

Jericho and Red Eagle

Two Boys' Adventures in the Old West

Book Three:

The Greedy Ghost of the Golden Dutchman



by **David Drake**
and **Tom Gnagey**

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

Book Three:

**The Greedy Ghost of the
Golden Dutchman**

by

David Drake and Tom Gnagey

The Family of Man Press

© 2015, 2017

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 precious 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.

In Book Two, the boys begin building a good friendship with a seventeen-year-old young man, Cal, who turns 18 and becomes a deputy. They go up against a despicable (wicked) rancher who is trying to me the US Government send all the Indians in the Midwest to reservations and commits robberies and other unlawful acts to make them look guilty. They care for an Arapaho boy and his sick grandmother and see them safely back to the Indian Territory, where they live. The rancher captures them and threatens their lives.

They had begun building a very good life for themselves among their new friends there in and around Red Bend Kansas. More and more it felt like home.

* * *

[NOTE: The author often uses the 'best' word instead of the 'easiest to read' word. For the younger readers who may not know those words he inserts synonyms in parenthesis after those words. We hope that makes reading move along with less effort.]

[In Book Three, *Rupert Rasmussen/Golden Dutchman* is a fictional character and will not be found in the history of pirates.]

///

CHAPTER ONE

The Ghost in the White Silk Suit

Jericho and Red Eagle were exploring the inside of the old mill, which sat a half hour ride north of Red Bend and near Sunday Creek, which ran south just to the west. A fast-moving summer storm had blown in and by six o'clock the world had grown dark, with rain falling in sheets from black, swirling, angry looking clouds. Lightning brightened the sky in unpredictable, brilliant, jagged flashes. Thunder rattled the old building.

The mill was large with two main floors and a full attic. There was a partial basement under the south-east corner where the large axil from the water wheel out front entered the building to power the grinding stones up on the second floor. The wheel hadn't turned in many years.

"Looks like we'll have to weather out the storm here in the mill tonight," Red Eagle said as he stood looking out one of the huge, second floor windows. We need to bring the horses in."

There was a long, wide earthen ramp on the north side that led up to barn doors on the second floor. It was how wagons filled with corn and wheat to be ground by the gigantic, stone wheels had made their deliveries

The boys trotted across the huge empty space to the double doors at the top of the ramp. With some difficulty, they moved the horizontal crossbar that kept it securely closed. They pulled one of them open and Red Eagle whistled. Golden and Lightning had taken shelter in the woods a few yards north of the lane that led to the bottom of the ramp.

They came at a gallop and were soon inside.

“At least it’s dry for them in here,” Jericho said. “May get chilly tonight. Can’t really start a fire up here on the wooden floor. Burn the place down.”

“And, it is a very large area to try and heat,” Red Eagle pointed out. “The horses will be fine up here. Maybe the basement for us. Most basements have dirt or stone floors and low ceilings.”

“We’ve really never given it a good looking over,” Jericho said. “It will soon be pitch dark inside. We probably need to light one of the lanterns we’ve seen in here. I hope they have kerosene in them.”

They looked around and found several, but all were bone dry.

“Over there in the corner,” Red Eagle said. “A tin can.”

Jericho picked it up.

“It’s full of something,” he said, then sat it back down on the floor and with some difficulty unscrewed the lid. He sniffed it.

“Kerosene, alright. Bring a couple of lanterns over and we’ll fill them.”

They soon had three lanterns lit. They left one hanging high, close to where the horses were. They removed their canteens, saddle bags and bed rolls and took them along. They carried the other two lanterns down the long, wide, dark, wooden steps to the first floor and from there across the big, empty room to the south-east corner where they had determined the trap door in the floor allowed entry to the stairway into the basement. It was a good deal deeper than they remembered.

“There’s a door to the right there in the corner,” Red Eagle said holding the lantern high.

“Probably to the outside,” Jericho said,” and that’s the last place we need to go right now. You were right about the floor – part stone and part dirt. If we close the trapdoor we should be able to heat this little space with just a small fire. Lots of short pieces of old lumber down here. I’ll close the trapdoor and you pick a spot for the fire.”

They chose to build the fire in the center of the rock floor. The dirt was, well, dirty and damp.

Before long they had struck a spark from Jericho's knife handle onto some splinters they had cut, and soon had a small fire going. If it needed to be bigger they would see to it. The fire lit the area so they turned off the lanterns to conserve fuel. The smoke found its way outside through cracks somewhere above and out of sight.

"What do we have left for supper," Jericho asked reaching for a saddle bag. "Looks like I have a couple ham slices," he said. "We can roast them on sticks."

"And I have a can of beans and a spoon. We can heat them or have them cold."

"I'm starved," Jericho said. "Let's eat them cold while we heat the ham."

They exchanged a nod and got at it.

"I hope the horses have had enough to drink," Jericho said.

"They have been out playing by the creek all afternoon," Red Eagle said. "They will have taken good care of their needs."

Jericho nodded. It was what he figured, but it was always reassuring to have his brother provide confirmation about things related to horses and the outdoors.

They recounted their day as they finished eating.

"This is a great old building," Jericho said. "Built to last a century or more. I wonder how many bushels of ground flour and corn meal they produced during the years it operated."

It had been a question with no good answer, but Jericho was fascinated by the unanswerable questions of the universe.

"I wonder how long it has been since the water wheel has turned out there," Red Eagle said, presenting his own question – although it probably had an answer if one were willing to read through back copies of the local paper in Cilla's newspaper office.

The boys ducked as the old building shook from the loudest clap of thunder they had heard – and felt.

"I hope the horses aren't scared," Jericho said.

"They'll be fine. They are dry by now and we left their blankets on them so they'll be warm."

“You just did it twice.”

“I just did what twice?” Red Eagle asked clearly puzzled.

“You used a contraction – they’ll instead of they will. I’ve never heard you use a contraction before.”

“They are very difficult to learn to use – much easier to understand than to say. To be truthful, I did not realize I had performed that surgery.”

“What?”

“Making a contraction is like surgery; you remove something and stitch up what you have left with an apostrophe – they’_ _ ll.”

“I doubt if it has ever in the whole history of the English language been explained like that,” Jericho said.

“I will quote my brother: ‘Good! I would certainly hate to do things just like everybody else does them’.”

“I guess you got me there. It’s true, though. Can you imagine a world where everybody was just alike – talked alike, dressed alike, believed alike, liked the same foods, had the same interests, had the same dreams about their futures. Ugh! It gives me the shivers just thinking about it. I want to be the very best me I can be and that means I won’t try to be like anybody but me.”

“That is one of the best things I am learning from you. You lived through the problems of being an orphan by working hard to find yourself, your unique self. I lived through the problems of being an orphan by trying to be enough like everybody else that they would not reject me – so they would like me and accept me and care for me. I can see that your way is best – at least now that we are no longer children.”

“What an interesting set of observations. I hadn’t thought any of that through like you have. I admire you for that.”

“Maybe the best thing about us is that we fit together so well. Our different backgrounds balance each other – what I don’t have, you do, and what you don’t have, I do – well in many areas at least.”

“Oh, don’t back down from it that way. I think you’re exactly right. We are the most fascinating team I have ever heard of. In their own ways, we’ve heard both Doc and Cilla

say it, too.”

“Yes. I suppose you are – that is you’re – right,” Red Eagle said spreading a smile.

They chuckled.

The storm grew louder and they heard the old windows rattling.

“Did you bring something to read?” Jericho asked.

“I cannot believe you asked that.”

“Let me rephrase that. What did you bring to read?”

Red Eagle removed a thin book from his saddle bag and handed it to his brother.

“The History of Chance County, Kansas up to 1868. From Cilla?”

“Yes. I thought since we live in Chance County we should learn some things about it. There is a section about this Mill in it. I just haven’t gotten that far yet.

[Chance County is fictional, but would be in the general area of Rice County, smack dab in the center of Kansas.]

“What have you learned, so far? Teach me brother!”

“One thing that fascinates me is that a pirate from the Caribbean Sea played a part in settling this area.”

“A Pirate? Way out here? When?”

“Early 1800s. He was a Dutchman named Rupert Rasmussen. Like many of the pirates of the time he sailed out of Port Royal, Jamaica. He specialized in going after boats of the royal families of England and Spain. The story is that he amassed a huge treasure of jewels, and gold. He had a famous eccentricity (peculiarity). He only took gold and diamonds for himself. Everything else his men could have. His nickname became the ‘Golden Dutchman’.

“It was said he didn’t trust anybody and except for a few dependable men, he used a new crew each time he sailed. He retired in the very early 1800s and later on made elaborate arrangements to transport his treasure to a safe hiding place. Lore has it that he loaded a dozen sturdy wagons at New Orleans, put them on a boat he bought, sailed up the Mississippi to the Arkansas River, which he sailed all the way to southern Chance County. He then traveled north overland

and stopped in the northern part of the county – right about where Red Bend is today. None of the 12 wagon drivers were ever heard from again. He apparently wanted to make sure nobody could reveal the final destination of that trip.

“Rupert had one son who he disowned for some reason not stated, and had documents drawn up saying none of his descendants through that son had any rights to his fortune. In fact, he said nobody had any right to it and that he would personally come back from the dead and harm anybody who so much as looked for it.

“Here is where the story gets really interesting. It is said he built a rock cabin on the top of a hill – there aren’t that many hills in Chase County – and that during a cyclone (tornado) he was swept away and never found. But, prospectors at the time told of seeing him walking the hillside at night, sword at his side, dressed entirely in white to match his white hair and full white beard. It was as if his ghost was guarding his treasure.”

“Sounds like a strange guy, alright,” Jericho said. “He collected all that loot over years and years and then just buried it or some such thing and never spent it. I have to wonder why a man would risk his life over and over again to capture that treasure and then never touch it. Does it give any clues about which hill?”

“One of the stories said his ghost had been seen right here at this mill as short a time ago as 1858.”

“That’s the year we were born – not long ago at all, I’d say.”

“I suppose you don’t believe in ghosts, do you, Jericho?”

“No. It makes no sense to me. How about you?”

“Cherokees are very much into the Spirit World so I was raised hearing about such things all the time. I have a hard time believing in things I can’t experience – see, touch, smell, taste. The old man in my village asked me why, if that was my basis for belief, I believed in love, which couldn’t be seen or touched or smelled or tasted. I had no answer for him. He didn’t expect one, of course. What he said was for the purpose of keeping me thinking.”

“You were lucky to have a person like that in your life –

one like the old man who would push you to think about important things. I didn't have one until we met Doc and Cilla."

"In case you hadn't noticed, Cilla is not a old man."

It was worth a smile, but no more.

"What did you bring to read?"

"One of Docs medical books. I got interested while we were treating Cal's snake bite. I'm learning one thing for sure – for all doctors seem to know, they really don't know very much. I think they mostly count on common sense."

That discussion would have to continue at some other time.

There were noises coming from the trapdoor. The old, rusted hinges creaked – the boys had noticed that earlier. What they were hearing were those rusted hinges creaking again. They could barely make out what was happening from where they sat across the room. What they could make out was that the trapdoor was being lifted. Lightning brightened the area from the floor above as it opened wide.

"Maybe Sandy or Cal got worried and came to look for us," Red Eagle whispered.

"You could be right except – look, there on the stairs. Have you ever seen Sandy or Cal dressed in an all-white pirate uniform?"

///

CHAPTER TWO

Going Right to the Source

The white clad, whatever it was on the stairs raised its arm and shook its finger at the boys, like a teacher telling Jericho to stop squirming in his seat. It turned and made its way back up the steps and disappeared. They heard no footsteps on the floor above.

Jericho went to the steps and climbed them slowly up to the point his head was just above the floor. He looked around. The area was pitch-black. Red Eagle was close behind. Jericho moved on up the stairs so his brother was also high enough to look things over. Lightning briefly lit the area.

“Nothing!” Jericho said.

“Listen to see if the horses are disturbed,” Red Eagle said.

They heard no sounds from the second floor.

“So?” Red Eagle asked.

“That’s my question, too – So? Whatever it was it didn’t seem dangerous did you think?”

“Not that time,” Red Eagle said. “It clearly gave us a warning for some reason.”

“Yeah, like to keep our noses out of his business – the business of the Golden Dutchman’s treasure, I’m thinking. I don’t think it took us seriously, only wagging its finger like we were little kids.”

“Thought you didn’t believe in Ghosts.”

“Oh, I don’t,” Jericho came back quickly. “Answer me this. Why would a ghost open the trap door when it could just float right through it?”

“To confuse us, maybe? To scare us? To tease us first with the creaky hinges. To make sure we took notice of him.”

“In that case,” Jericho said, “I suppose he achieved his goals.”

“Do we look for it/him? Do we leave? Do we go back to reading? Do we sleep?”

“We won’t find him, we can bet on that. It’s still storming. Doubt if we can concentrate on our books. I suppose if those are the choices I vote for sleep.”

They returned to the basement pulling the trapdoor closed above them. Red Eagle spread small pebbles on the three top steps thinking if anybody tried to use them they would slip and fall providing some warning to the boys. Jericho thought his brother had been quite creative.

With their bed rolls arranged and the fire stoked for the night, they slept.

By early morning the fire had died down and the room was chilly. Jericho awoke first. He chose not to add wood to the fire, thinking they would be leaving soon. The storm was over. He noticed two things – a gold coin beside Red Eagle’s head and an open trapdoor. Someone had been there with them while they slept. His brother always heard everything that went on asleep or not. How could he have missed it – unless it had not been a person? He would not let himself think such things.

Red Eagle stirred (perhaps because Jericho nudged him with his foot).

“Rise and shine, lazy bones. I’ve already been up for twenty seconds or so.”

It got a smile while Red Eagle stretched and rubbed his eyes.

“We had a visitor, last night.”

“I know. I was here, remember.”

“After that. While we were asleep. Look there beside your cheek.”

Red Eagle turned onto his side.

“I see. Hmm?”

He picked it up.

“Looks old.”

“I think it’s Spanish – like from Spain,” Jericho said.
“Once saw a picture of one like it in a book.”

“Like from the Dutchman’s treasure?”

“Possible, I suppose.”

Jericho turned and pointed to the trapdoor.

“Tell me you opened that this morning,” Red Eagle asked getting to his feet.

“I can tell you that I did, but it wouldn’t be the truth.”

“A second visit from the same guy, you think?”

“Can’t know at this point, but that makes sense. How many folks walk around a long-abandoned mill in the middle of the night during a raging storm?”

“Can I assume we are leaving, now?” Red Eagle asked.

“Seems reasonable. We can come back tonight.”

“What?”

“Maybe we can see something from the outside – lights, figures at windows, things like that. We haven’t explored the attic at all, come to think of it.”

“Or, most of this basement if you are getting really specific,” Red Eagle added.

They stirred out the fire, gathered their things and made their way back up to where Golden and Lightning were waiting on the second floor. They were soon on the road back to Red Bend.

“We need to ask Cilla what she knows about the legend of the Dutchman,” Red Eagle suggested. “I imagine she and Doc will still be at the restaurant.”

They were. Sandy arrived at the same time the boys entered.

“It is always a pleasure to see you two in the morning,” Doc said.

“Because we are such great conversationalists?” Jericho asked.

“No. It’s just reassuring to see that you are both still in one piece and breathing.”

Sandy and Cilla nodded with some force, suggesting their full agreement. The boys shrugged twin shrugs choosing to see it as meaning they were precious to them rather than that they were in any sense careless or irresponsible.

“What does anybody know about the Golden Dutchman

– Rupert Rasmussen?” Red Eagle asked, getting right to the business of the moment.

“The pirate with the gold and diamonds,” Cilla said. “I know the general tale, but none of the specifics.”

She turned to Doc.

“Who’d be likely to know more about it than we do?”

“How about old Jake what’s-his-name north of town?”

“Oh, yes. Jake. Jake . . . Davison I think. Old as the hills. No teeth. A hermit. Hasn’t been to town in years. Probably been longer than that since he’s had a bath. I’d even forgotten about him.”

“He doesn’t work?” Jericho asked.

“Lives off the land as it is said.”

“Just how old is he?” Red Eagle asked.

“Let me just say I called him an old man when I was five,” Doc said.

“Do you think he will talk with us?” Red Eagle asked.

“Red Eagle, have you ever known anybody who your brother couldn’t engage in conversation?”

He looked at Jericho and smiled.

“Why did I even ask?”

“One thing,” Cilla said, “Jake’s been known to take shots at unwanted strangers, and most everybody – in his mind – seems to be an unwanted stranger.”

“Why do you think he’ll know about the Dutchman?” Jericho asked.

Cilla chose to answer

“He tells of a time when he was a young man he would see the Dutchman’s ghost walking across the prairie toward a hill late at night. Apparently, he believes he witnessed it many times.”

“Is he sane?” Jericho asked looking at Doc.

“Probably not, but he still manages to care for himself. He causes no problems for others and always seems happy. Sometimes it’s hard to define insanity and in his case it probably doesn’t even matter.”

“Why are you two suddenly so interested in the old pirate?” Sandy asked.

“It is covered in a book I’ve been reading about Chance County,” Red Eagle said. “I have only recently learned about

pirates and the Caribbean Sea they sailed in. I seemed to have inherited a love for learning from Same Face here. And, I do know you don't inherit things from your brother."

"I will do some research and see if I can send for some books about it from the library in Kansas City," Cilla said. "I have a good contact there."

"Thank you," Red Eagle said.

They finished breakfast, catching up on the local news from Sandy and Cilla. Between the two of them not much happened they didn't know about. The boys got directions from Sandy so they could find Jake. They purchased a few supplies and were soon on their way headed north. They had been told they would find the old man to the north and east of Big Red Rock Hill which set a bit closer to town than the boys' Little Red Rock Hill.

They circled the hill around from the west side. It was many times larger than the hill, which held their cave. There was gently rolling land on to the north, which soon leveled off for as far as they could see. They passed a farm house. It was well maintained and had several children playing out front. That would not be what they were looking for. The older boy – maybe eight – pointed them in Old Jake's direction. It was still a number of miles away.

"Ol' Jake always shoots at folks commin' upon his place," the boy said. "He can pick off a jackrabbit at 100 yards so if he misses you he intended to miss you. Ain't never heard a him killin' nobody. Mostly just his way a sayin', 'I see ya commin'."

The boys thanked him for the information and did actually feel themselves relaxing a bit about approaching the old man.

"From what the kid said, I'm thinking when he shoots we just keep riding in the direction of the shot," Jericho said.

"I suppose you have said things that were more foolish than that, although right now I can't think of any."

"Nobody has said he's dangerous," little brother.

"That could be because none of those he shot to death are around to tell about that side of him."

"You really are quite clever."

"Thank you. I am hoping I will still be around tomorrow

to be clever for another day or so.”

They rode on for some time. They came to a rise. It appeared to be the last one for many miles since they looked down on a vast expanse of flat prairie all the way to the horizon.

A shot rang out. Jericho turned Lightning and rode directly toward the sound. Red Eagle followed, perhaps slumped down just a bit, hoping to become a smaller target. It was Tuesday so Jericho wore white boy's clothing and Red Eagle, his usual Indian garb. Jericho had decided that always made for a good conversation starter and all he ever needed was a starter.

Presently, they saw the man – short, grubby, a white beard that hung almost to his waist. He was wearing an ancient straw hat, boots with spurs, and pants on suspenders over long red underwear that was all that covered his upper half.

Jericho waved back and forth over his head. Red Eagle joined him, but with far less enthusiasm. When they arrived, the man was standing next to his shack, holding his rifle by the barrel beside him, its butt on the ground. Without dismounting – which Red Eagle thought was perhaps the first sensible thing his brother had done during those past five minutes – Jericho began to speak.

“Hello, sir. I am Jericho and this is my brother, Red Eagle. It is a long story and we'll be happy to go into it if you want us to. We have been told by several sources that you are the best expert there is when it comes to the Golden Dutchman and hope you will be willing to talk with us about him. It's like a school project.”

The old man hitched his head, turned and walked closer to his one room wooden shack a few yards away. It had a rock chimney, a door that closed, a window with glass and a roof that sloped toward the rear. A mule stood munching grass that covered the area a foot high. They dismounted and could see that behind the building a spring boiled to the surface and trickled back down the slope they had just climbed. At its source, it was enclosed in a low rock wall two feet high. Water overflowed it to the rear.

Jake pointed to the horses and then to the water. The

boys took it to mean they had been given permission to drink there. They let the horses go and they made their way there first thing – would have, permission or not. In front of the shack were four large stones suitable for sitting and apparently intended for guests – an odd thing for a hermit they thought.

Once seated, Jake began talking, taking the boys at their word relative to the reason they had come to see him. He related what they already knew about the pirate. Then he began relating his experiences with the ghost.

“He used to walk from the outcrop, there – he pointed – south toward Blg Red Rock Hill. Now he comes out a those trees just to the east, there, and walks toward the hill. I got no explanation fer why, when he come back, he changed it up like that.”

“You say, now,” Jericho said. “What do you mean, now?”

“About a month ago he come back. Hadn’t seen him for thirty years or more – probably more. Time sort a runs together when your head turns 83 or 80 or somewhere in there.”

“We wouldn’t know, I’m afraid, but we can imagine I guess,” Jericho said hoping it was the polite thing to say.

“Don’t the Injun boy talk?” the old man asked hitching his head in Red Eagle’s direction.

“Oh, yes. He talks fine. I guess I usually hog the conversation. Red Eagle is very patient with me that way.”

“You Cherokee, son?”

“Yes, Sir – well, I was raised Cherokee.”

“My second wife was Cherokee. A good woman. Very good. You have a good language – say a lot in a few words. The world needs more a that.”

