

Jericho and Red Eagle

Two Boys' Adventures in the Old West

Book Two:

IMPOSTORS



BY
DAVID DRAKE
AND
TOM GNAGEY



**Jericho and Red Eagle:
Two Boys' Adventures in the Old West**

Book Two

THE IMPOSTORS

**By
David Drake and Tom Gnagey**

© 2015, 2017

The Family of Man Press

Book One: The Beginnings
Book Two: The Imposters
Book Three: Greedy Ghost of the Golden Dutchman
Book Four: Dangerous Journeys
Book Five: The Boys' Great Adventure

Best if read in order.

**[Based on the short stories from 1961,
The Adventures of Jericho and Red Eagle
by Tom Gnagey]**

///

A Few Things about 1870 in the United States

The Pony Express, started operation in 1860 and was gone by 1863, replaced by the telegraph and efficient cross country stagecoach lines, which had become the major means for long distance travel. Brave Families moved west from Missouri in covered wagons seeking better lives in places from Kansas to California. Stagecoaches would, in turn, soon be replaced by the railroad. Locally, people depended on horseback and buggies to get from place to place, and on sturdy livery wagons to haul cargo. Although trains had been in local use throughout the eastern United States for several decades, the first railroad to connect the east coast with the west coast was not completed until 1869. The bicycle would not be in general use until the 1890s and the common use of cars was still fifty years away.

Kansas became a state early in 1861 the same year the first telegraph communication was established between the east and west coasts. Common use of the telephone would wait until the early 1900s and radio was not widely available until about 1920 depending on where one resided. 'Town folks' bathed once a week in a large, wooden tub, everybody in a family using the same water. Rural folks often used the creek. Outhouses sat behind every home since indoor plumbing was not available.

The Civil War began in 1861 and ended in 1865. Many areas of the country, particularly Kansas, remained bitterly divided over the issue of slavery even after the end of the war. Abraham Lincoln (the 19th president) was assassinated in 1865. The 1870s were ushered in under President Ulysses

S Grant, a Civil War hero (the 21st and 22nd president – he served two terms).

Kansas, during this period in history, was still the old west as pictured in 'Western' movies with men carrying holstered six-shooters; sheriffs wearing tin stars and carrying rifles; bad guys robbing stages; wide, dirt Main Streets separating rows of wood-front stores and raised wooden sidewalks with overhanging roofs. In the eyes of Kansas law, stealing a horse was every bit as wrong as killing a person.

Boys rolled large wooden hoops down the street for fun and girls played with homemade, cloth dolls. Most children were expected to work to help the family. In the best of times, a small-town man in Kansas earned between \$2.00 and \$8.00 a week. Families averaged five to eight children and one in three babies died at birth. Doctors were often twenty-five to fifty or miles away. Familiar names during the era included: Wild Bill Hickok, Butch Cassidy, Kit Carson, and Jesse James.

* * *

The story of Jericho and Red Eagle up to now.

[The term 'Indian' is used in these stories because that was the term used in 1870 America. No disrespect is intended to our valued Native Americans.]

Twelve-year-old twin boys were separated at birth. One was raised as a Cherokee and the other a white boy. In 1870, Kansas, they each undertook a separate journey to Red Bend Kansas hoping to discover who they were. They met along the way and soon accepted that they were twin brothers. In Red Bend, they discovered the circumstances of their birth and separation, and became friends with Doc Webber, Cilla who was the newspaper editor, Sandy the deputy sheriff and Cal, an older boy who hoped to someday become marshal of the territory. They discovered a secret cave, which they made their home, and a hidden gold mine that presented financial security for them. They each acquired a wonderful horse, stronger and faster than any others in Central Kansas. They outran a prairie fire, handled a runaway stage coach, and captured a band of outlaws that was out to steal their gold.

They found the blending of their backgrounds make for a remarkable life together. Red Eagle taught Jericho Cherokee and the ways of his people. Jericho taught Red Eagle to read English and helped him understand the ways of the white people.

They had begun building a very good life for themselves among their new friends there in and around Red Bend Kansas.

CHAPTER ONE

Rising Sun

The sun said nine o'clock. It was becoming one of the hottest May's the old timers around Red Bend could remember. Any trace of a breeze seemed to have died in mid-April.

The boys were both determined to learn as much about each other's cultures (the way their people lived and believed) as they could. So, on Mondays they both dressed alike – one Monday Cherokee and one as white boys. It was the Cherokee Monday. It amazed them how just switching clothing and hair style gave them such completely different looks.

Red Eagle had helped Jericho make his own bow, quiver and arrows right down to hammering out Cherokee arrow heads from flint. They had also acquired large pieces of well-tanned leather and had made him an official, Cherokee, breechclout (Google an image). It was in that fashion they were dressed that Monday morning.

They were following Red Creek east from town looking for a good fishing hole. They were walking their horses at an easy pace – Golden and Lightning. Tall prairie grass and a few clumps of trees populated both sides of the generally shallow creek. Red Eagle, with his Cherokee background, knew much more about outdoor things than Jericho so he and Golden were riding next to the water while Jericho and Lightning moved along beside them to the left.

The creek was generally straight, but from place to place where it came upon a large rock outcropping it would

bend one way or another for a short detour and then resume its easterly path. It was those bends that Red Eagle examined most carefully.

“Why the bends?” ever inquisitive Jericho asked.

“The water churns with more force there. The power digs a deeper channel. There is often shade offered by the huge rocks. Deep, shaded water is cooler and most fish seek such places.”

“Very clever!”

“Clever of me for knowing it or clever of the fish for knowing it,” Red Eagle asked.

It was intended humorously so didn’t require a response. It did, however, get a quick grin.

Presently, not far from the boy’s cave which lay just to the north, Red Eagle pointed to such a bend ahead. Not only was there rushing water and a huge rock outcropping, but there were trees for additional shade.

“An ideal camping spot if I ever saw one,” Jericho said as they both dismounted.

“See how the water bubbles,” Red Eagle said, pointing. “It captures air and that makes it easier for the fish to breath. A hole like this one will produce large fish that lay lots of eggs.”

“That’s good, I’d think,” Jericho said kneeling beside his brother to take a closer look.

“Good and bad. When too many fish, there is not enough food for them and they stay small or die.”

“That’s sort of sad,” Jericho said.

“Maybe not. When the small fish stay weak and can no longer swim against the current so they can stay here, they are washed down stream to find a new home. That means more food for the ones that remain.”

“You are a cornucopia of contradictions, little brother.”

“And you, Same Face, are a dictionary full of strange words.”

They traded smiles.

“Cornucopia in this usage means abundance, plenty, lots. Contradictions means things that don’t seem to fit together or allow one another.”

“Thank you. I learn things from you every day.”

“Yeah. It’s such a shame I never learn anything from

you.”

It had been intended as humorous and that was how Red Eagle received it. They continued to explore the water hole. Red Eagle positioned himself on his belly, pulled himself forward so his head and shoulders were extended out over the bank. He lowered his face into the water. After a minute or so he brought it up and pushed back to deliver his findings.

“Perfect. About six feet deep. Lots of big rocks setting on the bottom so the fish have places to hide and escape the current and lay their eggs. I will say fifteen feet long. What do you say?”

“Right on – fifteen feet – I’d say. You’re getting pretty good with feet and inches – next we’ll move onto yards. What did you see down there?”

“Twelves of fish – all sizes.”

Jericho chuckled.

“I think what you mean is ‘dozens’ of fish. There are 12 in a dozen, but we use the term ‘dozen’ – dozens rather than twelves.”

Red Eagle nodded and shrugged. He would not make that error again – Red Eagle was highly intelligent and usually didn’t need more than one experience to learn things.

“It would be a great place to swim,” Jericho said. “Will that bother the fish?”

“Would it bother you if a giant buffalo got in to swim with you in there?”

“Yes, I suppose it would, but we don’t have horns and sharp hooves.”

“I was really just joking – that’s not the best word,” Red Eagle said.

“Kidding, I think, is the word you are looking for.”

“Yes. Kidding.”

“So, a swim?” Jericho asked.

Before his brother could answer, their attention was drawn to the road, a hundred yards north east.

“A lone rider being chased by a dozen or so men,” Jericho said, pointing out the obvious.

“Twelve to one doesn’t seem fair, does it?” big brother.

Before Red Eagle had finished they were mounted and headed on a course to intercept the rider. It took but a minute

to draw within hailing distance. It was an Indian in his mid-teens.

The boys motioned for him to follow them. He did. They rode into the stand of trees west of their big red hill. The men rode on past.

“They will be back when they realize you are no longer ahead of them,” Jericho said. “Should we be afraid of you?”

The boy looked puzzled. Red Eagle repeated it in sign language. It was a system of hand signals that allowed all tribes to communicate across all languages. The boy shook his head. Jericho realized it had been a dumb thing to ask even as he had said it.

Jericho pulled back the blanket on which he was riding and removed a bandana.

“We need to hide him in our cave, but can’t let him know where it is. I will blind fold him if he will allow it. Hurry.”

Red Eagle offered a set of hand signals and the boy nodded his agreement. Jericho tied the cloth in place while Red Eagle took the reins to lead the horse. They moved at a trot to the cave and were soon inside. They left the horses ready to ride. Jericho removed the bandana. The boy looked around in amazement. Jericho moved to the opening to keep watch on what was going on outside. Red Eagle discovered the boy new enough Cherokee so they could converse with minimal need for signing. He was Arapaho (another Indian Tribe) and had been riding with a wagon carrying his ailing grandmother when it had been attacked by a group of white men. The boy knew he could not fight them off, so he took out on his horse, hoping to make the men follow him and leave his grandmother and the driver of the wagon alone. At least he had succeeded in making them chase him. He had no idea how the other two had fared back at the wagon.

“Still no sign of the men on horseback,” Jericho reported.

He had been listening and had an idea (of course!).

“I’m thinking we need to go back and get that wagon out of there in case the bad guys return.”

Red Eagle translated to the boy.

The boy nodded.

They drank from the bubbling water. The horses had

already helped themselves. Jericho retied the bandana and they were soon back outside and mounted. They led the boy's horse for several hundred yards away hoping to keep the site of their cave private. Jericho removed the blindfold.

"He have a name?" Jericho asked.

There was talk between the other two.

"He is called, Rising Sun."

Jericho pointed to Rising Sun and then back down the road motioning that he should take the lead. They were soon leaning low, galloping along at a rapid pace – hair, manes and tails flying behind them.

The boy pointed just to the south of the road some fifty yards ahead. They saw the situation.

"The driver's horse that was tied behind the wagon is gone. So is the driver," Red Eagle said, offering to Jericho what the boy had told him.

Rising Sun dismounted beside the open wagon and attended to his grandmother.

"She has not been harmed."

Jericho was the only one who had experience driving a team and wagon so he was set to the task.

"Back to our hills. We will decide what to do there."

Rising Sun rode in the wagon keeping wet cloths on his grandmother's face and hair. Red Eagle led the other two horses. It was a two-horse team and a small wagon. They needed speed, so Jericho pushed the horses.

He turned south off the road. Red Eagle didn't understand, but didn't question it. It was in the opposite direction from their cave. They came to the creek – a wide shallow spot, easy to ford (cross). Once on the other side, Jericho turned the team straight west along the creek.

Then, Red Eagle understood. He was moving the wagon in behind the rock outcroppings and trees at the fishing hole where they had been earlier. It would be an ideal hiding spot and much closer than the woods by their cave.

Finally, they had time to discuss the situation with Rising Sun. His grandmother had been sick for some time. A missionary who was trusted by his village, said he knew a doctor who could make her well. It was their own Doc Webber. The missionary offered to drive them to Red Bend. It was he

who was missing.

“I will ride to get Doc,” Jericho said. “I’ll get him back here as soon as I can. What are her symptoms?”

The boy listed them. Rather than taking the road, Jericho chose to ride south of the creek where the grass was exceptionally tall and he and Lightning could hide if necessary. It took little more than ten minutes – somewhat longer than it would have been on the road. Jericho kept to a full gallop down Main Street, dismounting on the move as he came to Doc’s Office. He ran up the stairs and burst into the office.

“Doc! Emergency!”

Doc emerged from his private room, slipping into his suit coat. The old man looked hot. Jericho had to wonder like Red Eagle – why did the white men wear so many clothes in the heat of summer? He would take it up with Doc later. He explained the situation and the symptoms of the old woman. Doc went to a cabinet and put several things into his black leather case.

“I’ll head on east on the road in the buggy,” Doc said. “You let Deputy Sandy know I’m out of town for a while. Then catch up to me.”

“It’s the third bend in the creek, large brown rocks, a good-sized stand of trees.”

Doc nodded. He had grown up in the area and knew most every blade of grass – as the saying went. He boarded his one-horse buggy and turned east down Main Street. Jericho raced across the street to the Sheriff’s office to give Sandy, Doc’s message. There were lots of horses in front. Jericho didn’t take time to wonder why and just opened the door and went inside. There were a group of men in there.

“That’s him!?” one of the men said pointing at Jericho.

“I’m him what?” Jericho asked, confused.

“The horse thief,” the man answered.

Sandy explained to Jericho.

“These men say a young Indian boy stole one of their horses and then hooked up with a wagon heading west.”

Sandy turned to the man who had pointed at Jericho.

“You are certain this is the boy.”

“Absolutely. How many young Indians can there be runnin’ loose around here?”

“Well, it sounds like at least three, I’d say,” Sandy said.

The man looked puzzled. Sandy spoke.

“Let me introduce you to my friend, Jericho. He has a twin brother, Red Eagle. I can assure you neither one is a horse thief.”

The man grew quiet.

“What makes you think it was an Indian boy who took your horse?”

“We were camped by the road last night – at the creek. Early this morning Slim, here, saw a boy messing with the horses. When he saw Slim he mounted one of our horses and rode off. We saddled up and followed. Saw the horse tied to a wagon. The boy was in the wagon. When he saw us riding up behind, he mounted the horse and rode off up front of the wagon. We took the driver and brought him here to you.”

Jericho spoke.

“The man you took is a missionary who is transporting a very sick old lady here to Red Bend for Doc to care for.”

Jericho went to the desk and wrote something on a scrap of paper. He folded it and held it in his palm.

“Sandy, ask the man his name.”

The man – Rising Sun’s friend – had been placed in a cell while the deputy tried to sort things out. He turned to the man.

“You heard the boy’s request. What’s your name?”

“Reverend Raymond Vincent.”

Jericho handed the paper to Sandy who read it aloud.

“The paper says, Reverend Raymond Vincent.”

He turned back, the spokesman.

“Was there a woman in the wagon?”

“Well, yes. An Indian, though.”

It was said as if an Indian was something less than a real person.

“Did your horse carry a brand?”

“Yes. K bar K.”

Sandy turned back to Jericho.

“I take it you’ve seen the horse in question.”

“Yes, Sir. It carries no brand at all. Was your horse, shod (horse shoes) Sir?”

“Of course. What kind of a question is that?”

“The boy’s horse is unshod – an Indian pony.”

Sandy turned back to the spokesman.

“Did you get close enough to see the horse close up?”

“I suppose not. But . . .”

“No buts. Reverend. What can you tell us to help clear this up?”

Sandy opened the cell and motioned him out.

“Except for the thievery, the man’s story is all true. We were on the road before sunup. Rising Sun – the boy – had been out hunting rabbits for breakfast. He came upon the string of tethered horses and heard one whinny in pain. He rode to it. It was hobbling (limping). He said he went to it and found a stone lodged in its hoof. He had just dislodged the stone when the man began chasing him. The odds looked bad so rather than try to explain, Rising Sun mounted his horse and rode off.”

“It doesn’t account for the missing horse,” Sandy said looking at Jericho.

The men moved in closer to the boy.

CHAPTER TWO

Meet the Impostors

“Maybe there is no missing horse,” Jericho said.

“How many horses did you have with you at your camp site?”

“Twelve, one for each of us.”

“And how many men each rode a horse in order to get here today?”

The man looked around, sheepishly.

“Twelve. It looks like we may have made a mistake.”

“It does look that way,” Sandy said clearly disgruntled (irritated). “And you were willing to accuse an innocent boy of the crime that didn’t even happen. Which way you headed?”

“On west.”

“I’ll send a deputy with you back to your camp. Collect your belongings, leave out west, and never visit my territory again – got that?”

The men nodded and left. Sandy and Jericho both noted that the men seemed more upset they had been found out than that they had made an error.

“I need to get back to the wagon,” Jericho said. “Doc is already on his way. Probably there by now. I imagine he will bring her into town once he hears the danger is over.”

Sandy nodded. Jericho and Lightning left east on Main in a cloud of dust.

* * *

Jericho spoke to Red Eagle first.

“Our deputy, Sandy, ran the bad guys out of town. How’s the grandmother?”

“She had a bad cut on her leg that she didn’t tell anybody about. Doc said it is badly infected. Old Indian women are very proud and many do not like to admit they have lost their physical skills. She fell and cut herself.”

“Will she be okay?”

“Doc hasn’t said.”

Jericho approached Doc.

“Bad guys are gone. Do we need to take her to town?”

“If she’ll go. What do you say, Rising Sun?”

Red Eagle translated.

“She will go if that is what you think is best.”

“Give me five more minutes to get a bandage in place. Then we’ll leave.”

The grandmother was a very large woman. When they arrived in town Doc first went into the newspaper office to talk with Cilla. They both soon returned.

“We will take her to Cilla’s bedroom on the first floor. Use the rear door,” Doc said. I’d like to at least keep her overnight if she’ll stay.”

Red Eagle talked with them and eventually nodded.

“She has agreed to stay. Rising Sun will need to stay with her. We will take the wagon around to the back door.”

Doc looked at Jericho.

“Go get Sandy and round up another man. She must weigh close to 300 pounds. It will take some doing to move her.”

As it turned out, Cal became the extra man. He was just a bit short for his age, but well-built and, as it turned out, very strong. They managed her inside. Rising Sun remained with her according to her wishes. Indians never left their ill without family at their side.

Back outside Cal spoke.

“I’ll take the boy’s horse and team to the livery stable, get them fed and cleaned up.”

“Let us know the charges,” Jericho said. “We’ll cover them.”

“I imagine Harry (Livery owner) will just let it slide. We take good care of each other here in Red Bend.”

“We know that, for sure,” Red Eagle said.

Cal drove the team and wagon and Red Eagle led the

boy's horse. Once they had those things taken care of, the twins walked to Sandy's office. He was there doing paper work and looked up as they entered.

"Gentlemen! A busy morning for you lads. Thanks, by the way."

"Welcome, by the way," Jericho said.

The boys took seats. Sandy put down his pen.

"Something on your mind?"

"Technically that would be mindS, since there are two of us."

Sandy shrugged. He was getting used to such things.

Jericho nodded at his brother who spoke.

"We told you about the arrow we found in the dead man when we first arrived here. It was not a true Indian arrow you remember. One of the bad men's horses had several like it sticking out of his saddle bag."

"That just may be interesting in light of this wanted poster that arrived on the stage this morning."

"Interesting, how?"

"A merchant's wagon was attacked and robbed last week, supposedly by Indians, north of town. It was carrying supplies for the General Store here in Red Bend. The driver was wounded in his shoulder, then tied to a tree and left. The thieves drove the wagon away."

"What tribe?"

"No information. Just said they wore buckskins (soft leather shirt and pants), a single feather in head bands, and bandanas across their faces."

"Do you know where it took place – the robbery?" Jericho asked.

Sandy stood and moved to a large map on the west wall. He pointed.

"Red Bend is here. Sunday Creek is here to the west of town running north to south. The trail north to the old Mill is here along the creek. The robbery took place right about here, half way between the old mill and Red Bend – at the 'S' bend in the trail."

"Did the thieves' horses carry a brand?" Jericho asked.

"It seems the riding blankets were pulled far to the rear covering it if there was one."

“What about the arrow?” Red Eagle asked.

“Shot into the side of the wagon, just below the seat.”

“Was the man wounded by the arrow?” Red Eagle said wanting to be sure he understood.

“No. An interesting question. He was shot with a colt six-shooter – a .44 caliber slug.”

“Many Indians have rifles these days, but seldom side arms. Guns are only for shooting larger game at a distance. Handguns are for killing people close up.”

“What did the arrow look like?” Jericho asked.

“Read the description for yourselves.”

He removed the poster from his desk drawer and handed it to Red Eagle. The boys studied it.

“Sure sounds like the one we have,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle nodded and went on to explain all the details to Sandy.

“Can you draw that for me – the one you have?” Sandy asked.

Jericho took the pen and paper and soon had completed an accurate rendering. He showed it to Red Eagle. He nodded, and had suggestions.

“Write, ‘white string’, by the arrow head and, ‘big game arrow head’. Then – I don’t know the word. It means a wavy shaft.”

“Warped and that’s a good addition. Anything else.”

“Yes, shaft was pine – a very soft wood. It is why it warped. Indians use only hard wood. It doesn’t split when slits are made for the feathers and the slot is cut for the arrow head. The feathers and arrow head were tied in place on ours.”

Jericho made the additions and laid the paper on the desk.

“I’ll show this to the Sheriff when he arrives from Sandy Ford later in the week,” Sandy said.

He put his hands on his waist and shook his head, looking back and forth between the two boys.

“What?” Jericho asked.

“You two beat all – you look identical when you dress like Indians and you look identical when you dress like white boys. You even have to claim each other when you’re

dressed differently from each other.”

“Yes,” Jericho said, “and we take full credit for that.”

It drew smiles from everybody.

They left and took seats out on the edge of the wooden sidewalk out front.

“You thinking what I’m thinking?”

“I often am. Time for a ride up the trail toward the mill?”

“We’ve never been up that way. Only seems right that we check it out – us being new to the area and all. Might even run into a girl.”

