coming fall and winter might have been rather uneventful, but for one thing. One day that autumn, while entering his sister Anna's home at 689 Madison Avenue, Theodore bounded up the staircase where he unexpectedly found himself face to face with a pretty, intelligent, and cultured young lady of 24. Bamie had perhaps arranged the "chance" meeting, in hopes that her brother might show some interest in the charming though quiet and reserved Edith Carow, once Teedie's childhood playmate and sweetheart. No longer the shy, awkward little girl whose brunette hair fell in curls, she had grown into a strikingly beautiful woman, both in face and form. Just as intriguing, she seemed to possess at least as much book knowledge as Theodore. TR had tried his best to avoid women for more than a year and a half. But that was over now, as he fell hopelessly in love with "Edie." Their courtship was a quiet and private matter, even conducted under a veil of secrecy. The normally talkative Theodore insisted on jealously guarding their privacy, probably because of standing Victorian mores regarding the proper conduct of men and women mourning the loss of a spouse. Some biographers have gone so far as to conjecture that TR experienced a strong sense of guilt for carrying on such a secretive romance, and seemingly so soon after Alice's death (Miller 1992, 174–76; McCullough 1981, 356–59; Morris 1979, 313–14).

Speculation aside, one fact is certain. On November 17, 1885, Theodore quietly proposed marriage, and Edith accepted. Resilient and determined to go on with his life, he had apparently learned that a man who had loved and lost so much could one day learn to love again. Before long, however, Edith learned that she must share Theodore with the world. For one thing, his irrepressible spirit of adventure beckoned him back to the Badlands. Experiencing what he frequently called "that caged wolf feeling," on March 15, 1886, TR bid his fiancée Edie a cheerful goodbye and boarded a westbound train. (Morris 1979, 313–14; Putnam 1958, 557–59).

Just days after arriving in Medora, TR wrote home that life on the ranch had "settled down into its usual monotonous course" and that the coming spring would not likely be "an especially adventurous or exciting one." What he failed to mention was that he had been sworn in as a deputy sheriff

and was about to embark on a dangerous manhunt for one of the most nefarious characters in all the Badlands, a scoundrel, thief and hide hunter named Mike Finnegan. On March 30, TR, Bill Sewall, and Wilmot Dow shoved off from the banks of the Little Missouri, determined to track down Finnegan and two of his partners in crime who had recently stolen a boat. Not until the afternoon of the third day of their search did TR's posse come upon the camp of the boat thieves, and after waiting in the brush until after dark, the three deputies surprised the surly-looking Finnegan and the two half-wits who accompanied him.

The trip to transport the thieves back to the town of Dickinson more than eighty miles away proved an arduous one. The trek took nearly a week, and during the final three days and nights on the trail TR remained awake, watching the prisoners around the clock, his Winchester constantly trained on them. By the time TR drove a borrowed wagon into Dickinson on April 11 and turned the fugitives over to the town sheriff, he was exhausted, mud-splattered, badly sunburned, with huge blisters on both feet. Dr. V.H. Stickney remembered the strange sight of the buckskin-clad TR plodding toward him, his clothes in shreds. As TR approached, Stickney observed "the most bedraggled figure I'd ever seen limping down the street," noting further that his face was so covered with mud he appeared to be "all teeth and eyes" (Roosevelt 1926a, 115; Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress, series 8, reel 430, March 18–April 10, 1886; Cowles 1924, 71–73; Morison, Blum, and Chandler 1951–1954, 1: 95–98; Stickney 1922, 10; Collins 1989, 72–75).

In comparison to stalking outlaws, working cattle and hunting deer in the sand hills surrounding the Elkhorn proved pleasurable. By his own accounts, TR seemed happier than at any time since the deaths of Alice and Mittie. As he confessed that May in a letter to sister Corinne, he had fallen in love with ranch life, and like the little boy who used to share his childhood adventure fantasies with "Conie," he concluded that his new life in the West was "in many ways ... perfect; we are so rarely able to ... in real life to dwell in our ideal 'hero land'" (Morison, Blum, and Chandler 1951–1954, 1: 99, 101; Robinson 1921, 138; Cowles 1924, 81; Roosevelt 1926a, 114; Roosevelt 1926c, 1: 85).