Neither of them knowing how to respond, Jericho tried to turn the conversation back to the Dutchman.

“Does he look the same way now as he did way back?”

Jake gave his answer careful thought before speaking.

“It’s hard to remember. Dressed in white head to toes. A wide brim hat with a huge feather in it – a plume I think they are called. I’d say pretty much the same. Like I said – this 83-year-old head you have to understand.”

“I imagine you can describe him can’t you?” Red Eagle said. “My brother can draw anything. You describe him and Jericho can draw.”

Jake nodded. Jericho got a pencil and a pad of paper from his saddle bags. The old man began recalling him. Jericho sat on the ground below him so he could give suggestions when the drawing didn’t look right. Soon, Jake was really into the activity – make this longer, shorter, fatter, thinner, taller, bigger, smaller. Twenty minutes later he nodded his approval.

“That’s the old devil, himself, fer sure. Good job, sonny. Good Job. How’d you do that so quick?”

Neither boy admitted to having already seen the ghost, or whatever it was, which had made the rendering relatively easy for Jericho. Mostly it just verified that they were all talking about the same thing.

Jake pointed at the paper to make sure Red Eagle got a good look at it. [Jericho’s drawing is on the book cover.]

“He sure looks out of place here in Kansas,” Red Eagle said. “If it is a ghost you are seeing, why do you think it is here and where has it been for all those years when you didn’t see it?”

Jake turned to Jericho.

“When the kid once starts talking he don’t stop, do he?”

They all smiled. Jake collected his thoughts and attempted an answer.

“You’ll hear lots a speculation about it, but I’m the only one who knows the real story. They’ll tell you the Dutchman was swept away from his house up on the hill by a cyclone. There was a terrible storm that night, but no cyclone. Let me back up.

“The Dutchman came up the Arkansas on a flatbed barge with a dozen wagons loaded up with his treasure. He promised each driver a hundred gold pieces to make the trip with him. Instead, he done ‘em all in after they helped him hide the treasure. They was pretty dumb to believe he’d ever let ‘em go. That’s why he chose all young drivers – in their teens, mostly – so they’d be too dumb to figure that out.

“Well, turned out one of them drivers – a young man in his early twenties – outsmarted the Dutchman. After he was

shot he laid there all quiet like and was left for dead. Now, the Dutchman was a clever devil and he hid each wagon of treasure in a different place. That young man knew the Dutchman checked his burial spots every week, so it was impossible for one man to dig it up without being found out. Well, what really happened was that young man climbed that hill during a storm and pushed the Dutchman over the side. The last thing the Dutchman seen was that young man's face.

The haunting started a few weeks later. The young man went to where his wagon load of the treasure had been hidden – in a cave. But, it wasn't there. The Dutchman had moved it. That young man spent the rest of his life looking for it but never found it. When the ghost appeared, it turned toward the young man and laughed – like it's teasing him – putting him down – punishing him you could say.

"This past month there hasn't been any of the taunting like that. He just quietly walks across the meadow."

"At night?" Jericho asked.

"Often, but not always."

"Do you ever try to follow him?" Red Eagle asked.

"I did early on. Now, my bones don't move fast enough. Odd, you know."

"What's odd?" Jericho asked.

"While he was gone all those years I missed him. I don't like people, even nice people, but I missed the old Dutchman's ghost. Beats all how that could be."

"May I ask how long you have lived up here?"

"Most all my life. Been a pretty good life."

Their conversation was interrupted by a shot in the distance. They were startled and all stood and looked in the direction of the sound. Jake pointed.

"Well, I'll be. There he is. See him?"

The old man's face brightened as if greeting an old friend.

///

CHAPTER THREE

More Questions

The 'ghost' disappeared after walking some thirty-five yards. The boys prepared to leave soon after that.

"You boys are welcome here any time. Just don't let nobody know I said that. Already had one other visitor in the past two years. Gets crowded up here in a hurry."

"One other?" Jericho asked.

"Yep. Talked funny – heavy accent. He was askin' about the Dutchman, too. Didn't understand a lot a what he asked so probably didn't help him much."

The boys rode off in the direction of the small stand of trees from which the figure in white had emerged.

"It looked like a man," Jericho said.

"So, did the thing on the steps last night. I noticed you didn't add much detail to his face on your drawing."

"Jake didn't give me much to work with and I didn't want to add anything that would let him know we had already seen him – and, apparently much closer up than Jake ever has. I will fill it in later for us."

"Good thinking. How do you suppose he knows so much about that young driver he talked about?"

"He's pretty old. I suppose way back closer to the time when it all happened there were probably lots of stories floating around," Jericho said.

"I'm not so sure about that. If the Dutchman came in secret, like he surely did, and none of his help survived – well, maybe the one boy according to Jake – and there are no stories about folks coming here to search for the treasure,

maybe there wouldn't have been any stories. It seems like nobody in Red Bend even really takes the whole thing seriously."

"Interesting. You are probably right. That's some head you have on your shoulders."

"I am told it is a duplicate of the one you find on your shoulders," Red Eagle said with a grin.

"That's true. It fascinates me how, although they were identical when we were born, the different sets of experiences we have had, have made them so different in so many ways."

"People's spirits reflect the paths they have taken. And yes, it is an Indian saying. I think we prove it is true."

They came to the wooded area and stopped, looking around.

"Let's ride around in there and see if anything looks interesting," Jericho suggested.

"Do you think this is where the spirit lives?" Red Eagle asked.

"If you are kidding me, 'Ha ha'! If you aren't, 'no I don't think this is where any spirits live. I can see we have things to talk about."

"There," Red Eagle said pointing to the ground. "Fresh horse droppings. There has been a horse here within the past hour."

They both looked around.

"Can you track the horse?" Jericho asked.

"No. Pine needles cover the floor of the woods here. We might find some horse tracks along the outside. The ground will be soft from the rain last night."

They rode to the edge of the woods and then circled it.

"There. Sets of hoof marks – all four."

Red Eagle was the first to dismount. He knelt and examined them.

"Old shoes."

He pointed to several spots that looked to have been well worn.

"There. A small piece of the iron shoe has been broken away – probably by running across an area with lots of small, sharp, rocks."

"Like they are around our hill?"

“Yes, like that.”

“They tell you anything else?”

“Yes. See how deep these tracks are and then when it walks away they are shallow. Deep, means it had a rider’s weight on it. Shallow, mean the rider got off and the horse was walking without a mount. Here are boot marks where the rider got off. He walked off in that direction – the way the ghost went. It will be hard to follow them through the grass.”

“He ended up over there behind the large rock outcropping below the hill,” Jericho said pointing. “We may be able to pick up the man’s trail over there.”

It was disappointing because that area was solid rock where there would be no foot prints.

“Once he got here he’d need a horse to leave, right,” Jericho said.

“Maybe, unless he knows a way back to the woods that would keep him hidden.”

“I guess we struck out on this one,” Jericho said.

“It was probably good that we did,” Red Eagle said. “As I recall we had no plan in case we came upon him/it/whatever, the way you say it. And we know he has a gun.”

“Where is this spot?” Jericho said looking around at the wider area. “It’s the south-east point of the Big Red Rock Hill, right?”

“Yes.”

“We can get here a whole lot faster by riding a straight path from the east side of Red Bend. Our big circle trip today must have been three times longer than that would be.”

They turned around and headed for town, taking the short route. Still, it was nearly ten o’clock when they entered Cilla’s office in the heat of the day.

“Found him – Jake, I mean,” Jericho announced as they plopped down in two of the well-padded chairs in the corner by the big windows.

Cilla was sitting behind a long table that served as her desk. It sat ten feet back from the front door. She removed her glasses ready to hear the story. Uncharacteristically, Red Eagle began. That caused Jericho to smile. He and Cilla exchanged a wink over it.

“Jake is an interesting man. The way he talks, tells us

he hasn't had much school leaning. He is 83 years old according to him. That means he was born back in 1787 when America was only eleven years old. He was very friendly and liked to talk. Not what we expected from a hermit. He has a mule that slept standing up most of the time we were there."

Jericho grinned and looked at Cilla.

"And Jake asked if my brother ever spoke."

It was worth chuckles.

"He tells the story a little different than the one we have heard," Jericho said.

He went on to tell the old man's version. Red Eagle had a question for Cilla.

"Do you know when Jake settled here?"

"I have no idea. Have to ask him, I suppose. Why is that important?"

"Probably isn't. Just wondered. He indicated he has been married at least two times. I was wondering if he was married when he came here."

"What was his reaction to seeing the supposed ghost?" she asked.

The boys looked at each other as if sending mental messages back and forth. Jericho spoke.

"It seemed like a matter of fact part of his life. He was there. The ghost was there. He never indicated he was afraid of it or that he didn't believe it was a ghost. That the way you saw it, brother?"

Red Eagle nodded with nothing to add. Jericho continued.

"We found evidence the 'ghost' was riding a real live horse today and that he left footprints like a real live man. Big surprise!"

"I haven't heard stories about the old Dutchman since I was a little girl," Cilla said. "Jake seems to verify that nothing has been happening to help grow the stories."

"Seems to?"

"I guess he didn't say if he knew if any of the treasure has ever being found, did he?" Cilla asked.

"No. We didn't ask him outright, however," Jericho said. "I think we need to put together a list of questions and ride back up there in the near future. What I can't understand

is why this whole thing has started again at this time.”

“That’s probably the crucial question, isn’t it?” she said.

“Crucial?” Red Eagle asked needing a definition.

“Most important.”

Red Eagle nodded. It meant both thanks and that he understood.

“Why would somebody want to make people think there was a ghost walking around?” Jericho asked, mostly to himself.

“To scare people, to keep them away?” Cilla suggested as a question.

Jericho nodded. It was what he had thought as well.

“Keep people away, why?” Red Eagle asked.

“That’s another good question,” she said. “My first guess would be that it has something to do with the treasure – why else make it the Dutchman’s ghost?”

“Especially after all these years,” Red Eagle added.

Doc walked by on the sidewalk and noticed them inside. He pushed the door open and stuck his head in.

“All the problems of the world being solved in here, are they?”

He went on inside and closed the door behind him.

“Boys have been up to see Jake and in the process got a gander at the recent version of the Dutchman’s ghost, Cilla explained.

“Really? He’s back? Since when?”

“About a moon – a month,” Red Eagle said.

“Any idea why?”

“Jake didn’t offer and we didn’t think to ask,” Jericho said.

“How is the old man?”

“You mean Jake? Seems really good for a 83 years old,” Red Eagle said. “A boy in the area says he can still pick off a rabbit at 100 yards. That’s pretty steady hands for a man that age, isn’t it.”

“That’s pretty steady hands for a man my age – and no more will be said on that topic.”

“You know we will find out,” Jericho said. “And, we wouldn’t have even been interested if you hadn’t said what you just said – indicating secrecy about it.

“They will find out and you know I won’t tell them,” Cilla said.

“Okay. Sixty-eight – a very young, trim and fit sixty-eight.”

Jericho pushed out his stomach, rubbed it and lowered his voice.

“Yes, very trim and fit,” Jericho said bursting into laughter.

Even Doc chuckled.

“Have you ever seen Jake – talked with him?” Red Eagle asked Doc.

“No. Can’t say I have. He’s most every bit as much of a mystery as the old Dutchman. Word was when I was a little tyke that they may have been the same thing. Made the whole story scarier. Of course, Jake was barely more than a kid himself back then.”

“Any information about more books on him?” Red Eagle asked.

“I sent a telegram. Expect it to take a day or so for a reply. It seems to me you’re more interested in all this than Jericho,” she said.

“That is how we are. We were just talking about it – our interests reflect the different paths our souls have taken. My life has been filled with references and rites about spirits. Jericho’s has not. We always help the other one in his search, even if it is not our interest. I think that is a wonderful part of being brothers or maybe just part of a family – like how you and Doc and Cal and Sandy are always willing to listen to us and help us.”

Nothing more really needed to be said on the topic.

An eight-year-old runner from the telegraph office opened the door and entered.

“Telegram for you Cilla, from Kansas City. Hope everything’s alright.”

Cilla handed him a nickel tip. He thanked her and left on the trot.

She opened it: **FOUR BOOKS ON NOON STAGE. LUCY.**

“What service,” she said. “Your books should be here by this time Thursday,” Red Eagle.”

“That is so hard for me to understand,” he said. “Messages that come over wires from hundreds of miles away and stagecoaches that deliver packages and messages on paper. I do not think you people can understand how unbelievable that is to me.”

“I suppose not,” Doc said. “Please keep reminding us. We tend to take such wonderful things for granted.”

Doc left for his office upstairs. Cilla returned to writing articles. The boys rode out to their new fishing hole at the first bend in Red Creek just south of Little Red Rock Hill where they lived. By noon they had caught four good sized fish and had them cooking like hot dogs on the ends of sticks over a small fire. They talked. Jericho was speaking.

“So far, the ghost – I’ll let us call it a ghost until we get it figured out – has only appeared in two spots; at the mill and at the south end of Big Red Rock Hill,” Jericho said. “I wonder why in those spots?”

“Maybe those are the boundaries of the area it wants to have folks keep clear of.”

“Hmm! Interesting. Those could be the east and west boundaries. What about the north and south? And something else – for his appearances to work – scare people away – he has to have folks present to see him.”

“And nobody, including us, knew we’d end up exploring the old mill when we started out that morning so he couldn’t know ahead of time we’d be there.”

“Could have been chance, I suppose,” Jericho said. “He was there, he found that we were there, he didn’t want us there, so he tried to scare us away.”

“That makes sense,” Red Eagle said. “I also liked how you said that. No more words than necessary.”

Jericho smiled. To his way of thinking more words could have made it better – filled out the meaning, made it sound prettier, things like that. He didn’t mention it, however.

“So, any idea what we need to do next?” Red Eagle asked.

“I suppose we need to decide if and why we need to actually do anything,” Jericho said. “The ghost seems be minding his own business and hasn’t hurt anybody.”

“Come now. You are just aching to find out what or

who it is and why and how he is doing whatever he is doing.”

“You have learned my nature well in just a few short weeks, little brother.”

“My question remains – any idea what we need to do next?”

“For one thing, see if we can get him/it to set north and south boundaries for us so we can know the exact area he is trying to protect.”

“How can we accomplish that?”

“He has to know he has aroused our interest – since we’ve seen him twice. I imagine all we need to do is to hang around up north and down south long enough for him to get concerned about us.”

“Does all this mean he already may know where the treasure is?”

“Can’t be sure. He may just be staking out the likely territory so he will have free rein to search it. That’s my best guess, otherwise he’d come in, take the treasure and move on.”

“You have a way of seeing right to the center of things,” Jericho. “I admire that.”

Jericho sat up straight and pointed in the direction of their cave.

“Speaking of seeing right to the center of things – look up there on top of our hill.”

Red Eagle had to turn around since his back was to the hill.

“Oh, my! I see. There he is walking across the top of our hill. Did you see how he got up there?”

“No. Just glanced around and he caught my eye. I think he may have been just standing there until he was sure one of us saw him before he started moving.”

“Like he wanted to be sure we saw him, you mean?”

“Like that. Yes! I think he may have just set the southern boundary for us.”

CHAPTER FOUR

The Map?

“So?” Red Eagle asked.

“So, I say we don’t let these great smelling fish go to waste. Then we go explore the top of our hill.”

“It is hard to believe we haven’t been up there yet.”

“Life seems to have been very busy since that moment our eyes first met across that creek.”

“It has. It’s been so great? I really never had adventures back in my Cherokee village, you know.”

“Well, I had adventures, but they usually involved running away from some home I hated.”

“I have meant to ask you. It sounds like you got spanked a lot. I know what it means, but I can’t understand why it happens. My people would never have thought about hitting a little child. It seems so cruel.”

“It’s nothing I really like talking about, but all the foster parents I had spanked first and talked second. My butt was red from as far back as I can remember up to the day I finally ran away for good when I was ten. I will never spank my kids, I can tell you that. I’ll do it like Doc does it when we do something dumb – sit us down and talk it through so we understand what we did wrong and help us find ways to fix it.”

They finished eating, put out the fire and headed back to Little Red Rock Hill.

“It’s not really a hill, is it?” Red Eagle said looking it over as they approached it.

“No. It’s more like a really huge chunk of rock sticking up out of the prairie. It is somehow connected to Big Red

Rock Hill – I mean in the kind of rock structure it is. They are several miles apart with level land all around them. With the sheer, steep sides it will be hard to find a way to the top.”

“If the ghost man found it, I’ll bet we can find it,” Red Eagle said.

“Unless he just flew up there!”

They chuckled at the idea. Red Eagle shrugged.

“I have to wonder why he’d choose to be up there,” Jericho said wondering out loud.

“Maybe we will find out when we get up there.”

“I hope so.”

They took their time riding around the big rock – as Jericho had described it – looking it top to bottom every few yards. They were eventually back at the place from which they started.

“That was disappointing,” Red Eagle said. “No path. No steps. No nothing.”

“We did learn something valuable, though,” Jericho said. “We learned we are not as good observers as we need to be. We need to think about it in some different way. If there is not a usual way to get up there, what unusual way might there be?”

“I see what you mean. Maybe the way is hidden from view like inside one of the fissures (huge cracks) that run top to bottom. Or maybe there is a way up from inside one of the other caves we found.”

“Good ideas, little brother! Where shall we start?”

“I think the fissures make the most sense. Caves are surrounded by solid rock. Fissures are open.”

“There’s a good one to start with,” Jericho said pointing.

It was on the south-east side, just around the corner from and about thirty yards east of the entrance to their cave.

They dismounted and arranged the bridles so their horses could graze or go where they pleased. The bottom of that big crack was only four feet wide. They walked into it to see how deep it went.

“Only three or four yards deep,” Jericho said.

“But look back there where it seems to stop. It actually turns, doesn’t it?”

They moved into it as far as they could go. Red Eagle

had been correct. The fissure continued around the corner to the right, rising in an irregular fashion high toward the top of the hill.

"It looks like it can be climbed – like a very steep path with natural steps," Red Eagle said.

"Think it goes all the way to the top?"

"Really can't tell from here. I assume we climb."

"I assume we do. Since you're there, you lead the way," Jericho said.

Jericho had earlier calculated that the hill was between 75 and 100 feet tall [roughly like an eight or nine story building]. From below it appeared to be relatively flat on top. They would see. From the beginning, it was a difficult climb. Some of the 'steps' were five feet tall. They stopped to rest often. There was an updraft within the crevice – a constant breeze rose within the three walls. The sun did not penetrate most of it and in places it was nearly dark – like in a cave. They had to feel their way along, often not being sure they were on solid footing. It took the better part of a half hour to reach the top. The sudden burst of light when they emerged from the big crack in the mountain momentarily blinded them.

Once their eyes adjusted they pulled themselves up the final four feet and stood on the top turning around slowly so they could take in what was there.

"More red rock," Red Eagle said sounding unimpressed.

"What did you expect? The Garden of Eden?"

Red Eagle didn't know the reference so Jericho moved on.

"See that?" Jericho said pointing to the far end of the hill.

"The remains of a structure of some sort, I'd say. It's fallen in. What do you suppose?"

"I'll tell you what I suppose. I suppose it's the rock house that the Dutchman built to live in – the one Jake told us about."

They trotted the length of the area – some fifty yards.

"Looks like it was made from rocks that were already up here. All sizes and shapes. None of them really shaped to fit with each other," Jericho said.

“Old beams – rotted now. Probably the roof supports don’t you think?” Red Eagle said.

Jericho nodded and continued the description.

“It was just one room about fifteen feet square. One door. Two open windows. I don’t see any evidence of glass. It would still be here.”

They moved around to the other side.

“A pool of water,” Red Eagle said.

They went to investigate.

“Like a small catch basin – caught rain and snow for the old guy to use,” Jericho said. “Clever, really, building right beside it. About the size of our pool.”

“Look. Inside the building. What remains of a table and some chairs – a trunk and some other things,” Jericho said pointing them out.

He opened the trunk.

“Clothes. All colors. Pretty well rotted away. Shirts, pants, coats, knee high boots – put them together and you could have pirate outfits.”

“It is actually a really nice spot up here,” Red Eagle said, having moved outside and closer to the rim of the large flat area. You can see to the horizon in all directions – prairie, rolling land, clumps of trees and a few larger woods, Red Creek to the south and west and Big Red Rock to the north west. Beyond it is the mill, but Big Red Rock is in the way so we can only see the very top of the roof, see.”

Jericho turned serious as he nodded.

“What does all that tell us?”

“I don’t know. What?”

“You have just described the area the ghost seems to be reserving for himself.”

“I see. No, I don’t see. What?”

“From up here the Dutchman could see all of it. He could keep his eyes on the spots he hid his treasure.”

“Oh. Yes. I do see. So, you’re saying as we look out over the view, we are actually seeing the places he hid it – we just don’t know what to look for.”

“Exactly. It might as well be a thousand times bigger. We’ll never be able to search all of it.”

“Why would we search for it?” Red Eagle said, clearly

puzzled. “We have too much money now.”

“Just to find it – like a wonderful puzzle. We don’t have to keep it. We don’t even have to tell anybody or move it. Just find it.”

“It is a wonderful puzzle,” Red Eagle said. “I suppose we could use some of it to build that home for orphans you have talked about.”

“I knew there was some reason I kept you around, little brother. That’s a spectacular idea.”

“Spectacular?”

“Remarkable!”

“Remarkable?” Red Eagle asked, grinning, seeing it as humorous that he didn’t understand the synonym his brother had given him for the word he didn’t understand in the first place.

“Amazing, astonishing.”

“Got it. Thank you for your patience with me.”