“Of course – a random girl just happening to be walking all alone on a isolated trail in the middle of nowhere,” Red Eagle came back.

“I’m glad you understand.”

They stopped at Cilla’s first to see if there was anything they could do to help Rising Sun’s grandmother.

“You might stick your head in the bed room and let the boy know you’re available if he needs anything. I think he’s feeling pretty out of place here. The missionary man is in there with him now.”

Jericho offered to have him ride the trail with them, but he would not leave his grandmother’s side. Red Eagle understood that’s how it would be, but figured it was good if his brother discovered it for himself.

As they passed the Livery, they called and waved to Cal who was cleaning stalls. Once at the edge of town they picked up the pace to a gentle gallop. It was a little used trail – a good weather short cut occasionally used by merchants who delivered to the tiny settlements up that way. The mill had closed a few years before.

“That must be the bend in the trail Sandy told us about,” Jericho said.

As if planned ahead of time, they moved their horses onto the grass along the sides of the trail. They were looking for clues and didn’t want to disturb any that might remain in the dirt. They dismounted and began looking around.

“The wheel tracks from a wagon – fresh,” Red Eagle said.

“Look at the prints from the horse’s feet,” Jericho said.

“I see. There would have been four according to the

poster – two pulling the wagon and two from the thieves, right?”

“Right. I see. If the story is correct, two of the horses should be shod – from the wagon – and two unshod – the ones the Indians were riding. All of these are shod.”

“Just what we both figured we’d find, I guess,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle nodded. He had learned that when White people wasted words explaining the obvious they expected at least a nod, if not some words of agreement. He thought it was very strange to have to expend extra energy acknowledging such things, but assumed some of his ways probably seemed odd to his brother as well.

Red Eagle pointed, moving his arm in a wide circle.

“The wagon turned around here, see, and headed back north on the trail.”

“I see. The thieves took the wagon. Maybe it will lead us to their camp.”

“We could follow the signs for a while if we are careful.”

It was cause for full out laughter at the idea either of them would actually be careful. Doc had once said their idea of being careful was getting home without any broken bones.

They mounted up and moved slowly north, riding in the grass beside the trail. The tracks made by the wagon wheels were easy to follow. Fifteen minutes later they spotted the wagon off to the left near the creek. It was empty.

“Why would the thieves abandon the wagon?” Jericho said mostly talking to himself.”

“Yes. A wagon could be sold for money, couldn’t it?” Red Eagle asked.

“Fifty, maybe sixty dollars.”

“How much is that?”

Jericho smiled. How in the world did a guy answer a question like that to someone who had no idea about money? He offered a very practical response.

“Breakfast at the restaurant for both of us for three months – three moons.”

“Wow!”

Jericho still smiled when his brother used the slang expressions he had picked up from him.

"I am hungry," Red Eagle said. "Rabbit?"

"If you want rabbit we can have rabbit. I was thinking more chocolate cake and apple pie back in town."

Without any words indicating agreement, Red Eagle turned Golden toward town and gave the horse his head. Jericho and Lightning followed. It became a race to Main Street. Red Eagle, having the Indian's great sense of good sportsmanship, allowed his brother to catch up, but from then on it was every man for himself. One would pull a few yards ahead and then the other. As always when they raced, the two horses enjoyed each other's company so much they didn't like to be separated so neither stayed ahead for long. It was comical and always brought full out laughter to the boys. More than once it had landed one or both of them in the grass.

Lightning had gotten used to being saddle-free on the days they dressed as Indians. He seemed to enjoy the freedom, but never really objected to getting back into the saddle on White Boy days.

The people in the town had become used to the two new look-alike arrivals racing down the street side by side. All ages would stop and look, and wonder about them. Oh, they liked the boys just fine, but they really didn't conform to many of the expectations they had for young men their age there in Red Bend. They were often seen at night way later than reasonable bed times. Sometimes they appeared as Indian, sometimes White. Nobody understood who they lived with or where, and up to then the boys had managed to avoid specific answers. They were as likely to enter Main Street seated backwards on their horses as frontwards – unless, of course they were standing on their horses' backs, twirling lassos above their heads or jumping back and forth from one horse to the other. One thing everybody understood; wherever the boys went they brought smiles, laughter and joy. The parents appreciated the good models they provided their youngsters. The younger boys strove to be like them and the girls offered more than just passing glances at them because – well, because they were boys – cute boys.

They pulled to a stop in front of Sandy's office at the same moment, but no race was over until they touched the door of where ever they were headed. On that occasion, their

right hands reached for the door just as it opened – in. Sandy was coming out. They boys fell flat on their faces into the office. It called for several minutes of roll on the floor laughter.

Once they regained their senses they asked the question they had come to ask.

“We found the wagon. What will be done with it?”

“I suppose Charlie, the owner, will go get it when he recovers from his wound.”

“We’d be glad to bring it back to town for him,” Jericho said. “It would be safer in town, I imagine. The horses are gone. It’s sitting in the grass along the creek bank so we didn’t find any useful foot prints or other clues to the thieves. You have any idea why the bad guys are disguising themselves as Indians?”

“Maybe to avoid detection. Maybe to rile things up between us and the local Indians.”

“Us?” Red Eagle asked.

“Hmm,” Sandy began. “I understand your question. I guess it’s still too easy to divide our Kansas world into bad Indians and good non-Indians in our thinking. I apologize for that, Red Eagle.”

“You do not need to apologize. Indians also think that way, good Indians and bad non-Indians, as you put it. I think it is because we – the two groups – do not know each other. I was taught never to trust a White man because they hated Indians and would surely hurt or kill me. Jericho says he received just the same idea only backwards from the people he lived with. It is a very strange world.”

“Indeed, it is,” Sandy said. “You should hear Doc go on about it.”

And Cilla, I’ll bet,” Jericho added.

“Oh, yes! And Cilla,” Sandy agreed, raising his eyebrows.

“It puts my brother and me in a odd position, doesn’t it,” Jericho said. “We are both white and Indian according to Doc. Does that mean we belong to both groups or to neither group?”

Red Eagle spoke.

“I think the big mistake was when humans started dividing people up into groups in the first place. White Cloud –

a wise man in my village – used to say, ‘All men must recognize we are all brothers, otherwise we will all be destroyed’.”

“He does sound wise,” Jericho said. “I wish I could have known him. I imagine you are very lucky you did.”

“I am. Of all the people in my village, he was the only one who always had time for me. I loved him very much – like a grandfather I suppose.”

* * *

By mid-afternoon the boys were taking Rising Sun’s team north along the trail to retrieve the wagon. Red Eagle and Golden led the team and Jericho followed. They had no intention of being careful because there was (of course) nothing to be careful about.

WRONG! WRONG! WRONG!

///

CHAPTER THREE

Over the Waterfall!

When Red Eagle came to the spot where the wagon had left the trail, he turned off, following it to the left. He looked back at Jericho and hitched his head. Jericho urged Lightning up beside his brother. When they turned to look for the wagon, which, as they recalled mostly sat behind a stand of trees close to the stream, they instead found themselves facing a dozen guns. The faces looked familiar; it was the men Sandy had run out of town earlier – the men who the boys were sure were posing as Indians during their robberies. They had a team already hitched to the wagon and it was in position to be driven back to the trail.

“You again,” the leader said, anger clear in his tone.

It was difficult to determine if he were irritated or figured he was fortunate that he had run into them. There was no doubt how the boys felt. Frightened out of their gourds would pretty well sum it up.

Two of the men moved to take the bridles of their horses to keep them from leaving. Another took charge of the team they had brought. It wasn't the boys' team. It was borrowed. For them that made it even more of a responsibility. They had to think quickly. They each carefully looked over the setting. Jericho spoke to Red Eagle as two men pulled them off their horses.

“Our friends to Sandy on three. One, two, three.”

At that the boys spoke as one.

“Get Sandy.”

They slapped their horses gently but the message was

clear. They reared up, knocking the men who had been tending them to the ground. They turned and galloped wildly back toward town. One man raised his rifle as if to shoot at them. Red Eagle immediately had an arrow in his bow. The man immediately had an arrow in his hand. The horses were soon out of sight around the bend.

The leader of the group took the bow and quiver from Red Eagle and tossed them to the ground. He slapped Red Eagle several times. By then another of the men had Jericho's arms secured behind his back. They were both tied – arms behind them – and set into the back of the wagon.

The leader indicated they would move north along the creek to stay out of sight in case anybody came along the trail looking for the boys. Most of the men rode ahead with only one bringing up the rear. It was a high Livery wagon – the sides a good five feet tall. Only the driver could see them and he, of course, was looking forward.

Jericho moved his legs back underneath him – assuming a kneeling position – so he could reach inside the back of the waistband on his breechclout with his fingers and remove the knife he carried there in its scabbard. He soon had their ropes cut. They had escaped from a wagon before (Book One) so both knew the plan. Jericho looked at his brother and took in a deep breath, puffing out his cheeks. He hoped it made sense to him. Red Eagle nodded.

Jericho wiggled his hand. That caught Red Eagle's attention. Jericho started the countdown with his fingers – one, two, three.

The plan had far more chance of failing than succeeding – even assuming Red Eagle had understood what Jericho was trying to tell him.

They were up and over the side before any of the men recognized what was happening. The boys dashed toward the creek. The first time they had come to the wagon they noticed that the water was deep and ran fast down the slope in the direction of town. The depth had tempted them to swim. Its rapid flow had told them it was best not to.

That time they had no choice. They dived in and submerged, swimming downstream, underwater with the current for as far as one breath would allow. The rapid current

moved them along quickly. They surfaced and looked back to see if they could tell what was going on. They heard loud, angry voices, but could see nothing through the trees and bushes that lined the bank. They were sure the men would not let them go without a search.

They continued to ride the current – looking downstream, faces just above water, arms outstretched to steady them. There were sharp rocks around which they had to maneuver. They realized it was a wonder they hadn't bashed open their skulls while underwater. It crossed their minds that it might be good to reconsider that 'careful' thing, but probably not while they were running – well, swimming – for their lives.

"Oh, oh, Little Brother. Look! We're about to go over a water fall!"

"Keep your feet forward," Red Eagle said. "At the bottom, swim back to the falls."

Jericho thought he understood about the feet forward part. The rest made no sense, but he trusted his brother in all things outdoors.

By the time they reached the edge of the falls, they were traveling along at great speed. The fall to the creek below took their breath away. They landed in a deep pool – some twenty feet below the creek above. The undertow from the falls pulled them deep down toward the bottom. Their lungs ached for a breath as they struggled to the surface. Two heads bobbed above the water, each one gasping for air. They turned back toward the falls. Jericho hesitated just long enough to watch Red Eagle duck through the falls. Frankly, it seemed like a foolhardy move, but he followed him through the falling wall of water. It was like their heads were taking a beating from a hundred clubs.

Once behind it, however, they found just what Red Eagle was counting on – a depression back into the rock that had been carved out from the falling water. In fact, it was more than just a depression; there was an entrance into a full-blown cave some twenty feet or more front to back and side and to side. It was chilly inside with a breeze flowing from the falls toward the rear of the cave. That indicated some sort of opening back there.

The wisdom in Red Eagle's move was immediately apparent to Jericho – a safe hiding place from the bad guys, who, they hoped, would not know to look there. It was clear the cave had been used before – there was a stack of kindling, ashes where there had been fires and empty bottles. The boys were dripping wet and shivering. Red Eagle soon had some of the wood arranged for a fire. Jericho struck the metal end of his knife against a rock and soon a spark started a flame. The tiny flame spread and before long they had a good fire. The smoke rode the breeze toward and out the rear of the cave. The area soon warmed and presently they stopped shivering.

“How long do we hide out in here?” Red Eagle asked.

“Not sure. Long enough so the bad guys give up looking and leave, but not so long that Sandy has to get too worried about us.”

Red Eagle smiled.

“I get the idea that Sandy is always worrying about us.”

It was worth nods and smiles. Red Eagle was right, of course. Those responsible for 12-year-old boys are always worried about them.

Having to remember that what they did affected other people was new to both boys – nobody had really ever cared what happened to them before. It meant two main things: For one, they needed to plan ahead so they didn't unnecessarily worry the adults in their lives. For another, it was really wonderful to be that important – precious – to others. That was something they truly never had expected would ever happen for them.

After several hours, they decided to make their way back outside and see what was going on. Red Eagle chuckled.

“Now that we are all dry and warm, we have to go through the falls and get wet and cold again.”

“At least the sunshine outside will help on both counts – dry us and warm us. I see a definite advantage to the Cherokee's summer clothing. Not much to get wet and quick to dry!”

Red Bend was a half hour south – probably only twenty minutes at the rate the horses had been traveling. Another

thirty to get back. That left an extra hour in which Sandy didn't know what had happened to them. He would understand some of it – the wagon would not have been where they told him it was so he would know it had been taken away. Who knew where it was? Most likely he would understand the bad guys, knew. Therefore, it would be a good guess it had been the bad guys who had taken it and were probably, also, responsible for the boys' disappearance. He would not have met the wagon on the trail south, so he would know it must have traveled north. At least that's what they hoped was going through the deputy's mind. And, of course, Rising Sun's team should still be in the area – without the boys. The bad guys had left it behind.

If Sandy put all that together and went north after the bad guys, it only took him further away from the boys. They headed directly to the trail where they stopped looking in each direction.

“North or South, Red Eagle?”

“If the horses found Sandy, he is likely north of us by now, right?”

“Right. We go north, then.”

They took off at a good trot. A breeze had picked up from the South – good news, bad news. It would eventually dry them off, but as it did it made them shiver-all-over-again-cold.

The boys ran on for fifteen minutes. At that point they heard horses coming at them from the north. They hurried into the trees and brush off to their right. It only took a moment to determine what was happening; Golden and Lightning had apparently caught their scent on the breeze and had turned around and come in search of them.

“That proves it,” Jericho said as they moved out onto the trail to meet them.

“What?”

“Our horses are smarter than half the guys who drink at the saloon on Saturday night.”

Red Eagle didn't think it was as funny as Jericho, but he managed a chuckle and smile. The brothers always supported each other.

“Come now,” Jericho said as they mounted up. “That

was very funny.”

They turned and started back north at an even gallop. Red Eagle responded.

“I guess I do not see anything humorous about people getting drunk – they willingly leave the best part of themselves behind.”

“Best part?”

“The ability to make good decisions – one of the things that sets human beings apart from the animals.”

“I can’t argue with that. Thanks for pointing it out. I guess it’s sad instead of funny to see a grown man fall flat on his face, giving up his ability to control himself.”

The discussion didn’t continue, but they would certainly talk about such things again.

Red Eagle gave Golden his head and let him make his way back to where he had left Sandy. He figured it couldn’t be far considering the scent on the breeze thing. He was correct. They almost immediately met Sandy and two deputies heading south with the team that belonged to Rising Sun. They all stopped.

“Found the team, but not the wagon. Also found your quiver and bow on the ground, Red Eagle. If you left it as a clue, good going. If not, at least it helped.”

Sandy pointed to his saddle bag. Red Eagle retrieved them.

“What do you know that I don’t?” Sandy asked.

The boys filled him in with all the details. Sandy shot them ‘the look’.

“We realize we could have been more cautious,” Jericho said trying to get ahead of any bawling out that might be in their future. “It has been a good lesson for us.”

Sandy shook his head. It didn’t mean they shouldn’t have been more cautious. It meant he was somewhat amused and dumbfounded (amazed) at how the boys could spin even the most irresponsible of their behaviors to make themselves come out looking good.

“I suppose you wouldn’t approve of my brother and me riding on north to see what we can find.”

“I suppose you are right.”

Sandy pointed south along the trail. They started back

toward Red Bend.

“The Sheriff came in early – he’s at the office. He says there have been a half dozen Indian raids south east of Sandy Ford where his main office is. The people down there are really on edge – ready to shoot any redskin that comes in sight.”

“Clearly our skin is not red, Sandy,” Red Eagle said, sounding a bit put out.

“Sorry. Old habits die hard. I meant no disrespect.”

Red Eagle had heard the term many times, and it usually did imply disrespect. Jericho was ashamed to admit he had even used the term – not realizing it was disrespectful at the time, however.

The tense situation across the territory remained; the bad guys were stirring things up between the settlers and the Indians. The boys hoped the dangerous sentiment (feeling) didn’t spread north to Red Bend. Regardless of how they dressed, the towns’ people knew Indian blood ran through their veins.

“Why do you think the bad guys are doing it?” Jericho asked aiming the question at Sandy.

“Hard to tell. Once we can find out who they are and where they’re from we may get some idea. Now, I wish I’d questioned them further when I had them in my office.”

“What are the fake Indians – the impostors – stealing?”

“Money and things that can be easily turned into money – like gold and silver. Sometimes nothing at all – very strange.”

“Do you think there is just this one group or could this be one of many?” Red Eagle asked.

“You are just full of good questions today, son. I’m sure the Sheriff hasn’t thought of it as anything other than this one small band of outlaws. I’m thinking perhaps the governor needs to be alerted to the possibility you brought up.”

“Wow!” Jericho said. “From a couple of kids out for a leisurely swim to the Governor, all within a couple of hours. I’d say we’re having some day.”

“If these men are as dangerous as they seem to be, I’d say you are very lucky to be alive and be able to look back on your day,” Sandy said. “You have clearly riled them up. I’m

thinking I better assign a deputy to stay with you.”

That was certainly not something the boys would allow – their secret cave, their secret gold mine, their secret spot from where they watched the girls sun themselves at the creek. Oh, no! They would not put up with a Deputy!

CHAPTER FOUR

Birthday Cakes Don't Need Candles

Back in town they dropped off the team and wagon at the livery. Sandy went on to his office. The boys stayed to help Cal with the team.

"Hey, what's going on with the guns and holsters," Jericho asked. "Never seen you wear them before."

"Never have. It's my birthday today – eighteen. Back when my dad was alive he had two rules for me about side arms and I've kept to them both. First, never strap on a gun to wear in public until your eighteen, and, never strap one on until you're faster than everybody in town."

"You have been practicing, then?" Red Eagle asked.

"Since I was your age."

"We'd like to see a demonstration sometime," Jericho said glancing at his brother.

Red Eagle nodded enthusiastically.

"How about this evening? I'll meet you out at your place."

The boys looked at each other. Jericho spoke.

"At our place?"

He paused waiting for a response.

"Oh, my. I think I just slipped up big time," Cal said. "Sorry. I need to explain. Let's see, here. Well, I like to fish at the first bend in Red Creek east of town just south of Little Red Rock. One day, shortly after you guys arrived, I was riding out there to swim and catch supper. I noticed you two up at Little Red Rock. I saw several things that seemed odd. It was just the two of you – no horses to get you back to where

you came from. And then the really odd thing. It appeared that you were walking right through the solid rock wall – like ghosts or something. Then you just disappeared. I was mystified so I rode up to take a look. I stopped thirty yards out and walked up the slope.

“I knew that nobody knew where you lived and figured it wasn’t any of my business – guys are due their privacy. I even thought about it as a possibility right then, but figured if something bad had happened to you I needed to check on it out. So, I walked up to the hill.

“I’ve lived right here in Red Bend for eighteen years and I’ve been all over the territory, but I never stumbled onto that cave – your cave – and as far as I know, neither has anybody else. When I saw the entrance and heard your voices inside, I didn’t go any further. Like I said, that should be your secret if that’s how you want it to be. I’ve kicked myself ever since I snooped like that. We okay?”

“Two things,” Jericho said. “First, we appreciate that when you got concerned about our safety you checked on us. That’s what friends do. Second, we don’t know anybody who we’d feel safer trusting our secret with than you. We’re okay.”

“And third,” Red Eagle added, “When you come out this evening plan to eat the evening meal with us.”

“My girlfriend asked me eat at her place this evening, but that’s not until seven. I could probably manage a snack at least.”

“Didn’t know you had a girlfriend,” Jericho said.

“Sarah Beth, the school teacher’s daughter. As soon as I can find a better job we plan on getting married. Not many jobs in these parts except at ranches and I don’t want to get married and then go on a two-month cattle drive and have to leave her alone. Something will come up.”

The arrangements were made – well, some of them. The boys left and stopped at the general store where they placed an order they would pick up later on their way of town.

They checked on Rising Sun and his grandmother. Her temperature was going down and Doc felt good about the prognosis (likely outcome). Rising Sun had fallen asleep.

They crossed the street to Sandy’s. He directed his first remarks at the Sheriff.

“Sheriff, these are the boys I was telling you about – Jericho and Red Eagle. Look at them closely because next time you see them they both may be white boys or maybe one of each. I’ll explain later.”

“I understand you boys have a theory about the Indian raids south of here,” the Sheriff said.

“And the livery robbery up here and the murder of a horsemen the day we arrived in the area,” Jericho said.

The Sheriff continued.

“I brought a sample of the arrows that have been left after the raids, although the thieves provide most of their fire power with rifles and six shooters. Once Sandy told me about your idea, it all began making sense – things fell into place. I had wondered why bands of Indians would be shooting arrows if they were armed with guns. Now I see the arrows may only be a way to implicate the Indians.”

He took an arrow out of the drawer.

“Sure looks like the picture you drew.”

“I have the arrow we found,” Red Eagle said. “It is outside in my saddle bag.”

He left to get it.

Golden and Lightning had followed them to the Sheriff’s office so it was right out front. He reentered the office and handed it to the Sheriff.

“They sure look alike. Where did you get yours?” he asked.

“Out of the back of a dead rider we came across as we were riding the north trail east of town on our way to Red Bend the day we arrived in the area.”

“Tell him about the bullet hole,” Sandy said.

Red Eagle explained how the rider had first been shot with a rifle and then the arrow pounded into the hole to make it appear it had been the arrow that had done the damage.

“Clever, I must say,” the Sheriff said. “How in the world did you think to look for the bullet?”

