

“The Assassination of Thomas Howard”¹

By Armand Everett Gangwer

Her husband rocked back and forth in his chair.²
He smiled, nodded, and combed back his hair.³
She continued merrily with her activities.
She knew not his crimes, nor his violent proclivities.⁴
They spoke not a word; their two children nearby,
Running and hiding, not knowing they'd never say goodbye.⁵
She straightened her apron; he lit his cigar.
Husband and wife admired each other from afar.
Laughing in frolic, Jesse and Mary⁶ remained at play.

Thomas stood from his chair and looked with dismay.⁷
A friend had entered, cowardly and young.⁸
However coy, he spoke with a lying tongue.⁹
When the time was right,¹⁰ the deed was done:
The assassin shot Thomas with his nickel-plated gun.¹¹

¹ The name “Thomas Howard” was Jesse James’ primary alias.

² Jesse often installed himself in a rocking chair while at home.

³ Jesse was known for his striking, handsome facial features and his slicked-back hairstyle.

⁴ Jesse’s wife, Zee James, was oblivious of her husband’s criminal activities (although she quietly questioned his professional life).

⁵ Jesse’s children were very young when their father was assassinated; they knew their father’s love, not his criminal activities.

⁶ These are the actual names of Jesse’s two children: Jesse James, Jr. and Mary Susan James.

⁷ At this time in 1882, Jesse had grown increasingly suspicious of the members of his gang.

⁸ Robert Ford, although notably younger than Jesse, was considered an associate or a friend.

⁹ Robert had arrived at Jesse’s residence in St. Joseph, Missouri, under the guise of friendship.

¹⁰ Robert cowardly shot Jesse through the back of the head while he was facing away from his assassin; needless to say, Jesse did not expect the shot.

¹¹ Ironically, the nickel-plated pistol that killed Jesse James was a gift from Jesse to Robert, given one day before the assassination.