Jericho had never thought of times like that as being patient. It was just taking whatever time it took to be helpful. He was like that with everybody. The dance hall girl back in Bedford, Kansas had told him he was so patient that he should be a teacher – that he had a natural knack for it. He doubted if that’s how life would turn out for him, but he hadn’t ruled it out.

Red Eagle sat cross legged to enjoy the view back toward the north and west. Jericho joined him. He ran his hand across the rock surface that was a half inch deep in red dust.

“Hey, look at what you uncovered,” Red Eagle said pointing between them.

Working together they cleared the dust away from an area several feet square. At one point they both leaned down to blow it away and instead blew dust into each other’s eyes. It was worth an extended period of laughter. The laughing caused tears. The tears cleaned their eyes.

“That worked well, I’d say,” Jericho said.

The chuckles continued for a few more minutes.

“Lots of marks,” Red Eagle went on.

“Marks that have been cut into the stone with a chisel,” Jericho said.

“Not alphabet letters,” Red Eagle said. “Lots of outlines I don’t understand.”

“These could be the letter ‘X,’” Jericho said pointing here and there.

“Yes. I was thinking of Cherokee maps. On them, that symbol means, ‘here’, not ‘X’.”

“It also meant ‘here’ on pirate maps. Let’s think about it like it is a map – a map of this area we’ve been looking at from up here.”

They fell quiet looking back and forth between the view and the map on the rock surface.

“This could be our Little Red Rock back here at this end,” Red Eagle said.

“And this could be Big Red Rock sort of in the middle,” Jericho added.

“This circle with the ‘X’ inside near the front side is close to this long line at the west edge. That seems to be the most north and west part of the map – if it is a map,” Red Eagle said.

“That north to south line you pointed out might be Sunday Creek,” Jericho said clearing it of dust by running his finger in it from top to bottom. “That circle could sure be the mill, then.”

“But why a circle?” Red Eagle asked. “The mill is not built like a circle.”

“Maybe the mill hadn’t been built yet. The circle could represent a hole.”

“Or a cave, maybe.”

“That’s a good possibility. There are three other circles like that, see. Here, here, and here. They could all be caves.”

“Look here,” Red Eagle said. “A circle and ‘X’ right here at this end – like we are sitting on it.”

“Hmm. We know there are caves in our Little Red Rock.”

“But we looked in them and didn’t find a treasure.”

“But what if we actually did without knowing it?” Jericho said.

“I don’t understand.”

“In the cave, we call our ‘gold mine’. We really never saw any gold in the walls in the tunnel, right? We haven’t

taken time to look.”

“That’s right. Where are you going with this?”

“What if, instead of a gold mine it is a place where the Dutchman hid his gold? Somebody found it, melted down the gold rings and bracelets and chains and things and that’s where our little ingots came from instead of ore. It would help explain why the ingots were so pure. Like the banker said, it is purer than any he had ever seen right from a mine.”

“I’ll be!” Red Eagle said.

Jericho chuckled at him, using that phrase for the first time. Red Eagle understood, but didn’t comment.

“Let’s see, how many ‘X’s are there?” Jericho asked beginning to count.

They agreed on twelve.

“Twelve – that’s one for each wagon load of the Dutchman’s treasure,” Jericho said.

“So, you are agreeing that the Dutchman probably didn’t hide it all in one place. That was really clever, wasn’t it?” Red Eagle said.

“It was. In case any of his drivers did survive he’d only know where ‘his’ part of it was hidden.”

“Let’s get serious about the locations. We’ll say one is in our mine cave – we can investigate that later. And if one is somewhere around the mill, that leaves ten more.”

“I was thinking about this ‘X’,” Red Eagle said pointing to the far north east of the map. “Wouldn’t that be where Jake’s place is?”

Jericho studied the map for some time and began nodding.

“I think you’re right. The form that I thought was a raised hand and wrist could be a tree, instead. Was there any place there where stuff could be hidden?”

“There’s the woods just on to the east. Fits in with that tree idea. I suppose there could be something there. The trees were very old. It was small.”

“That would be three, leaving nine. I think we need to bring some paper up here so we can make an exact copy of the map,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle agreed. He, also, had another thought.

“Before we leave today let us look for another way up

and down this big rock. The ghost man didn't have time to climb back down the fissure before we arrived here. What do you think?"

"Good observation."

They stood up and walked the edge around.

"Think this might be it?" Jericho said motioning his brother to him.

"I will say, yes. A rope ladder fastened to large iron bolts that have been sunk down into the rock up here. It hangs in another crevice which is why we didn't see it when we rode around the hill."

"What else do you notice about it?" Jericho asked.

"The bolts and rope are brand new."

"Does it seem strange to you that a ghost would need a rope ladder, I mean he's a ghost? He can just float to places, can't he?"

"I think we have established it is not a ghost," Red Eagle said. "Foot prints sunk into the ground, remember?"

Jericho nodded not having really been sure what his brother's take had been on it.

"Shall we take the ladder on our way down, then," Jericho asked.

"It might lead down to where the ghost/man stays – another hidden cave or something."

"You're probably right to be cautious about it. Sandy and Doc will never believe this – us being careful. We can go back down the way we came and then circle around and find where the rope ends down there."

They began the walk across the top of the hill toward their crevice.

"Look there," Red Eagle said pointing to the surface of the hill.

"Like Doc's wallet. What would he have been doing up here?"

"It's 'like' his, not his. Most men carry one."

Jericho reached down and picked it up and spread it apart.

"Looks like some money and a folded piece of paper."

He took out the paper and handed the wallet to Red Eagle.

“It is a name and address. Would you look at this! It says, ‘Property of Rupert Rasmussen, Amsterdam, Zeedijk Stratt, Holland.’ That’s the name of the Golden Dutchman – Rupert Rasmussen – the original ghost!

///

CHAPTER FIVE

When is a Mine, Not a Mine?

They took the wallet with them.

“We need to get this wallet to Cilla. She may know how to make sense out of it,” Jericho said.

Back on the ground, they entered their cave. Lightning and Golden were already inside. The boys could tell they missed having Gray around from the time when Cal had been protecting them a few weeks before. When they went into town they’d make sure the three of them got some time together.

They cleaned up. They were dusted with red sand from their hair to their toenails. After a quick dip, they were soon clean and into fresh clothes – one White and one Indian – they returned to town. It was shortly after two o’clock when they dismounted in front of the newspaper office. Gray was across the street in front of the Sheriff’s office. Golden and Lightning immediately trotted to be with him.

“Got something very interesting,” Jericho said as he followed his brother into the office.

They walked directly to the big table she used as a desk. Jericho removed the wallet from his pocket and handed it to her.

“Do I get any clues or just wing it?” she asked.

“Look it over first and just react to what you find,” Red Eagle said.

He looked at Jericho who nodded his agreement.

“Hmm. Well, a pretty inexpensive wallet – second rate really. Old. Thin shiny leather. And, inside some bills – sixty

two dollars – quite a bit to be carrying around. Then, a small piece of paper – folded. Let's see, it is hand written in very pretty handwriting. A name and address. Oh, I see. Old Rupert himself. I never thought about pirates carrying wallets. Suppose they might have. This carries an Amsterdam address. Notice the country is listed as Holland. Since the early 1800s it has officially been called The Netherlands."

"So?" Jericho said encouraging her too keep thinking out loud about it.

"So, one interpretation could be that it is the Dutchman's original property, carried by his ghost and recently lost. Another could be that somebody is intentionally playing games with us – well, with you."

"For what purpose?" Red Eagle asked.

"A good question. Perhaps, trying to help set the case for the return of the ghost. Why, I have no idea. It or he may think it is easier to pull the ghost thing on kids rather than adults. No offense."

"None taken. We love being our age. We can still act like a kid any time we want to without causing any raised eyebrows while we are trying out ways to be grownups."

Red Eagle beamed. He had never thought of it exactly like that, but he liked it.

"We believe somebody is trying to scare people away from a certain area north of town while he or it searches for the treasure," Jericho explained.

"And," Red Eagle continued, "we believe that instead of hiding it all in one place he hid it in a dozen different places – each wagonload in a separate spot."

"And that one of those places may be up at Jake's place," Jericho added.

"And another near the old mill and one near . . . well, where we live. We may have found a map chiseled into . . . a big rock we ran across."

Sometimes it was difficult to talk without revealing their secrets.

"Ghost or man, are you thinking?" Cilla asked.

"Our brains say man, but part of my spirit leaves the door open for a ghost," Red Eagle said stating it just like it was for him and making no apologies about it.

"If it's a ghost you have very little to worry about," Cilla said.

"Why do you say that?" Red Eagle asked.

"Well, in all my years I have never heard of a single case where a ghost harmed anybody. Scared their pants off, maybe, but never actually harmed them. If it's a man, I can't say the same thing. And, since ghosts aren't high on my list of possible things, I suggest you two be careful. The way you describe the possibilities I'm thinking greed may play a part in this and greed has always led to the downfall of people, nations and societies."

"Help with the word greed," Red Eagle asked.

"Gathering for yourself much more than you need, often while hurting others – money and other kinds of possessions. Even power I suppose."

"Not a good thing, then," he said checking out what he thought he understood. "Like the stage robbers and pirates and men who cheat at card games."

"You have the idea. Or, super rich people who don't use their money to help others who have very little or are sick."

"My brother and I have much more money than we need. Does that make us greedy?"

"You didn't take it from anybody so you didn't hurt anybody. I have the idea from things you've mentioned that you have good intentions for how it will eventually be used – not just for you, but for others who need it more than you do."

"That is our plan. What is that called, ungreedy?"

"The best word I think is altruistic – generous would be another," she said.

Jericho joined in.

"Altruistic means like putting other people's needs before your own, right?"

"In its purest sense, that's right. Very few human beings are able to take it that far. I like to think of altruism as making other people's needs at least as important as you make your own. Like if you are able to have three meals a day you should be willing to make sure somebody else has three a day."

"Like brothers, then," Red Eagle said.

"Well, certainly like you two brothers, at least."

“Okay. Enough edification for the day.” Jericho said.

“Edifi-what?”

“Edification. It means learning new things that are generally held to be important.”

“I think I need to begin carrying a pencil and paper like my brother does.”

“Why don’t you see what Doc has to say about your find,” Cilla said. “He usually has ideas about such things.”

They thanked Cilla and ran the steps two at a time up to Docs office. Doc spoke as he examined the note from the wallet.

“The Netherlands hasn’t been officially Holland for three quarters of a century. It’s still called that by lots of us here in America, but not on documents – never in an address. Somebody’s trying to pass this off as an original from back at the turn of the century. To legitimize the ghost idea, I’m thinking.”

“Could it be – that old – the paper?” Jericho asked.

Doc examined the paper up close.

“My guess is this is brand new paper. Old world paper from that long ago would be thicker to begin with and would have begun to yellow by now. Exposure to light over time makes the cellulous in paper lose its white color and turns it yellow. I added that because I heard the question, ‘why’, forming inside Jericho’s head.”

They boys grinned. Doc had been correct. He continued.

“The ink hasn’t faded yet and it almost always does. And look at the fold marks – if they were that old, the stress from the fold would have begun to break the paper along the creases. I’m quite sure this is of very recent origin.”

“We are assuming the old Mill wasn’t built yet back when the Dutchman buried his treasure, right,” Jericho said.

“It was built much later.”

“You know anything about the spot it was built on?”

“Not much. It is a large structure so I imagine it was built on solid ground – foundation down to the underlying rock maybe. This old prairie soil isn’t very stable. The mill sits on the side of a low hill not far to the east of the creek. The creek has an abundance of rock outcroppings in it. Having said that I

do recall that several times wells were started by settlers up in that area, but they soon hit solid rock and had to stop.”

“Thanks, Doc.”

“Any time. Be careful!”

He returned the wallet to Jericho.

Back down stairs they crossed the street to say hello to Sandy and Cal.

“Saw your horses out front,” Cal said. “Knew you were around somewhere. Hoped you’d stop in. What’s up?”

“Came to town for a few supplies,” Jericho said. “You seen any strangers in town the past week or so?”

“What kind of strangers?”

“A head, two arms and legs.”

“I’m trying to help,” Cal said. “Be serious.”

“A man. About five feet eight. Maybe on a horse. Really have little idea about him.”

Cal looked at Sandy. They shrugged. It was no help. The boys left, stopped at the store for milk and two cans of beans, and rode back toward their cave.

“How about we take a good look at our gold mine,” Jericho suggested. “Since we first found it, we’ve never gotten back to really exploring it. All we know is there is that big room and one tunnel that runs south where we assumed the gold vein was.”

“That is not really like us, you know – leaving something unexplored,” Red Eagle said.

“That’s for sure. I guess we figured we’d go back when we needed more gold. I can see now that isn’t going to happen for many years – if ever. But, now that we have a new idea about it, it sounds like a good idea.”

“I wonder if ghost/man knows about it,” Red Eagle asked.

“I imagine we will soon find out.”

They left their things at the cave, took the padlock key from where they hid it up on the ledge and walked around the big rock to the well-hidden opening of the mine.

“I suppose if we are going to be careful, like everybody tells us to be, this is about the time we should do that,” Red Eagle said.

It seemed humorous to Jericho and he laughed all the

while knowing his brother was being serious.

“Not sure what careful would be in this case, do you?” he asked.

“As you might say, ‘I do not have a clue’.”

They approached the secret entry and were soon at the door.

“Lock is still in place,” Jericho said.

“So is the string you fixed to let us know if the door has been opened.”

Jericho unlocked the door and they entered. They lit two candles and closed the door. Jericho led the way into the tunnel off to their right. They had only been in it once before, but had stopped before getting clear to the end.

“Looks like it just comes to a dead end down there,” Jericho said, holding his candle high.

Red Eagle moved on past him to what appeared to be the wall at the dead end.

“This wall is not the end of the tunnel, brother. Come and look at it.”

He was correct. It was a pile of rocks, floor to ceiling and side to side.

“Look down here,” Red Eagle said pointing toward the floor. “A very thick wooden beam on the floor just in front of the rocks.”

“And something else,” Jericho said. “Look at the floor just in front of it.”

“I see what you see. It has been chiseled flat – not uneven like the rest of the tunnel floor. But why?”

“I have an idea,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle smiled into the darkness. It was one of those things that was unnecessary to say – his brother always had ideas.

“I think those rocks we see are piled up on a wooden structure that moves – swings out, most likely. The floor would need to be very flat for that to be possible. Let’s see if we can find a way to open it – to swing it out toward us.”

They looked. They pushed. They tugged. Nothing moved. Jericho sat down on one of the rocks to rest and think. Red Eagle spoke.

“I suppose that many rocks weigh a very large amount.

Maybe it takes a team of horses to move it.”

“That’s a good point. Or, maybe we just need to remove the rocks.”

He stood and began trying to lift one of the smaller ones.”

“Cancel that idea. I can’t even move the littlest one.”

After that, they both sat down on the rocks.

“What’s that, brother-who-doesn’t-believe-in-ghosts?”

“Not a ghost. The pile of rocks is moving our way.”

“Just the left side – it’s opening like a door,” Red Eagle continued.”

They stood and stepped back into the tunnel out of the way.

“Well I be a monkey’s uncle,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle let it go noting he needed to ask about the saying later.

It stopped after disclosing a four-foot-wide opening nearly five feet high. Jericho moved inside to take a look.

“Look at the mechanism behind the rock wall – beams and supports all resting on four strong wagon wheels on an axil. In some way when we sat on one of the rocks we triggered a latch or some such thing and out it popped.”

“And huge hinges on the right edge. And see the floor behind the wall – it’s on a slight upward slant so the weight of the wall makes it roll downhill out into the tunnel when it is set free by opening the latch.”

“The question remains,” Red Eagle said, “why the wall and mechanism?”

“I’m betting when we move inside a little further we’ll find out. First, let’s roll one of the loose rocks that sits on the floor of the cave to a place that will keep the door from closing and locking us inside.”

Red Eagle agreed. They set the rock and moved on inside.

“Would you look at that!” Jericho said as they stopped in their tracks.

There were a dozen large chests stacked ceiling high and wall to wall. They extended back two deep.

“The treasure, I assume,” Red Eagle said.

It was the first time he realized he really had no idea

what a treasure would look like.

“Oh, yes, and quite a treasure it is. Let’s open that trunk in front.”

Jericho used his knife and soon had the hasp lock loosened. With one well-placed strike from a good-sized rock, Red Eagle knocked the lock away. It took a good deal of effort, but soon it squeaked open.

The boys’ jaws dropped. They were speechless. The contents sparkled in the light of the candle flames and cast a golden glow around the tunnel.

“Gold in a dozen forms,” Jericho said. “Necklaces, bracelets, vases, plates, rings, even a crown and chains and coins and huge ingots – four by four by twelve inches in size. This is better than any old gold mine we could ever find.”

“So, what now?” Red Eagle asked looking nervously back out into the main tunnel.

“Well, how about if we take just a small sample of things – like a few rings and bracelets and a chain – so we can see what Doc and Cilla think?”

“That sounds like a good idea.”

They each selected three small pieces and stowed them in Jericho’s pockets.

“See. There are some good things about White Boys’ pants – they are called pockets.”

They found when they pushed on the wall, it closed with relative ease.

“Whoever built this thing knew what he was doing. Must be counter balances.”

They turned and began walking toward the entrance.

There was a noise at the door. It moved in and out as if being tampered with. Always the more cautious brother, Red Eagle blew out both of the candles. They waited silently, afraid to take a breath. Red Eagle readied an arrow in his bow and Jericho slipped his knife from its scabbard. The door swung open!

CHAPTER SIX

“I really hate being rich, you know.”

The boys began breathing again and their hearts started beating when they saw the scene just outside the door. Lightning and Golden had come looking for them and one of them had managed to open the door with his mouth.

Outside, a few minutes later, they had the door locked and the string back in place.

“I hope ghost guy hasn’t been watching from out there,” Jericho said.

“We have become very careful coming and going from our cave since our problems with the Impostors,” (Book 2) Red Eagle said. “I do not think he could know the hill is our home.”

“I hope you’re right. The sun says it’s what, about four o’clock?”

“Yes. Are you thinking of riding into town still this afternoon?”

“Just wondering. What do you think?”

“I think two things. I really want to know what Doc and Cilla make of the samples we have. And Second, I could really use a good meal even if we have to buy one for every person in Red Bend. It looks like we will be able to afford it”

Red Eagle’s smile sobered as he continued.

“I really hate being rich, you know.”

“I know you do. We need to begin making some solid plans about putting it to good use – like Cilla indicated today. Tonight, we can talk it through.”

“That sounds very good to me. We are going to town,

then?”

“Sure. I have one thing I want us to do at the cave first.”

The boys took off at a trot. The horses mingled right in with them thinking it was a grand new game.

“So, what is it you want to do?”

“We’ll need three feet of black fish line.”

Red Eagle got it from his saddle bag without questions.

“Here’s my idea. I want to be sure nobody is coming into our cave, but we don’t have a door to use like at the mine entrance. So, see this crack up about eighteen inches on this side of the opening – the doorway. We will slip the line in so one end is held tight up there. Then we will just drape the rest of it across the opening and down on a slant to the ground. We’ll set a small rock on the end of it to hold it in place. In the deep shadows in here it can’t be seen so when anybody enters they will move it without even knowing it. That way we’ll know.”

“Very inventive. And a good idea. What if we find somebody has come in?”

“Then, we will just have to get inventive again. Until then, we won’t worry about it.”

“You are sounding more like Cherokee every day, Same Face.”

“Thank you.”

They pulled up in front of Cilla’s office and dismounted. Jericho spoke.

“How about you go get Doc and bring him down so they can examine our samples together? Then we’ll go eat.”

Red Eagle ran the stairs to get Doc.

Lightning and Golden trotted on down to the livery stable in hope of seeing Gray. They were not disappointed.

A few minutes later the boys had pulled chairs up around Cilla’s big table. Red Eagle told the story about the tunnel and the door camouflaged with rocks while Jericho removed the samples from his pockets and placed them on the table.

At one point, he paused, looking at what he found.

“How’d that old toad get in there?”

Red Eagle rolled his eyes at the others and went to set

the toad free outside. When he reentered, Doc was with him.

"This is amazing," Cilla said as she humorously tried on and posed with every piece.

Doc, as he often did, had some important advice.

"You found this collection in a trunk I imagine . . .?"

"Well, in about twelve trunks, actually," Jericho said.

"Eleven, actually," Red Eagle said. "I counted them. One was empty out in the main cave."

"Eleven! That's a ransom for the king of Spain, himself."

"You mean a lot, I think," Red Eagle said looking for confirmation.

"Yes. A lot. And you say this it only one of twelve hiding spots."

"That is our present evaluation," Jericho said sounding a lot like Doc.

"Well, what I started to say is that I imagine you will find two kinds of items in the treasure. Part will be important historical relics that you will probably want to return to Spain or England to be put in the appropriate museums. The rest – 90% of it I imagine – will be just run of the mill jewelry rich people wore in the day."

"In the day?" Red Eagle asked.

"In that period of history," Doc explained. "I can see how that expression is confusing."

"How will we know which is which?" Jericho asked. "We sure wouldn't want to melt down things that are of historical value. Considering that empty trunk and the gold we already found, somebody may have already done that to some of the things."

"There are experts who know about such relics," Cilla said. "Let me send out feelers to some of my associates and see how they think you should proceed."

"We had planned to buy supper for all of us this evening," Jericho said, "but now that we can't sell any of the treasure for a while, I guess we'll just have to stay the poor little children we were before the ghost guy showed up."