“It was the arrow,” Red Eagle continued. “The back end of the shaft was smashed like the top of a stake that had been driven into the ground. Also, it was the wrong kind of an arrow head – much too large – like for deer or buffalo. Also, the whole arrow was . . . What’s the word Jericho?”

“Fake.”

“Yes, fake. It was like no tribe’s real arrow. The shaft was even made out of pine.”

“You boys are quite the detectives. Better sign them up, Sandy. You do need a new deputy, you know.”

With that, the boy’s, as one, understood two problems had just been solved – provided they could just convince Sandy. Jericho decided to sneak up on the first one.

“Did you know this is Cal’s birthday – eighteen today?”

“No, I didn’t,” Sandy said.

“He’s looking for a different job, you know so he and his girl can get married.”

“Cal’s a good boy – well, man now I suppose,” Sandy said.

“You ever seen him draw and shoot?” Red Eagle asked.

“Yes, I have. Taught him myself. He’s faster than I am, now. Glad he’s one of the good guys around here I can tell you that for sure.”

The Sheriff winked at the boys and spoke to Sandy.

“Do you have any idea what the boys are suggesting, deputy?”

“Suggesting. I don’t understand.”

The Sheriff swung his arm indicating for the boys to lay it out.

“Cal needs a job, you need a deputy, Cal has always said he was going to be Marshal of the entire territory someday, he’s excellent with a gun and has better common sense about things than most.”

“What? Oh! Oh, yes. It’s hard for me to think of him as anything but a little boy playing with wooden guns. It is a grand idea. I’ll talk to him later.”

“Then there is just one more thing, Deputy Sandy.”

Sandy turned to the Sheriff.

“They only call me by my title when they want a favor or need help getting out of trouble.”

He turned back to the boys. Jericho continued.

“You know that deputy that you said you needed to assign to us until this whole Indian Impersonation thing is cleared up. Well, we think he’d be great – young, understands

kids, an easy first assignment . . .”

Sandy turned to the Sheriff again.

“They are often exasperating (frustrating), but consistently have very good ideas. It’s why I keep them around.”

He turned back to the boys.

“I’ll see about that as well. You let me do all the talking to Cal about everything, understand. It’s my place, not yours.”

“Our lips are sealed, Deputy,” Jericho said. “And there will not be a bill for all our good efforts on your behalf.”

Red Eagle addressed the Sheriff.

“It is at this point Sandy usually flicks the back of his hand at us and tells us to skedaddle.”

Extending the humor, Sandy flicked the back of his hand at them and told them to skedaddle. It was worth chuckles and smiles. The boys left.

“We really are good, you know,” Jericho said.

“Well, you are, at least, and you are rapidly infecting me.”

Jericho laughed.

“I think you meant influencing you.”

“No, I really think I meant infecting me. I’m pretty sure every time you talk me into doing something like that my temperature rises. That’s infection. Ask Doc.”

It was worth another tussle in the street. Again, neither won – neither ever intended to win. It was a way they could say, ‘I love you’ without using the words.

By that time, it was mid-afternoon. They picked up their package from the store. It had already been a very busy day. They set a leisurely (slow) pace on the way home. At the opening to the cave they removed the bridles, blankets and saddle bags from their horses and let them go for a run. Red Eagle had been training them to come to the boys when they whistled for them. They would call them in later if they come in on their own. They knew there would be a portion of oats for them about sundown and they never missed that treat!

Inside, they both read for a while. Red Eagle had shown himself to be a fast learner and was already reading the same books as Jericho – sometimes he needed help, but his brother was always there to provide it.

“You’ve learned to read English much faster than I’ve learned to speak Cherokee,” Jericho said.

“It has been more important for me to read than for you to Cherokee.”

Jericho smiled at his brother’s phrase although he had to agree. There would be a lifetime in which to learn Cherokee.

When Red Eagle went outside to check on the horses he saw Cal Galloping along the trail in their direction. They spied each other at the same moment and waved, arms back and forth over their heads.

As Cal dismounted, the other horses arrived and spent some time getting acquainted with the new horse – a big gray stallion (male horse).

“Cal’s here,” Red Eagle called in through the opening.

Jericho was right there. Cal’s gray followed Golden and Lightning inside. They were all thirsty. The boys remained outside.

“So, how do we do this draw-and-shoot demonstration we’ve been waiting for?” Jericho asked.

Cal looked around.

“Let’s line up six, five-inch-tall stones on that big flat rock. I’ll stand back about twenty-five yards and when you say go, I’ll draw and fire.”

They arranged things in that way and stood back eager to watch.

Jericho counted down: “Ready, set, draw.”

Six crisp shots rang out in quick succession – Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow!

All six stones were gone. The boys clapped. Cal immediately re-loaded and then holstered his gun. He had another suggestion.

“This time set up the stones in six different place – different heights and different distances away.”

They were soon set up.

The boys stepped back.

Jericho counted down.

Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow!

Again, all six had been disintegrated.

The boys expressed their amazement and admiration.

The demonstration was over and they went inside.

Cal was impressed by their cave. The boys pointed out all its features. They had a small fire going and soon slices of ham were warming on a metal grate they arranged about a foot above the flames. Red Eagle had potatoes baking in the coals.

They talked and learned things about Red Bend they hadn't known. It began as a one building trading post and it wasn't until the stage line decided to include it as a stop that the settlement began to grow. It had recently become a hub for the stage company with several coaches arriving from all directions every day. The stores there supplied over fifty farms and ranches in the area – some of them small and some of them large. Dozens of cattle drives moved herds north to Nebraska and the Dakotas to graze in the spring and then back south to the rail head at Sandy Ford or back to Texas in the fall. The ranchers and cow hands spent lots of money in Red Bend – and that was a good thing – but they also were a rowdy lot and caused many headaches for Sandy and his deputies.

“I want to thank you guys for talking to Sandy and the Sheriff about me. They offered me a job as a deputy. My girl isn't much for it – the danger involved scares her. I suppose I can understand that. I told her about it after I told Sandy I'd take it. That probably was backwards, wasn't it?”

“Depends which is more important to your life's journey,” Red Eagle said as if quoting some wise Indian saying.

“I could quit, but I won't.”

“Then you have chosen your journey, haven't you?” Red Eagle added.

“I guess I have. Life's confusing, you know.”

He looked from one of the boys to the other as they all sat near the fire.

“I said that as if neither of you had ever had anything confusing in your lives. I didn't intend it that way.”

“We didn't think you meant it that way,” Jericho said. “Food's ready.”

They had tin plates and knives and forks and spoons and cups for the fresh lemonade Red Eagle had made.

“Ice in lemonade? Clear out here?” Cal asked.

They explained about the ice box and the cart they had made to transport it.

Presently, they were finished – Cal had eaten much more than a snack. The boys wondered if the dinner with his girl had been cancelled in light of the disagreement. Jericho removed a red and white checked cloth from what it had been hiding just off to the side.

“Happy Birthday!” they said as one.

“A birthday cake? I’ve never had a birthday cake before.”

“We sort of figured that,” Jericho said.

“Neither have we – Cherokees do not have birthday cakes,” Red Eagle explained.

Jericho went on to explain.

“Read what it says. Mrs. Olson at the general store decorated it all special for us.”

“Happy Birthday, Cal, J. and R.E. Pretty nice, sharing my first cake with you guys. It’s just about the most thoughtful thing anybody’s ever done for me.”

He sniffled, but let a single tear find its way down his cheek. The boys looked away. For some reason boys believed there was nothing wrong with a few tears, but the accepted reaction was to look away and pretend they weren’t seen. It was a guy thing. (Most girls would say a DUMB guy thing.)

“Hope you like chocolate with chocolate frosting. Sorry we forgot about candles,” Jericho said.

“Can’t eat candles!”

They chuckled. Humorously, Red Eagle – never having had contact with such a cake before, cut it into three equal sections assuming each of them would eat an equal share. They did!

“I assume we can all agree it was the best Birthday Cake any of us has ever had,” Red Eagle said hoping it would be funny.

It was.

“I have a idea,” Cal said, turning serious. “Since we’ve missed way too many cakes in our lives, let’s agree to share one together on the first Sunday of every month until we catch

up. We'll decorate them just like this one."

Jericho did some quick calculations in his head.

"That will be twelve for Red Eagle, eighteen for you, and twelve for me – that's forty-two months."

"And if we add in the next four years that it will take to have all those celebrations, that's another dozen," Cal said.

Clearly there was going to be a LOT of cake in the boys' futures. They seemed to feel up to the task.

///

CHAPTER FIVE

String Them Up From the Nearest Tree!

The boys arranged a place near the fire for Cal's bedroll since Sandy said he was to stick to them like ink to a newspaper. The horses seemed to get along well. Cal's horse – 'Gray', as it turned out – was clearly not as comfortable inside the cave as he was outside, but was willing to stay there overnight provided he could stand close to the entrance and keep Cal in sight.

The next morning, they arrived in town in time for breakfast with Doc and Cilla – hardly a coincidence.

"So, how is Rising Sun's grandmother," Red Eagle asked Doc even before the three of them had taken seats.

"Doing very well. They are going to leave for home later this morning if her temperature is still down. He said to tell you he wanted to see you before he left."

The boys acknowledged the message with nods.

"You know our new shadow here, 'Ink Boy', Jericho said referring to Cal and thinking the inside joke was hilarious. The three young men enjoyed it. Doc and Cilla enjoyed watching the boys enjoying it.

Eventually, Doc spoke again.

"Sandy says you boys have the Indian raids all figured out."

"Figuring them out and stopping them are very different," Red Eagle said. "It has stirred up a lot of resentment for the Indians between here and south to the state border with the Indian Territory (it later became the 46th state, Oklahoma). The Sheriff even reported some Indians

who live off the reservation just up over the border into Kansas have been burned out. I do not understand how people can be that way – act without any proof.”

There really was no adequate answer to that dark side of human nature, so nobody tried.

“We think there are several bands of impostors,” Jericho said. “The raids have been so far apart in distance and so close together in time that one band couldn’t have gotten from one place to another that fast.”

“The Sheriff agrees with us,” Red Eagle added.

“The raids are moving north,” Cal said. “At first, they were all down along the border, but in the past week they’ve even been north of Red Bend and we’re nearly in the middle of the State. There are hardly even any Indians living up this way so it’s hard for me to understand why they’d use that method around here – try to make us think it was Indians doing the bad stuff.”

“There are a growing number of small-minded folks who want to require all Indians to live on government reservations,” Cilla said. “The Kansas City Star (a large newspaper) has run articles about it. Spreading the raids throughout the plains states might be a way to make it appear that is the only safe way to handle them. In the least, it’s a good way to expand and spread anti-Indian sentiment (feelings) throughout the territory.”

“Hear any rumblings here in Red Bend?” Jericho asked.

Doc looked at Cilla who would be the one to know about such things.

“None I’ve heard about, of course nobody here in town has been hurt by the raiders.”

“Do you know who is behind the effort to return the Indian’s to the reservations?” Cal asked.

“I’ve heard only one name,” Cilla said. “A man named Waterson. He’s a big rancher just east of Wichita. Not sure how he got such a burr under his saddle, but he sure seems to hate them.”

“Is it an organized movement or just Waterson?” Doc asked.

“I understand there are newspaper ads beginning to be run in the bigger papers across the state by a group calling

themselves, The Association for Cultural Purity – ACP for short.”

“Please explain the words,” Red Eagle asked.

Cilla responded.

“You know association – a group of people bound together by some common interest or activity like a quilting club or hiking club. Cultural has to do with the traditions and ways of a group of people – like I am sure you and Jericho have found differences in the ways you have been taught to live – what your people believe is right and wrong and how things should and shouldn’t be done for example. Purity in this instance means untouched or unchanged by any other culture, any other group’s beliefs.”

“So,” Red Eagle began, thinking out loud, “ACP people don’t want to try out anybody else’s ways or ideas. They want to just keep to their own ways – keep their ways pure – never mix other new ways into their old ways – never take the opportunity to improve themselves.”

It had been offered partly as a statement and partly a question to make sure he understood.

“Well stated,” Cilla said nodding.

“More than just not wanting the mix, many people are afraid of the different ways,” Doc said.

“I understand,” Red Eagle said. “The old Cherokee people often say something that means, ‘We must keep to our fathers’ ways’. It is often said to young men who suggest changes.”

“Most cultural and religious groups act like that, Red Eagle,” Doc said. “It’s like they believe no other group can possibly know anything about living that is better than what they already know. They enjoy remaining ignorant.”

“I used to believe that way,” Red Eagle said.

“Me, too,” Jericho said, “before I found my brother – that sounds odd, doesn’t it – ‘found my brother’? Anyway, I believe my life is a billion times better since I’ve had the chance to learn about the Indian ways – well, at least the Cherokee ways since that’s the only real contact I’ve had. I can think about things in ways I never could have before because I didn’t even know such possibilities existed. It’s like Red Eagle told me – it is like we have twice the possibilities

that we did before we met. We have to do something to stop all of this 'against the Indians' stuff."

Everybody at the table nodded. It was easy to agree to it. It would be much harder to do anything about it. Hate had a way of spreading faster than love and understanding.

Sandy entered the restaurant and approached the back table.

"All of Red Bend's great thinkers right here at one table. What about that?" he said smiling.

"It's true of course," Jericho said, "now that you've arrived."

Sandy turned to the Doc and Cilla.

"A compliment. What does the boy need from me?"

They chuckled and Sandy took a seat. He continued looking at Cal and the boys.

"The Sheriff is arranging escorts for Rising Sun when he starts back to his reservation with his grandmother. I volunteered Cal to accompany them as far south as Sandy Ford and since Cal is required to stay with you boys, I also volunteered you."

"We'll be happy to help. He's a great kid. Is the Sheriff expecting the IMPs will go after him again?"

"IMPs?"

"Indian Impostors," Jericho explained. "It's our shorthand for them. It takes too long to always have to say, 'the bad men who are posing as Indians in order to rile up negative sentiment against them so the government will confine them to their reservations back in the Indian Territory.'"

"When you explain it that way, I can see the advantage to IMPs. You guys keep in touch with Doc so you'll be ready when they leave. Expenses for the trip will be on the Sheriff. Keep track."

Sandy left. The table fell into quiet conversation about nothing in particular – who got married, who died, who moved to town, who moved away and things like that. When they finished eating, Red Eagle said, humorously: "We will let the bank pay for all our breakfasts this morning."

He meant, of course, they would be paid for from the boy's bank account. He still didn't fully understand about how white men's finances worked. It was not high on his list of

things he wanted to learn. He wanted to learn about germs and steam engines, and the telegraph, and the President, and newspapers, places called Europe and Africa, oceans and the ships that sailed them, and the history of the white man – his list went on and on.

At any rate, the boys accompanied Doc and Cilla back across the street to check on Rising Sun's Grandmother. Doc pronounced her fit to travel so the boys and Ink Boy – that is, Deputy Cal – went to the livery stable to prepare the team and wagon. Ten minutes later they were waiting at the rear of the newspaper office. Red Eagle had added a blanket on top of a deep bed of straw in the wagon to make the ride more comfortable for the old woman. The Missionary who had accompanied them was returning to Kansas City, so Rising Sun would be in charge on their journey south. Cal would teach about the art of driving a team on the way.

The boys explained to their new friend about the escort that had been arranged for him all the way to the northern border of the Indian Territories. Red Eagle translated his response.

"I do not understand. I am very confused. I have been taught white men have always been hurtful to my people. They stole our land and now they force us to live in places that are foreign to our ways. Why would you provide guards to protect us?"

Red Eagle answered him. The others had no idea what he was saying. He would tell them later. Whatever it was lit up the boy's face and he nodded. That, the others believed they understood. [Red Eagle had explained that just like among Indians, most of the white men were good people, but also like among Indians, there were some bad white people. He said he hoped Rising Sun would not judge all white men by the few that had been hurtful to him and his people.]

With Grandmother comforted into her new soft bed, they were ready to leave. Red Eagle offered a shrill, two-finger whistle and within moments the boy's three horses rounded the corner and trotted up the alley to meet them. That morning Jericho was a white boy, Red Eagle was Indian, and Cal was, well, Cal – the recent owner of a bright new shiny deputy's star.

“You keep shining that thing and you’ll wear it out,” Jericho joked.

They moved out and were soon on the road traveling due south along Sunday Creek toward Sandy Ford. It was a bright warm day, but the unexpected breeze made it relatively pleasant. Rising Sun turned out to be a top-notch wagon handler. As they talked with Rising Sun, through Red Eagle, they learned many interesting things about his tribe – the Arapaho.

They had been on the trail no more than an half hour when it happened.

‘Thud.’

Something hit the side of the wagon. Cal was driving, giving Rising Sun’s arms and hands a rest. Red Eagle and Jericho were riding their horses.

“An arrow!” Jericho called out seeing it still quivering where it lit far to the front on the right side.

Red Eagle and Golden moved to the front of the team and led it up a gentle slope to a spot behind a rock outcropping. Cal jumped to the ground and drew a gun. Two more arrows flew in their direction from the clump of trees just to the west across the road.

“The fakes,” Red Eagle said upon examining them.

Rising Sun pointed across the road.

The others saw it, several men on foot, dressed as Indians – well, sort of.

“Not Indian,” Red Eagle said.

He motioned for Rising Sun to follow him and the two of them disappeared on foot into the small stand of trees to the north – the direction from which they had come.

Cal and Jericho moved to a position between the wagon and the rear of the outcropping – six-shooter and knife in hand. They waited. The faces of several more men appeared in the brush across the road. The barrels of rifles were also in evidence. They waited some more to see what the IMPs had in mind.

“Why have they stopped? What’s going on?” Jericho asked.

“I imagine some of them are circling around behind us to get us in a crossfire. We really need to get out of here, but

on their horses', they will catch us in no time."

Suddenly, there was a racket from across the road.

"What's that?" Cal asked.

"I have a pretty good idea," Jericho said.

His 'pretty good idea' proved to be 'pretty correct'. A moment later, down the road from the north, came Red Eagle and Rising Sun each atop a strange horse with four more tied to a long rope following behind each of them. They were off at a full-out gallop, riding low against the horses' necks. Red Eagle whistled and the boys' three horses reared and ran off in pursuit of the others.

"Good going, Indian Boys!" Jericho called out, waving his hat. "Now we can get out of here. They have taken the IMPs' horses so they can't follow us."

"You handle the wagon, Jericho. I'll lay a few rounds into the trees to hold them in place."

Cal knelt in back with Grandmother. Jericho mounted the wagon seat, untied the reins and with a flip of the leather they were soon on their way again. There were a few shots from the woods, but none came close.

Jericho kept the team to a good gallop for the first ten minutes. After twenty, they met the other boys heading back up the road toward them on Golden and Lightning. Gray, Cal's horse, which had left with the others, was piled high with saddle bags. Jericho slowed, but didn't stop. The boys took up places alongside him. Red Eagle began the explanation.

"They had their horses tethered to ropes between trees. You saw what we did. The horses are now scattered. The saddles are in the creek. We brought the saddle bags along just in case. Just in case of what I'm really not sure. Anyway, we have ten of them on Gray."

"Let's toss them into the wagon," Cal said. "We'll examine them later. It was a good thing to do, by the way. They may tell us lots of things and leave the IMPs high and dry for supplies."

"I'm hoping they contain some lead about who they are or at least where they're from," Jericho said.

Rising Sun went immediately to his grandmother and they talked. He was apparently explaining to her what had happened. Jericho had to ask him a question (through Red

Eagle, of course).

“Your grandmother didn’t appear to be upset or fearful throughout the whole thing. I don’t understand.”

“My people have a saying: ‘When there is nothing you can do, do nothing.’ That includes worrying and being fearful.”

“I wish you could stay around, Rising Sun,” Jericho said. “I think you have a lot to teach me.”

Rising Sun turned to him and smiled a far bigger smile than they had seen from him. Then, in perfect English he said:

“And I can see you have a lot to teach me.”

“What’s going on, here?” Jericho asked clearly puzzled. English?”

Rising Sun continued – in English.

“I do not understand very much Cherokee, but my missionary has taught me much English. We have another saying: ‘Never show your enemy more than you must in order to survive.’ Early on I believed you were my enemy so I showed no more than I needed to in order to survive. Now I know you are my friends. What I have is yours if you ever need it.”

His grandmother chuckled, having known what was going on all along, of course.

Cal turned to Jericho.

“You just be happy that you weren’t in Rising Sun’s shoes, Jericho.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Can anybody who knows you even imagine that you could possibly keep quiet for three whole days?”

The laughter continued for some time. Rising Sun told the joke to his grandmother. She had a response.

“Grandmother says she was wondering if his wick ever burns out.”

* * *

They delivered the wagon and its precious cargo safely to a deputy at Sandy Ford who would stick with them to the border with the Indian Territory. It would be less than 100 miles from there on south to their reservation.

At that point, the three boys only had to navigate their way back north through a dozen very angry IMPs who, they

were sure by then, would be happy to string them up from the nearest tree.

///

CHAPTER SIX

The Wolves Eyes Shone in the Campfire Light

The boys circled east and then north hoping to avoid the IMPs and it was eight p.m. when they finally entered town at the bend in Red Creek. Sandy was interested in Cal's report, which had, in all truth, been mostly delivered by Jericho and Red Eagle.

"If you boys continue to aggravate your IMPs, we'll soon need the cavalry to protect you," he said.

"We have a question, Sandy," Jericho said. "Is it Cal's job to tell us where we can and cannot go or just go with us wherever we decide to go?"

"The question scares me, but his job is not to control you. And, having said that I'm already regretting it. He's wise for his age. I hope you will listen to any cautions he may offer."

"You just don't worry your pretty little head about us," Jericho said. "We've been doing dumb things for twelve years and we're still around to tell about them."