Following the 1886 spring roundup, TR continued to serve as president of the Little Missouri Stockmen's Association, and as an advocate of a strong organization among ranchers on the Northern Plains; in late April he even attended the Montana Stockmen's Association in Miles City. Aside from spending much of his time that summer writing a biography of the legendary expansionist, the late Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, he attended to his growing herds of some 3,500 head. At every opportunity, he struck out, alone, across the broken prairies on horseback with a brace of weapons, in search of deer. Then in late August, looking for the elusive white mountain goat, he traveled with Bill Merrifield by train into

the high country of the Northern Rockies. Guided by an irascible mountaineer named John Willis, he ventured into the majestic Bitter Root Range and beyond, to the wilds of the Coeur d'Alene country of northern Idaho. Inspired by the grandeur of towering peaks, roaring mountain streams, cascading waterfalls, and majestic pine forests, he vowed soon to visit the Great Rockies again. Before the seasonal snows descended on the mountains that autumn, he embarked on another hunting expedition, this time in search of elk in the valley of the Yellowstone River. But that is another story (Willis 1931, 9–13, 17–22).

By the time TR returned east in early October, he had therefore gained an abiding reverence for a spectacular wilderness that must not be lost to future generations. Not long after arriving home, TR allowed himself to be persuaded by Republican Party officials to run for mayor of New York City. Knowing that he had little time and probably no chance of defeating the powerful Democratic Party machine at Tammany Hall, he accepted the challenge and even campaigned with the fervor of a crusading evangelist. And though the so-called “cowboy candidate” finished a distant third to Democrat Abram Hewitt and reformer and author Henry George, he claimed to have had a “bully time.” In mid-November he traveled by steamship and joined Edith in London, and there on December 2, 1886, the couple wedded in St. George’s Church at Hanover Square. They then left for their honeymoon on the Continent (Miller 1992, 184–85).

Meanwhile, in the Badlands a severe arctic blast blew down across the plains, plunging temperatures below zero, bringing icy winds and blinding blizzards that literally buried the cattle industry beneath several feet of snow. When TR left his bride with Bamie and Baby Lee and returned to the Elkhorn in April 1887, therefore, he could only survey the devastation caused by the harshest winter yet recorded on the Northern Plains. “You cannot imagine anything more dreary,” TR lamented to his former partner Bill Sewall. “Everything is cropped as bare as a bone.” Referring to the rangelands as simply a “barren waste,” even he had to search for words to describe the sight of a vast, windswept graveyard littered with the stiffened carcasses of thousands of animals. “I am bluer than indigo,” he wrote to Bamie on April 17. Estimating that he had likely lost half of the \$83,000 that he had invested in cattle business, a pessimistic TR announced, “I am planning to get out” (Sewall 1919, 41, 47, 96–97; Morison, Blum, and Chandler 1951–1954, 1: 126–27; Roosevelt 1899, 17–24).

In only three summers spent ranching in the Badlands, TR had made himself over again. In the process, he had rediscovered a love for what he would one day term the “strenuous life.” Years later he even went so far as to insist that, had it not been for his time in Dakota Territory, he might never have become president. “Here the romance of my life began,” he reflected. In the West he had been able to lose himself in a rough and rugged country of equals where no one cared about a man’s family,

education or social station. He had experienced the life of a cowboy, though he never truly mastered the skills of riding and roping; he had entered the world of a most colorful cast of characters – from gunslingers and gamblers to lawmen and hide hunters, from teamsters to mountain men – and all seemed to walk right out of the pages of the adventure novels of his boyhood.

When the 29-year-old TR reappeared in the East that fall, he did so with the perspective of a westerner. On December 8, 1887, at an informal gathering in the Madison Avenue home of his sister Anna, he helped to found the Boone and Crockett Club. A curious collection of intellectuals and sportsmen, including the naturalist George Bird Grinnell, the founders of the organization pledged to promote “manly sport with rifle” as well as the “travel and exploration of the wild and unknown.” At the same time they vowed to lobby Congress for legislation to protect endangered species. Soon TR also began writing a trilogy of narratives detailing his experiences ranching and hunting in the Badlands and Northern Rockies. At the same time, he had already begun research on an even more ambitious undertaking, a sweeping four-volume history of the westward movement; he would call his monumental work *The Winning of the West* (Roosevelt 1893; Morris 1979, 383–84).

While the education of TR seemed to be just beginning, the quintessential traits of an iconic American leader had already been shaped. The inimitable swagger, the ceaseless energy, the abiding values and vaulting confidence that would come to characterize the nation’s 26th president, indeed the very identity of the man had been forged from the trials and triumphs of his youth. All things considered, therefore, no one should have been surprised when, soon, he would cease to be satisfied with chronicling his own experiences or writing of his nation’s past, but instead would only be content to make history.

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