"You poor little children are rich enough to buy a whole railroad company so don't give me any of that poor us malarkey," Doc said. "It only increases my appetite up into the

really expensive range.”

Outside on the sidewalk they watched the three horses race down the street all the way to the city limit sign. Cal came out of the Sheriff’s office and stood looking after them.

“How in the . . .? I had Gray latched into a stall. You have a pair of horse-nappers there.”

“We have noticed they are getting very clever,” Red Eagle said. “They just want to play awhile. You know they’ll be back.”

“Why don’t you and Sandy come to supper with us,” Doc said. “The boys are buying.”

“Okay! Let me tell Sandy.”

“You are taking great pleasure in this, aren’t you, Doc?” Red Eagle said smiling, believing he understood what was going on.

“You bet your beautiful Cherokee skin he’s enjoying it Honey,” Cilla said.

Doc raised his eyebrows without comment.

They lingered over supper enjoying each other’s company. Sandy left early to take of business. He told Cal to stay, understanding he and the boys had grown close and there hadn’t seemed to be many opportunities for them to be together recently. Sandy was a good man.

* * *

They rode home in the dark, with only the slip of a new moon lighting their way. As they rode they talked over the fascinating day that was about to come to an end. Well, maybe not!

“You see it,” Red Eagle said in a whisper.

“I see it or him I suppose. The white clad pirate. Why is he just standing in the road up there?”

“He could be watching our hill,” Red Eagle said. “He is standing sideways. Should we stop?”

“Probably should, but I want to get a closer look. He probably really just wants to try and scare us again.”

They slowed, but kept moving forward. When they pulled to within thirty feet of him he disappeared.

“What in tarnation?” Jericho said, borrowing one of Cal’s favorite expressions.

“He made it seem like he disappeared,” Red Eagle

said.

“That is exactly right. Nobody just disappears so
Somehow, he made it appear that he disappeared.
Fascinating, wouldn't you say?”

“What I would say is, ‘What now?’”

“Let's just keep going like we didn't see him. He has
never made any move to hurt us.”

“Up to now, at least!”

Golden whinnied. Red Eagle explained.

“He doesn't know what my shaking legs against his
sides mean. Let me hold them out away from him.”

Jericho figured that was all between his brother and his
horse so continued whispering.

“Since we can't know that he's not watching us from
someplace out there in the dark, how would you feel about
camping out at the fishing hole tonight? We sure don't want
him to begin associating us with the hill or see us disappear
into the that big slab of rock and give away the location of our
cave.”

“That sounds good to me. Fire or no fire?”

“A fire would seem more natural I suppose. If he's
watching us he'll know where we are fire or no fire.”

It was decided. They hadn't brought bed rolls figuring
they would be home by bed time.

“You use our horse blankets to cover up with, Red
Eagle. It may get chilly out here tonight. We'll put you close to
the fire.”

“You are thinking that is another good use for White
Boy clothes. I will admit that is true and laugh while I watch
you having to wash them in the creek every Saturday
morning.”

A tussle was in order, but not under those
circumstances.

They built up a larger than necessary fire for the night.
Jericho used the excuse of keeping Red Eagle warm, but they
both knew it had to do with the possible danger. Jericho laid
his knife beside him and Red Eagle had an arrow free of the
quiver for easy access if it were needed. The horses
remained close as if they sensed that was where they needed
to be. The boys had come through a strenuous day and, not

really expecting any problem, fell asleep almost immediately.

They awoke with the sun, each one momentarily puzzled by the bright light. They were used to awakening to the lower level of light inside their cave. The details of their situation soon came back to them. The horses were grazing close by. The boys stood and looked in all directions. Nobody was in sight.

“Think it’s safe to return home?” Red Eagle asked.

“I suppose we have no way of knowing.”

“What we need is a distraction,” Red Eagle said.

“Distraction?”

“Something to occupy ghost guy’s attention if he is watching us, while we slip up the slope and into the cave.”

“Excellent, but what?”

“Let me get out my pad of paper.”

Red Eagle was puzzled, but he had learned that was just a normal part of living with his new brother.

Jericho wrote: Sandy/Cal – Using horses as a distraction. Just tell them to go home. We are fine. Thanks – J & RE.

They saddled Midnight and put the message in the saddle bag.

“Go get Sandy, boys. Go get Sandy and Cal.”

They patted their behinds and off they tore. It had become a pretty good messenger system, better even than the old Pony Express, because the boys horses didn’t need riders.

They waited until any unwanted eyes would be following the horses and not looking toward that hill. They ran, bent low, and were safely inside within a couple of minutes. They stood inside and surveyed the area outside looking to see if anybody showed himself. Nobody did. They settled in and built up a small fire for breakfast.

“The horses will be back in a half hour,” Red Eagle said. “We will need to watch for them to be sure they are alone.”

“Good precaution, Little Brother.”

They put the samples from the treasure up on their hidden ledge.

“I suppose you noticed the string had not been moved,”

Jericho said.

Red Eagle nodded.

It was a breakfast of fried ham, scrambled eggs and milk to drink. Red Eagle liked his milk warm. He had grown up drinking it soon after the cow or goat had been milked so it was always warm. Jericho preferred his cold – his cow had always been the icebox in the kitchen. Those were two of the differences that helped define their unique backgrounds.

“So, the treasure,” Jericho said. “Looks like it will bring us in a lot more money. We need to make plans to see that it is well used.”

“I think the first thing is the orphanage – the place where kids without parents can live and have wonderful lives. The one you have dreamed about building,” Red Eagle said.

“Wouldn’t that be wonderful! What do you think, two kids to a room, each with their own bed?”

“Two is good so they won’t be lonely at night,” Red Eagle agreed. “Nights were the worst times for me. After I got too old to be comfortable with the women at night, I’d just find someplace that seemed safe and comfortable. Often it was not either of those things. I dreamed about having somebody there with me – another kid I mean.”

Jericho agreed with a nod and continued.

“And a place for the babies so they never have to stay wet or soiled and when they need to be held there will be a kind and gentle person right there to take care of them.”

“And you said a doctor whenever they needed one.”

“Yes. I remember being sick for a whole week once when I was about seven I suppose. My foster parents kept me in bed in a cold room upstairs. They brought me food and water and said they had to stay away from me so they didn’t get my sickness. I cried for the whole week.”

“We’ll see that never happens to any of our kids, you can count on that, Same Face.”

“Wouldn’t that be great to think of them as our kids? How many do you suppose we can take care of?”

“Doc says we can buy a railroad. I suppose we can take care of lots and lots. We need to get Doc in on this. He will know about taking care of kids, don’t you think?”

“I’m sure he will have lots of ideas – and Cilla.”

“And maybe Cal, too. He was in that same situation, sort of. I guess he had an aunt. We really haven’t heard about his full story.”

“Where are we going to build this place?” Red Eagle asked.

“I had always thought in a city because all I knew back then was cities. But I wonder if someplace out in the country not too far from a city might be good. The kids would have lots of room to run and play and ride horses.”

“And we’d need it close to a creek so they could swim.”

“And close to a stage line so people could come to visit them – clowns and jugglers and such – and they could go visit places when they got older.”

“And a school. They will need teachers and books and maps and pencils and paper.”

“We’ll write all this down and then take it to Doc and Cilla, okay?”

“You write better, Jericho. I’ll help talk about things and you can write. Like when we wrote the articles for Cilla’s paper.”

“It’s a deal. We are different in that way. I think best when I have a pencil in my hand and you think best when you are pacing around. Sometimes when I first wake up in the morning I just can’t believe I have you – well, that we have each other, Red Eagle. I can’t think of anything more wonderful than that – well, than this.”

“I understand. I have even wondered if it was all a dream. I suppose we both couldn’t be having the same dream, could we?”

“Doc would say that you are sounding like me. I think that’s great.”

They heard horses approaching on the road below. They went to the door and peeked around the rock opening.

“That is not what we expected.”

“No. Golden, Lightning and somebody riding on a third horse.”

“Trouble, you think?”

“We won’t know ‘til they get closer. You think the horses would just cooperate like that with ghost guy?”

“I guess we’ll know if they all show up on our door

step.”

They stepped back into the shadows to wait. Both boys prepared their bows with arrows.

///

CHAPTER SEVEN

Girls!

As the rider and horses turned off the road and headed up toward the cave the boys recognized who it was. They stepped outside and waved.

“Cal! Didn’t expect you to escort the ‘boys’ back out here.”

Cal spoke as he dismounted.

“Gray was determined to come – with me or without me. Actually, it was Sandy’s idea. Something about the word ‘fine’ in your note. He said you two would think things were fine even if you were still just five feet ahead of a charging coyote. I volunteered. Actually, I was out the door and mounted up before he had time to say anything.”

“We’ve missed you,” Jericho said. “It was great being with you at supper last night. We really are okay. Had another encounter with Ghost Man on our way home last night.”

“Somehow he made it appear like he disappeared right there in front of our eyes. It was a very fine ill . . .”

“Illusion,” Jericho said supplying the word. “And he’s right. Standing there on the road one second and gone the next. I’ve been thinking he probably rides a black horse because he was way out here and we didn’t see any sign of a horse.”

“We camped at your fishing hole last night because we didn’t want him finding out about our cave.”

“That was clever. Well, I’m glad you are alright. I better get back to town.”

“Oh, no,” Jericho said. “Your hair is full of dust from the ride. Your face is smudged. I just imagine you’re encrusted with dirt from head to toe and you know what that means.”

Cal broke a broad grin.

“I suppose you’re right. An officer of the law shouldn’t appear in public looking scroungy like that. Your pool or the swimming hole.”

“Let’s stay in here in case eyes are watching,” Red Eagle said.

“Half an hour later they figured Cal was presentable and sent him on his way. It had been a good excuse for a good time together.

“See you Sunday morning for cake,” he said as he and Gray made their way down the slope to the road.

The boys held Golden and Lightning to let them know they needed to stay near the hill. When freed, they went to the creek to drink.

“We need to get up on top and make a copy of that map that’s chiseled into the rock,” Jericho said.

“I was wondering,” Red Eagle said. “Do you think ghost man knows about it – it was covered in dust you know? If we hadn’t sat down right there, we’d have never seen it.”

“I think he must at least know about what it contains since he’s marking the proper territory with ghost appearances. Whether it’s because he knows about that specific map, I have no idea. He was up there on top of our hill, though. We saw him.”

By nine o’clock they had the map drawn out and had returned to their cave. The rope ladder made it an easy trip.

“Since he – or somebody – went to all the trouble to install that rope ladder, I’m thinking he’s planning to fix up that rock building up there to live in. Why else go to all that effort and expense.”

It had been Red Eagle.

“Maybe our presence around here is interfering with that,” Jericho. “That could be why he’s put in three ghost appearances just for us – to keep us away.”

“That sounds reasonable.”

“We need to make a plan,” Jericho said. “Do we start making the rounds of the ‘X’s on the map to locate the rest of

the treasure or what?"

"Did you ever think the treasure might actually belong to ghost man?" Red Eagle said.

"I don't understand."

"Maybe he is some relative."

"Remember the story is that the Dutchman disinherited all his relatives. So, technically – legally – it can't be theirs."

"Then it is like a race between ghost man and us to see who gets it first?"

"Yes, like that I suppose, although I hadn't thought of it that way. I guess he hasn't done anything illegal, has he. There is no reason for Sandy to arrest him or run him off. As far as I know, impersonating a ghost and disappearing on a lonely road at night are not against the law."

"I wonder where he is staying right now." Red Eagle asked.

"The only buildings in the area of the map are the mill, that ranch house just south of the Big Red Rock Hill, and the kid's house we saw when we rode up to Jake's. The only place in the mill we didn't look over was up in the attic."

"I'm thinking we need to ride to town and stop by that ranch house on the way. Sandy said a woman lived there by herself. It could be that Ghost Man took over her place."

That became the plan. They saddled up and were soon on their way west on the road. The lane to the ranch house was about half way to town. They talked as they rode.

"Isn't this Thursday?" Red Eagle asked. "The books from the city should be here today on the morning stage."

"In fact, they should already be here. That stage arrived at eight. I didn't even hear it go by."

"We were inside in the pool then. We tend to get noisy when it's the three of us."

Suddenly their morning was filling up in a hurry.

They rode up the lane to the ranch house. An older woman moved into the open doorway from inside and stood there wiping her hands on her long apron. She had gray hair pulled up into a bun on the back. The boys waved. She waved and smiled in return. They pulled to a halt a few yards from the porch.

"Morning Ma'am," Jericho said. "We've often ridden by,

but never stopped to say hi. Felt it was about time we did that.”

“I have seen you often. Must say I have wondered about you. Now that I see you close up I find there are even more things to wonder about. I have noticed that you are both exceptional horsemen for your ages and those are about the finest pieces of horse flesh I’ve seen in my lifetime.”

The air had been filled with the aroma of something wonderful most of the way up the lane. They would soon find out what it was.

“I have warm, just out of the oven, apple pie sitting on table looking awfully lonesome. Suppose you boys could manage a piece?”

“No ‘suppose’ to it, ma’am,” Jericho said dismounting.

Red Eagle was right behind him.

The introductions were made and they followed her inside.

They sat around the large kitchen table and she served extra-large slabs of the very best apple pie they had ever had.

“Do I have to coax your stories out of you? Still half a pie for an additional bribe if that’s necessary.”

“No bribe necessary,” Red Eagle said. “My brother will tell you our story while I eat.”

They all chuckled.

An hour later the story had been told and the entire pie had been finished.

“I must say you have lived a fascinating set of lives,” she said. “It sounds like you are living on your own.”

“Does it, now?” Jericho said offering no more than that and a broad smile.

She got the message – that was not a topic for conversation. The boys thanked her and stood to leave.

“You’ll find there’s usually pie or cobbler here at this table Thursday mornings about this time; more often in the winter. There will be loaves of bread by sundown in case you stop in. I love to bake, so don’t let me down, now.”

“You are very kind. You seem to know a lot about boys.”

“Had five brothers. Had to know a lot about boys just to survive. I do have a nephew back in Kansas City, but I’ve

never seen him – Johnny – he’s just two.”

The boys mounted up and turned to wave as they reached the end of the lane. It was less than a ten-minute ride on into town, five if their horses had anything to say about it. They went straight to Cilla’s office.

“Did the books come in?” Red Eagle asked, having entered first.

“Sure did. My friend did things up right. She sent seven books.”

“Seven all about the Dutchman?” Jericho asked surprised.

“No. Come to find out there are no books just about him, but there are passages and even full chapters in several books. Others deal with pirates and the history of the time both here and in the Caribbean. Believe it or not as a little girl I wanted to be a pirate.”

“I can see it,” Jericho said. “Knee boots, a pink plumed hat, a knife between your teeth and a saber in your right hand, swinging across the water on a rope and boarding a ship from the King of Spain.”

“I can tell I have a lot to learn about pirates,” Red Eagle said sorting through the books. “Where shall I start?”

“There is a short chapter about the Dutchman in this little book, ‘Oddities of the Western Plains’. I haven’t had time to give them more than a quick thumb-through.”

“Thank you for handling this for us. How long can we keep them?”

“No time limit. Like I said, a good friend. They aren’t books that have been used very often.”

“We will find a way to thank her,” Red Eagle said.

“Like he said,” Jericho said managing a thoughtful look. “My brother is much better at being polite than I am. It’s not that I’m not appreciative of things that are done for me, but during my earlier life very few things happened to me that deserved a thank you. It was often just the opposite for Red Eagle. I guess we sort of balance out that way between us.”

Red Eagle turned to Cilla.

“What he means is I continually save his behind by remembering to be polite for both of us.”

Jericho shrugged and nodded, admitting the truth in

what his brother said.

“Lunch at noon?” Jericho asked.

“Sure,” she said nodding. “I think it must be Doc’s turn to pay, don’t you?”

The boys agreed with a nod and smiled. They soon had the books stowed in their saddle bags.

“We don’t have time to get up to the mill and back before lunch,” Red Eagle said. “How shall we spend our time?”

“We could go to the park and begin looking through the books.”

“Sounds good. I’m eager to get into them.”

“Doubt if you’ll fit,” Jericho joked.

The books seemed more important than a roll in the street so they rode east to the park. It was an area with Red Creek on the far side and the church on the near side. There were several swings hanging from trees and two teeter-totters. There was a large gazebo (lattice enclosed shelter) and several benches. A sign by the hitching rails read, “All horses must be hitched”.

“The horses will hate that,” Red Eagle said.

“Let’s take the saddle bags and let them go find Gray.”

The exchange was made – saddle bags for freedom. It seemed fair to all parties concerned.

They found a shady spot under a tall old elm tree and stacked the books between them. Red Eagle chose the one about pirates. Jericho picked up the first one he came to.

Ten minutes passed. Two girls approached them. The boys didn’t notice until they stopped a few feet away.

“Hello!” the one with blond hair said.

The boys looked up. Suddenly they had forgotten how to speak.

“I’m Sally. This is my friend, Molly. We’re thirteen and will be in eighth grade in September. Mind if we sit down in the grass here beside you.”

Of course they didn’t mind. They had dreamed of having girls sit down in the grass beside them. Now, if they could just remember how to speak. Jericho tried.

“Sure. Please. Sit. Need any help?”

It had gone well right up to that last stupid phrase and

Jericho knew it.

“We both know how to sit. You are funny.”

Funny was good, Jericho thought. Funny was certainly better than full out, totally, completely stupid.

Red Eagle managed the introductions.

“I am Red Eagle and this is my brother, Jericho. I am also known as Jacob and he has Same Face.”

The girls seemed to think ‘Same Face’ was for some reason humorous and giggled. It became immediately apparent to the boys that guys chuckled and girls giggled. It also became apparent that girls were good talkers. They knew the questions to ask to keep the conversation going and when they talked about themselves little more than nods and responses such as, ‘Ah’ and ‘Oh’ were called for from the boys.

It became quite comfortable. As they relaxed about it they even found themselves asking questions and offering things about themselves that hadn’t been specifically requested. It had been a nice time. They found that in many ways, girls were really just like people.

When the girls stood to leave, Red Eagle stood and pulled his brother along with him.

“Thank you for stopping to talk with us,” Red Eagle said.

“Yes, it has been very nice getting to know you,” Jericho added. “We hope to see you again.”

“We come to the park often. We will be here again on Monday.”

The girls hoped the boys would say something about being there, also, but the boys did not yet understand how those things went between girls and boys. They were, after all, years behind in having had the usual boy-girl associations – in school, family, and such. Just as Jericho was wondering whether or not they should offer to shake their hands, the girls turned and walked away, avoiding a really awkward situation.

“Well, that was very nice,” Jericho said as they watched them walk back toward town.

“Yes, it was. They talked a lot, didn’t they?”

“Lucky for us. We sounded like a couple of tongue-tied ganders (male geese) every time we opened our mouths.”

“I wonder why. We can talk to Cilla without any problems.”

“Not sure. Age, maybe. Have to ask Doc,” Jericho suggested.

They put the books away and, with their saddle bags over their shoulders, began the walk back to the restaurant.

A man on a tall black horse was riding down the street in their direction. Jericho nudged his brother in his ribs. Red Eagle knew something was up. He followed as Jericho set an angle across the street that would put them within several feet of the man. Jericho tipped his hat as they got close, but kept on walking, crossing just behind the horse.

Up onto the opposite sidewalk he spoke as they kept walking.

“You see what I saw?”

“The red dust on his boots I suppose you mean.”

“Right. And he wasn’t dressed like folks from around here – long jacket split up the sides, silk shirt with ruffled cuffs, embroidery (fancy stitching) around his pants pockets.”

“What does that mean?”

“Not sure, but Cilla will. At least it tells us he’s from some place far from Red Bend.”

“You are thinking he is the ghost man, aren’t you?”

“Aren’t you?”

Red Eagle nodded and sneaked a look back over his shoulder. The man in the fancy clothes on the big black horse was looking back at them as well.

Jericho figured trouble lay ahead and could hardly wait.

Red Eagle figured trouble lay ahead and began feeling uneasy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“That Will be Far Enough, Boys.”

Doc and Cilla were already seated in the restaurant. The boys took chairs.

“So, is there some big reason for this confab other than starvation?” Doc, asked looking back and forth between the boys.

Jericho responded.

“Three things: one, that new man in town on the big black that just rode by; two, how to handle the treasure when we find it; and three, girls.”

“I noticed the man from my window earlier,” Doc said. “He spent some time in the saloon. Rode in from the west and then rode on east. I assumed he was just passing through.”

“We have our suspicions about him,” Red Eagle said.

“More,” Cilla said.

“He dresses in black, rides a black horse and has . . . other things about him that make him suspicious.”

“I am sure I don’t follow you at all,” Cilla said.

They went on to tell them about the disappearing pirate on the road and the red dust and how it was connected to the map they found on top of Little Red Rock Hill when they up to investigate after the ghost was seen up there.

“He had to be riding a black horse or we think we would have seen it out there last night,” Red Eagle explained.

“And I think I have discovered how he disappeared,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle turned to him, frowning. He hadn’t heard anything about that. Jericho explained.

“Just now when we passed him on the street I noticed his saddle bags were huge and overloaded.”

Red Eagle nodded indicating that he had seen that as well. Jericho continued.

"I saw white silk peeking out of one them and black silk from a second one."

"Well, that certainly clears up any questions about a disappearing pirate in the middle of Kansas," Doc said, chiding (kidding) him for not getting to the point.

"Be patient respected Sage (wise man)," Jericho said arranging his hands in a prayerful manner in front of himself and lowering his head as if out of respect. The others smiled at the humorous gong on between the two of them.