"Speak for yourself, Same Face. I've seldom done dumb things – until I met you."

"I'm proud I've been able to be such a good influence on you, Little Brother."

Had they been outside an all-out, roll across the street, tussle would have been in order. They all understood it had just been put on hold.

"I'm starved," Cal said.

"Me, too," Jericho said emphasizing his answer by patting his stomach.

“We, too,” Red Eagle said attempting a joke – it got a round of chuckles. He still had some work to do when it came to making jokes.

“Home or restaurant?” Jericho asked.

Red Eagle turned to Cal.

“That really wasn’t a question, you know. My brother’s questions are often strong suggestions in disguise. I have learned to just ignore them and follow him.”

“Supper’s on the Sheriff, this evening,” a voice said from behind them as the outside door opened.

It was the Sheriff.

“I trust your trip south was uneventful.”

Sandy addressed the Sheriff.

“Nothing these two kids ever do is uneventful. They have been known to get into trouble while they are sleeping. I’ll fill you in later. Short version – attacked by a barrage of arrows, stolen horses, saddles in the creek and a mountain of saddlebags on the floor over there in the corner.”

The Sheriff turned to the boys.

“Bloodshed?”

“No, Sir,” Cal answered.

“I always assume it has been a successful mission when my men come back reporting no bloodshed. Good work.”

They took a few minutes to search the saddle bags. There were dozens of the fake arrows, several sets of buckskins, lots of ammunition, and documents from the Waterson Ranch at Wichita. None of those were really incriminating, however.

They ate at the restaurant and were back at their cave by ten o’clock. It was dark except for the half moon. The dark red rock absorbed the heat of the day and it was always warmer close to the tall, red, hill. The horses went inside to get drinks. The boys sat outside retelling their day and making plans.

“You know, Sandy and the Sheriff would be against this plan,” Cal said.

“You feel better now that you’ve said that?” Jericho asked with a smile.

“Yes, well, better that I’ve warned you, but terrified

about what might happen.”

The plan was to set out for the Waterson Ranch – the Flying W – east of Wichita. It would be a long day’s ride – eighteen hours with luck. They would leave at daybreak. Neither the boys nor Cal really knew where it was, but they would find it.

Gray stuck his head outside and whinnied. Red Eagle commented.

“I think your mother is calling you in for the night, Cal.”

They laughed themselves inside. It was pitch dark. After some bumping into each other and fumbling around – which they also thought was hilarious – they soon had a small fire going. They swam, mostly to wash away the dust from the road and were soon asleep.

Breakfast the next morning consisted of everything in the ice chest that might spoil – milk, sausage, and eggs. They were nearly out of ice. It would be at the top of their list upon returning.

“I think you two would be safer if you dressed like white boys today,” Cal said. “If Waterson is crusading against Indians, it seems prudent.”

“Prudent?” the brothers said as one.

Jericho continued.

“Did you recently eat a dictionary?”

“It means . . .”

“I know what it means,” Jericho responded – sensible or cautious – we’ve just never heard you use words of that caliber.”

“I’m trying to keep up with you two. Every morning Cilla gives me a new word for the day. Yesterday’s was prudent. Since nothing you two did yesterday was either sensible or cautious, I didn’t have any opportunities to use it.”

The sky was just coming alive in the east as they galloped down the slope from the cave. They crossed the creek and headed cross country, south east.

“You been to Wichita, Cal?” Jericho asked.

“Yeah. Several times. It’s a gazillion times bigger than Red Bend. Has a railroad depot (station) and trains come and go all day long. The streets are always full of people on horses and in buggies.”

Jericho had spent a good portion of his life in cities, but he didn't comment, just letting Cal be the expert and tell all about it. Red Eagle was interested – it was all new to him.

It was jerky and hardtack (dry biscuits) for lunch – they didn't want to take time to hunt and cook rabbits. By sunset they had the city in view ahead. They had been following the Arkansas River south east.

“Let's camp here for the night,” Red Eagle suggested. “The horses are tired and hot.”

“I'm tired and hot,” Cal said.

“I'll go find food,” Red Eagle said.

He uncovered his quiver and bow – white boys didn't carry that sort of equipment so he had hidden it – from his open saddle bags and slipped off into the fading light. Within a few minutes, he was back with two large jackrabbits. Cal had a fire blazing and Jericho had seen to the horses near the water.

They talked as they ate.

“I think we should locate the ranch first,” Jericho said. “It's huge so I imagine anybody we meet in town will be able to direct us to it. Then, we can spend a little time looking over the city. If the ranch is really east of Wichita we can probably ride right through town on our way to it.”

The plan was set. They positioned their bedrolls around the fire and turned in.

Near mid-night the horses became uneasy. Golden appeared at the fire and nuzzled Red Eagle. He woke up the others.

“The horses sense trouble,” he said. “Probably a wolf or coyote. Let's build up the fire and bring the horses in closer.”

Cal picked up his rifle. Red Eagle whistled and Lightning and Gray appeared.

“There!” Red Eagle said pointing. “Eyes in the dark brightened by the flames. How far away?” he asked, still struggling with white man's measurements over distances.”

“No more than twenty yards,” Cal said. “Shall I shoot it?”

“No need to do that,” Red Eagle said sounding surprised at the suggestion.

He selected a long, substantial stick from the wood they had gathered and caught one end on fire. He walked slowly in the direction of the eyes, moving the flame in an irregular path in front of him. The wolf slowly backed away and eventually turned and ran off into the darkness. Red Eagle returned.

“Are you crazy?” Jericho said clearly upset.

Red Eagle attempted an explanation.

“Wild animals that have had experience with fire – like the grass fires that often burn around here – fear it. When they see that the fire follows them, they run off in a hurry. That’s what this one did. It was a mother. We don’t kill animals that are nursing babies.”

“Still, wasn’t it dangerous and scary approaching a wolf like that?”

“Not really. I assumed that Cal knew how to use his gun.”

“Not only do I know how, but about one step further and I was ready to use it.”

“See, Same Face. I was in no danger at all. My! I am sounding more like you every day. Now, THAT IS scary!”

The next morning found them up early and soon moving along an actual road into Wichita. Red Eagle was wide eyed. Everywhere he looked there seemed to be things to ask about. Many buildings were three stories high and a few even four. He hoped they didn’t fall over. The main streets were paved in brick. The list of new sights went on and on. Cal and Jericho were as delighted watching Red Eagle as he was in seeing all the new sights.

It was still early so the streets were not yet crowded – more men on horses than buggies and wagons. They came upon a man alongside the street who was mounting his horse.

Cal spoke to him.

“Sir, can you set us in the direction of the Flying W Ranch – Waterson’s spread?”

“Sure can. He has a office here in Wichita – corner of Maple and Washington – straight ahead about ten blocks. His spread butts up against the city on the west. Can’t miss it. He only hires seasoned cowpokes if you’re looking for work.”

“Purely a social visit, you could say,” Cal replied.

“Thanks for your help. Have a great day.”

The boys rode on, noting they were on Washington Street. They kept an eye out for Maple. The man had been correct – ten blocks from where they had been. The Flying W Ranch office was on the near corner to their right.

“So, do we do something at the office?” Red Eagle asked.

“Let’s hitch the horses,” Jericho said. “I’d really like to get a look inside. I have an idea. I’ve used it several times before. You and I will go in. While I engage whoever is in there in conversation, you look around and see if you can find anything about the Association for Cultural Purity – the ACP. I’m thinking there will printed sheets about it.”

“I’ll stay with the horses,” Cal said, “but if you aren’t back out here in fifteen minutes I’m coming in, guns drawn, to see what’s going on.”

“That is comforting,” Red Eagle said.

It sounded odd and produced smiles on the others. Red Eagle didn’t pursue their responses.

Inside there was a man sitting behind a desk. Behind him was a closed door leading into another room – Mr. Waterson’s office, Jericho figured. He approached the man while Red Eagle hung back.

“Sir. This may seem like an odd request, but my little brother and I are looking for our uncle. Folks call him Slim and we heard he might be working at the Flying W.”

The man smiled appearing to be very friendly.

“Son, we probably have a dozen men who go by Slim on our payroll. You’ll have to be more specific.”

“Of course. I hadn’t thought of that. Sorry. It’s Uncle Johnny – John Smith.”

The man took a ledger book from a drawer in his desk and thumbed through the pages.

“No. I see nobody by that name on our roster. Sorry. There is a Flying H on about thirty miles straight south. It’s the only other Flying anything ranch in the area.”

“Thank you for your help. You have been very pleasant. We appreciate that. Lots of men in your position don’t take us kids serious, you know. Have a good day.”

The two of them left. They had come nowhere near the

fifteen-minute limit Cal had set for them.

“You found stuff?” Jericho asked as they walked to where Cal was sitting on the edge of the sidewalk.

“I suggest you just put it in a pocket and we leave,” Cal said. “The man from the office is looking out the window at us.”

They mounted up.

“Back west, the way we came, then, if we’re being watched,” Jericho suggested.

West, it was, for two blocks. They turned one block to the south and then headed east out of town toward the ranch. It was a ten-minute ride to the city limits. They came to a sign that stood on posts and spanned the trail – Flying W Ranch. They moved several yards off the trail and dismounted. They sat and looked over the things Red Eagle had found back at the office.

One was a brochure that contained information about the association – exactly what Jericho had hoped to find. Another listed dates and places where meetings were taking place. A third was an article that purported (claimed without facts) to discuss the atrocities (terrible things) that Indians had carried out in Kansas during the past several months.

“I don’t think Sandy or the Sheriff have seen this article,” Cal said. “It must be new.”

Jericho ran his finger down the list asking questions as he went.

“Cal, have you heard about all these?”

“Cal looked and spoke as he pointed.

“Yes, yes, yes, yes, no, no.”

“Any way we can find out if Sandy or the Sheriff knows anything about them? Those last two took place just west of Red Bend. I’d think they’d know.”

“I can telegraph Sandy. Take maybe an hour to get a response. What are you thinking?”

“Look at the print on the page.”

Red Eagle responded first.

“Those last two things are set in different type – like Cilla does sometimes in ads she prints in her paper. She calls them font styles. You and I have helped her set things like that.”

He had been talking to his brother.

“So? I still don’t get it,” Cal said.

“I’m wondering if the last two have been added to the list on the page after it was first printed and the printer used a slightly different kind of type when he set it.”

“I see. But what would that mean?”

“Maybe nothing. Maybe something. Can you send that telegram?”

An hour later they had a response from Sandy.

“This is very strange,” Cal said sharing the printed wire with them. “The first four Sandy and the Sheriff know about. The last two they seem sure did not happen – the ones at Prairie Crossing and Titus.”

“Where was this copy of the article when you found it, Red Eagle?”

“The other sheets were laying out on a narrow counter under the window. A sign said, ‘Take One’. But this sheet was on a shelf underneath the top of the counter. I figured it was alright to take it.”

“Alright or not – and I’m pretty sure it wasn’t – I think we are going to be very glad you did,” Jericho said. “We need to get to back to Prairie Crossing as fast as we can. Maybe we have time to prevent something bad from happening.”

They mounted up and set a gallop toward the east. They didn’t notice the two horsemen following a quarter of a mile behind them. And, of course, they couldn’t notice those horses bore the Flying W brand.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Billy and Dark Eyes

As the boys rode on at an easy gallop – they had a day and a half ride ahead of them – Jericho laid out their mission.

“Those first four ‘raids’ as the ACP calls them, have been less than a week apart. The list did not include the attack on us on the way to Sandy Ford, so I’m betting Prairie Crossing is due for one any day. Any ideas about how to stop the next one?”

“Let the Sheriff know,” Cal suggested.

“I thought of that first, too, but Sandy would want more proof before he acted. I also figured if the IMPs saw lawmen all over the place they wouldn’t show themselves and we need to have them show themselves so we can catch them in the act.”

“We?” Red Eagle and Cal asked as one.

“I assume you’re authorized to make arrests, right, Cal?”

“Well, yes.”

“And Indians are well known for their stealth (cunning) and we have One and a half Indians right here.”

“One and a half?”

“Well, Red Eagle and I are both half Indian and he was raised as a Cherokee, so I figure averaging all that out that together we’re worth like one and half.”

Cal didn’t follow either the logic or the math, but decided to just let it pass.

“It seems to me,” Red Eagle began, “that they make two different kinds of raids. One is when they try to run off

Indians who have settled off the reservations and the other is against white folks when they steal from them and try to make it look like the work of Indians.”

“Good observations,” Jericho said. “And, since there aren’t hardly any Indians settled up in this area, the new raids will probably be the second kind – making it look like the Indians have attacked.”

“If memory serves me,” Cal began, “The IMPs as you call them have always traveled as a group of ten, right?”

The boys thought for a moment and nodded.

“So, we will most likely be looking for a group of ten horsemen – or at least a large group. That should cut our search down significantly. Not many travelers in groups of that size.”

“Lots of good thinking going on today,” Jericho. “It seems to be my turn and I got nothing.”

“I think catching the printing thing qualifies you for membership in our astute group,” Cal said.

“Astute?” The other boys said/asked.

“Oh, the Cilla thing,” Red Eagle said. “I still need help with that one.”

“Intelligent, clever,” Cal explained.

“Thank you.”

“So,” Jericho began again, “having said all of this, how are we going to go about finding what they have planned and then putting a stop to it?”

They rode on in silence for several minutes.

“It would probably be a good idea to make sure there aren’t any Indians living over there, first,” Cal suggested. “Running them out seems to be the most important thing to these guys. I know the minister there. He will know.”

“A good place to start,” Jericho said.

It was not until mid-morning the following day that they found themselves dismounting in front of the little white church. The minister was watering a flower bed out front. Cal reminded the tall, thin, black clad middle-aged man who he was.

“I’m Cal Calvin. I sometimes come to visit my Aunt Edith.”

“Certainly. You here to see her, I assume.”

“No, not really – I mean I hope to, but that isn’t our main purpose. There is a group known as the Association for Cultural Purity that we suspect is harming Indians who live around here and making raids they blame on the Indians. We hope to stop them.”

“I know about the group. Hate in any form is a terrible thing. Seems like a pretty big task for the three of you to stop them, however. May I help in some way?”

“I figured you’d know if any Indians were settled in this area.”

“Only one family that I know of, just north of town along Friendly Creek, it runs east and joins Sunday Creek.”

“We know Sunday Creek. Have they been here long?”

“Oh, my, yes. I suppose seven or eight years now. Billy – that’s the name the man goes by – handles the horses out at the B Bar B Ranch. Solid citizens. They don’t attend services at my church, but Mrs. Billy – as we call her – comes to the women’s quilting group on Wednesday mornings. They have one child – a boy about seven.”

“So they are well accepted around here,” Red Eagle asked.

“I would say very well. Folks hardly even think of them as Indians anymore.”

“Thanks for your time and information, Sir, er, Reverend,” Jericho said tipping his hat. He had had very little contact with ‘reverends’ in his life.

They rode on into town on what appeared to be the Main Street – It turned out to be Prairie Street, crossing the town of Prairie Crossing. The boys thought that was for some reason hilarious. They had skipped breakfast anticipating a restaurant meal when they arrived. The place was called, Annies, according to the sign, which had omitted the apostrophe between the ‘e’ and the ‘s’. Interestingly, it had been Red Eagle who had caught that.

They had the morning special which seemed to include as much of everything as they wanted. They ate. They talked. They planned. They left a good-sized tip.

They inquired of the waitress – Annie, who also seemed to be the owner, cook, and bouncer – about any large groups of riders who may have come through town in the

previous several days. She didn't know of any. The boys took that as a mixed message. It meant that if they were coming the boys had beat them and that was good. On the other hand, the boys were impatient and wanted to get on with their business.

Outside again, Red Eagle spoke.

"We go to find Billy's place first?"

It had been one of his interesting statements and questions all in one phrase.

The others nodded. They mounted up and rode north out of the small town. They didn't know how far they would need to go. The plan was to find Friendly Creek and then follow it west toward the B Bar B Ranch.

The plan worked well with one exception.

Red Eagle spoke.

"We have been followed from town by two men. During the past few minutes they have eased up much closer to us. What do you think?"

"I think we continue like we didn't know," Jericho said. "If we change our direction now they might suspect something. If we turn and confront them we may get shot."

"I agree," Cal said privately pleased at the boy's good sense.

They passed through a small stand of trees and came upon a clearing.

"That must be Billy's place," Jericho said pointing toward the creek at the far side.

The cabin looked to be two or three rooms, constructed of both logs and upright siding. It was a shake (wooden shingled) roof with a rock chimney at the center of the building. There was a wide porch across its width. Out front was a wooden, horse-trough apparently fed through a pipe from the creek that flowed down a relatively steep hill just behind the cabin. A small boy, who had been playing out front raced into the house.

A moment later a woman appeared at the door where she stood, not venturing outside. Red Eagle immediately recognized her clothing and head band and began speaking to her in Cherokee. The sense of relief washed across her face. Red Eagle dismounted first.

The others followed his lead. The horses moved to the trough. The boy clung to his mother's side in the doorway.

Jericho joined the horses and, pretending to examine a rear hoof on Lightning, actually surveyed the woods behind them for some sign of the men.

While Red Eagle continued talking with the mother and her son, Cal spoke to Jericho in low tones.

"You can use the rife hanging from Gray's saddle if it comes to that."

"I'm not about to go shooting men," Jericho said.

"We'll see. Maybe just seeing you with it will discourage them."

"If they are bad guys I doubt that anything about two squirts like Red Eagle and me will discourage them from doing whatever they are here to do."

Presently, Red Eagle told the boys what had been going on between him and the woman and announced she actually spoke pretty good English.

"It is Billy's place. His wife is called Dark Eyes. The boy is Sammy. Billy is at work at the ranch and won't be home until dark. There are several rifles in the house. She says there is a large root cellar that opens up into the kitchen floor – under a braided rug. There is also a shed behind the house where the cow, goat, chickens and horse stay."

Jericho had a plan.

"Cal, how about you mounting up and heading east along the creek. We'll make it look like you just accompanied us here and that you're leaving. Make sure they see your badge. Then you circle around behind them in case bad things begin. If they leave, you come back to us."

They made a big deal out of Cal's leaving – hand shaking, pointing east along the creek and the other usual things. The boy ran after him shouting 'goodbye'. When he neared the edge of the clearing he turned and they all waved as if for a final time.

Dark Eyes and her son went inside and she made the rifles ready. The boys took their horses around back to the shed.

An hour later, Cal returned. The two horsemen had left. He caught sight of the brands on the horses.

"I have the idea this isn't over," he said. "I wasn't close enough to hear much of what they were saying, but I did catch the word 'midnight' several times."

"Billy will be back by then," Red Eagle said.

"I guess we better count on it being ten against the five of us," Jericho said.

He turned to Cal.

"How far to Red Bend from up here?"

"A little less than two hours at a quiet gallop."

"Here's an idea," Jericho said. "We write a note, put it in the saddle bag and send Golden or Lightning to get Sandy."

"Think they'd know the way?"

"It's the best idea I have. You got something?"

"I guess not. There didn't seem to be any lawman at Prairie Crossing and I'm guessing less than twenty men there – lots of them old. Not much help."

The boys agreed. Jericho wrote two identical notes and one was placed in each of their horses' saddle bags. The duplication was in case anything happened to either Golden or Lightning.

"This worked before for us, Cal," Jericho explained, "the first time the IMPs messed with us above the falls on Sunday Creek. The horses knew the way for sure that time. I'll admit this is different."

"Horses have very good sense of direction," Red Eagle said. "Once they hit Sunday Creek they will recognize the terrain."

They sent both horses on their ways telling them to go to Sandy. Dark Eyes was clearly skeptical. She would have preferred one of them ride for Billy, but she had no idea where on the huge ranch the men were working.

"It might be best if you and your son take your horse and head for the ranch anyway," Cal said. "It will be safer there."

She agreed and after transferring some of their precious things down into the root cellar for safe keeping, mother and son started out toward the west along the creek. Sammy sat behind her thinking it was a grand adventure. The boys encouraged him in that belief, hoping to keep him from being afraid.

The boys looked around the property. In the shed were several pails which they filled with water in case the IMPs might try to burn down the house. That gave Jericho another idea. They had soon reconfigured (changed) the way the pipes from the creek to the trough had been set up so they could soak the wooden house from the roof to the ground. It stood to reason that wet wood should not burn.

There were three windows across the front of the house. They opened into the room on hinges on one side. The boys opened them wide and placed a rifle at each so the barrel could be seen from outside. That was as much to save the glass from being shot up as anything else. Glass was expensive way out in Kansas. There was a back door as well as a front door. If things turned bad they figured they would slip down into the root cellar and wait it out. So long as the rug that covered that trapdoor wasn't moved, they should be safe.

There were lots of unknowns. First, would the bad guys even return? If they did, would they actually attack? What could the boys do alone if the IMPs actually attacked? Would Golden and Lightning reach Sandy and could he get there in time to help? Lots of unknowns.

At three fifteen that afternoon, at least one of those questions was answered. Across the clearing to the south appeared ten men on horseback. They stopped sitting on their horses. Jericho and Red Eagle recognized several of them – the leader with the black moustache for one. They dismounted. Half were dressed in buckskins and carried quivers and bows – the rest rifles.

“Not good,” Red Eagle said pointing. “Shafts of arrows are wrapped in cloth. You watch. They will dose the cloth in oil and light them before shooting. It is their intention to burn down the house.”

They boys had no time to prepare further. They watched as the arrows were lit. The arrows flew through the air.

Thud! Thug! Thud!

The arrows hit and suck into the outside wall.

///

CHAPTER EIGHT

Never Use More Force than Necessary!