"It is a one plus one plus one sort of thing. Follow me, here. White silk like what the pirate's ghost's suit is made from – who has white silk here in Red Bend? The black horse that would remain hidden in the black of night. The piece of black silk. Hear me on this. The man, dressed in his white pirate outfit, hides the large black cloth behind him, waits until we have seen him in his shimmering white, then drapes the black cloth over him appearing to disappear."

"That's funny," Red Eagle said – Appearing to disappear."

"It could have certainly happened in that way I suppose," Cilla said.

"Oh, if my brother says that's how it happened you know that's how it happened. He is always right."

Red Eagle had been fully serious so the others kept their smiles to themselves.

"I am concerned that he was riding east. We have it figured that the treasure sites are north and west. East doesn't fit with that."

"So, you saw him, Doc," Red Eagle began. "Did you notice if he was wearing any kind of clothing? I said that wrong. Did you notice what kind of clothing he was wearing? Jericho thinks it is from someplace far off."

"I agree. Cilla, what do you say?"

By then, Jericho had done a quick sketch of the clothes and slid it across the table toward Cilla.

"European," she said. "German or Belgian or it certainly could be from the upper class in Holland."

"Ah ha! We got him?" Jericho said.

“Got him for what, dressing well?” Doc said. “Possessing a pair of fancy silk pants isn’t going to send him to jail.”

“It makes a Dutch connection from the Golden Dutchman – the pirate – to some guy who shows up here looking for the Dutchman’s treasure.”

“Your connection is not really very tight, Jericho,” Doc said.

“Often his connections do not seem very tight,” Red Eagle said as if needing to defend his brother. “But you just wait, he will be right.”

“Somehow, I don’t even really doubt that, Red Eagle,” Doc said. “Just do what you can to keep him safe.”

“It does seem like that is becoming my purpose in life – keep Same Face safe.”

He meant it as a joke and received the smiles and chuckles he had hoped for.

“Okay, now onto item two,” Jericho said. “When we find all twelve parts of the buried treasure, what do we do with it? How do we keep it safe? It suddenly seems like an overwhelming responsibility.”

“I can imagine,” Cilla said. “She had no good response so turned to Doc.”

“First, I know you are keeping quiet about your belief there are treasures hidden around here. That is essential or treasure seekers from all over the country would descend upon Red Bend like ants to honey at a picnic. Second, you must – I say MUST! – be very cautious throughout this process. If this man in black is as ruthless as the Dutchman was, then consider your lives are in danger. Third, if you find where the remaining eleven hiding places are, and the Man in Black doesn’t, gives up, and leaves, you can leave it all right where you find it until you have time to deal with it. Fourth, you can establish a secure site with guards and transport it all to that spot to await your final action.”

“Number four would attract too much local attention and we don’t want people to know we have lots of money,” Red Eagle said.

“And number three – if this guy came all the way from Holland to find this stuff he must have very good reason to

believe that it is here and exactly where that here is. He won't be leaving."

"I believe you skipped number two, boys," Cilla said.

"You noticed that about the safety thing, did you," Jericho said grinning. "I don't like thinking number four is really our best alternative, but we do have an idea about where we could store most of it all in one safe spot."

"We do?" Red Eagle said as if a question, then immediately rephrased it to, "We do, emphasizing its truth with a series of nods."

Of course, he had no idea what this brother was talking about.

"It's a matter of getting it there without being noticed," Jericho continued.

They finished eating and prepared to leave. Jericho winked at Cilla as he began to speak.

"Gee, Doc. This was really good of you to invite us all for lunch like you did. You have a good day now."

Doc turned to Cilla.

"It seems I've been duped (tricked) and I have the distinct idea you have been a partner in the crime."

The boys grinned their way out of the restaurant. Red Eagle finger whistled and the horses soon appeared from one of the side streets. They set a slow pace back toward their cave keeping an eye out for the man in black. As they passed the lane to Bea's ranch house they both waved, even though they didn't see her, figuring she might be inside looking out.

"We forgot to ask about girls," Jericho said.

"So, we did. I suppose the girls and Doc will be around a while longer.

Red Eagle nodded. He had something else on his mind anyway.

"What did you mean we had an idea about where to store all the treasure?"

"Our mine. The treasure that is there only takes up about 10% of the tunnel. If we move that rock door out to where the tunnel enters the main room of the cave, there should be room for most of the rest back behind it. We have lots of extra room in the cave where we live for any that's left over."

“Very clever. I think it will work. I’m sure you will figure out how to move that door.”

Once home they read in their new books for about an hour, something they had decided they would do every day. That way they could keep on the trail of the treasure while continuing to learn things that might be helpful.

“So, anything interesting or useful,” Jericho asked as he put his book down.

“I found a Rasmussen family tree – a chart showing how the family grew from the time Rupert was born. He was the only son of a wealthy shipping family and studied engineering – boat building I imagine. He was married the first time when he was fifteen. That wife died giving birth to their son, Rupert the Second. He remarried immediately and the Dutchman left everything to her in his will and his son hated the new wife for it. When he was seventeen he hired a gang of thugs to kill her. A similar plot against his father was foiled (stopped) and when his father found out, he had his son sent to prison for life, and disowned him. The son bought his way out of prison a few years later. He married and had lots of kids. The older Rupert – the Golden Dutchman – disappeared immediately after his second wife’s death and two years later surfaced in Jamaica with a ship full of ruthless pirates. It was the fastest ship in the Caribbean – one he had specially designed for pirating with the tallest masts and the largest sails. It carried eight cannons. His legend grew from there as he successfully pillaged (looted) heavily armed ships from the royal families of England and Spain. He always left one survivor to tell the story of the raid and grow his image as the most ruthless and skillful of all the pirates that sailed the Caribbean. By the time he retired from the sea, he was wanted in the deaths of more than 3,000 people. According to the family tree he now has something like 250 great grandchildren.”

“Wow! Lots of diapers in that family tree,” Jericho said. “It really doesn’t narrow the field much about which one we might be looking for does it?”

“I guess not. The family has spread out all over Europe. I didn’t find any who came to America. What did you find?”

“My book is a collection of stories – tales and rumors,

really – about what happened to the treasure. As best I can tell during his pirate days, he owned a tiny island south west of Cuba and that was where he sailed to after each raid – sometimes he'd rob six ships before sailing back to his island. It's rumored that was where he kept his treasure. Then he'd sail to Jamaica take on a new crew and venture out after more booty (robbed treasure). He is credited with over 300 raids. When he retired, he loaded his ship with all his treasure and sailed to New Orleans. There, he bought one of the very first steam powered barges, which he used to transport the treasure up the Mississippi to the Arkansas River and all the way up here."

"Does it say why he stopped here?"

"One legend says he rolled the dice – got three – and said he'd stop after three weeks. There are others, but it's the only one that really makes sense. I mean how would a pirate from Holland, who sailed the Caribbean, learn about some great place to bury treasure here on the 'Plains of the Red Rocks'?"

They put the books away, having gained a lot of interesting information, but nothing that seemed really helpful.

"How about we head up to the mill – taking a back route, cross country to the north of the two red rock hills?" Jericho said.

"I had the same idea. Do you think our brains really do talk to each other?"

"I doubt that, but in the short time we've been together we really have gotten to know and understand each other better than most. That said, I also know we have some very special connection. I've heard twins have that. Never had reason to really think about it before."

The 'shortcut' took the same amount of time as the 'longcut' would have, but they got to see a lot of territory they had not seen before. They also came close to several of the spots marked with an 'X' on the map. Their plan was to look them over more carefully on the return trip.

Presently, they found they were approaching the mill directly from the east along the mill stream that had once taken the water from the huge wheel and eventually trickled into the Red Creek several miles above the stage road that

ran just south of their cave. It had been empty the first time they were there because the water feed from Sunday Creek had been closed. They had not taken time to examine the water wheel, but as they pulled to a stop there that day, the wheel stood right in front of them.

“The water is running and the wheel is turning,” Red Eagle said sounding very much like a white man pointing out the obvious. Jericho noticed, but didn’t mention it.

“I wonder how that happened.”

“Let’s ride around to the back and take a look,” Jericho said.

“How about we leave the horses over here and walk,” Red Eagle suggested. “We will not be so noticeable if someone is watching.”

“Good idea, little brother.”

They were soon across the narrow stream of water that splashed down from over the wheel. They moved around the western side of the structure. It was up a pretty good slope to the rear of the building. They moved west past the earthen ramp to the narrow trench that carried the water from the Creek, east to the mill. They examined the wooden trough that funneled the water along the west side of the building onto the top of the wheel.

“There,” Jericho said. “A small iron wheel. When it’s turned one way it opens a door that allows water to flow. The other way it stops it. Have to wonder why it’s open and who saw to it.”

“Probably the ghost man, don’t you think?”

“I suppose that would be my first guess. I wonder who owns the mill. We need to remember to ask Cilla. Maybe every once in a while, the owner just lets the water run to keep the wheel in shape or something.”

Red Eagle didn’t think that made much sense, but didn’t disagree.

“Inside?” Jericho asked.

With no need for a response, they returned to the ramp and walked it up to the second floor. The door to the first could not be budged – they had tried it before and again that day. The door at the top of the ramp was partially open. They slipped through and found themselves in the dim light of the

huge room inside. The lanterns were right where the boys had left them. They each took one, but didn't light them, figuring they could see well enough from the light that came in through the floor to ceiling windows on each side.

Jericho turned and began the climb up the stairs to the attic.

Red Eagle followed close behind him. Near the top they paused allowing their eyes to adjust to the lower level of light. There was one small window near the peak. Unlike the large, open rooms on the first and second floors, the attic was divided into several rooms.

"It's like a house," Red Eagle said. "Like it was built to be a place to live up here."

"I agree."

They lit one lantern and moved up onto the floor, crossing to the first door. They paused and looked at each other; then, Jericho reached out and tried the knob. It turned; it clicked; he slowly pushed the door open. They entered and walked to the center of the room. There were two doors on the wall ahead of them, one was open and one was closed. Light entered through the open one.

"That will be far enough, boys," came a deep, scary voice from behind them.

The boys froze in place.

CHAPTER NINE

“I Should Lock You Boys Up just to Keep the Ghost Safe.”

“What was that about being more careful?” Red Eagle whispered to his brother.

“Indian kid! Put your bow and arrows on the floor and kick them into the corner.

“That’s a wonderful accent you have, Sir,” Jericho said. “Would it be Dutch, Upper Holland Dutch, maybe?”

“Good ear, kid.”

“You will find that most of my parts are good, Sir – fingers, nose, teeth.”

“A smarty Alec. I hate smarty Alecs.”

Jericho ignored it.

“You have a beautiful black horse,” Sir,” Red Eagle said trying to go along with whatever plan his brother might have.

“I would think your white pirate costume would get terribly wrinkled in your saddlebags, however – not that I have ever been close enough to silk to be sure of that.”

It had been Jericho.

“We enjoyed your disappearing act on the road the other night – a black silk shroud (cloak) was a very clever touch,” Red Eagle said fearing he was about to run out of things to say and not at all sure why they were saying them in the first place.”

“You will now be quiet. You seem to think you know many things.”

“No, Sir. We are quite sure we know many things. That’s exactly what we told our friends in the sheriff’s office

just before we told them we were starting up here today.”

Red Eagle thought that had been one of his brother’s smartest sayings ever – considering the situation in which they found themselves.

“I have a place for you where you will never be found. You constantly interfere with me. The Dutchman’s treasure is to me mine – all mine. His ghost has told me. You will be quiet now.”

Telling Jericho to be quiet was like telling an owl not to hoot or a baby not to cry.

“That seems quite greedy of you considering all the good that can be done with it, but your approach would seem to qualify you as his relative for sure. You really don’t seem to be a friendly sort. We came out to welcome you to the territory. With the attitude you’re showing so far, I’m thinking you won’t fit in real well out here.”

Seldom before had Red Eagle found himself chuckling at humor while his legs were shaking in fright.

“Through the door to your right. Quickly now.”

“Can you explain why you are treating us so badly, Sir,” Jericho asked.

They went into the next room. It had windows at the far end so they assumed it was the front of the building. It was much brighter. There were lengths of rope hanging from a peg on the wall.

“On the floor on your stomachs, hands behind your back.”

The boys complied with his request. They had not seen him, but for all they knew he might be armed with a cannon right off a pirate ship. The man tied Jericho’s hands first, then moved to Red Eagle and repeated the process.

“Sit up facing away from me.”

They sat up facing the front wall away from him.

They soon found themselves blindfolded with bandanas. The man pulled them to their feet and attached a rope around Jericho’s waist. Leaving six feet of rope between them he did the same to Red Eagle. As a final touch, he also looped the rope around Jericho’s neck, from which he would lead them.

He patted down Jericho through his clothes in search of

a weapon. The same was not necessary for the scantily clad 'Indian Boy'.

"Can we know your name, Sir? It is easier to plot our escape if we know who we're escaping from," Jericho said.

"There will be no escape so I suppose you can know. Ditmer Dekker. Now come. We will return to the place we first met."

The boys supposed he meant the basement. That at least confirmed that Dekker and the ghost were one and the same person. They found it interesting that it was quite difficult to maintain their balance walking down stairs with their hands tied behind them. Presently, they were on the second floor, then the first floor and finally into the cool of the basement. Jericho noted to himself that Ditmer was actually quite gentle with rope around his neck. Very un-pirate-like he thought.

The boys could not make out what the next series of sounds meant, but soon found themselves moving 'through' the outside wall of the basement to the south. It was the door they had seen during the storm, but not explored. They expected to feel the sun on their bodies and for light to filter in through their blindfolds. Neither of those things happened. It seemed suddenly chilly and if anything, darker than before. They walked on for some time before Jericho thought it was time to take a verbal shot at their abductor. Only one thing made sense.

"We wouldn't have thought an outsider like you would know about this tunnel under the millstream. My brother and I love it in here. The sheriff has great stories to tell about playing here when he was a kid."

If Ditmer had believed it was some sort of secret place, safe to 'do in' the boys, he now at least had to reconsider it. Jericho, of course, had nothing to base his statements on other than using his good brain to associate what he was feeling with what kind of a setting would produce those sensations – damp, musty, dark, cool, underground – a cave; but since it continued walking on for so long, more like a tunnel.

Ditmer stopped and Jericho ran into him, not having any way of knowing what he was doing. In turn, Red Eagle ran into his brother.

“Imagine meeting you guys here,” Jericho said going for a joke.

It came to him he may have already used that one, but still, it seemed humorous to him. Red Eagle managed a full-blown grin into the darkness.

“You are allowing the flame in the lantern to burn too high, Sir,” Jericho said sniffing the air. “It not only waists kerosene, but the heat may eventually break the glass chimney.”

The man paused, adjusted the flame and spoke.

“You will need to climb up over a number rocks to your left here in order to move from this tunnel to another one.”

“May I suggest you remove our blindfolds so nobody gets hurt?”

“You must not see my face.”

“You mean the pasty white face with the thin moustache, the scar on the right side of your forehead, and the thick, long, light blond hair – that face? You could wear a bandana over the lower portion of your face if you really want to play that game.”

Several moments later he slid their blindfolds up onto their foreheads. There in mostly darkness it took no more than a few seconds for their eyes to adjust. The offshoot from the main tunnel was well disguised. Unless you knew it was there you would never see it.

Several minutes later they entered a low, long, wide cave that was no more than six feet high. There was a gentle breeze at their backs which entered the area from the part of the tunnel that still lay ahead of them before they turned. It made the ‘room’ relatively dry and not as musty smelling as the tunnel. The single lantern did not produce enough light to illuminate the entire expanse.

Ditmer led them to the far end of the cave – the far end, which contained a dozen old trunks like the ones they had found hidden in their mine. Without speaking he motioned for them to kneel on the floor and sit back on their legs, backs and the bottoms of their feet against one of the larger trunks. He tied the lead rope to the handle on one end of the trunk and tugged on it to make sure it was secure to Jericho’s neck. He left without saying another word. It grew dark.

Jericho called after him, "We'll need water, Sir, and dancing girls would be nice."

From the tunnel, they heard the wild laugh of a maniac.

"I guess that tells us his plan for us," Red Eagle said – sit her until we die of thirst."

"That's his plan, not our plan, brother. Give us a moment to think."

They sat in silence for several minutes.

"First, we must get out of these ropes, right?" Red Eagle said.

"Right. My knife is in my right boot. His pat down of me was strictly that of an amateur. You can move around. I can't. The way the rope has tightened around my neck I can't change positions so it is impossible for you to get into my boot. See if you can move to the place he tied the end of the rope to this trunk to my right. You can back into it and untie it."

"Oh, is that all? I'll need at least ten seconds."

"I just have great faith in those in Indian fingers of yours."

Without responding, Red Eagle scooted in front of Jericho and arranged himself at the proper place so his hands could work on the knot – knots as it turned out. It was pitch dark and he took a few minutes to get the feel for what he was working with. The knots were drawn tight. He dug his fingernails into the rope and pulled until he thought his nails would come loose and fall off.

Gradually, the rope loosened. Once he had slipped it an inch, the rest followed more easily. Then there was a second knot. It, too, was tight and took a long time to begin budging. It was a good half hour later when the rope came free and Jericho could move.

"Good going, Red Eagle! Now, my knife. You know the drill – we seem to have been in this situation several times before."

Jericho worked himself into a seated position. His legs ached from all that time kneeling. Red Eagle scooted so his back was against his brother's boot.

"I can't reach low enough. Can you bend way forward so I can lean back against your shoulder?"

“Like this?”

“That’s good. Now I just have to work myself down a little bit lower.”

He slipped his fingers inside the top of the boot. The knife had settled low in the boot and he couldn’t reach it.

“You sit forward again,” Jericho said. “Let me raise my leg up and kick it. Maybe jarring it like that will slide the knife back toward the top of the boot.”

Jericho shook his leg in the air until he felt it slipping. It fell out onto the floor of the cave.

“I guess you heard that,” he said to Red Eagle.

“Yes. Let me removed a moccasin and I can feel the floor with my toes and find it.”

It took him no time at all. Jericho backed up to his foot and lay down on his back getting a good grasp on the knife. As if doing a sit up, Jericho was quickly sitting up. Red Eagle backed up to him and Jericho had soon cut the rope that held his wrists together. He then freed his brother.

In the process, Jericho felt Red Eagles hands.

“Your hands are wet.”

“Working on the rope with my nails made them start bleeding. They will be fine.”

What he really meant was, ‘this is one of those things that talking about will not help, so stop’.”

“It seems with Ditmer’s help we have found the second of the twelve stashes of treasure,” Jericho said.

“And it means this is a very safe place if no one has come upon it in fifty or more years.”

“I agree. Let’s get out of here, little brother.”

“Do you think he was really going to just let us stay here and die?”

“I suppose we will never know. But I do vote on hightailing it out of here before he decides to return and use that six-gun strapped to his hip.”

“Before we leave let’s see if we can lift one of the trunks. It will help us plan for later.”

“Good idea, little brother.”

They each took hold of one handle and tugged. The trunk didn’t so much as shiver.

“I guess that gives us our information, then, doesn’t it?”

“We’ll need to make some sort of a gadget to help move them,” Jericho said.

“Or, if we can figure a way to get Ditmer out of our lives, we can just leave it here until we need it. Then we can unload the trunks into buckets or something and carry it outside in a wheelbarrow.”

“Good thought, Red Eagle, and, speaking of outside, let’s see if we can find it.”

The opening between the cave and the tunnel was small, basically circular and no more than three feet in diameter through solid rock. It sat a good five feet above the floor of the tunnel and was set back out of the direct line of sight of those who walked by it. They let themselves down into the tunnel.

“Let’s continue on south in the tunnel instead of going back to the mill,” Jericho suggested.

They turned left. Without any light source, they had to feel their way along a wall.

“I’ll feel our way, Red Eagle. With your messed-up hands, you just hold onto my belt and follow along.”

Fifteen minutes later they saw a spot of light ahead.

“Dekker with a lantern?” Red Eagle asked in a whisper.

Jericho did not respond but continued at a slower pace. The spot of light grew larger as they approached it. Presently they saw it was the opening – the mouth of the tunnel. That was a relief.

Outside, they immediately knew where they were – no more than four yards from the trail north to the mill and south to Red Bend. The narrow entrance sat in the side of a low hill behind another rock outcropping. The area was home to dozens of bushes and trees and lots of tall grass. It was impossible to see it from the trail.

They walked out onto the trail and looked back, studying the area, making certain they would be able to find the spot again. Red Eagle whistled. They only had to wait a few minutes before the horses appeared on the gallop from out of the north east.

“I suppose we tell Sandy about what Ditmer did to us,” Red Eagle said.

“He held us against our will. That’s against the law I’m

sure. Maybe that will get him out of our hair.”

As they rode back to Red Bend they looked over their shoulders several times, to see if they were being followed. The sun was well down in the sky to the west.

They entered town with long shadows slithering along the ground ahead of them. They dismounted in front of the Sheriff’s office. Gray was their indicating Cal would probably be inside. He was. So was Sandy who spoke to Cal.

“Why is it that it’s always such a relief to see these two?”

They all smiled. Red Eagle spoke.

“I suppose you are making a humorous reference to the fact we are all in one piece.”

“I am, but I’m not sure it’s really humorous.”

“I think we have a legal complaint to file,” Jericho said looking at Sandy.

“Oh. Cilla hasn’t paid you for your newspaper articles yet?”

His remark was worth a faint smile from each of them.

“We met the ghost man, the black horse man, or more accurately Ditmer Dekker. He is from the Netherlands, the north Holland province, and speaks with a very pleasant accent. The one I’m thinking old Jake had difficulty understanding a couple of years ago.”