Angry voices arose across the clearing outside. The men could not understand why the logs were not catching fire. They prepared and shot additional arrows, that time at the roof. Still no fire. They dropped the bows and took out their guns. At Cal's suggestion, the boys knelt on the floor behind the ten-inch-thick log walls. No bullets would penetrate them. They would be safe right up to the point the bad guys entered the house. Then, who knew?

"I suppose it would be a good time to decide if we are going to use the guns," Jericho said.

"It should be okay to protect us, shouldn't it," Red Eagle said quite puzzled at his brother's unwillingness to use them.

"Okay, but over their heads and on the ground in front of them."

"I really don't understand you about this," Red Eagle said.

"It's a long story. I'll tell you later."

The three of them began shooting. It seemed to surprise the men and they scattered into the edges of the woods.

"Look there," Red Eagle said, two are circling back behind the house."

Bullets began entering through the open windows.

"I hope they don't get the idea of shooting flaming arrows in through the windows," Jericho said. "Things aren't wet in here."

The first of those arrows entered a few minutes later.

Jericho was at a window.

"I think they're getting the idea we aren't hitting them. How about we try your foot thing?"

"Or this!" Red Eagle said.

He pulled the flaming arrow from the floor where it had landed and shot it back at the leader of the group. It started the grass on fire at his feet. The gentle breeze from the north east quickly spread the fire in a line across the clearing, forcing the men even further back into the woods.

"Or that!" Jericho said. "It will burn out at the woods. The floor in there is mostly moist dirt, remember. It won't hold them for long. They'll be back. I opt for the foot thing when they come back. Better check out back, will you."

Cal cracked the door and looked out toward the shed.

"You won't believe this, but the Billy Goat has run them off. Neither one will be sitting down comfortably soon. I hope they don't shoot it."

"Red Eagle went to Cal's side. He raised a rifle, fired a shot and hit one of the men in his foot."

The second man helped him hobble off toward the front.

Over the next five minutes nine more shots rang out from inside the cabin. Nine more IMPs fell to the ground with wounds below their ankles.

"So, now what?" Red Eagle asked.

"From their reaction, out there I think the main 'what' is that we really made them mad. I've heard cussing before, but nothing like that. Doubt if they're just going to turn tail and run."

"And, I imagine in this sun, the outside of this place is drying out fast," Cal said. "I hope they don't notice."

"Got a problem here," Jericho said, still watching out the front window.

"Just one problem?" Red Eagle said.

Jericho offered a quick smile and explained.

"They are belly crawling in our direction."

"Belly?"

"Stomach, front, abdomen, not the back."

"Stomach was enough. From this angle we can't hit feet or even legs."

“We could from up on the roof,” Jericho said.

“But we’d be easy targets from up there ourselves.”

“We really do need to do something. They are no more than five yards away now.”

Cal took a position at a window prepared to begin picking them off one by one.

Red Eagle put his finger in the air and turned his head as if to say, ‘Stop and listen’.

“Like a roar from both the east and the west,” Jericho said. “A tornado without a storm?”

“Not a roar. Horses. Lots and lots of horses,” Red Eagle explained.

“But from two directions?”

Red Eagle shrugged having no explanation.

With great care the boys moved back to the windows and peeked outside. There at the east side of the clearing was Sandy with a dozen men. They dismounted, guns drawn. There on the west were another two dozen men they didn’t recognize. As the IMPs lay down their guns, Cal, who had remained relatively quiet through the siege, went outside to join Sandy and his men.

The IMPS were soon rounded up, tied, and placed on their horses for transport to Red Bend. Once things seemed to be under control, the boys went out onto the porch. A man dressed in Buckskins approached the house from the group of men who rode in from the west. He was clearly Indian.

“I am Billy Whitecloud. You are the boys who warned my wife and son?”

“I suppose so,” Jericho said. “Are they safe?”

“Yes. These men with me are from the B Bar B.”

“What great friends,” Red Eagle said.

“The best in the world. Everybody here is alright?”

Jericho decided those statement/questions must be an Indian thing. Actually, it was a very efficient way of communicating.

“We are both fine. One thing we need to explain – we sort of messed up your pipe system from the creek.”

“I saw. I felt the logs. How did you ever think of such a thing?”

“It is a one word answer, Billy,” Red Eagle began. “It’s

called, 'Jericho'. His brain works in wonderfully odd ways. He is my brother. I'm Red Eagle, by the way."

Golden and Lightning moved in from the stand of trees at the east. They were well lathered and drank long from the water trough. Sandy approached the porch looking the boys in the face. He held up one finger.

"First, you could have got yourselves killed."

Two fingers:

"Second, you endangered the life of my deputy."

Three fingers:

"Third, I am completely baffled by the array of wounds on the bad guys – all shot in their feet – what in the world? These men were trying to kill you and you shoot them in their heels!"

"It is my brother's version of our Cherokee belief – never use more force to defend yourself than is necessary."

"No more than necessary?" Sandy said clearly exasperated (enraged in sort of a friendly way). "They were ten feet away with their guns blazing. It just doesn't seem like your level of force was working very well."

"On the other hand," Jericho said spreading his arms to his sides, "here we are – safe and sound. Seems to me our plan worked quite well."

Sandy turned to Billy.

"Just a head's up. Never try to argue with this kid. Never. Never. Never."

Sandy started his men back to Red Bend with the prisoners. There were only nine – the mustached leader had escaped in the confusion. Also, none of the remaining horses carried a brand. Unless the men who had been captured talked, it would not be possible to connect them to Waterson and the ACP.

Dark Eyes and Sammy returned in a buggy with a woman from the ranch. The foreman at the B Bar B Ranch insisted on providing two men to stay at the cabin until the problem was resolved. With handshakes and thank yous behind them, Sandy, Cal and the brothers started back to Red Bend. Sandy set a leisurely pace understanding the boy's horses had been worked hard.

"I suppose you all deserve an explanation about me

and guns,” Jericho said as they rode. “I seldom tell the story because it pains me greatly. When I was seven I lived in a home with two other kids – just babies. The parents weren’t nice to me. Often at night the parents would lock me inside the house while they went out for the evening. I was expected to take care of the babies.

“One night when they were out, a man broke in. I heard him on the first floor and went down the stairs to see about it. He was stealing things – putting them in a gunny sack. I took the rifle from above the fireplace in the living room, went into the dining room where he was taking things and pointed the gun at him. It was the first time I had ever held a rifle. I didn’t even know enough about guns to see if it was loaded. I told the man to stop and get out of the house or I’d shoot him. He laughed at me and came toward me. I pulled the trigger and killed him. One second he was alive and the next second he was dead. It was the most terrible moment in my life.

“A neighbor heard the shot and came to me. I guess it was very clear what had happened: the lock on the front door was broken, the man’s bag of stolen things was right there with him, I was still holding the gun – frozen right there crying – when the neighbor found me. The police arrived and tried to convince me what a brave hero I was. All I could think about was that I had killed a man. I had taken his life. He’d never take another breath or say another word. It made me shiver and sob and the vision of the blood coming out of his chest and him falling onto the floor and the gurgling sound he made when he died just wouldn’t go away. I still dream about it sometimes.

“The neighbor and policeman stayed with me until the foster parents got home. The policeman bawled them out something awful for leaving a kid my age home to care for two babies. After they left, the parents gave me a terrible spanking because the rug was soaked in blood and the babies had wet diapers.

“The next morning I ran away to the police station and got put into a different home. Every night for months I woke up screaming from bad dreams and got handed to three other homes within a short amount of time because they thought I

had some sort of mental problem.”

“How perfectly terrible,” Sandy said.

Red Eagle reached out and took his brother’s hand. He understood that touch was better than words in such a situation.

Cal sniffed and fought back his tears.

They all finally understood, and would never ask Jericho about it again.

As they dismounted in front of the Sheriff’s Office, Doc and Cilla hurried across the street to greet them – quite honestly more to make sure they were alright than to welcome them back.

“It seems you survived still another lame brained scheme,” Doc said looking them over to make sure they had not been wounded.

“We appreciate your concern, Doc,” Jericho said offering his wonderful smile.

“I’ll need a story for the paper,” Cilla said.

“Cilla, you’re just encouraging them to risk life and limb with talk like that,” Doc said.

“Doesn’t seem to me they need any encouragement, Doc,” she came back.

He shrugged and nodded.

“Sometimes I think I need to lock the two of them up in order to protect the bad guys,” Sandy said hoping to lighten the mood.

Doc continued.

“I’ve just tended to nine foot wounds – five of which required casts for broken bones.”

“The story just keeps getting better,” Cilla said, winking at the boys who she felt were being given far too hard a time.

She already had a headline in mind for the story: The Heroes of Prairie Crossing. She’d have the boys write the story as part of their school work.

“You boys undoubtedly need to eat,” Doc said, pulling the brothers close to him and planting a kiss on the top of each head. “On me this evening. You come, too, Cal. You deserve something special just for putting up with them.”

Inside the restaurant there was a humorous moment. Two men were sitting at ‘doc’s’ table. When they saw him

enter, they moved to another one, plates, glasses, silverware and all. Doc nodded toward them appreciatively.

Between the two of them, the boys related every moment of the adventure. They turned to Cal; Red Eagle had a question.

“You were very quiet in the cabin.”

“I was assigned to protect you not to plan your strategy. I must admit I was only a hairs breadth away from stuffing the two of you down into the root cellar when the reinforcements arrived.”

Jericho turned to his brother.

“Have you ever been stuffed, brother?”

“No, I don’t recall that I ever have. Have you?”

“Not that I recall, either. Do you suppose we missed out on a great experience?”

“Maybe sometime he would give us a stuffing demonstration so we could give a better answer to that question.”

At that point they exploded into laughter. It was infectious and soon they were all chuckling. Doc addressed Red Eagle.

“How are you handling the recklessness and strong headedness of your newly found brother?”

Red Eagle didn’t miss a beat in delivering his answer.

“I am handling him a whole lot better than I am these terribly uncomfortable White Boy’s clothes. They itch, they tug at my arms and legs, they confine my soul and the very thought of having to wear them festers in my heart like grandmother’s infection.”

Doc turned to Cilla.

“Isn’t it a shame the lad doesn’t have an opinion about our clothing?”

“I will urge him to write about it,” she said. “That way he may discover his true, hidden thoughts about them.”

Red Eagle understood they were making fun, but also understood they were not really making fun of him. It was a wonderful feeling there among his friends.

After they finished, the boys and Cal rode on east down Main on their way to the cave. Golden and Lightning had soon coaxed the boys into giving them their heads and it

became a full out race the rest of the way.

Once back inside the cave the horses drank, a fire was lit, the boys cleaned up in the pool, the bed rolls were spread and they had soon slipped off into a well-deserved sleep.

They all understood the problem had not been solved – Moustache Man and Waterson were still able to operate with no proof against them. If anything, the boys had very likely just aggravated the ACP for the third or fourth time. The Sheriff would put out a memo to the other law enforcement men across the state with his suspicions. That should make it more difficult for the group to continue its hurtful and narrow-minded activities.

Cal and Sandy were more concerned than ever about the boys' safety. It was quite a slap in Waterson's face to have had ten of his toughest men outsmarted by a couple of twelve year olds. They wondered if Moustache Man would be demoted because of it.

The next morning the boys needed to get back to the regular things about life – they needed to go into town and get supplies, get two blocks of ice (each about a foot square) for the icebox they constructed, and spend a little time on the ridge above the spot in the creek where the girls sunned themselves – not necessarily in that order.

They stopped at the creek first. No girls. It was a disappointment, but there would be other times. They were still hoping to get up the courage to actually talk to one (a girl) face to face before they were old men. Next, they stopped at Sandy's office where they learned Rising Sun had sent a message that he and his grandmother arrived home safely and that she was doing much better. The boys agreed it would be lots of fun to ride down and visit him at some point.

The next stop was the general store for bacon, jerky, flour, salt, potatoes, carrots, sugar, cinnamon, and a few other things. Jericho had discovered that he could make hardtack biscuits with sugar and cinnamon and they became wonderful treats. Red Eagle preferred his with an apple slice on top.

From there they went to pick up the ice in their special, insulated, cart. Golden pulled it – he was used to pulling the travois and didn't mind. Lightning had never pulled anything so they didn't bother him with it. He did seem perturbed

(really bothered) at the boys for attaching it to his best friend, but was gradually getting used to it. The horses were very protective of each other.

On the way out of town, they (they boys not the horses) added a gallon jug of milk and hurried on so it didn't spoil in the heat of the day. It had been a quick trip. They talked as they galloped along.

"I didn't see any signs of the flying W brand in town, did you?" Jericho asked.

"No, but there were two men on unbranded horses at the saloon," Cal said. "I told Sandy to keep watch on them."

"What's going to happen to the men who attacked us?" Red Eagle asked.

"They will stay in jail until the judge arrives next week. I imagine they will be sent to the regional prison."

"The Cherokee do not have prisons or jails."

Before Red Eagle could offer an explanation, Cal spoke.

"We're being followed by two riders. It could be the horses that I saw at the Saloon. Probably best not to go directly to the cave."

"Maybe they are just headed east on the road," Red Eagle suggested.

"If they are they're in a hurry. They just set their horses to a full-out run after us – with their guns drawn."

///

CHAPTER NINE

They Settled for a Cookie

“I’ll break off and ride on up and around to the east of your red hill,” Cal said. “You two head for the bend in the creek. Stay back in the stand of trees. Stay low in your saddles. If they follow you, and I’m thinking they will, I’ll follow along behind and try to surprise them.”

“That would have been more reassuring without the word, ‘try’,” Red Eagle said.

Cal silently agreed. He took off at a good gallop. They repeated the waving routine they had used at the cabin the day before. The boys picked up their pace just a bit and were soon fording the water just downstream from the bend. The horses sensed something was wrong – not heading right to the cave.

They moved deep into the stand of trees behind the outcropping of the large rock. Red Eagle immediately undid the ice cart from Golden in case they might need to make a quick run for it. Jericho spotted a very tall tree with a double crotch some thirty feet off the ground. He had an idea, which he shared with his brother. They hurried to make the preparation and a few minutes later found themselves high in that tree.

They heard the men approaching. They appeared beneath them on horseback. One was Moustache Man. He slapped the boys’ horses with his reins and they moved away – not far, the boys were sure. The men dismounted and began searching the area on foot, six-shooters drawn. Something moved in the brush ten yards away. It drew their

attention and they both fired in that direction. That let the boys know they were truly in danger. These guys were willing to kill them. They waited patiently and quietly up in the tree hoping that movement had not been from either Cal or their horses.

The men searched about below them, apparently figuring the boys would have stayed in the area where their horses had been. After a short time, they were standing exactly where the boys wanted them – directly below where they were sitting thirty feet above them in the tree.

Jericho whispered – One, two, three!

Previously, the boys had used their ropes to lift the two blocks of ice up into the tree with them. On ‘three’ they dropped the heavy blocks onto the heads of the two men.

At that same moment, Cal arrived guns drawn, ready to take on the bad guys.

“What the?” he said, scratching his head and looking around.

“The boys hurried down the tree.”

They examined the men sprawled out on their backs on the ground. Jericho couldn’t resist the joke.

“I’d say these two are really out COLD.”

The other two groaned, really wishing they had thought of it, of course. The men were soon tied in place, lying across their saddles. Red Eagle whistled and Golden and Lightning appeared as if they had just been waiting for the signal.

“I need to get these guys back to town,” Cal said, “but I’m not supposed to let you two out of my sight.”

Red Eagle had the solution.

“Let us take our supplies back to the cave. Then we will go with you to town. For some reason, we suddenly need two more blocks of ice. Looks like the first pair shattered over these guys’ hard heads.”

They delivered the men to the jail and Cal filed the complaint. With new ice in the cart, they once again started for the cave. That time they arrived without an unwanted escort. The useful part of the morning had been that they had learned it was very important to make sure they were not being followed. It would not do for the bad guys to find their secret home inside the red rocks or, of course, to do them in before they got there.

* * *

A week went by with no more IMP incidents reported. Sandy was convinced the boys were still not safe, however, so Cal remained with them. Jericho and Red Eagle thought it was great. Cal had become like the older brother neither of them had ever had. He had lots of wonderful stories to tell about growing up there on the plains. The boys had finished the story for the paper about helping save the Indian family's cabin and it had made them something of heroes in town. Girls began waving as the boys rode down Main Street – they had always looked, but now they waved. That was undoubtedly the best part of the whole adventure as far as they were concerned. For some reason, they seemed to feel the need to spend more time in town after that.

One morning with the 'gang' at breakfast at the restaurant, Sandy shared information he had received from the Sheriff.

"Three raids in three days have taken place back over in the area of Prairie Crossing," he said. "They were different from the others. All were committed by just one man dressed in buckskins and riding a spotted horse. I forget what Billy Whitecloud rode."

"A spotted horse – dirty white on medium brown, I'd call it," Jericho said turning to his brother for confirmation.

Red Eagle nodded and continued.

"Billy uses a rope bridle like I do, but rides in a saddle like cowpokes."

"I don't have that information about the man in these stories," Sandy said.

"It sounds like somebody is trying to give Billy Whitecloud a bad reputation," Doc said. "What sorts of things has this thief done?"

Sandy offered what he knew.

"Robbed a single rider on the road out west of town. Robbed an elderly couple in a buggy as they were on their way to church last Sunday. And, he was apparently seen leaving a store in town early morning just as the owner arrived for the day. Like he waited so he would be seen. Money had been taken from the cash register."

"Don't the people in Prairie Crossing know Billy on

sight?" Cal asked.

"They do, but this guy wore a bandana across his face and had his hat pulled low down on his forehead."

"What color were his eyes?" Red Eagle asked.

"I don't have that information," Sandy said looking puzzled at the question.

"Ask that elderly woman," Doc suggested. "Women always remember eye color. Men almost never do."

"You know," Red Eagle began, "I didn't even know there was such a thing as blue eyes until the first time I met you, Cilla. It was like the most beautiful thing I had ever seen – beautiful and totally unexpected. They were like two of the shiniest big blue beads I had ever seen. At first I wondered if something was wrong."

"Honey, you can stare into my eyes anytime you're strong, young heart desires. Looking back into your handsome face is certainly not the worst way for a lady my age to spend her time."

Red Eagle looked away, clearly embarrassed. Jericho tried to turn a joke.

"I suppose if you wear his face out looking at it, I'd be willing to let you look at mine. It has often been said that we are even more handsome after a slice of apple pie, however."

"Stop by the office before you leave town. I just happened to have baked last evening."

A round of chuckles led them back to the problem at hand. Jericho had the suggestion.

"It seems to me a good and very safe place to begin would be talking with that old man and his wife – the eye thing. If they were brown we're nowhere of course, but if they're blue we know it couldn't have been an Indian."

Sandy responded.

"Jericho, nothing you have done since you arrived in these parts has qualified as being very safe, although you have a point, I suppose."

"My brother and I will be delivering Cilla's newspapers over to the general store at Prairie Crossing tomorrow morning. We can take a little extra time and look into it. I really doubt if the old buggy driving man is going to harm us."

"I suppose. I've learned not to tell you two to be

careful, but please come back in one, non-bleeding piece – EACH of you!”

“I’m really quite careful, Sandy,” Red Eagle said. “It is just when I’m close to Same Face that bad things seem to happen to me.”

“Same Face?” Doc asked clearly both puzzled and amused.

It was apparently the first time the name had been said in their presence. Jericho answered.

“It’s like my Indian name. My brother has a white and an Indian name so he figured I needed two as well. So, ‘Same Face’. I happen to love it.”

The explanation required no comments.

It had been set. The next morning the three boys would set out for Prairie Crossing. It was just a little over an hour’s ride. That morning they helped Cilla finish setting the type for the new edition and by four that afternoon they had the paper printed, dried, and stacked into bundles for delivery. The bundle bound for Sandy Ford had to make the five o’clock stage going south. On occasion the stage had been known to wait for it. The entire territory counted on Cilla’s news.

After the promised apple pie – it didn’t last long with three always hungry young men working on it – they returned to the cave with the newspapers for Prairie Crossing in their saddlebags. Red Eagle had been helping Jericho learn about making and shooting bows and arrows. That afternoon Cal got a lesson as well – he did not earn a very good grade! It was the first-time Jericho had ever hit a moving target with an arrow. They practiced with a piece of wood thrown into the air. In fact, his arrows found the target a half dozen times before dark overtook them. Cal was always amazed that a man with a bow could accomplish such a feat. Red Eagle almost never missed. Jericho was determined to someday be as good as his brother although he didn’t ever state that out loud. He would let his skill speak for itself when that time finally came.

After sunset, they had a good time inside the cave around the fire, sharing stories about their lives. Although the boys had suspected it, Cal told them that he was also an orphan. The part they hadn’t suspected was that his parents

had been killed by an Indian raid when he was five.

"I am so sorry," Red Eagle said clearly disturbed at the news.

"I'm sure you are. You are a good young man – one of the best I've even met. I hope you understand that I don't hold my parent's deaths against you. It wasn't you."

"I do understand that, but it does not take away my sorrow for you. Were the raiders Cherokee?"

"No, Sioux. It was a small band that had left the main tribe. It was led by the son of a chief. The young man declared war on all white men in an attempt to make a name for himself after his father named his younger brother to become the next chief ahead of him."

They talked well into the night wondering together about many of the great questions about life and how to best live it.

The next morning at daybreak they were on their way to Prairie Crossing.

"I think we should skirt around Red Bend to the south in case Sandy has had second thoughts about allowing our journey today," Jericho said.

No one disagreed and before long they had set an easy gallop south on the road toward Sandy Ford. Fifteen minutes later they turned west. It would be less than a half hour trip from there. They had enjoyed the breakfast there before – so much food for so little money – that a stop at Annie's was first on their agenda. Jericho used the unneeded excuse that Annie would likely be able to direct them to the old couple who had been held up by the man in buckskins. He had been correct.

"That was Mr. and Mrs. Bentsen – Olaf and Beatrice. They have a place just west of town. You'll see their lane off to the right out about a mile or so – a one story house and a large barn sittin' a hundred yards back from the road. They both need painting – the house and barn not the Olaf and Beatrice."

Annie thought her joke was quite funny and she was still chuckling as the boys left.

While they checked the gear on their horses Red Eagle turned to Jericho.

“Cal had seven flapjacks (pancakes) so I suppose we can’t count on him moving very fast today.”

“Hey, brother of Same Face,” Cal said. “I saw you put away twelve strips of thick cut pepper bacon so I’m doubting your agility as well.”

“Agility?” the boys asked.

“A Cila word. It means how quickly and precisely you can move and do things – like saying, ‘the trick rider performed with great agility’.”

“Thank you.”

Red Eagle always thanked whoever helped him learn a new word, well, helped him learn anything.

It took only a short time to find the lane and they were soon at the front porch. Red Eagle was dressed as a Cherokee – against Cal’s advice, but he had had it with white boys’ clothes – so he held back and let the other two approach the door. Jericho knocked.

Both of the old people appeared at the door. The man looked back and forth between Cal’s badge and Red Eagle.

“He’s not the one who stopped us if that’s what this is about,” he said pointing.

His remark had been directed to Cal so Cal answered.

“We know. This is Red Eagle. He is our good friend. We just stopped by to see if we could get a better description of the bandit. The one we have is too vague to be of any help.”

“Certainly. Won’t you come in?”

They filled the living room to overflowing. Cal and the old folks took the three chairs. The boys sat cross-legged on the floor.

“A wonderfully cozy room you have here,” Red Eagle said looking around.

The old couple seemed surprised he spoke such fine English. It seemed to immediately set them at ease. The woman went into the kitchen and came back with a plate piled high with cookies, unaware, of course, that they had each just downed two and a half pounds of breakfast. Cal sensed the hesitation on the boys’ part. He reached out and took one.

“We each appreciate your generosity. Thank you.”

They boys got the idea. They were to eat cookies and

sell the idea they loved them. Actually, the selling part came easily. Those just may have been the best sugar cookies they had ever eaten – of course the boys' experiences with sweet things was quite limited.

"So, you want a description of the highwayman," the old man said. "I'll let Beatrice begin. She remembers things like that better than I do – it's a woman thing I believe."

He smiled at her and patted her hand.

The boys smiled and nodded, having heard a similar saying before. Beatrice sat up, straightening her back and began. She was clearly taking the assignment seriously.

"Nearly six feet tall. Wore store bought buckskins. Wore boots not moccasins. Wore a black felt hat that didn't match the color of his light brown outfit. His hair was dark – more brown than black I suppose. He wore a string of beads around his neck that kept getting in his way, like he wasn't used to them. He held a rifle on us the whole time – it said Remington on the stock – but he had a bow and quiver of arrows over his shoulder."

She paused. Jericho jumped in with specific questions.

"Did you see his face – his eyes?"

"Not his face – he wore a blue and white bandana across it, but yes to his eyes. Strange you should ask. It was the oddest part. He eyes were as blue as Olaf's and mine. Never did tell of a blue eyed Indian. And one other thing, his left eyebrow was gone – there was an ugly scare there instead."

"One more question, ma'am. Did you see anything odd about the back of his right hand?"

She turned her head and thought for a moment.

"Well, no. I don't remember anything, do you Olaf?"

He shook his head.

"It was in plain sight as he held his rifle."

Jericho went on.

"No long, wide scar, there."

"Oh, no. I would have remembered that."

"How about just one more question?" Jericho went on going for broke. "Do you know Billy Whitecloud?"

"Oh, yes. His wife comes to quilting at the church and brings their little boy, Sammy. He certainly has a lot of

energy.”

“And the man who held you up was not Billy?”

“Oh, no. That dear man would never do such a thing.”

Olaf spoke.

“Frankly, Sheriff, Beatrice and I have talked about it. The more we think about it the more we’re quite sure it wasn’t even an Indian. For one thing, his horse was shod, wore a leather cowpoke saddle and a iron bit with leather reins.”

Cal stood and the boys – neither being very agile about it – struggled to their feet, ready to leave. She slid the remaining cookies into a bag and handed them to Red Eagle, pinching his cheek.

“You are just the cutest boy I’ve ever seen. Thanks for stopping by.”

Outside Jericho voiced a problem.

“So, you’re the cute one now. I have your face, but YOU’RE the cute one.”

Red Eagle was ready.

“It has to be the superior way an Indian wears that face.”

Had it not been the old couples’ front lawn, there would have been a tussle – not a short, roll around for a minute or two tussle, ending in smiles and laughter, but an all-out, ten minute, go-at-it-full-throttle, kick up the dust, encounter, that ended in – well, in smiles and laughter, of course. It just took a tussle every now and then for them to make sure the other one wasn’t building muscles and strength the fastest. So far they seemed dead-on-even. That morning they settled for sharing a cookie rather than a tussle.

///

CHAPTER TEN

Drop Your Pants!

Back in Prairie Crossing they dropped off the papers at the general store. They spoke with the proprietor (owner).

“Thanks boys. Things going well up at Red Bend?”

“Seem to be fine,” Jericho said.

“I liked your article last week – at least I assume it was yours.”

Cal confirmed that it was. The man continued.

“Boys your age should really be more careful, though.”

“We’ve been told that,” Red Eagle said. “Thank you for your concern.”

“I just have to ask,” he said. “Are you two White or Indian?”

“Yes,” Jericho answered thinking it was hilarious.

When one laughed so did the other. So, Cal provided the short answer, which seemed to satisfy the man. He clearly had no problem with youngsters from mixed parentage. He understood the kids had nothing to do with that.

“Tell Cilla and Doc, hello,” the man said.

They assured him they would, and were soon back outside and headed east for Red Bend. As boys who have eaten their fill a mere hour before will do, they munched on cookies as they rode.

Something about their cave came up, which led to the topic of caves in general, which led Jericho to ask Cal:

“Do you know about the cave behind the falls up on Sunday Creek?”

“Cave? No. There’s a cave there?”

“Red Eagle stumbled onto it while we were trying to escape from IMPs up there.”

“More like I swam onto it,” Red Eagle said, offering a broad grin.

He went on to explain.

“Behind the falls there is a ledge about two feet above the water level and there is a slight depression in the rock wall just above it. There is an opening into a cave there. It’s been used – we found kindling, ashes, jars and cans inside. The ledge leads over to the east bank of the creek, though it’s hard to make out with the water running across it. It’s wide enough for a horse to cross over.”

“We have time to go take a look if you want to,” Jericho suggested really having in mind a nice cool swim on a hot day.

“Remember how this ‘we’ thing works,” Cal said. “I’m here to protect you two so what I want doesn’t really count.”

Inside, Cal was really feeling like a part of the team – like being there for younger brothers. He didn’t say it, however.

“Let me put it this way, then,” Jericho continued. “If you were a kid our age would you be interested in exploring it?”

“Darn tootin’ I would!”

Jericho looked at his brother.

“Would you ‘darn tootin’ want to go back up there?”

“I sure ‘darn tootin’ would.”

They gently kneed their mounts up to a gallop. The horses loved to run and had soon taken advantage of the permission, running full out. They were sensible and would slow when they got tired so the boys let them have their heads. Without instructions, they turned and headed north at the crossroad. It was how they had come.

It was nearly noon when they reached the falls. The horses drank. The boys drank. The cool water roared as it fell from the creek above and splashed into the pool twenty or so feet below.

“Swim first then into the cave?” Jericho asked.

They were soon enjoying the cool of the water. It was a deep pool that had been carved out by the force of the water over a period of several centuries. They stained a softball-sized rock green by rubbing it in the grass so it would stand

out from the others. Then, they dived for it. It made for a good time.

Eventually, Red Eagle led them into the cave. They started a fire and were soon warm.

"I don't know how I ever missed this," Cal said looking around in the flickering light. "I don't think any of the guys my age knew about it."

"It probably saved our necks," Jericho said. "Red Eagle says most waterfalls have a depression carved out behind them. I didn't know that."

"And here I thought you knew everything," Cal joked.

"I wish! I mean I really wish I did!"

"He means that," Red Eagle said. "I have never known anyone before who liked to learn new things as much as Same Face. He would rather read than sleep. Have you ever known a boy our age who rather read than sleep?"

"Can't say I have. Maybe he'll be governor someday."

"I am going to be governor. Maybe he will be President."

"Lofty goals. Keep after them."

"What do you want to be?" Red Eagle asked Cal.

"I aim to be Chief Marshal of this here whole territory. Emporia on the east to Goodland on the west and border to border north to south."

"That sounds like a very important job."

"It is. It's why I've been learning all I can about law enforcement from Sandy since I was knee high to a grasshopper."

Red Eagle laughed.

"That means very small, correct? It is a funny saying. Did you make it up?"

"Can't claim it. It's been around these parts since before even Doc was that size, I imagine."

"It's funny, but I never thought about Doc ever being a little kid," Jericho said. "I suppose he was, though. Can't you just see him in his little dark suit and suspenders carrying his little black bag and tweaking his little mustache?"

They all enjoyed the funny image.

At that moment, a most humorous thing took place. Golden stuck his head through the falls into the cave. He just

stood there looking each one of the boys in their eyes like a grandmother checking on her grandsons when they grew too quiet. He backed out and left.

"I suppose we should have made sure he saw where we went when we came in here," Jericho said once the laughter calmed down.

"He really looked concerned," Red Eagle said.

"What?" Cal asked.

"His ears were straight up and his nostrils were flaring – it is how horses become when they are bothered."

"Interesting!" Jericho said. "Those same things happen to you when you're afraid you're going to miss a meal."

The unrealized tussle from earlier that day suddenly burst forth and they rolled from side to side across the floor of the cave. Cal kicked small stones out of the way so they wouldn't be hurt. He hadn't had a brother with whom to tussle so he was more than a little intrigued by the activity. He never interfered, just watched realizing he had missed out on something that apparently was very special.

When they finally stopped, they looked over at each other as they lay there on their backs.

"You're filthy, little brother," Jericho said grinning.

"So are you, big brother."

"I imagine a quick dip in the pool will handle that," Cal said. "I also imagine Sandy is wondering where we are. Ready to head to town?"

The boys nodded. Cal offered them each a hand up from where they lay on the dirty floor. They spread the fire so it would burn out quickly and left.

Back on dry land with the horses, Red Eagle had a question.

"I have noticed that very small white boys seem to look dirty all the time. I wonder if dirt just shows up easier on their skin than it does on ours or if they really do get dirtier."

"Red Eagle," Cal began, "you have definitely been spending way too much time around Same Face. That's the sort of off the wall thing I'd expect to come out of his mouth and suspect he lays awake nights wondering about it."

"Glad I could be of help," Jericho said offering his hand to his brother. They shook a single, dramatic, shake and

directed a single nod and a self-satisfied face in Cal's direction.

Back at the Sheriff's office they found there had been two developments of interest to them – well, three if they counted the girls who waved at them while they rode down the street.

“Got a letter for you boys,” Sandy said motioning them inside.

“A letter?”

“How?”

“Who from?”

Sandy removed an envelope from his desk drawer. It was addressed to ‘The Two half-breed boys recently of Red Bend, Kansas’.

“I suppose that's us, for sure,” Jericho said as Red Eagle reached out and took the envelope.

He looked it over from end to end and back to front.

“It is the first letter I have ever seen. I do not understand how it works.”

“You have to open it. The real letter is inside.”

Impatient Jericho ripped it open, removed the single sheet of paper and began reading.

“Half-breeds: Keep your noses out of business that doesn't concern you or you won't live to see Summer.”

It was not signed.

“Never heard a death threat that read any clearer than that,” Sandy said taking it to look over himself.

“Waterson, I imagine,” Jericho said.

“I think you are right,” Red Eagle agreed.

“That's what I figured when I first saw the envelope,” Sandy said.

“How did you get the letter?” Jericho asked.

“It's a stage-line letter, not a US Post Office letter. The back is marked \$5.16 prepaid. The coach line charges a half cent a mile for letters. That puts the sender a little over a hundred miles away. It came on the stage from the east. The Identification Mark under the fee – KAN-22 – is the stage address for Wichita. The coach line requires the sender's address, but you see this envelope doesn't have one. Somebody was bribed to leave it off. Why it came stage. It

would be much harder to find a US Post Office employee you can bribe.”

“Good Sheriffing work, Sandy,” Cal said.

“So, what should we do about it,” Red Eagle asked looking to Sandy for a response.

“Well, the safest thing, of course, would be for you two to keep your noses out of Waterson’s business the way the letter suggests, but since you won’t do that – even if I give you a direct order to that effect – I can only say be very careful, use good judgment and keep your heads down when the lead starts to fly – as I’m sure it will.”

“Well put. You have come to know us pretty well,” Jericho said. “Any more reports about the IMPs bothering anybody?”

“One. They attacked a lone wagon just east of Wichita. A man delivering supplies to the Cavalry post down near the border with the Indian Territory.”

“Oh, no!” Jericho said. “Not Zeke! Is he alright?”

“How inarnation did you know the man’s name, Jericho?” Sandy asked.

“He is a friend of mine – a good man. Do you know how he is?”

“Shot up pretty bad, according to the report. He’s in the hospital at Wichita.”

“I have to go to him. If it wasn’t for him I’d have never come across my brother.”

“That’s we two have to go to him, then, Jericho,” Red Eagle said.

They exchanged a quick smile and nod. Cal pushed his hat toward the back of his head and spoke.

“I guess that’s ‘three we’ then guys. We’ll need supplies. Stage or horseback?”

“Which will be faster?” Jericho asked looking at Sandy.

“Considering that the stage changes horses often on that run, I’d say the stage. Without having to carry your weight, your horses will be fresh by the time we get there with you.”

“When is the next eastbound?”

“Four fifteen. That gives us less than a half hour,” Cal said.

Jericho turned to Red Eagle.

“You get thirty dollars out of the bank and meet me at the general store. I’ll have the supplies by the time you join me. Cal, will you go tell Luke at the stage office we will need three tickets. We’ll pay for them when we get there. Be sure it doesn’t leave without us.”

Sandy shook his head.

“What?” Jericho asked afraid he was going to try and stop them.

“It’s just hard to understand how you two can be so darn grown up and responsible at times like this and so cotton pickin’ irresponsible at other times.”

Jericho offered a broad grin.

“Why, it’s just called being twelve years old – that’s too far back for you to remember, I suppose.”

“Skedaddle, vamoose, get out a here!”

They left. Sandy followed them to the door and called after them.

“Come back in one piece, you hear, or I’ll personally tan your hides.”

With the horses’ reins tied off so they could follow along, freely, at their own pace, the saddles on the back of the stage, and the boys on board, the coach pulled out exactly on time – four fifteen. It was a bit more than a one-hundred-mile journey – thirty or so east to McPherson and then south to Wichita. The fare came to \$18.00 for the three of them and would take between twelve and fourteen hours allowing time for stops to change teams and one stop for the passengers to eat. It would get them to their destination by about sunup the following morning. The idea of traveling 100 miles in only 14 hours amazed the boys. There was one other passenger, a middle-aged man – a salesman – who rode as far as McPherson. Out of McPherson it was only the boys. The driver explained that the all-night run seldom carried many passengers – mostly just the two strongboxes, mail and packages.

It gave them room to spread out and get some sleep. Jericho and Red Eagle each laid out on a seat inside and Cal climbed up top which was a better fit to his size.

About two o’clock in the morning shots rang out

awakening the boys. The stage drew to a quick halt. They didn't show themselves, but managed peeks out the windows. There were loud voices.

"Highwaymen," Jericho said.

"I count only five of them," Red Eagle reported. They are all on the west side of the road."

Jericho pointed to two of the three rifles Cal had brought along – he had one with him up top. Each boy took one and slipped out the door opposite the horsemen. Apparently, not having seen any passengers through the windows, they assumed there were none. The boys crawled north through the grass some fifteen yards.

"With clouds covering the moon right now if we hurry we should be able to circle around and get in behind them before they leave," Jericho said.

That was, unfortunately, the only part of the plan he had figured out.

They moved as silently as Indians – Red Eagle had taught his brother well. They took a position ten yards behind the men. Only one remained mounted and held a rifle while the others worked to tie the strong boxes onto two pack mules that accompanied them.

"Cal still hasn't showed himself," Red Eagle said quietly.

"He has probably tried to whisper down to us and not getting any response figured we were up to something. I'm thinking he's just waiting for us to make a move. It's all working well."

"So, if this plan is working so well, why do the bad guys still have the strong boxes?" Red Eagle asked.

"They won't for long. Whistle for the horses and then begin firing at the ground in the direction of the riders. Cal will think of something."

"Not the best plan you have ever had, Same Face."

"I go with what I have. Now, we need to lie down in the grass about twenty feet away from each other. Tell Golden to go to Cal. Lightning and Gray will follow him and disrupt things. We start firing immediately."

The boys crawled into position. The moon came out for just a few seconds. Jericho stood up and waved his arms

above his head. He figured the highwaymen were too busy to notice, but hoped that Cal would. He dropped back onto his belly. Red Eagle whistled. The clouds drifted back across the moon. The horses came to them and were immediately sent on their ways toward the stage – to Cal.

The boys began firing, spreading out the shots over a wide area to make it appear there were more shooters. Gray knocked to the ground the man who had remained mounted. The mules balked and kicked and ran off. All the men turned to look in the direction from which the boys were firing. They fumbled for their side arms.

Cal stood up on top of the stage and called out.

“Put down your guns and kick them into the grass. I am a sheriff’s deputy. You are surrounded by my posse.”

He fired a few shots coming very close to several of the men who were slow to follow his direction. They immediately did as they had been instructed.

“Drop your pants around your ankles, fasten your belts, and get on your bellies. NOW!”

He fired a few more shots. Standing by then, the boys moved in from the south. Within a few minutes the men’s arms were tied behind their backs.

The driver and the man riding shotgun, who had both jumped off the stage and run into the darkness at the first shots, returned looking a bit sheepish (embarrassed) and apologized.

“How far to the next stage stop?” Cal asked the driver.

“An hour – a little less.”

“We’ll leave these guys there and send the sheriff’s deputy up from Newton to pick them up. Get ‘em into the coach. We’ll ride alongside. We need to make sure none of them have hidden weapons before we lift them inside.”

Cal arranged them kneeling on the floor with their heads and chests on the seats.

“Tie each door closed at the windows so there’s no chance they can get out.”

With all that done and the horses saddled, they continued south along the road.

“One question, Cal,” Red Eagle asked. “Why did you make them drop their pants?”

“Ever see a guy try to run with his pants down around his ankles?”

“I see. Very clever. Like something Same Face would think of.”

“Same Face did all the thinking he needed to do, Red Eagle. He saved whatever’s in the boxes and maybe our lives.”

“Each box holds about five thousand dollars in gold from the Bradford mine up north of the old mill.”

“A real gold mine?” Jericho asked as if totally surprised there might be any in that area of the country.

The Shotgun answered.

“Only working mine within a hundred and fifty miles in all directions. The old timers tell of another one that’s so well hid nobody done never found it.”

“Imagine that!” Jericho said with surprise and amazement in his voice.

Red Eagle muffled his chuckle into his arm. His brother was really something else – at least he thought that was the expression. He would check it out later.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Waterson!

They secured the bad guys at the stage station and continued on in relative peace. They even managed to sleep. Six a.m. saw them pulling to a stop at the station at the northwest edge of Wichita. They saddled up and set off in search of the hospital. They learned from the station master that there were two in that city. They had no information about which one was caring for Zeke so they headed for the one on the north side of town first.

It was a large, older, three story house that had been converted for use by two local doctors. At seven o'clock they entered the front door into a wide long hall with doors off to each side. Nobody seemed to be around. Perhaps it was too early for visitors. Not to let a little thing like having been given no permission to enter stop him, Jericho began opening doors. The third one turned out to be the right one.

Zeke was still asleep. Jericho approached the bed while the others held back. He was wearing his knife on his belt; it was at eye level as Zeke lay in bed. The man's eyes fluttered open and he saw it. His face broke a smile.

"Not gonna throw that thing in my window again, are you?"

He turned from his side onto his back and looked up into Jericho's face.

"How in tarnation did you know I was here?"

"I got ways."

"And I don't doubt that for a minute. Who are your friends?"

Jericho motioned them toward him. Zeke's forehead furrowed and he looked back and forth.

"My eyes seein' double?"

"A long story. For now, I'll just say this is Red Eagle, my brother. I ran into him about a week after I left you."

"I'll say brother – twin brother! That's a tale that needs to be told."

"I'll explain later. This tall guy with the badge is our good friend, Deputy Cal Calvin. We are after the bad guys who did all this to you. They've done similar stuff to other people. Are you up to talking about it?"

"Sure. Well, let's see. You know how I just take off across the prairie – don't often use roads or trails. I was on my way back to KC. A group of men rode up – I'd been watching them trailing me for some time. When I cross a ranch sometimes riders come to check me out and tell me I'm on their property so that's what I was expecting. Instead, I saw they were wearing buckskin – poorest Indian impersonators I've ever seen. You ever in your whole life seen a Indian with a beard down to his chest? I stopped and laid my rifle across my lap. Right then two arrows came at me. One hit me in the chest and the other hit the wagon. Then there were several shots – one hit me in my left leg and one in my left shoulder. I guess the final shot grazed my head and knocked me unconscious.

"I don't remember any more until I woke up here. They tell me a snake oil salesman brought me in. I had met him several days before. We were going in opposite directions that morning. He gave me a sample bottle and told me to spread the word. I made no promises. I guess he found me, turned around and brought me clear back to Wichita. Then he left. I never seen him after. He called himself Dr. Astounding, that's really all I know about him. I have no idea what happened to my team and wagon."