“No law against being from Holland or speaking with an accent. This is America. We love folks from other places”

“How about if such a person held us at gun point and bound us, leaving us in a cave to die?”

“That would be different. You saying that’s what he did?”

“Yes, that’s what we’re saying he did. He came upon us in the attic of the old Mill north of town. He came right out and said he was going to do away with us.”

“We think he’s crazy,” Red Eagle said. “You should just hear his laugh.”

“Laughs aren’t usually reason to diagnose insanity,” Sandy said, “but abduction and being held without your consent, and left to die certainly are against the law. You think he is at the mill?”

“We really do not know,” Red Eagle said. “We did not

see his horse or any of his things there. We thought he might be living in the attic – that is why we went there in the first place.”

Jericho explained further.

“We didn’t have anything against him – anything illegal – so we sort of went snooping.”

“Well, you have something against him now, although it will be your word against his in front of a judge. You’ll both need to write out a statement – a complaint.”

“And we’ll do that first thing in the morning,” Jericho said pushing his brother ahead of him toward the door.

Sandy put his hands on his waist and called after them:

“Meaning, you are about to go risk you lives again trying to pin something else on him. I ought to lock the two of you up just to keep you safe!”

///

CHAPTER TEN

Gold Belt Buckles?

“So, home?” Jericho asked.

“Sounds good. We have lots to think about.”

The horses were waiting and they were soon on their way out of town. They passed the church and the park.

“Remember we have to be at the park Monday morning,” Red Eagle said.

“The girls. I remember. Shall we switch clothes – you Whit and me Indian and see if we can fool them?” Sound like fun?”

“Sounds like agony, wearing your clothes – but fun, too. I guess I’m in.”

They crossed the creek and rode on.

“I’ve been meaning to ask you, Jericho. Back at the Mill you told Ditmer you thought he sounded like he was from North Holland Province in the Netherlands, and you were right. What? How? Why?”

Jericho grinned.

“There was a map of the Netherlands in one of the books. I noticed it only had two provinces – like our states – North Holland and South Holland. It is a tiny country. With only two, I had a 50-50 chance of being right so I took a shot.”

“And what if you had been wrong and he had said, ‘No, South Holland’?”

“I suppose I would have said, ‘That was going to be my second guess.’ It does remind me that sometime we need to go back and get your bow and quiver. In the meantime, you can use the set you helped me make.”

They rode on a bit further. Red Eagle spoke.

"I was thinking if we want to take a look at where we think the treasure is up by Jake's we probably should do it at night so we don't bother Jake."

"Good thinking. Tonight?"

"Sun's up 'til a little after eight. It will give us time to do some more reading, first."

* * *

It was a cloudless night with nearly a quarter moon – enough to light the way ten or so yards in front of them. They circled far around to the east so they could come upon the stand of trees from that side. His shack was on to the west of the little woods by nearly a hundred yards.

Uncharacteristically, they tied the horses to trees so they would not wander close to Jake's place and give up the fact they were there.

"These trees are about fifty years old," Red Eagle said examining them up close. That means they would have been planted around 1820 or a little before. And, they were planted – they just didn't grow wherever a seed happened to fall. See how they are arranged."

"Fascinating. You see things I'd never even think to look for."

Red Eagle shrugged. Jericho continued.

"Our understanding is that the treasure was stashed around here during 1815 – that would be 55-years ago," Jericho said.

"The trees could be that old. I suppose there have been some dry years out here."

"Are you suggesting this woods was planted on purpose to hide the treasure?"

"It could be," Red Eagle said.

"Then the treasure will probably be toward the center, wouldn't you think?"

"That makes sense. It will be darker in there. Harder to see."

They walked to a spot they figured was close to midway and carefully looked over the area.

"Some moon light filters through the trees. Any idea what we're looking for?" Red Eagle asked.

“Ten trunks loaded with booty.”

“Although that is funny – tree trunks and treasure trunks – that is not what I meant and you know it.”

“If I had a better answer I would have offered it.”

They looked further.

“This tree is much older than the rest – maybe eighty years old,” Red Eagle said patting it. “It would have been here when the others were planted. Maybe it is the main marker for the treasure.”

“You are full of great stuff tonight! Let’s search around the base.”

“Or up on the tree trunk. Look here.”

“I see. A horse shoe, open end up. It has been here forever – see how the bark has grown up around it. You know what I just thought?”

“No, but I have the idea I soon will,” Red Eagle said.

They shared a quick grin.

“If, instead of being rounded, the horse shoe was pointed, the rounded end could be thought of like an arrow – in this case pointing down.”

“So, we just start digging?” Red Eagle said/asked at a loss for how to proceed.

“Hands and knees search time, I think,” Jericho said. “Just see if we find anything on the ground. Your fingers up to that?”

“Sure.”

Each boy searched an area out from the trunk – one going right and one left. After several minutes, Jericho heard a very strange noise. He turned toward Red Eagle. He wasn’t there. He stood and searched the area where he should have been.

“Red Eagle,” he whispered as loudly as he felt he dared.

He came upon a sight that was at once odd and out of place. It was a heavy, wooden door raised out of the ground hinged on its narrow end revealing a hole in the ground. Jericho went to it and knelt trying to see inside. Again, he whispered.

“Red Eagle!”

“Down here brother. There are rock steps. Another

cave. Very small. Can't see, but think I'm feeling trunks."

"And when were you going to tell me?"

"Sorry, I just got caught up in the moment, as Cilla would say."

Jericho removed a candle and matches from his pocket and they had light. Red Eagle already had it all pretty well figured out. The ceiling of the cave was some five feet beneath the ground above. Ten steps had been chiseled out of solid rock leading to the floor of the cave. It was no more than twelve feet in diameter – a bit narrower in some places. The trunks were set two feet off the floor on a series of rock columns. It seemed to be designed to keep them off the floor and dry. It was very humid, however.

The door had been fashioned from six by six wooden beams, which had been well painted in tar to preserve them. A counterweight had been attached to the rear making it relatively easy to open.

"One trunk is open," Red Eagle said pointing.

"Hard to tell if it's full. Like some of it has been taken out maybe," Jericho said. "And look, it is entirely filled with just belt buckles – gold belt buckles."

"I see. Look. There is a lantern over here," Red Eagle said.

He shook it.

"Half full of kerosene. If it had been here for fifty years it would be bone dry."

"So, you're thinking somebody has been here recently."

"Yes. And since that somebody left a lantern behind I am thinking it is somebody who comes here often, needing light."

"Jake?"

"That would be my guess," Red Eagle said. "It could be how he gets the money he needs to live on – sell a buckle now and then. I was worried about that and wondered if we should offer him some of our money."

"In that case, this is all Jake's treasure and we just need to get out and leave it alone," Jericho said. "We should take a pledge right now to never reveal this hiding place for as long as we live. You agree?"

"I agree."

They climbed the steps and lowered the door, scattering it with dirt and leaves the way it had been when Red Eagle discovered it.

Back at the horses they discovered Jake's mule standing with them.

"Wasn't expecting that," Jericho said.

"The mule caught their scent and came to check it out. They got on well the other day when we were up here. I doubt if Mule gets many visitors."

The boys led their horses down the gentle slope for a hundred yards before mounting up and moving on toward home. Mule watched them on their way, then turned and moved back toward Jake's.

"You know what I believe about Jake," Jericho said.

"Yes. That he was the young driver who had the tussle with the Dutchman right up on our Red Rock Hill when he fell to his death. And, that the young driver's trunks were buried in that cave we were just in, and that's how he knew about them, but probably doesn't know about any of the others."

"Hmm. Yes. That is what I've been thinking. I've also wondered if he has felt guilty all these years about killing the man and that's what makes him think he has seen the ghost – like part of his mind is punishing him. The book I was reading from Doc calls it hallucinating."

"I think when you say mind you mean what I mean when I say spirit. If that is so, I also agree with your theory about the ghost. I wonder how Ditmer learned about that part of the story."

"Remember Jake said something about a young man dropping by some time ago to talk with him," Jericho said. "I've been thinking it was Ditmer, but now I'm sure of it. His research has probably taught him a great deal more than we know. We've just been looking into it for such a short time. It is what led him to this area and he came to try and find the treasure. That may mean that he probably did run across the map chiseled into the top of our Red Hill and somehow figured we had, also."

"So, he tried to scare us off – us just being kids and all."

"I guess that didn't work so well, did it little brother?"

Back at the cave they built up the fire and fixed supper.

It was going on ten o'clock and they were hungry. Fire roasted chicken and vegetables, pan fried in butter – one of their favorite meals. Something was on Jericho's mind.

"I've been wanting to ask you something."

"Oh? Ask!"

"Sometimes I call you, 'little brother'. I think of it as kind of a joke since I'm probably only a few minutes older than you are. I was wondering if that made you feel bad."

"Feel bad? No! It makes me feel great – like when you say that it's like you are saying you are my protector. It makes me feel very safe. I remember how the feeling sunk into my heart that first time you said it. It was like I knew for sure I had a family."

"Wow! That's wonderful to hear. Just the idea that I have a brother gives me all those same feelings. What a pair we are."

Jericho got his saddle bags to fetch his pad and pencil. He wanted to list some of the questions they still had.

"Hey! Look at this!"

Red Eagle stood and went to him.

"What the? A gold buckle in your saddle bag?"

"Look in yours."

"Yeah. I have one, also. What does it mean?"

"Here's what I think it means. Tonight, Jake somehow found out we were in his woods and he overheard us talking in the cave."

"And this is his way of thanking us for the pledge of secrecy we took," Red Eagle added.

"He is a good man," Jericho said.

"And apparently, he believes we are good, also."

They sat quietly for some time thinking about it and what it meant – the unspoken bond they had formed with him by having done the right thing. They each liked himself just a bit better that night.

At last Red Eagle broke the silence.

"It's late. A quick dip in the pool – we got filthy down in that hole?"

So it was – a dip, a dry and a sleep.

* * *

"Red Eagle was up early and put bacon in the large

skillet to sizzle, knowing the aroma would soon awaken his 'big' brother. He settled back with a book to wait."

"You can add the eggs now. I will be awake and fully functioning in three minutes."

It had been Jericho, of course, struggling against every 12-year old's desire to go back to sleep.

With the smells of breakfast, Lightning and Golden left for their morning run – it was part of their daily ritual.

While the boys ate, they talked, of course.

"I was reading earlier and came across something that might be interesting."

"Okay. What?"

"In one of the short stories or rumors or whatever you would call them, there is a reference to the year 1812, during which time the Golden Dutchman just dropped out of sight – no raids, no sunken ships, no recruiting of sailors, and no record of him being seen in Port Royal, Jamaica."

"And that started you thinking, I suppose," Jericho said.

"When I was waiting to fall asleep last night, I was wondering how the Dutchman would have had time to fix up his hiding places – the rock wall in our mine and now the cave under the woods. Who knows what else? Those things took a long time to build."

"I see where this is going," Jericho said. "You're thinking during that missing year or so in his life he came here to make the preparations."

"According to Cilla, there was no settlement here, no stage runs, mostly just wandering Indians. There was one settlement between here and where Great Bend is today. We need to ask her about it."

"Why?"

"Don't you think the Dutchman had to have some connection to this area – some way of knowing about it? He could have selected a hundred different islands or anyplace along northern South America, or anywhere up and down the Mexican coast or on the Gulf of Mexico. Any of those places would have been handier than up here out in the middle of nowhere."

"But there is that lore about him just throwing the dice," Jericho said as a reminder of what they already knew.

“Looking at what we have seen of his handiwork, it seems to me he was much too well organized to leave it all to a toss of the dice.”

“You make sense. You keep amazing me at how you put things like that together.”

They met Doc and Cilla for breakfast at the Restaurant. As the boys approached the table Jericho was already speaking.

“So, Cilla, about that early settlement between here and Great Bend. I think you said maybe Swedish and Dutch.”

“It was a religious commune of mostly Swedes. They came across the Atlantic Ocean to the port of New Orleans in a ship provided by a Dutch ship builder. In payment for the journey they agreed to allow a half dozen Dutch prisoners to go along and settle with them. The prisoners were related in some way to the ship builder – several of them brother’s as I recall.”

The settlement lasted only a few years before smallpox wiped it out along with a large number of American Indians who had been offering them help and teaching them how to farm the land. That may be more than I know, actually. I believe there is a log of the settler names in a collection of early Kansas documents I have somewhere. Why are you interested?”

Red Eagle continued as they took seats and ordered – the earlier six pieces of bacon and three eggs seldom was enough to see them through to noon.

“We have a theory – partly founded in things we have read – that the Dutchman actually came here during 1812 – we think to build the hiding places for the treasure he planned to bring later. That made us start looking for some connection between him and this place. His family was ship builders. From what you say, the ship builder who brought the Swedes here may have also been a member of the Dutchman’s family and that could be how he knew about things here.”

“An interesting weaving of fact and rumor,” Doc said. “I like it, however. You have found additional treasure sites, then?”

“Yes – two more.”

They went on to relate what they found at Jake’s and

their theory about his role as a young wagon driver at the time the Dutchman brought his treasure into the area.

“You boys must write about all this,” Cilla said. “Even if it doesn’t turn out to be true it is a fascinating story.”

“I can only see problems arising from such a story, Cilla,” Red Eagle said. “If word gets out there is treasure in our hills, every greedy man in America will come here, and such a gathering of greedy people can only lead to terrible problems.”

“The boy is wise, Cilla,” Doc said.

She agreed with a nod and a sigh. She still thought it would be a great story and somehow, she would see it got written once all the treasure had been recovered and dealt with.

///

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Skeletons!

Sandy and Cal entered and walked to the table. Sandy looked down at the boys and spoke while Cal took a seat.

"I have been informed that Gray has become seriously lonesome for Lightning and Golden and that the only solution is to have him stay with you two for a few days – maybe a week."

Cal smiled, but the others all looked puzzled. Sandy continued.

"The only solution, according to my new deputy, is for Gray to rub noses with your horses for such an extended period."

"We accept your kind and generous offer of protection, Sandy," Jericho said.

"So, I didn't disguise that very well, huh? I really thought I'd learned enough 'sneaky' from you two to pull it off."

The others all took their shot at Sandy.

"It was terrible!"

"Worse than terrible!"

"Absolutely awful!"

"Unbelievably bad, coming from such a good mind!"

"I figured you'd put up a fuss about it. Anyway, I have had the Chief Marshal send out feelers about this Ditmer Dekker fella. Until I find he's some sort of choir boy, I want Cal to stick with you. I appreciate you're not making it difficult."

"What happened to your idea about just locking us up to protect Dekker?" Red Eagle asked knowing it had been a

joke.

“I realized that Jericho’s constant chatter out of the cell behind my desk would drive me batty.”

“I’ve always respected an honest man,” Doc said, raising his coffee mug toward Sandy as if in a toast.

“Welcome back big brother,” Jericho said patting Cal’s back. “For our next death defying trick, the World-Renowned Brothers Palmer will . . .”

It got the chuckles he had hoped it would.

Sandy left first, presently followed by Doc and then Cilla, which left the Restaurant empty except for the three boys and a man at the counter. Jericho removed the copy of the map he had drawn and spread it out on the table. He began bringing Cal up to date on what they were doing without giving out the locations of the specific things they had already found. Cal understood that the fewer who knew the details the better.

The fourth ‘X’ was on the Big Red Rock Hill. That Hill formed the northern boundary of Mae’s ranch and the southern border of the Johnson’s ranch. The mark seemed to indicate something on the eastern end of that huge rock.

They were soon on their way. On the way east on the Stage road, the boys turned up the lane to Bea’s. She was pumping water into the horse trough out front.

They dismounted to chat a few minutes and help. Red Eagle took over the pumping. Cal split a few pieces of wood for her cook stove and Jericho – big surprise – Jericho talked with her.

“Thought we’d like to ride up around Big Red Rock this morning. Okay if we cross your land?”

“Of course. You don’t have ask permission. Saw a coyote and her young ones back there a few days ago. They’re small so she’ll be cranky.”

“Thanks for the heads up. We’ll be extra careful. Wouldn’t want to be in the position of having to shoot a momma.”

“Looking for anything special back there?” she asked mostly just making conversation.

“We heard the old Dutchman’s ghost’s been seen roaming around lately – Jake, you know.”

“Oh, you know about that do you? Of course, you do! Hasn’t been reported around her for decades. How’s he lookin’?”

“Like he used to, according to Jake – dressed in white coat, pants and knee boots, and a large plume in his broad-brimmed hat. Looking like a ghost, I suppose.”

“That’s him, for sure.”

“Do you believe in ghosts?” Jericho asked puzzled at the tone of her response.

“Goodness no. I am interested though that the lore hasn’t changed one bit since it started back, what, sixty some years ago. Most such stories get added onto, you know – they change and evolve with the generations. I suppose it may be because he really doesn’t have a story. He just appears and disappears – never bothers anybody – never even interacts with anybody.”

“What do you think about all the treasure the Dutchman is supposed to have buried around here?”

“Sounds like a fantasy to me – hauling a large amount of treasure two thousand miles on the sea, up rivers and over land. Makes no sense. And it’s doubtful if that steam powered boat it’s said he used even existed back then.”

Mae saw they got their fill of cookies before they moved on. She was appreciative of all the help. The boys liked her.

They rode a straight path north east to the near end of the huge hill. It offered sharp, cliff-like sides with the typical accumulation of rock chips forming an incline up to its base.

“Fifty or sixty yards high, you say, Cal?” Jericho asked.

“About that. Sure won’t be any climbing that face.”

“The way the ‘X’ is positioned on the map there is no way of knowing just where the spot is. Could be on top, down here, or anywhere up the side of the hill.”

“I think that mark is more to the north than to the south on the map we found and more just a little back from this side than right at this end,” Red Eagle said.

“That’s right,” Jericho said. “So, our search will be more north and a bit west of where we are.”

They urged their horses to move on around to the north side while they gave the hillside a good looking over. That side was a series of natural terraces like long wide irregular steps

with five to ten yards from one on up to the next.

"Lots of places," Red Eagle said. "I believe we need to find the one that will be the easiest to get to."

"It looks like there may be a way to climb up to that first terrace. See, over there!" Cal said.

"Let's take a look."

They dismounted and walked the twenty yards to the place he had pointed out.

"I suggest we go up one at a time," Red Eagle said, always the voice of caution.

"Good idea. Who goes up first?" Jericho asked after he was already five yards into the climb.

That surprised neither of the others.

After a few minutes, Jericho called down.

"Somebody's been up here recently. Rocks have been displaced. The sun-faded sides are turned over onto the bottom. I'm thinking we are on the right track to something here. Red Eagle, come up and see if you agree with me. You're the expert."

Red Eagle began the climb. Jericho was about twenty yards up above.

"I can already see what you mean. Pretty good eyes for my White brother."

"You've been a good teacher. I'm so close to the hill up here I can't see the big picture. Any ideas about direction from down there?"

"The path splits just above you," Cal said from his spot on the ground. "One of two things at that point. To your left, it soon stops so that might be connected to the spot you're looking for. If not, then the path continues to the right – back and forth – for another ten yards or so up the side to the next terrace. Can't make it out for sure from there on."

Jericho moved left to explore the shorter path – a 'path' only in the loosest sense of the term. There were fairly sizeable and sharp rocks that needed to be climbed over or worked around. The footing was often loose and every step had to be carefully examined before allowing his full weight down against it.

"Come on up to where I am, Red Eagle. Something odd here."

While his brother made his way to him, Jericho called down to Cal.

“A spyglass (hand held telescope) in my saddle bags. See what this area looks like from down there.”

As Red Eagle arrived, Cal had a report.

“I see something. It is hard to describe. There is a large, flat-faced rock just below you. It’s about five feet high and three wide.”

“Why is that of interest?” Jericho called back.

“It is not the same color as the rocks around it – a lighter shade. I know there is variation in the colors all over the hill, but this still seems odd. No fading of color from one place to the other. Just, Boom, and there it is. Then, another thing. Below it there are like two – I don’t know how to describe them except like wagon wheel ruts cut right into the rock from the ground to that hunk of rock. You get the idea?”

“I think so.”

“I noticed them on my climb,” Red Eagle said. “Exactly two feet apart and about two inches deep into the soft rock surface. They have to be man-made.”

“Any ideas what they might be?” Cal asked.

“A very heavy, iron wheeled wagon was pulled up the slope by two flying horses,” Jericho said, joking.

“That’s as good as anything I have,” Cal said.

“Any idea how to get down from here where I am, down to the small ledge in front of that odd colored slab of rock?” Red Eagle asked Cal.

“I think I may have the answer right up here,” Jericho said. “An iron bolt with a circular ring on the end has been drilled or driven into the solid rock up here. A rope could be strung through it and around a person’s waist and he could be lowered down. It also gives me an idea about those two shallow ruts in the side of the hill.”

“So, you need a coil of rope,” Cal called up.

“Right,” Red Eagle responded. “The longest we have along is in my saddle bag. I’ll climb down a bit and meet you half way.”

Before long he was feeding the end of the coil over to Jericho who threaded it through the iron ring. Jericho made a tight loop around his waist.

“Wind the rope once around that rock protrusion to keep it from feeding out too fast,” Jericho said pointing. “Tell me know when you’re ready.”

“I don’t suppose you want to think this through one more time before you risk your life again,” Red Eagle said.

“You do know me pretty well, little brother. Ready?”

“Ready as I know how to be.”

Jericho knelt facing the hill and then slipped onto his stomach with his legs dangling over the side. It was only an eight foot drop to the narrow ledge below. Red Eagle lowered him as expertly as if they did it every day.