"Did they take anything from you?" Cal asked.

"Money, watch, boots, rifle – maybe other things from the wagon."

"Any idea how long you'll be here?"

"I'm pretty weak. My temperature is down – I guess it raged from infection the first several days. A few more days I

assume. I still don't understand how you got here, Jericho."

"Cal's boss, got a notice about the attack on you – it listed your name. The attack looked a lot like several others that we believe were done to stir up trouble so the Indians will be sent to the reservations down south of us. When I heard your name – the only Zeke I've ever known – and where it took place, I figured it was you. Of course, I came."

"Of course, you would come. Thanks, you know."

Jericho nodded and continued.

"Did you notice any brands on the horses?"

"No. And they wore bandanas across their faces so I'd never recognize them."

At that point in the conversation, a nurse entered clearly disturbed they were there.

"We looked for you earlier, but couldn't find you. Zeke here is my long-lost uncle."

Jericho figured if the uncle story worked once (Book One) why not use it again?

"We are leaving now anyway. You take the best care of him, you hear. Whatever he needs."

By then she had herded them out into the hall and closed the door. Jericho continued.

"My brother and I will pay his bill. Send it to Jericho and Red Eagle in care of Red Bend Kansas. All our mail comes that way."

Again, Red Eagle had to muffle a chuckle. The statement had been accurate of course. All the mail – one letter – they had ever received had come that way – well pretty much anyway.

Outside they hatched a plan.

"I'm pretty sure I can take us on the route he uses. He laid it out in some detail for me. I think he expected me to come running after him once I spent my first night alone on the prairie. Maybe that's the place to start – see if we can find the team and wagon."

The boys turned to Cal to get his reaction.

"Sounds good. How about we check with the Sheriff first, though. No need duplicating what he may have already done."

"Makes sense," Red Eagle said. "Shortest trail to your

destination is usually wisest plan.”

“Is that another Cherokee saying?” Jericho asked.

“No. That’s Red Eagle agreeing with Deputy Cal, hoping to rein in brother’s unbridled enthusiasm.”

“Unbridled enthusiasm!” Jericho said. “Remember that for when we write our article about this adventure for Cilla’s paper.”

Cal shook his head. Soon the young man would be having dreams that someday full length books would be written about their adventures. [Hmm?]

The sheriff was out so they talked with a deputy. He had little more information. His men had looked for the team and wagon with no success. They did find a shoe one of the raider’s horses had thrown.

“Can I see that shoe?” Cal asked. “You know many ranches have their black smiths mark horseshoes to help identify stolen horses.”

“That’s right,” the deputy said. “I have to admit I hadn’t thought about that.”

They were soon examining it.

“The marking is on the inside. It’s put there on the side that fits against the hoof so it won’t wear off through use,” Cal went on.

The boys looked on with interest. Their respect for Cal was growing by the minute.

“What does that look like to you, Deputy?” Cal asked pointing.

They boys strained their necks to see.

“Well I’ll be – the Flying W. Not proof of course. Waterson will just say it belongs to a horse that was stolen.”

“What is a term that means just less than ‘proof’?” Red Eagle asked.

“How about ‘strong evidence?’” the deputy said.

“So, if we could find a Flying W horse with one brand new shoe, would that help, deputy?”

“More evidence, but still not proof. Lots of reasons horses need shoeing.”

Cal nodded.

“How thorough a search did your men do?” Jericho asked.

“Couldn’t call it thorough, I suppose. The spot was easy to find – the only stand of five old pines around a small pond in the area.”

He drew them a rough map and handed it to Cal who he assumed was in charge. That was fine with the boys.

Outside, Red Eagle spoke.

“Eat, then travel?”

The response was unanimous.

By ten o’clock they were on their way due east of the city. They skirted Waterson’s ranch to the north eventually coming to a small creek that ran generally north and south.

“I think we should follow the water,” Red Eagle said. “Zeke’s horses will find and stay with the water.”

It made sense. The creek was on the map although some distance west of the stand of pine trees. They were riding single file along the creek with Jericho in the lead.

“Red Eagle is right again,” Jericho said. “Look just up there. The team and wagon.”

They picked up their pace and were soon there.

There was a problem – well several, actually. The wagon had overturned onto its side and the horses had not been able to get away.

“Looks like the wagon overturned when the team waded out into the creek,” Red Eagle said. “The bank is really steep right there.”

“At least they’ve had water to drink and grass to eat,” Jericho said.

The boys dismounted. Jericho approached the horses. They seemed to remember him. While he talked to them and used his fingers to comb their manes, the others unhitched them from the wagon.

“The wagon really isn’t damaged,” Cal said. “We’ll need a long pole to use as a pry bar to help us right it. That’s one big, heavy wagon.”

“Zeke hauls supplies to the Army post down on the border. Makes the run every week. Probably puts three hundred miles or so on it a week.”

“So, you rode with him west from Kansas City,” Cal said really asking.

“Yup. I kept some bad guys from stealing his loaded

wagon one night and that sort of cemented our friendship. He's the one who taught me how to shoot a rifle and drive a team. The best man I ever knew before I hit Red Bend."

"I count six arrows still in the wagon," Red Eagle said. "Shall I collect them?"

They looked at Cal. He nodded.

"They're the fake kind that you've described, are they?"

"Yup."

Cal and Jericho broke into laughter – it was so unexpected to hear Red Eagle say, 'yup'.

"Nothing at all left inside the wagon," Cal said.

"It would have just been personal stuff since he was on his way back to KC," Jericho explained. "And he traveled light."

"Do you still want to go over to the stand of pines," Cal said.

"Doesn't seem necessary now," Jericho said. "We have the wagon and team and that's what we set out to find. The Sheriff's men seem to have given the site of the attack a good enough going over. I say we head back."

Red Eagle nodded.

An hour later they had the wagon back on its wheels, the team hitched to it and had pulled it out of the creek. Cal handled the wagon and they headed back south. Gray ran free clearly aggravated that Golden and Lightning were not free to play with him.

By one o'clock they had boarded the team at a livery stable near the hospital. The boys were glad they had found Zeke's horses and wagon, but they were still disappointed they had no solid evidence against Waterson and the ACP.

"I'm thinking the only place we're going to find that evidence it out at his ranch," Jericho said.

"I don't like where this conversation is going," Cal said.

"As I recall, Sandy just said you had to stay with us, not listen to us or agree with us," Jericho said with a grin.

"Do you have a plan?" Red Eagle asked.

"Of course. We go out to the ranch."

"That's it? We go out to the ranch! I think I'm with Cal on this."

"It might be best if only one of us went, anyway – less

easily spotted.”

“Not on your life,” Red Eagle said. “Who’ll come to your rescue when you get in trouble?”

Jericho smiled to himself. His plan already seemed to be working very well. He had his posse and they insisted on accompanying him.

They stopped by the hospital to let Zeke know they found his team and wagon and told him where it was stabled. Then they set off for the ranch.

Once on Waterson’s property they kept a distance of some hundred yards south of the main trail that led to the house and buildings. The grass there had not been grazed recently and grew belly high to the horses. Good cover, Jericho thought in case they were spotted. They rode on for nearly an hour. It was apparently a huge ranch.

The buildings came into sight – a large, two story house, a corral that could hold dozens of horses, and a tall windmill pumping water from a well into a large pond. The buildings were all painted brown – an odd choice they thought, but let it pass. Maybe it just reflected the man’s somber (gloomy) approach to life.

“That’s the bunk house behind the main house,” Cal said pointing – “the long narrow one. There will be hay for winter put up in the two large barns – places for the horses on the ground floor.”

“Where do we start looking and what are we looking for?” Red Eagle asked.

“Records about the ACPs activities, I imagine. They’ll most likely be in the house, don’t you think?”

The other two shrugged, having no idea how to process his suggestion or question or whatever it had been.

They dismounted, walked on through the high grass and were soon close enough for a good look at the house. Cal reluctantly offered a comment, pointing.

“The window in the front center on the second floor just above the porch roof. See the heavy drapes – green. Look at the other windows – frilly curtains. I’m betting the old man’s office is the one with the drapes. That’s probably where the records would be.”

Red Eagle had taken the information and already had a

plan in mind.

“The vine thing . . .” he waited for Jericho to provide the proper word.

“Trellis.”

“The trellis beside the front porch looks sturdy enough for a black bear to climb it.”

“Good!” Jericho said. “We’ll have easy access to the window from on top of the porch. Now, how to open it?”

“Use your knife to pry it open.”

He reached out and tugged on Jericho’s shirt.

“The sun is at three o’clock shining on this side of the house. That white shirt of yours isn’t going to let you sneak across the porch roof.”

“Indian boy time, I guess,” Jericho said.

He had soon changed into the Indian garb he always carried in his saddle bags. Their skin was a near enough match to the color of the house they would pretty well blend in.

“I suppose I’m nominated to stay here with the horses,” Cal said. “Signal in some way if you need my help – make that when you need my help.”

Without comment the boys ducked low and made their way through the grass toward the house. Cal crossed his fingers and knelt down to stay out of sight. Oddly, perhaps, nobody seemed to be in the area. They supposed they were all away tending to things ranch hands tended to.

The boys made it to the porch. They made it up the trellis and across the roof. They looked into the empty office room and pried open the unlocked window. They entered and looked around. To their right, sat a huge desk in front of a wall of floor to ceiling book cases. Four chairs were arranged in front of the desk. The floor was mostly covered by a round, braided rug. It was a mix of brown, green and orange and was the only thing in the room that could be considered bright and pleasant. The door was large and appeared to be solid oak. The knob and hinges were shiny brass and massive.

After a few minutes, and with no warning, the door opened. A middle-aged man entered, six shooter soon in hand. He didn’t look happy to see them.

CHAPTER TWELVE

It Became a Life and Death Race!

“Imagine seeing you here. Mr. Waterson, I assume,” Jericho said offering a tone that sounded far more confident than he was feeling inside. He offered his hand for a shake. It was ignored – pushed aside with the muzzle of his gun, actually.

“You! The half breeds.”

“Yes, Sir, and quite proud of it. So you can more accurately address your letters to us in the future, My brother is Red Eagle – or Jacob if you prefer his white half name – and I am Jericho – or Same Face if you prefer my Cherokee half name. Just hate for your letters to get lost you understand. I hope you are pleased that we came as soon as we got your note.”

“You insufferable (unbearable) half-bred scum!”

“And yet my brother and I had absolutely nothing to do with the fact that we were born to be what we are. It’s hard to understand why you seem to blame us for it.”

“Red whoever!” Waterson said addressing Red Eagle. “Put your bow and arrow holder on my desk.”

“It is called a quiver, Sir,” Red Eagle said trying to maintain the same sound of confidence his brother had launched. Being behind the desk he figured Waterson couldn’t see his legs shaking.

“You armed?” he asked turning to Jericho.

“Oh, yes, sir. Twice. My right arm here and my left arm here.”

Waterson made a sound of greatest irritation. His face turned red. Jericho continued.

“I used both of them as we gathered proof you are behind the so-called Indian raids. In fact, we got you clean as a WHISTLE, right, brother?”

Red Eagle got the message. He turned toward the open window and whistled long and loud. The idea was that their horses would hear and come toward the house and that Cal would understand that was their signal that things weren't going as planned.

Waterson opened the door and called out into the hall. Soon two men appeared just outside the room.

“Lookie what the boss done found, Slim. Ever see such a thing?”

The two men looked back and forth between them.

Waterson interrupted.

“Take them to the attic room. They're a sly pair. Tie their feet and their hands behind them. I'll deal with them shortly.”

He holstered his gun and patted it to make a point to the boys.

His two men each grabbed one of the boys by his arm and were soon pushing them up the steep, narrow stairs ahead of them. Five minutes later found them bound and laying on their stomachs on the floor.

“Wow! Did they make a big mistake,” Jericho said.

“You know I have no idea what that might be, considering our present situation.”

“They forgot to gag us. We can talk and when we can talk it's like three or four brains all working together.”

Red Eagle had noticed the same thing. One would take what the other said and then add to it and the first would do the same until something entirely new and wonderful had evolved (come about). But still things didn't look so great to him at that moment.

“I'll just wait while you talk the ropes untied,” Red Eagle said, stating their situation the way he saw it.

“My knife is under the belt in the front of my breechclout. We get on our knees. I come up behind you. You reach back and feel for the knife. Once you have it you'll hold it out straight behind you. I will back up to it and together we'll cut through the rope around my wrists.”

“And what do I do when we cut the vein in your wrist?” Red Eagle asked sounding a bit skeptical of the whole operation.

Jericho ignored, but took note of, the caution.

Without much difficulty, Red Eagle reached the knife in its scabbard. The real problem came in removing the knife from that carrying case. A loop held the handle in place and it had to be slipped up over the end of the knife. Only then could it be removed.

Red Eagle held the scabbard with the knife in it behind him. Jericho backed into him. He found the scabbard. He located the loop with his fingers. In the process the knife and scabbard fell to the floor.

“We can handle this,” Jericho said. “You lean back against me far enough so you can and touch the floor with your hands. Then I’ll move you into position so you can pick it up.”

It took a while, but eventually the scabbard was back in Red Eagle’s bound hands. Jericho scooted toward him and his brother was soon kneeling up straight again.

“Hey. The fall loosened the loop.” Jericho announced. “The knife is free to be slipped out.”

“The knife is stuck in the leather,” Red Eagle said.

“I see. Let me turn my back to you again. You hold the handle of the knife tight and I will pull the scabbard free.”

That was accomplished more easily than either had figured. Red Eagle turned the blade, sharp edge up, and held it as low as he could manage. Neither of them could see what was going on.

“We need to be very careful,” Red Eagle said then chuckled.

“What’s so funny?”

“I sounded like you, telling us to be careful when it was the last thing that needed to be said. The way white men say unnecessary things, thing.”

“That is funny. When we tell it to our grandchildren I’m sure I will chuckle, also.”

With his fingers, Jericho located the blade and very carefully lowered the rope that bound his wrists onto it. He began moving his hands so the rope slid across the blade. He

needed to stop several times – the position put great strain on his arms and shoulders.

“I felt one of the strands pop free,” Jericho said. “There are just three strands in the rope. You doing alright?”

“I’m fine. You have the difficult part of this.”

They continued and ten minutes or so later the final strand came apart. Jericho turned around and took the knife from Red Eagle. He cut himself free of the rope around his ankles and then attended to his brother.

“So, we are free of the ropes. How do we get free from this room?”

It had been Jericho thinking out loud. He walked to the door and tried it.

“Locked.”

“You sound like that surprised you.”

Jericho ignored the comment. He began feeling around the walls. The beams that supported the roof were open above them. That observation didn’t immediately seem to help any.

“Up there where the inside wall with the door meets the roof – see that opening with slats running across it,” Red Eagle said pointing.

“It can’t be more than ten inches wide and twenty-four long,” Jericho said. “Probably extends out above the stairway. I have an idea about it.”

“Of course, you do.”

“There is a cupola at the center of ridgeline on the roof.”

“A cupo-what?”

“Cupola – like a little square dome with a little roof on it that straddles the ridge of the roof. It has louvers in it to let out the hot air from the attic. It looked to be maybe three feet square. Hard to judge the size on the basis of a fleeting glance from so far away.”

“I see,” Red Eagle said. “We scamper up the wall, break out the slats at the ceiling, move up into the Cupo-thing, break out the louvers there, climb out onto the roof and roll down it thirty feet to our deaths.”

“Basically, yes – without the pessimistic final scene. The peak in this room is about ten feet above the floor. We are each two inches shy of five feet tall. Subtract the height of

one of our heads – ten inches – and when one of us stands on the other's shoulders, adding in the length of our arms, we can easily reach those slats in the ceiling don't you think?"

"If I followed what you said – and surprisingly I think I did – I believe your estimate is correct. One problem, though."

"Only one," Jericho said grinning.

Red Eagle ignored it and continued.

"What if somebody hears us breaking the slats?"

"Simple. When he opens the door and enters the room, the one of us who is on the other one's shoulders falls on him, knocks him out and we tie him up with what's left of the ropes. Then we leave down the stairs."

"And if four men enter instead of just one?"

"Then we'll need Plan B."

"Who's up and who's down?" Jericho said.

"You up," Red Eagle said. "You may need your knife up there."

With less difficulty than they imagined, Jericho was soon up and working on the slats. Rather than having been nailed in place, they had been slid into slots along the sides and were easily and quietly pulled out and removed. It was at that moment they both saw the problem. If one lifted himself up into the cupola on top of the roof, how would the other one – the one standing on the floor – also get up there?

"Let me come down and rest your shoulders while we think this out."

He jumped to the floor.

"What about this?" Red Eagle said. "What if I go up on your shoulders and hang there by my fingers over the lip at the ceiling while you climb up over me until you can slip through the opening into the cupo-whatever? Then I'll pull myself up and follow you."

"Sounds good, but are your fingers really that strong? They'll have to support the weight of both of us for several minutes."

"I think we are about to find out – unless you have reason to believe yours are stronger. I have milked the goats twice a day since I was about eight. I imagine that would have strengthened them, don't you?"

"Makes sense. You okay with that, then?"

“I believe it was my idea.”

Red Eagle was soon in place on Jericho’s shoulders working to get the best grip possible on the edge of the opening.

“I’m as ready as I’ll be, I guess.”

Jericho stepped back and Red Eagle hung there. Jericho hugged his arms around his brother’s legs just above the knees and then did the same with his legs at his ankles. Gradually he slipped his arms higher and then his legs. Soon his arms were around his brother’s neck. He moved his legs to his chest and finally was in position to grasp the edge of the opening himself. They hung there back to back.

Red Eagle sighed.

“Good work, little brother.”

“Did you expect something less?”

“Can you pull yourself up above?” Jericho asked thinking his brother was more in need of a rest than he was.

It proved to be a very tricky maneuver in such close proximity with each other, but eventually he was sitting inside the structure that sat on the roof.

“I can pull you up with my hands,” Red Eagle suggested.

He braced his feet against the side of the cupola and leaned down between his legs, arms extended through the opening to Jericho so he could easily switch his grip from the edge of the roof to his hands.

It was a struggle, but soon accomplished.

They sat to rest, unexpectedly breathing hard. Jericho pointed out that the louvers on the outside of the structure were also slid into slots from the inside. It would make the task of disassembling it quite easy.

“There may be men working out back by the buildings by now,” Jericho said. “I suggest we remove the louvers in front and make our exit in that direction.”

They worked on it together. Five minutes later the front louver slates had all been slid out and stashed inside.

Red Eagle reached out and felt the roof.

“Very hot. Watch your skin or you’ll get burned.”

Jericho nodded and had a question.

“How far do you think the porch roof was below this roof

at the eaves?”

“Well, the ceiling in Waterson’s office was eight feet high so I’d calculate about a ten foot drop down across the second floor to the porch roof.”

“That’s what I was thinking. You’re getting pretty good with the measurement system, by the way.”

Red Eagle offered a quick smile. He had a good teacher, but wouldn’t waist words mentioning it.

“So, is that the plan, then,” Red Eagle asked. “Down to the eve, onto the porch roof and then back down the trellis?”

“Unless you have a better one.”

“This main roof is steep. Easy to lose our footing and start sliding.”

“We’ll butt scoot.”

“We’ll what?”

“Sit down, knees bent up, moccasins on the shingles in front of us. Then scoot our butts forward, scoot our feet on out in front, and repeat.”

“I have one more idea,” Red Eagle said. “Let us put the slats back in the ceiling so Waterson will have trouble figuring out how we escaped.”

“I love it. We can do the same for the louvers up here.”

It took an extra ten minutes, but they figured it was worth it. They blended right in against the brown shingles. Cal and the horses were nowhere in sight.

“I suppose once we hit the ground we make a bee line back to the high grass where we started from,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle nodded. They began their careful descent down the steep roof.

At the edge, it seemed it would be necessary to turn onto their stomachs, hang their legs over and drop to the porch roof. They arranged the front drape of their breechclouts up on the shingles to protect their stomachs and chest from hot tar of the shingles and made the drop. The porch roof was wood planking and not nearly so hot. They crouched against the front of the house looking things over.

Instead of heading right for the trellis, Jericho peeked in through the open window of Waterson’s office. He disappeared inside and reappeared a moment later with the bow and quiver. He handed them to his brother and urged

him toward the south end of the roof and the trellis.

A man rounded that side of the house and caught sight of them. He was walking and called out. The boys were still up on the roof. Red Eagle whistled for the horses. They appeared from around the opposite side of the house.

“Jump!” Red Eagle said.

He was immediately flying over the front of the roof, legs first, spread apart, and made a perfect landing, straddling Golden’s back. Jericho, never having done such a thing, followed his brother out into space. Amazed, a moment later he found himself astride Lightning. Gray had not appeared with the others. The boys lay low on their horses, headed for the grass at a full gallop and kept going. The man shook his fists after them and hurried back toward the corral. Fortunately, he had not been armed.

They rode on for five minutes before pulling to a stop and turning to see what was happening behind them. There was a lone rider – the man who had spotted them they assumed. They dismounted, thinking they would be better off hiding themselves in the grass and letting the horses run on ahead.

Rather than going on ahead, however, they ran toward the rider. The boys did not understand, but continued to move south through the tall grass glancing back over their shoulders from time to time. Lightning had charged a rider once before so perhaps he was moving to do battle and protect them.

Presently, the rider came close enough so the boys could make him out. Their horses were trotting along beside. It was Gray and where Gray went, went Cal. The boys stood up and waved. Cal picked up to a gallop and headed toward them.

“So, Waterson invite you in for a meal?” Cal asked really asking to hear the story.

The boys mounted up and gave the explanation as they rode at a good clip back toward Wichita.