“Give me some slack, now,” Jericho said as his feet touched down.

“That’s good. A little more. Okay. I’m flat footed on the rock. Give me about ten feet more so I can move around here.”

Both Cal from below and Red Eagle from just above could see all that, of course.

“This slab of rock is pretty much just what you thought it was. Seems to vary from six to eight inches thick. It has definitely been quarried to meet these size requirements.”

“Good,” Cal said. “That means it only weighs about a ton! Any ideas about moving it?”

“Give me a minute here to examine it,” Jericho said. “The Dutchman used counter weights on the other places we’ve found so I’m counting on that here.

He studied the area for several minutes.

“You’ll never believe this.”

“Not if you don’t tell us,” Red Eagle said sounding impatiently unlike himself.

“There is an iron piece maybe two feet long and two inches wide that has been slid in behind the slab as it stands in front of an opening. It’s held in place by ‘U’ shaped pieces driven into the rock surrounding the slab. It should slip out through them and I’m guessing allow the slab to move or swing back into the hill – probably another natural cave. I’ll need some sort of a pry bar to pull the right side of the slab out just enough so I can work the slide bar loose. What you got down there, Cal?”

“Best I can offer is a sapling with a three-inch-thick

trunk. I'll have to cut it and strip away the branches. Take ten minutes."

"Fine. I'm really secure here. The ledge is three feet deep and ten feet long. Just don't give me too much slack, brother, and keep that rope around the rock. It's interesting there is very little rust on the slide piece. I'm thinking that means Dekker has already been here."

"Is there a crack you can see through – to the inside?" Red Eagle asked.

"Yes and no – there is a crack, but its dark as night in there so I can't see anything. There is a little suction at the crack like air is flowing in to it from out here."

Cal soon had the new pole in Red Eagles hands. He in turn reached it down to Jericho.

"Perfect length, Cal. A little too thick at the end. I'll need a few minutes to whittle it down with my knife."

He got right to work, trying it for size from time to time.

"Got it. Now the trick will be to push on the pole and pull on the slide at the same time. It'll depend on how heavy this slab really is and if there is a counterweight system I suppose."

Jericho grew silent as he worked. Red Eagle grinned. He had finally found a way to keep his brother silent!

Suddenly there was a loud noise – the sound of rock scraping against rock.

"Got it!" Jericho announced with a good deal of enthusiasm. "See it Cal?"

"Yes, I can. It swung inside like a door. What do you see up there?"

"I see that our old pirate man was quite the gadget inventor. You'll just have to come and take a look for yourselves. Give me five minutes. I think there is like an elevator or a tram (like mine cars on rails) here. I'll need a few minutes to figure it out."

A few minutes later a wooden frame moved out of the hole onto the ledge. It had four, two-inch-thick, solid iron wheels no more than eight inches in diameter. They were fitted onto axils under a wooden bed two feet wide and four feet long. A strong rope led back into the cave from its front end. It continued to move out onto and over the ledge. The

wheels fit into the two ruts that ran up the side of the hill. It stopped. Jericho appeared. This is ingenious. Okay. Look. This – let's call it a wagon – can be let down to the ground and pulled back up by a hand operated winch (crank) that sets just inside. It is outfitted with brand new rope telling us Dekker has been making it ready to use. I assume there is treasure further into the cave. I'll go back inside and let the wagon all the way down to the ground. Then I can pull you back up so we can look things over together."

"I better stay down here to keep a look out," Cal said. "Red Eagle can come up."

Red Eagle made his way back down to the ground and arrived just as the wagon did. He took several candles from the saddle bags and went to the wagon. He lay in it on his stomach, locating hand holes in the sides for a passenger to hold onto. He was soon on his way up the sheer side of the hill. He decided that during the next trip he would tie himself to the wagon as a safety precaution. He arrived at the ledge.

"Nice ride, brother. How about a hand?" he called up into the cave.

Before long he was safely up on the ledge.

"From now on we need to tie ourselves onto that contraption," Jericho said.

Red Eagle just nodded giving no clue he had already come to the same conclusion.

Inside they lit candles and held them high. Twenty feet into the cave they saw just what they expected – rows of old trunks similar to what they had found in the other three hiding places.

They also found two things they hadn't expected – skeletons of two long dead men!

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Shot Rang out and Kicked up the Dust at their Feet.

"I've never seen a man's skeleton before," Jericho said walking right toward them to see what he might learn.

"I've never seen one either," Red Eagle said, taking a few steps backwards.

"I suppose these were the Dutchman's drivers or helpers," Jericho said. "It probably confirms the stories about how he kept all of this a secret. Let's open one and take a look."

"Open a skeleton?" Red Eagle said, wide eyed.

"No, silly. Open one of the trunks to see what sort of things these have in them."

He slipped his knife blade in behind the hasp lock and easily pried it loose.

"Need your help to open it, brother. This one is rusted shut at the hinges."

Presently they had it open and found it held a wide assortment of things from rings and bracelets to bowls and pendants. They took a ring and a pendant on a gold chain as samples before shutting it.

"I guess we've seen what we need to see," Jericho said. "It will be pretty easy to slide it all down to the ground on the wagon using the tracks. Let's get this door to the cave closed and get off this big slab of rock before Dekker sees us."

Now that was something Red Eagle could happily agree to!

They pulled the wagon back inside using the winch. The rock 'door' was nearly perfectly balanced and closed with

almost no effort. Jericho slid the iron slide into place the way they had found it and turned to leave. It called for chuckles. How were they to get down from there?

Red Eagle had the solution.

"I guess we climb the rope attached to the iron loop up above us. Lucky, we left it there."

It was a short climb, but not an easy one on half inch lariat rope. Fifteen minutes later both of them were back down on the ground, rope re-coiled and stowed in the saddle bag.

As they prepared to mount up, a shot rang out. It had come from the top of the hill and kicked up the dirt at their feet. Instinctively they rushed back toward the side of the hill where they could not be seen from up above. They waited, backs against the base of the cliff.

"That came close," Red Eagle said.

"Close means he really didn't want to hit any of us," Cal said. "From up there a ten-year-old could pick off a field mouse down here. He just means to scare us."

"How could he have known we were coming here?" Red Eagle asked.

"He could have followed us," Cal said, "but if he did, he is pretty good at tailing people because I kept looking back and didn't see anybody."

"He could have forced it out of Mae, I suppose," Jericho said.

"Maybe he lives up there on top someplace and just saw us ride up," Red Eagle suggested. "We haven't found where he is staying."

"Regardless, he knows we're here," Cal said becoming practical about their situation.

"We can move east keeping our backs to this wall and get to the end of the hill, but once away from the hill he can shoot at us there just like he did here," Jericho said.

All quite unexpectedly, Cal took several paces out away from the hillside. Nothing happened. He took several more and looked up toward the top.

"I think the shooter is gone. Like I said, he just wanted to scare us. I suggest we saddle up and get the heck out a here!"

That's exactly what they did. (Not a speck of heck was

left behind!)

As they road, Red Eagle had to ask. He turned to Cal who was riding between them.

“It seemed quite reckless of you to just step out into the open like you did.”

“Like I said, I was sure he wasn’t trying to hurt us. I suppose it wasn’t the smartest thing I’ve ever done. Why don’t we just keep that among the three of us?”

“Ah! I think we have blackmailing material here,” Jericho said kidding Cal.

A serious Red Eagle turned back to Cal.

“My brother was just joking, you know.”

“Yes, I know.”

They waved at Mae on her porch as they passed her house and headed back to town. If she had been forced into an encounter with Dekker she would have surely hailed them.

At the sheriff’s office Sandy said he had heard from the Chief Marshal who said his general inquiry about Dekker had offered nothing. He indicated there might be more coming later.

“I have an arrest warrant for him. The wanted poster will circulate to the area deputies and sheriffs on the noon stage runs. Cilla is printing it up this morning.”

“Thanks. We appreciate that,” Jericho said. “We’ll deliver them to the Stage Station ourselves.”

They trotted across the street to Cilla’s.

“You three look like the cats who swallowed the canaries.”

“I don’t understand,” Red Eagle said.

“Thinking about it, that really is an awful expression, isn’t it?” Cilla said. “It means you look like you have some absolutely wonderful secret.”

“Found number four, Cilla,” Jericho said. “About the same size stash as the others – ten to twelve or so big trunks. All this must be worth about a gazillion, gazillion dollars. Saw some really fancy golden bowls in the one we opened. First of those we’ve seen.”

“No trouble?”

“None that discouraged us,” Jericho said flashing his patented ear to ear grin, thinking he had quite skillfully evaded

the real story.

“So, yes, you encountered some trouble and barely escaped with your lives,” she came back not buying his attempt at deception (trickery).

As one, the three boys shrugged. Cilla moved on, understanding the matter was closed.

“I have been searching for a passage that I once read about the treasure. Didn’t know which one of a dozen books it was in. Found it a few minutes ago. It gives me reason to caution you even more than before. Apparently, the Dutchman made a veiled (disguised) threat to his men back when he was leaving port in Jamaica for the last time and heading here. It is recorded like this: ‘Let it be on record; Bright eyes first, lead to dim eyes second’.”

“What do you think it means,” Red Eagle asked.

“Let me take a stab at it – I know, that was another awful saying,” Jericho said glancing at his brother. “Anyway, like the person who finds his treasure will be happy about it at first, but then later will experience something bad.”

“I imagine that, in general, that’s the intent,” Cilla agreed. Bright eyes often is used to mean awake or enthusiastic or alive. Dim eyes mean just the opposite – asleep, lethargic, dead or dying.”

“I see what you mean about using more caution,” Jericho said. “But we’re well past the second stash and nothing has happened.”

“Maybe it means the first and second visits to the same stash,” Red Eagle suggested. “He had no way of knowing which would be visited first by treasure robbers.”

Cal nodded and spoke.

“My aunt once gave me a Chinese Puzzle box for Christmas. There were sliding panels and if you arranged them just right the lid would pop open. Once you learned how to set them to open it the first time, the second time that same solution wouldn’t work. Somehow the solution changed from one try to the next. Maybe the old Dutchman did the same thing – if we find a stash he lets us leave to get help or equipment to move it, but when we come back maybe the same entry process is booby-trapped to kill you. Someway it is triggered on the second entry into the area, but not the first.”

“Very interesting – very frightening,” Cilla said putting on a shiver.

“It wasn’t true for one of them, because we are quite sure somebody has been there numerous times,” Red Eagle said.

“Maybe that somebody figured it out the first time and neutralized it,” Jericho said.

“Maybe that somebody was one of the men who helped set it up in the first place – like we suspect,” Red Eagle said.

The others looked puzzled. Jericho noticed.

“Sorry. That’s all we really dare say about it, but who knows, that information may save our necks, and, little brother, later I’ll explain that last violent saying – save our necks.”

“Oh, I believe I understand that one.”

He clutched at his throat.

Jericho picked up the bundle of wanted posters on Decker and they took them to the stage office. The driver would drop some off at every stop.

Outside, they sat on chairs on the walk-in front of the station. Red Eagle spoke.

“I wonder why Dekker waited to shoot at us – to scare us as Cal says – until after we had discovered the treasure.”

Jericho tried an answer.

“In light of what Cilla found, and our discussion of its possible meaning, I’m thinking he wanted us to find it so we’d come back and the booby trap would kill us. That way we would just disappear and he could not be charged with killing us. Even if our bodies were found later, it would have been the gadgetry of the Dutchman that did us in, not Dekker. He’s nobody’s fool.”

“That makes good sense,” Cal said. “I don’t understand why he waited until now, though.”

“Maybe he just decided he couldn’t scare us off so he moved up to the next level,” Jericho said.

The others nodded, agreeing that made sense.

“I’m thinking it is time to send for one of those experts, Cilla and Doc suggested we need to have – to sort through the treasure and decide how to dispose of it,” Red Eagle said.

“It’s also time we begin taking solid steps to get our

newfangled foundling (orphan) home started,” Jericho said. “I hate that name, foundling home. We have to find a better one.”

Earlier they had shared their idea with Cal. He offered a suggestion.

“How about the Jericho and Red Eagle Children’s Home or The Palmer Home for Children?”

“We don’t want our names put on it,” Red Eagle said. “That would be like we were boasting or something about what good guys we are. It will be done anon . . .”

“Anonymously,” Jericho said, supplying the word his brother was searching for. “It isn’t about us,” he went on. “It’s about the children who need a wonderful place to live and eventually get hooked up with a loving set of parents.”

“Let’s tell Doc we are ready to get on with that,” Jericho said. “We will need his guidance.”

They walked north on the sidewalk and stopped at Cilla’s office.

“Cilla. That expert on the treasure you mentioned. We think it is time to get him here.”

“I’ll do some inquiring.”

They left and rounded the corner to Doc’s place. Being in a serious frame of mind they actually walked up the steps. Their horses that were looking on, clearly thought something was wrong.

“So, to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit by the Young Guardians of Red Bend?”

It got smiles. Jericho laid out their idea for the children’s’ home.

“It is a wonderful plan, boys. I have a friend in Kansas City who is both a doctor and a lawyer. It just happens he was also an orphan. I am certain he will assist you. I will get a telegram off to him this afternoon.”

“If you will write it we will drop it at the telegraph office and send it for you,” Red Eagle said.

Doc sat at the table and wrote it out.

“It’s long. It will cost you an arm and a leg to send.”

Red Eagle winced. Jericho explained.

“My brother is having difficulty with some of our sayings. I am amazed at how horrible many of them really

are. It makes us seem like a savage race, you know?"

It didn't deserve an answer at the moment, but would eventually become the basis of an article the boys would write for the paper. Doc brought them back to the original discussion.

"I suggest you boys write out a detailed plan of how you envision (see) the operation. Cilla and I will go over it and ask questions – perhaps even make suggestions – and then we can submit it to my friend for his thoughts. That will get the ball rolling."

Red Eagle figured, 'get the ball rolling', was a much nicer saying than, 'take a stab at it' and allowed the slightest smile to accompany his thought.

The boys felt better after the talk with Doc. They had a plan – a next step. They would get to work writing out their thoughts that very night.

"You know what this does to our lives," Red Eagle said as they waited on the street for their horses to find them.

"What?" Jericho asked, puzzled, but thinking his brother undoubtedly had some very important idea to share.

"Our plan will make wonderful lives for many, many, many children. It means we have to take very good care of ourselves so nothing will happen to keep us from making our dream for them come to life."

"Wow! You have a very wise side to you – often disturbing, but wise," Jericho said.

He turned to Cal.

"I guess that makes your job even more important, huh – seeing that we survive these upcoming, typically dangerous teen years for the sake of the little children."

"Here, I heard it meaning that now that you understand the great responsibility you have to those children, you will start taking such good care of yourselves that I wouldn't even be needed anymore."

Some of each, I expect," Red Eagle said offering a smile. "We still need a big brother to kick the seat of our pants when we're about to do something really dumb."

They crossed the street and sent the telegram. They stuck their heads in the office and told Sandy they were heading home – right after a piece of pie at the restaurant.

They invited him to join them.

“The day I pass up free pie, is the day you can toss the dirt over me right where I fall.”

Red Eagle managed a slight smile and shook his head. Those terrible sayings were everywhere. He would just have to get used to them.

It was to be a choice between apple and youngberry pie. It wasn't of course. Jericho ordered for all of them.

“We will each have half a piece of apple and half a piece of youngberry. We'll all have milk except for the old guy to my left. I imagine he'll have coffee.”

Sandy cuffed (hit lightly) Jericho's ears with his hat.

The four of them had an exceptionally fine relationship. The age differences really did not get in the way of things among them. The younger ones understood there were still important things about life and living they did not yet know and the older ones respected the younger ones for their perceptive questions and creative ideas. It remained that way when Cilla and Doc were with them. It was just about the most comfortable sort of friendship any of them could imagine wanting. It was a family.

It surfaced again around the fire that night back in their cave. Red Eagle brought it up. He was speaking to Cal.

“I think my brother and I are about the luckiest boys in the world. We have a lot of freedom, but we also have grownups who we know are sort of watching out for us. They make good suggestions to us, but almost never really boss us around or forbid us from doing things. It is a very unusual situation for twelve year olds, but everybody helps make it work. I wish life could be this good for everybody.”

Cal had something very important to add.

“You know, if you two were not so dependable and trustworthy, none of it would work. Sandy makes a lot of jokes about all the mischief you get into, but he knows every bit of it is normal growing up lessons that we all have had to learn, and some things are very difficult to learn any other way than trying them. Fortunately, you two exhibit very good judgment for twelve-year olds and you're not afraid to ask for advice. Guys make mistakes during the years they are learning how to be grownups and everybody close to you two understands

that. I agree with Red Eagle – you really have a good life going. I was lucky to have all those same people around for me – plus Harry at the Livery – he’s as much like a dad as I ever had.”

“I get the idea neither the Golden Dutchman or our Ditmer Dekker was fortunate enough to have such good people in their lives,” Red Eagle said.

“The others nodded, suddenly feeling extremely fortunate.”

///

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“It’s Dekker and his men. They’re armed!”

The following morning, Cal, and the boys, who were both dressed as Cherokees to match the hot day that was expected, urged their mounts due north from their cave in search of ‘X’ number five. It took them within a half mile of Jake’s place so they made the short side trip to see the old man. Although Cal had heard about him, he had never in all of his eighteen years met or even seen him.

“He didn’t shoot at us,” Red Eagle said. “I hope he’s alright?”

They all three laughed at how absurd (silly) that sounded.

Jericho called out as they approached so they wouldn’t startle him with their unexpected arrival. There was no response. They dismounted and approached the shack. His mule came around from the back and went right to the three horses. Jericho knocked at the open door and peered inside. There was no Jake.

Not wanting to give up secrets to Cal, Red Eagle spoke to his brother in a code he hoped would be understood.

“Maybe old Jake the wagon driver is hunting for something special over in the woods there. I’ll go take a look.”

Jericho understood – perhaps he had gone to his treasure cave. Cal had no reaction to the comment. Red Eagle was back a few minutes later.

“No sign of him,” he said. “What’s with Mule?”

Cal and Jericho turned around toward the horses. Mule had left and was walking away from them toward the north

west. He stopped and looked back.”

“I believe he wants us to follow him,” Cal said.”

They mounted up, and without a word or a nudge from the boys, the horses trotted after Mule in an obvious effort to catch up.

“You really think Mule is trying to tell us something?” Jericho asked. “I figured they were too dumb to do such a thing.”

“In some ways, they’re smarter than horses,” Cal said. “When a horse gets a back leg caught in a fence, it pulls and struggles and makes an awful fuss, and ends up tearing its leg to pieces. A Mule looks back at the problem, raises its leg straight up out of the wire and walks away unscathed.”

“Unscathed?” the boys said as one.

“A Cilla word. Means unharmed’.”

The boys tucked it away for future use.

They were soon riding along right behind Mule. He wasn’t fast, but he was steady and could walk all day without a break. They slowed to match his pace.

After twenty minutes the mule stopped, looked both ways, and then turned right – due north.

Red Eagle spotted something, slipped off his horse and knelt in the grass.

“Look here! Jake’s old rifle I believe.”

He stood holding it up for the others to see.

“Jake wouldn’t lose his rifle,” Jericho said. “He’s in trouble.”

“Mule is moving in the direction the rifle was pointing,” Red Eagle said, indicating it with his arm. “Maybe he was trying to leave a signal – a clue.”

“And, we can probably assume he was riding Mule, since he also turned in that direction right here.”

Jericho turned to Cal.

“Could a Mule be that smart?”

“You bet. And I agree, Old Jake would never have left his rifle behind unless he was being forced to.”

“Dekker, you think?” Red Eagle asked jump mounting Golden.

“You know of any bandits working this territory, Cal,” Jericho asked.

He shook his head and reached out toward Red Eagle.

"I have a place here to carry a extra rifle. I know you don't like them."

He took the gun.

"We are sitting ducks here on our horses in the middle of the prairie," Jericho said. "I suggest we at least dismount so we won't be so obvious."

They were all three immediately on the ground. Cal loosened the guns in his holsters and removed his own rifle from its long narrow scabbard (carrying case), which hung from his saddle. The tall grasses were as high as the twin's chests. Still they bent down a bit and carefully scanned the area ahead. Mule continued plodding on his way. Presently, it made a left turn. Again, it was Red Eagle who spotted it.

"There. The bandana Jake was wearing around his neck the day we were at his place."

He picked it up and handed it to his brother who had begun putting it all together in his head.

"Jake is leaving a trail, like dropping something every time he turns. Hope there aren't many more turns or soon we'll be finding his long Johns."

Under other, less worrisome circumstances, it would have seemed very funny. Not at that moment, however.

"It seems we are now heading for the old Kramer place," Cal said. "I remember when it burned to the ground. I was about six. The house, barns, corral, all up in flames during a prairie fire. No survivors."

"Seems like a strange place to build out here with no water close by," Jericho said looking around.

"There is what's called an 'eternal pond' here," Cal went on. "Doc says there's an underground river and it came to a solid rock wall down there so it bubbles up over it to the surface and then makes a tunnel for itself right back down on the other side into an empty space or vein of loose sand, leaving a pond up top that never goes dry. I think the pool in your cave is like a smaller version of it."

"That must be the pond up there," Red Eagle said.

They walked to it. The mule continued around it to the northern side and stopped. Humorously, the three horses accompanied him and left their riders to fend for themselves.

They followed on foot.

In general, the pond was oval-shaped – twenty yards long and ten across at its widest point. It appeared to be very deep; Red Eagle estimated fifteen yards or deeper. He was seldom wrong about such things. He spoke.

“I don’t understand what that is over by Mule.”