When they finished, Jericho added one more thing, which he directed at Cal.

“My brother’s people have a saying about never needing to say the obvious so in light of that you can probably skip saying what you’re thinking about what could have been

defined as our irresponsible, indefensible, dangerous behavior.”

It was skipped with a nod and a tip of Cal's hat.

“We don't seem to be any better off as far as proof goes than we were before all of this, Cal said.

“Well, maybe we are,” Jericho said.

They pulled their mounts to a stop and sat there waiting for Jericho to explain.

Jericho reached inside the rear of his waistband and pulled out a sealed envelope. It was addressed to Tom Jackson, Association for Cultural Purity, in care of as post office box in Denver.

“I figured this might be important for us. It was on his desk.”

They dismounted. Jericho tore it open and read it out loud.

‘Tom – Next month is ‘Go Month’. Each chapter of ACP will conduct eight ‘Indian raids’ in their immediate area. I have the bureau of Indian affairs here in Kansas ready to recommend to Washington that every redskin in the land be confined to reservations or be shot on sight. It is your assignment to do the same in Colorado. You need to make whatever dollar arrangements are necessary with the director of the bureau. God's Speed. Waterson.’

With their full attention on the letter, they had not been alert to what was going on behind them. A dozen or more riders were closing on them fast. Bullets started flying in their direction. It became a life and death race to the city limits.

///

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“Never Saw such a big Rattlesnake.”

As the boys and Cal would discover in the years to come, few horses in the state of Kansas were as fast as Golden, Lightning and Gray. They had soon left Waterson’s men in their dust causing them to give up the chase. It was well after five in the afternoon when they entered Wichita. They slowed to a walk, riding directly to the Sheriff’s office. Cal introduced himself.

“I’m Cal Calvin, deputy out of the Sheriff’s office at Red Bend. We spoke with your deputy earlier. We have been investigating the recent rash of so-called Indian attacks on travelers and businesses across a wide area of central Kansas. We are in possession of a document that incriminates the man who is behind it all.”

“Waterson? Really?” the Sheriff said.

“Sounds like you’ve suspected him.”

“I have – just haven’t been able to prove it. His son was killed by Indians when he and some friends rode down into the Indian Territory a few years ago, trying to stir up trouble. The Bureau of Indian Affairs found him to be at fault and cleared the Apaches of any wrongdoing – they were merely protecting their families according to the report. Ever since, Waterson has had it in for them.

“He formed his Association a little less than a year ago, and uses it as a front for stirring up trouble. There always seem to be a few who will follow a person who spreads hate. Can’t figure why, but they’re always around. It’s like the only way some failures can make themselves feel like somebody –

putting somebody else down – playing the bully.

“What did you find and don’t tell me how you came upon it since I’m sure he didn’t willingly hand it over to you.”

Jericho produced it and handed it over. The Sheriff read it to himself.

“I will hand deliver this to the Judge. I think we may finally have him. Usually when the top dog gets caught the members of his pack howl their heads off.”

“I assume that saying means his men will turn on him and provide evidence,” Red Eagle said.

“Exactly. Let me catch the judge before he leaves for the day. Will you be around in the morning?”

“We can be,” Cal said.

“I think that would be a good idea in case the judge has questions I can’t answer. If he does, choose your answers carefully. Nobody wants to get Waterson any more than the judge, but he’s a conscientious man and will follow the law to the letter in doing that.”

The boys turned to leave. The Sheriff had a question.

“So, you two. I imagine you have quite a story.”

“I’d say your ‘imagine’ is quite accurate,” Jericho said. “Perhaps there will be time in the morning. You’re in a hurry and we are starved. Can you recommend a place to eat?”

“The restaurant at the hotel across the street. Tell them Sheriff Mason recommended it and they’ll take good care of you.”

“They’re okay serving Indians?” Cal asked wanting to avoid a scene if it would be a problem.

“The woman who runs it is Cherokee. Best cook in this part of the state. You’ll be welcomed with open arms. Most of the folks around here are pretty open minded. Always a few bad apples understand, but mostly really good folks.”

They crossed the street to the hotel.

As they ate they talked.

“What do you think Waterson will do when he finds that envelop missing?” Red Eagle asked.

“He only has two choices the way I see it,” Cal said. “He can try to get it back or he can leave – run away – and I can’t see him just pulling up stakes and leaving his million-dollar ranch behind, can you?”

The boys shook their heads, agreeing.

“That doesn’t sound real good for us, does it?” Jericho said.

“Won’t the fact that you are a deputy keep him away?” Red Eagle asked.

“He doesn’t know I’m a deputy. At the ranch, I laid low waiting on you two. I didn’t come into contact with him or any of his men close up. They have no idea I wear a badge. I suggest you two change into white kids’ duds (clothes) as soon as possible.”

When they finished eating – steak, corn, beans, rolls and hot berry pie – the boys changed in a storeroom and they all left through the back door. Red Eagle whistled and soon their horses trotted down the alley from out front.

They mounted up. Jericho turned to Red Eagle.”

“Go ahead. Say it. Get it out of your system.”

“I really hate these clothes you know.”

“Feel better?”

“Not really, but thanks for listening.”

They walked their horses to the side street talking as they went.

“The man who came into the restaurant right after we did, just left out the back door of the hotel,” Red Eagle said. “I think he’s following us.”

“Let’s ride on a while and see what happens,” Cal suggested.

After three blocks the man appeared on a horse, slowing and hanging back well behind them. When they turned, he turned.”

“I have an idea,” Jericho said.

Cal turned to Red Eagle.

“What about that? Your brother has an idea. Who’d have thought that would ever happen?”

“Not me for sure and I know him pretty well.”

“When you two are finished making fun, I’ll be happy to share it with you.”

“Are we finished, Red Eagle?”

“I’m finished. Are you finished?”

“I’m finished.”

They looked at Jericho who patiently waited for their

foolishness to run its course. Then he shared his idea. They agreed and moved on out of town to a large stand of trees they had come upon on the way into the city. They rode a dozen or so yards into the woods until they came to a small clearing where they dismounted and began making camp.

“He’s watching us,” Red Eagle said.

They gathered stones to enclose a fire circle on the ground and started a fire with wood they collected from nearby. They rolled out sleeping bags.

“He is gone,” Red Eagle said.

“Let’s really get to work, then,” Jericho said. “We’ll each pile leave under our blanket to make it look like we are there asleep.”

With that done they broke out the several lengths of rope a prairie rider was never without. They moved a bit further into the woods and spread a wide lasso loop on the ground – eight feet across. They ran the other end of the rope up over a tree branch some 12 feet above the ground. The other end they fastened to Gray’s saddle horn. Gray stood on the opposite side of the tree heading into the woods, mostly hidden by underbrush.

They repeated that two more times, each loop a bit further into the woods – one tied to Lightning and one to Golden. They covered the loops with leaves.

That done, they went over the plan one more time.

“When that guy brings back reinforcements we can expect them to dismount and walk into the woods to avoid low branches, and so they can sneak up on us quietly. They should have their guns drawn – in their hands. At that point we’ll put the plan into action.”

The others agreed with nods. Cal remained out of sight with Gray. He figured the plan had maybe a fifty/fifty chance of succeeding. Red Eagle was with the boys’ horses further on into the trees. They waited for more than an hour. It had grown very dark there in among the trees.

“I hear horses,” Red Eagle called out quietly.

Jericho remained behind a large tree near the rear of their camp clearing. The men entered the woods precisely as the boys had predicted – on foot, guns drawn. They stopped at the other edge of the clearing. What they had hoped would

happen, did happen. Three of the clumsy, bogus, arrows flew through the air, one directed into each of the bed rolls. Since there was no movement or sounds from under the blankets, three of the six men walked up to the bedrolls and kicked at them. Instead of finding bodies, of course, leaves flew. There were angry voices as they looked around.

At that moment, Jericho moved around the tree into the light of the campfire where he could be seen.

“Good evening, gentlemen. I believe I may be who you are looking for,” he said before turning and running away in the direction of the lasso loops. He stopped just on the far side of the first one. Two men gave chase and stepped inside it. Cal slapped Gray who moved forward. The loop tightened around the men’s ankles and they were lifted up to the branch, hanging there upside down. Their guns were jarred from their hands as they were jerked into the air.

Confused, the others ran after Jericho. He ran on past the next loop and stopped taunting them by waving his fingers at his ears and sticking out his tongue. Three more were snagged and pulled up high into the tree. Again, as planned, the men had figured only one trap would have been set. It dawned on the last man what was going on. As Jericho raised his hands and backed up trying to look frightened – no acting required – the man sidestepped the circle of leaves spread on the path. He moved to the right of it – the only side offering passage – and he, too, soon found himself dangling and shouting without a fire arm.

Jericho assumed the final group would figure out what was going on and move to the side to avoid the rope. The last man had walked right into his trap to the right of the path.

Cal came out of the shadows, gun drawn and announced himself as a deputy. One of the men reached for his knife and soon found an arrow pinning his hand against his hip.

The plan was to lower one group at a time, tie them up and secure them to their saddles for the trip back to town. Before they could put that part of the plan into action a man’s strong, deep voice came from the clearing.

‘Waterson, himself?’ the boys wondered. Suddenly things were not looking good.

That, however, soon faded. The man who walked into the light from the fire was Sheriff Mason. He was accompanied by a half dozen men. He stopped, took off his hat and scratched his head.

“Well, I’ll be jiggered! I’m glad I brought deputies because I can tell you for sure nobody would ever take my word for this.”

“Why are you here?” Jericho began.

The Sheriff offered his explanation.

“Knowing Waterson, I knew he’d not just let you off Scott free. Knowing you three I knew you wouldn’t just let it alone. I figured my best bet to protect you and catch Waterson’s men was to follow you tonight. And here I am, looking fully as out of place as a second groom at a wedding.

“Foolish on your part, you understand, but well done, boys. There is a sizeable reward for his conviction – it has been kept quiet so Waterson wouldn’t know he was suspected. I’ll see you boys get a bank draft in the morning.”

“Can you leave the ‘Pay to’ line blank,” Jericho asked.

“Well I suppose so, but I don’t understand.”

“We have a friend in the hospital and that money will go a long way toward paying his bill.”

“Of course, then. I’ll see to it. You boys – er, young men – are really something else.”

It seemed they were hearing that a lot recently. They were proud it was true, of course, but it was always nice when others noticed.

They were tired after a night of capturing bad guys so remade their bedrolls and slept right there until noon the following day. For breakfast, Red Eagle made ‘campfire stew’ – rabbit and wild vegetables slow cooked for several hours.

By two o’clock they were headed back to the hospital to check on Zeke. The nurse said he was recovering remarkably fast and could be on his way back to Kansas City in a few days.

“I can ride with you back to KC if you want me to,” Jericho said.

“So will I,” Red Eagle added, not about to be separated from his brother.

“I will be fine, but I really do appreciate your offers.

Riding a wagon over the prairie can't be much worse than this awful bed, and being alone should be a good cure for Nurse Dorothy's constant chatter. I hear my bill has been paid. You boys wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

"Us?" Jericho said looking at the others. "Only bills we know about stick out of bird's faces."

Red Eagle and Cal nodded dramatically, proclaiming their innocence of it all.

"Well, should you run into the kind person or persons, tell them thank you for me."

"Consider it done," Jericho said.

They shook his hand and left. Next stop was the Sheriff's office.

"Mornin' boys. You'll be happy to know Waterson's men sang like canaries. On a warrant from the judge, my men picked up Waterson last night while I was pursuing a fully unnecessary mission – as it turned out. Thanks to you we have him on fifteen counts including bribery of a federal official. He'll be away for many years. His ranch is up for sale – the proceeds will go to compensate those he hurt."

"How much will it sell for?" Jericho asked.

"A good deal more than you boys could raise, I'm quite sure."

"Don't bet on that Sheriff," Cal said. "Don't bet on that!"

The Sheriff looked puzzled. The boys looked smug. Cal raised his eyebrows. The three of them prepared to leave with the Sheriff's thanks and a message for Cal.

"If you ever decide you'd rather live in these parts, just let me know. I will make room for you on my staff, anytime. You can even bring these two young rascallions (Imps – mischievous beings) with you. They must be good for something."

"They'd have your operation turned upside down in a week and you wouldn't be able to find a single reason to change back one thing about it

"And I don't doubt you for a second. Always stop in when you're down this way. Give my best to Sandy."

They were eager to get back home so gave the horses their heads and let them set the pace. Unlike the stage ride, the return trip would take nearly two days.

That night they made camp along a stream. They were looking forward to a supper of fried fish and hardtack. Jericho built the fire while Red Eagle and Cal cut fishing poles and strung them with line and hooks from their saddle bags. Cal had removed his boots for the night. As it turned out that had not been a good idea.

“Got a problem here, guys,” he called from the bank of the creek where he was sitting with a line in the water.

“What’s that?” Jericho asked.

“Just got struck by a big old rattlesnake. Never seen one so big.”

“Need to suck out the poison,” Jericho said.

[In those days, the treatment was to cut small Xs across each of the two fang marks and suck out the blood thinking that would remove the venom. That is no longer the suggested method. Google snake bite care if interested.]

Jericho made the four tiny incisions with his knife and began sucking on the wound, spitting out the blood each time. Red Eagle prepared mud to pack on the wounds. It was thought that as the mud dried it pulled even more venom out of the body.

Within a few minutes his ankle swelled to twice its normal size. I saw a snake bite treated once,” Jericho said. “They snugged a rope tight just above the bite and loosened it for ten minutes once every hour. Don’t know why. I’ll cut a piece of rope for that now.

Cal passed out. His face became pale. His temperature rose rapidly and his heart beat increased in frequency, but reduced in strength. Their newly adopted big brother was in serious condition.

“He’ll never be able to stay on a horse,” Jericho said.

“Give me ten minutes and I’ll have poles cut for a travois (Google or see book One). I’ll need four lengths of rope each three feet long to tie them together then two that are six feet to fasten it to Golden.”

Fifteen minutes later they were on their way west again. There would be no fried fish and no sleep that night. Cal moaned with every bump.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Governor. Really?

“Traveling at night will at least be cooler for him,” Red Eagle said.

“We must keep his hair and face and shirt wet to help bring down the temperature,” Jericho said. “His ankle has swelled even more.”

Every hour they switched the travois from one horse to another. Gray, especially, seemed to sense a problem with Cal, but they seemed all eager to take their turns.

It was nearly dark the following evening when they entered Main Street in Red Bend. Red Eagle was walking beside Cal keeping him wet. Jericho rode on ahead dismounting even before Lightning had come to a full stop in front of the newspaper office. He ran the steps two at a time to alert Doc to the problem.

“I hope he’s not away delivering somebody’s baby. I hope he’s not away delivering somebody’s baby,” he repeated over and over to himself.

He opened the door.

“Doc! Doc! Cal got snagged by a rattler. Looks really bad.”

Doc appeared from his bed room pulling up his suspenders.

“Where is he?”

“Down stairs. My brother is bringing him down Main Street.”

“Get Sandy to help bring him upstairs.”

Doc worked on him for a solid hour. He knew better

than to tell the boys they needed to leave so he kept them busy wetting towels and dabbing Cal's forehead and chest. He sent Jericho for ice.

At last Doc backed away from the table where he had been working and washed his hands in a bowl.

"You boys did very well. I must say I am surprised you knew to put a tourniquet on the leg and exactly at the proper place. That probably saved his life – keeping the venom from spreading through his blood stream."

"It was my brother's knowledge," Red Eagle said. "He knows just about everything, you know."

"And what he doesn't know he makes up as he goes!" Doc added.

It was worth brief chuckles.

"So, you think Cal is going to be alright, then?" Red Eagle asked/said.

"I'd bet my reputation on it. He'll need to stay here for the next twenty-four hours."

"We'll stay with him," they said as one voice.

Cal muttered something.

"Get them out of here, Doc. They haven't slept in two days."

"So, the dead rises," Doc joked feeling Cal's forehead.

"Temp is way down. Get Sandy back here and well move him into the bed in my room."

"Sandy, Sandy, Sandy," Jericho said looking at his brother. "Who does Doc think carried him from the stream to the horses? Who does Doc think lifted him onto the travois?"

"Didn't mean to offend you, gentlemen. Just don't drop him. I imagine he's still breakable."

They soon had him moved. He drifted in and out of consciousness.

Doc scooted the boys out of the office. They took the horses to the Livery Stable and told Harry the whole story. He directed them up to the loft where Cal stayed and told them he'd wake them when he got news.

It was eight o'clock the next morning when they stretched themselves back to life. Still on their backs in the straw Red Eagle spoke first.

"I am quite sure I have never been this hungry in my

entire life.”

“Let’s check on Cal and then get breakfast.”

They told their plan to Harry.

“May I make a suggestion?” he asked.

“Sure.”

“You guys stink worse than a stall that hasn’t been cleaned for two weeks. Go dunk yourselves in the tank out back before you set out to do anything else today. Use this.”

He handed them a bar of soap.

“You’re no longer little boys – young men need to take better care of themselves. Understand what I’m saying?”

“Doc mentioned it to us, but I guess we sort of ignored it.”

“You continue to ignore it and I can guarantee the girls will continue to ignore you.”

“He makes a good case for a dunking,” Jericho said.

“And, maybe even a soaping!”

The boys put on a shiver from top to bottom. Fifteen minutes later Harry pronounced them acceptable and they left for Doc’s – one Indian and one White boy.

“Doc?” they said as one entering the office.

“He’s gone to take care of the Winston kids – all eight of them came down with the measles. Said he’d be back by noon.”

It had been Cal, still in bed but wide awake and looking – well, terrible.

“You better stay here one more night,” Jericho said.

“Just to make sure you’re okay,” Red Eagle added. “You have been very sick.”

“You sound like Doc. I seem to have lost a day in there somewhere.”

“You were unconscious for most of twenty-four hours. You did babble on about stuff.”

“Stuff? What stuff?”

“Well, let’s just say we probably know as much about your romantic life as you do.”

“What?”

“Just kidding,” Jericho said.

“We wouldn’t know romantic even if you had said anything,” Red Eagle said. “We are really very dumb about

such things.”

“But very willing to learn,” Jericho added. “We’re going to the restaurant. Can we bring something back for you?”

“I still have no appetite, but thanks. Doc’s been forcing chicken broth down me. I’ll be fine.”

As was their habit when they left Doc’s, they stopped at the newspaper office down stairs to at least say, ‘Hi’. Cilla was glad to see them and pumped them for every tidbit related to their latest adventures.

“Looks like another story for you to write,” she said.

“Probably two,” Red Eagle said. “Doc says Jericho saved Cal’s life.”

“Not by myself. We make just about the best half breed, separated at birth, twin brother team there has even been in the whole history of mankind.”

“You’ll get no argument from me,” Cilla said.

“You use the term ‘half breed’ like you are proud of it,” she said.

“Oh, we are,” Red Eagle replied. Most people only possess the best traits of one race, but we possess the best traits of two races – two great races. We can’t think of anything that could be better than that.”

“I’ve been thinking about that term, though,” Jericho began. “A better term than half breed would be double breed, because, like my brother said, unlike most people we get to have the best from two races instead of having to settle for just one. That suggests twice the good stuff. Half breed seems to say only the stuff from half of us is good.”

“I like that, ‘double breed’ brother,” Red Eagle said.

Before the conversation could go further – and it would go further – Sandy entered the office with a large envelope.

“Something came for you two on the stage a little while ago.”

He held it out. Red Eagle accepted it and immediately handed it to his brother.

Jericho soon had it opened using more care than might be expected from an impatient young man his age. He removed a single, large sheet.

“It looks important,” Cilla said. “That’s parchment it’s printed on.”

Jericho read it out loud.

‘From the office of the Governor of the State of Kansas. This commendation for steadfast service and bravery in the face of a ruthless enemy of our citizens and for his capture, is hereby awarded to Jericho (Same Face) Palmer and Red Eagle (Jacob) Palmer with the deepest thanks from Governor James M. Harvey, this thirtieth day of May, 1870.’

At the bottom was a hand-written note. ‘When you can, please come and visit me at my office in Topeka. You are welcome anytime.’

“I’m not sure I understand,” Red Eagle said.

“Me either,” his brother echoed offering a fully puzzled look for one of the few times in his life.

They looked at Sandy who tried to explain.

“This entire territory was on the verge of an unfounded, vigilante war against every Indian within our borders. It would have been a terrible slaughter and ruined what few good things we have been able to establish with each other since the war.”

“Wow!” Jericho said. “All we were trying to do was stop a few impostors from hurting good people.”

Cilla looked at the boys over the top of her glasses.

“I think that is exactly what the governor said in the commendation.”

“Huh!”

“Huh?” Red Eagle asked not having heard the expression before.

“It’s like ‘wow’ but with a tone of disbelief and a question attached,” Jericho explained.

Red Eagle looked at Cilla and Sandy.

“I’ve been looking for a good word to describe my brother. I think I have found it – Huh! – like ‘wow’ but with a tone of disbelief attached.”

The adults laughed. Jericho would need to think about it before he reacted.

The boys’ stomachs growled – REALLY growled.

“Sounds like breakfast is required,” Cilla said.

“Breakfast, as well the last five meals we missed,” Red Eagle explained.

“I’ll buy,” Cilla said, herding them out the door with her

outstretched arms. “Do you have a good wall to tack your commendation up on at your place?”

The boys giggled at each other. Jericho responded.

“Oh, yes. We have just the place.”

(Of course, they really didn't, since their 'place' consisted of four walls of solid rock that nobody except they and their new big brother even knew existed!)

“So,” Red Eagle asked, “what's next, Same Face?”

“Oh, I don't know. Just continue the very careful, responsible, always safe approach to living we are so well known for.”

The four of them laughed their way across the street.

THE END