They circled around the west end of the pond to investigate.

“A small, low rock structure of some kind,” Cal said. “No more than six feet high.”

“I suppose nothing really strange about that. It could have served some purpose we don’t know about, like maybe it was the base for a windmill that sat on top of it,” Jericho said. “The really strange part is that it stands at the north side of that little pool that juts out to the north from the big pond. The rest of the bank around it is fairly regularly shaped but here, it sticks out some four yards – three wide. Any ideas?”

“Maybe the land there was sandier and the water carved it away,” Cal suggested.

Jericho walked around the pool kicking into to soil.

“Seems to be hard packed prairie soil to me. One other thing. The big pond cut a gently rounded bank – bowl shaped – that slopes out underwater toward the center. This pool is a sharp sided rectangle, like it was dug straight down with shovels.”

“Manmade, you’re thinking?” Red Eagle asked. “I see what you mean. You’re saying it is time for a swim to investigate.”

“Am I? I mean, yes, I am!”

Jericho knelt down to feel the water.

“It is really cold, Little Brother.”

Thirty seconds later Red Eagle was in the water.

“Why aren’t you shivering your teeth out?” Jericho asked.

“Just pretend it is warm and everything is fine.”

“Okay?”

Jericho sounded more than a little skeptical, but moved close to the edge, closed his eyes, and jumped in feet first. He came up muttering.

“I am pretending it is warm. I am pretending it is warm.

I am pretending it is warm. It is the coldest water I've ever been in. How do you stand it?"

Red Eagle ignored the question.

"Sooner we get things looked at down there, the sooner we can get out."

Red Eagle submerged. Jericho followed – not willingly and he would have things to say about it later.

Cal became concerned that they had been underwater for so long. He knelt and shaded his eyes from the sun's glare off the surface. A moment later Red Eagle's head popped above the surface. He breathed hard for several seconds.

"This is really strange down here, Cal. I'm going to take one more look then I'll get out."

One long breath later he disappeared. Jericho's head popped above the surface.

"This is really strange down here, Cal. I'm going to take one more look then I'll get out."

At least they agree something is strange, Cal thought to himself, amused by their identical phrases.

He moved to the rock building. It was six feet wide and ten feet long. There was a door on the side that faced away from the pool. The far side was right up against the oddly shaped little pool forming its northern edge. The door was wood planks arranged upright with two cross pieces to which they were nailed. It had an iron handle. Cal pulled on it. It was extremely difficult to open, but it did move. It was as if there was something on the inside that was arranged to pull it back shut. There was – a heavy weight on a chain. It was all he could do to hold it open. Just inside it was a second door, clad in steel plating and was locked with three padlocks on the right side – bottom, center, and top. 'Odd' seemed be the one thing true about everything there at the old Kramer place.

The boys pulled themselves out of the water. Even, 'just-pretend-it's-warm-Red-Eagle', was shivering.

"Run through the tall grass," Red Eagle said. "It will help dry you off."

After several minutes, they returned, surprisingly not ice cubes after all.

"So, do I get to hear?" Cal asked.

"The little pool is only about six feet deep," Jericho said.

“A flat bottom.”

Red Eagle continued.

“From there down, under the water, is a big cement box about the same size as the pool the way we see it from up here.”

“It’s ten feet tall or deep or whatever,” Jericho said. “No doors or windows. Like a huge casket under water.”

“And you have ideas about it I’m sure,” Cal said looking back and forth between the two still shivering boys.

“It holds treasure. I’m thinking the most valuable since the Dutchman went to such a lot of work to build this thing.”

“I assume you didn’t find Jake down there.”

“No. Oh. I guess we sort of forgot about him,” Jericho said looking sheepishly at his brother. “He should be our first priority. I don’t know what came over us.”

“Look here,” Cal said. “Another strange thing.”

He had let the door close while they were talking.

“Help me open this door and then I’ll back against it to hold it that way while you two see what you think about that door that’s behind it.”

Once the door was open again, the boys rolled several sizeable rocks against it so Cal could move away.

“Hmm?”

“Hmm?”

“Hmm’s are not helpful, boys. Can we get to the other side of that door?”

While Jericho examined the locks, Red Eagle went to Lightning’s saddle bags and returned with Jericho’s wire.

Jericho nodded thanks, and went to work on the middle lock.

“Seems to have five or six tumblers. Lots more than the hardware store variety lock, but I’m getting close.”

Cal held up his hands suggesting he was at a loss for what was going on.

“One of the many strange skills my brother came to me with was lock-picking. As far as I know he is not wanted for bank robbery, however. I will bet on him with these.”

They grew quiet.

Click, click, click, click . . . and, click!

“Got this one. It would be good if the others used the

same key," Jericho said.

They didn't, but that did not hinder him in the least. He began working on the top lock. It went much faster and the bottom was open almost as soon as he fed the wire into the lock.

"No hinges on the outside so the door opens in," Cal said hoping to be of some help.

"I see there is almost no room above the door so nothing from a booby-trap can fall on us, at least," Red Eagle said, sharing his observation.

"A good thing to bring up, though. No telling what could be waiting for us," Jericho said.

"Let's use that long pole in the grass. We can push the door open and still stay way back out of the way – I hope," Red Eagle said.

That became the plan. The pole was ten feet long. They placed one end against the right side of the door and pushed slowly.

"I figured after all this time the hinges would be rusted tight," Jericho said. "But look. It's swinging in with hardly any effort."

"That may mean Dekker has been here," Red Eagle said.

The others nodded. Mule nosed his way in close to the door opening.

"I imagine that means it believes Jake is inside," Red Eagle said.

They soon had the door pushed completely open. The light from outside washed across the area inside providing faint illumination.

"There is Jake!" Red Eagle said pointing to a back corner. He rushed over to him and knelt down to assess the situation.

"Unconscious. His breathing is shallow and slow. His heard beat is slow and weak. Has been bleeding from the side of his head, but that has stopped. The blood is caked solid.

"It means his wound was inflicted some time ago," Jericho said.

Mule became visibly upset.

“Lift his head so Mule can see his face,” Jericho said. “Maybe that will satisfy him that things are okay.”

Amazingly it did. The mule returned to stand watch from several yards away. Jericho motioned Cal to take a look, thinking he knew more about wounds and unconscious men than either he or his brother.

“A really bad wound. I’m pretty sure Doc would say he has a concussion – that’s like scrambled brains I think. We better not move him until Doc sees him. One of us needs to ride and get him.”

“Red Eagle, you’re the best horseman among us. Will you go?” Jericho said more than asked.

“Of course.”

He jump-mounted Golden from the rear as he spoke. Cal handed him a six shooter.

“In case you get in trouble shoot it in the air if you won’t use it in any other way. We’ll know you need help and I’ll come. Once you’re more than half way to town you’re on your own – we won’t be able to hear a shot from that far away.”

Red Eagle took the gun and slipped it inside the belt of his still damp breechclout. A brief glance passed between the brothers and he was on his way at a full gallop. Gray and Lightning became restless, but calmed to their keepers’ touch and voices. Jericho loosened Lightning’s saddle and slipped out the blanket.

He took it inside and placed it under Jake’s head. The man was lying on the wooden floor. The room was empty. Jericho had been expecting trunks in there. He just knew there should have been trunks in there. He examined the walls and floor.

“Something down here,” he said.

“Something what, where,” Cal said not understanding they were searching for something.

“The space between the floorboards is wider here and here. I’m thinking trapdoor.

“Use your knife and see if you can raise it,” Cal said.

“He slipped in the knife and eased the door up enough so Cal could slide his fingers under it.

“It’s like a trap door, for sure,” Cal said. “No hinges. More like a lid or something.”

Together they removed it from the hole it was covering and set it aside. Jericho lit a candle and held it low into the hole. It revealed a set of stone steps between rock walls. It descended on down some fifteen or more feet to a door on a solid concrete wall. It was the entrance into the 'casket' the boys had seen from the outside while they were underwater. While Cal went back to tending Jake, Jericho lit a candle and made his way down the wide, rock, steps. At the bottom, he found it was another metal door and another set of three padlocks.

He set the candle on a rock that jutted out from the wall and went to work on the locks. He had learned a good deal about how they worked from the first door and had them all unlocked in a matter of minutes. He called up to Cal.

"You have time to take a quick look at this set up down here?"

He was soon at Jericho's side getting his bearings.

"This door also opens away from us," he said feeling around its edges. "Surely it doesn't open into the water."

"There was no door on the outside wall under water – and where we are standing is some twelve or fifteen feet below the surface of the pond. Also, the cement structure under the water extends out three or four more yards. This is right at the north bank of the small pond – the pond sits on top of the cement room just on the other side of this door."

"Then you see any reason not to open it, Jericho?"

"I guess not."

As they reached to push on the door, they heard noises from behind them, up above, outside. They climbed the steps – Cal first. He looked through the crack along the edge of the metal door.

"A wagon and a team," Cal said in a low voice. Still thirty yards away but headed directly toward us.

"Couldn't be Red Eagle and Doc so soon," Jericho said wondering out loud.

He caught up with Cal and took his own peek.

"That's Decker, driving. He has several men with him – all look to be armed. He may be coming for the treasure I'm sure is just on the other side of that door down there."

Cal pulled the door open, stooped low, and ran to his

horse to get the two rifles and ammunition. A shot rang out.
Cal fell to his knees.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Jericho could see that Dekker was stark raving mad!

Jericho started to go outside and assist Cal.

“I’m fine. Stay safe in there. I just slipped when I ducked.”

He was soon back inside at Jericho’s side. He handed him a rifle, offering a shrug. Jericho understood and accepted it. He sat it against the wall.

Jericho slithered outside on his belly, grasped the end of the pole they had used earlier, and dragged it back inside.

They closed the door, knowing they had no way of keeping it closed for long against the force of the several bodies they had seen with the wagon. They positioned the pole as a brace against the door the best they could. They heard the wagon and horses stop amid loud voices. It would be obvious to the newcomers that they were inside. Jericho hoped Lightning and Gray would run off.

There was banging on the door. There was pushing on the door. It gave a little, then, it gave a little more. Cal believed it would be impossible to shoot through the metal door. He positioned himself and the end of his rifle at the crack through which they had been looking. As soon as he saw daylight he would fire, hoping that would discourage them from continuing their attempt to enter.

It worked – at least for the moment. At the single shot, they withdrew. The door remained cracked open. Those outside stayed out of view mumbling among themselves. Cal and Jericho could not make out what they were saying.

Cal kept looking though the crack. A boot came into

view. A toe of a boot was blown apart amid cries of pain.

"That should buy us a little more time," Cal said.

Jericho nodded. He went to Jake's side while Cal stayed by the door. At one point Jake opened his eyes, saw Jericho's face in the candle light, and offered a faint smile before closing them again.

The mostly silent standoff went on for nearly an hour. Suddenly, a barrage of bullets began hitting the door. Cal had been right. The door was bulletproof. He couldn't understand what they were thinking by shooting at it.

"I think they figure their fire will keep us back from the door and at some point, they will stop shooting and rush us."

At that, Cal put down the rifle and took out his six-guns. He stepped back from the door moving Jericho with him. Shooting continued outside, but, oddly, none of it was hitting the door. Cal moved back to the crack to see what was going on. The firing stopped. Several minutes passed. There was a loud knock on the door. Jericho thought things were about to get really bad in a hurry. He figured the knock would be followed by some loud voice commanding them to put down their guns and open the door.

There was a loud voice. It was commanding. It was Sandy's.

"You okay in there?"

Cal removed the prop and opened the door. Jericho ducked under his arm and stood in front.

"What do you mean, Okay? Something bad been going on out there?"

Acknowledging the remark with a shake of his head, Cal motioned for Doc to go inside. Red Eagle carried his bag. While Doc attended to Jake, Cal and Jericho filled Sandy in on what had been going on.

"Which of these men is Dekker?" Sandy asked pointing to a row of men sitting on the ground with their hands tied behind their backs.

"None of them," Jericho said. "He must have gotten away."

"What's this old building all about," Sandy asked, still not having entered it.

"This was the old Kramer place, you know," Jericho

began, having no idea where he was going with his story. “Well, this old rock building is the only structure that didn’t burn in the fire. It seems like it could have been their root cellar and scared hole (an underground room safe from tornados). It’s where Dekker put Jake – at least we think it was Dekker. Jake has been unconscious so we can’t be sure.”

“I hear Mule is the hero in all this,” Sandy said with a smile, reaching out and rubbing the animal’s huge ears.

“He led us here for sure,” Jericho said. “I need to apologize to him for thinking he wasn’t capable of such a thing. I guess the men aren’t saying if it was Dekker or where he went.”

“Right. A day or so as my guests may loosen their tongues.”

“I wouldn’t count on it. For one thing, you feed your prisoners too well and second, I’m beginning to think Dekker’s every bit as ruthless as the Dutchman was and his men will know they better not talk.”

Doc came back to the door.

“We can move him back to my place, now. We can lay him in the area behind the seat in my buggy. Has a concussion for sure. You were right not trying to move him on his mule. We can make a slow wagon ride much easier on him. Looks like he was hit on the side of his head with the butt of a gun. He’ll pull through. The man clearly has the constitution of a mule. Probably why the two of them get along so well.”

Doc chuckled at his little joke. It deserved more than smiles, but got nothing more.

Red Eagle had been looking around outside. He returned to his brother.

“There is a fresh disturbance in the grass heading toward Big Red Rock Hill,” he said. “I figure it was made carelessly by Dekker on a horse.”

The boys arranged blankets in the buggy. Cal carried Jake out and they soon had him comfortable and ready for travel. Even though the old gentleman appeared to be unconscious or asleep, Doc still spoke to him, telling him where they were going and why.

“Even people in his state are often aware of what is said around them. I always proceed as if they can hear me.”

Doc mounted the seat and waited to leave. Sandy and Cal tied the men over their saddles – stomachs down – and roped their horses together for the trip back to town.

When they were ready to leave, Sandy looked at the three young men, pointing at each on as he spoke.

“You three stay out of trouble. That is a direct order. Catching Dekker is the law’s job. I expect to see you at supper. If you aren’t there I’ll send out a search party and revoke (take away) your travel privileges until you’re thirty.”

The boy understood he had just told them he loved them.

He and his procession were soon moving off toward Red Bend with Doc’s buggy right behind. Mule followed Doc.

With that portion of their day completed they got back to working on the treasure – or at least what the boys felt very sure would be the treasure. Cal spoke.

“The treasure hunt is really your thing. I don’t need to be a part of it. I’m here to see to your safety, so I’ll keep out of your way.”

“That is really up to you, Cal,” Red Eagle said. “With all we have been through together we really don’t have many secrets from each other. We’d be happy to have you in on things unless you have reason not to want to be.”

“I guess I can live with that, but understand that the treasure is yours. I wouldn’t know what to do with more than the forty dollars a month I’m earning now.”

“Neither can we, you know. We have some great plans for all the money; we’ll share them with you tonight.”

They followed Jericho back into the building and down the stairs. He pushed on the door. It swung open revealing pretty much what they expected – a number of trunks.

Red Eagle picked up the candle and Jericho removed his knife and began prying one of them open. Those chests were sturdier and had survived the years in better shape than those they had already found.

“Why do you suppose these are better preserved than the others?” Red Eagle asked moving among them.

“Maybe this is a better place to preserve them – it’s like

almost air tight down here under the water,” Jericho said. “Or, maybe they contain the best of the booty so maybe the Dutchman put them in the best trunks to begin with.”

Cal turned to Red Eagle.

“If we don’t stop your brother he’ll spin another ten ‘maybes’ before he gets that first one open.”

“I thought you like my ‘maybes’,” Jericho said flashing a grin.

Cal had the final word.

“Oh, we do. We just don’t want you to wear out the ‘maybe-creating-center’ in your brain at such a tender age.”

There were more grins. Once the padlock was removed Cal helped raise the lid.

The room remained quiet. The boys were speechless. They couldn’t believe their eyes. Like the others, it was filled with things made from gold and, in that case, silver, but each item had at least one diamond as a part of it. There were rings and broaches and pendants and bracelets and even silver ware and plates and bowls. Sitting on top at the center was a tiara (a woman’s crown) with: “Twenty-four, very large diamonds on it,” Jericho announced after counting them twice. Do you suppose all these trunks are filled with diamond things?”

“One way to find out, I suppose,” Cal offered.

The others understood – open them and look. There were fewer trunks than in the other stashes – only six. The next four contained more of what they had found in the first one. The sixth was reinforced with metal straps as if made to carry a very heavy load. It had a metal bottom and a double padlock on the lid.

“What could be so special the Dutchman would go to all this trouble?” Cal asked, showing more excitement than the boys had witnessed from him in the past.

They opened the lid and in the candle light they were met by a trunk filled with diamonds – loose diamonds, not attached to anything diamonds.

“I didn’t know there would be this many in the whole world,” Red Eagle said. “Can we touch them?”

“Of course,” his brother answered shoving his hands down into them and lifting out many dozens at a time. They

fell back into the chest like a cascading waterfall reflecting the brightest sunlight. “They are beautiful! They are also sharp. Be careful.”

Cal removed his hat, scratched his head and spoke.

“You’re saying there are a dozen trunks filled with gold in four other places you have already found?”

“That’s right,” Red Eagle said. “Can you just imagine all the wonderful things we can do for people with all this?”

They all nodded.

“Tarnation!”

“Wow!”

“Double wow!”

“Let’s get this all locked up again,” Jericho said. “We need to get after Dekker.”

“But Sandy told us . . .” Red Eagle began.

Jericho interrupted him.

“Sandy said catching Dekker was the law’s job. I agree with him, but I didn’t hear him say specifically that private citizens couldn’t help.”

“But he implied . . .”

“Implication is not ‘no’ where I came from.”

“Sandy will hang you up by your thumbs for this,” Cal said.

“Make you feel better for having said that? Jericho asked.

“Yes. Much. What’s first?”

“First, is to set the team free from the wagon,” Red Eagle said. “They will be fine here with grass and water until we can arrange something more permanent for them. I’m thinking Mae’s ranch, maybe.”

It took no time at all to remove the collars, reins and such. They went right to the water to drink. Jericho refocused their mission.

“Dekker!”

With minimal effort, Red Eagle found Dekker’s trail.

“He sure didn’t try to hide it,” he said. “Shall we follow it and see where it leads us?”

In a few minutes the other two had everything closed and locked and were mounted up with Red Eagle in the lead following what he believed was Dekker’s escape path through

the high grass. They rode on for some twenty minutes when they came to the rocky ground near the base of Big Red Rock Hill.

“No more tall grass,” Red Eagle said. “There may not be any more trail to follow.”

He looked for fresh marks from horseshoes on the rocks, but came up empty.

They stopped and scanned the part of the huge hill that was visible to them from there at the edge of the prairie. Nothing stood out as being important.

“No sign saying, ‘Ditmer Dekker Hides Out Here’, Jericho said, trying to lighten things. “If he’s smart he’ll remain hidden. He must know he’s a wanted man by now. With no place to look, I suggest we head back to town and think this thing through. By the time we get there, it will be close to supper time – that should make Sandy happy – the three of us showing up unscathed upon his direct order.”

“That may be a first, Cal said.”

Smiles.

The big hill was already casting a long, late afternoon shadow to the east and the horses headed them toward it for shade. It had become a very hot afternoon. They hugged the hill as they turned south east. They would come out just north of Mae’s house.

Unfortunately, the three of them were not going to make supper that evening.

A shot rang out from somewhere just above them. Two horsemen, rifles at the ready, rode in behind.

“Drop your weapons,” came a familiar voice.

“It’s Dekker,” Red Eagle whispered to Cal. “Better do as he says.”

Cal tossed the rifles and his gun belt to the ground.

“Now, dismount!”

They followed his orders.

“You, the mouthy look-alike kid. Use your rope and tie the other two’s hands behind them. Do a good job or you’ll earn a bullet in your shoulder.”

“Jericho went to work, moving Cal’s hands out of sight to the men and into position so Red Eagle could watch as he tied him. Red Eagle winked out of sight of Dekker, letting

Jericho knew he understood what he had done. Jericho then tied Red Eagle in a similar fashion.

“I assume you want them tied together, back to back, Marshal Style, right, sir?”

Dekker had no idea what Marshal Style was – but then neither did Jericho. The man agreed, not wanting to sound uninformed about such things.

“That should do it, then, sir. What’s next?”

“You get on your horse and ride to Red Bend. You tell the Sheriff that Ditmer Decker, great, great grandson of Rupert Rasmussen, The Golden Dutchman, has this list of demands that must be met within twenty-four hours or my two prisoners will accidentally fall off the top of Big Red Rock Hill.”

He handed an envelope to Jericho.

“Don’t you think for one minute that we won’t do what I say we’ll do.”

“We? I don’t understand,” Jericho said.

“Why, the ghost of the Dutchman and me. We have formed an alliance, you see. He has ordained me as the treasure’s rightful owner. He will vent (express) his considerable wrath (anger) against anyone who stands in my way. He has more powers than he has shown.”

That confirmed for Jericho that Ditmer was a stark raving mad man. He suddenly really feared for the safety of the two he was leaving behind.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Dekker's Final Demands

Jericho looked at Cal and his brother. They nodded at him, each one actually feeling relatively secure – Red Eagle with the knowledge that when the chance arose they could easily escape the ropes Jericho had tied in slipknots like they used on Golden's travois, and Cal because while he was being tied, Jericho had managed to slip his knife from where he carried it inside the front of his breechclout, to inside the back of Cal's pants.

Jericho let Lightning set a fairly fast, steady pace. The new information that confirmed the boys' previous belief about Dekker being crazy, led him to formulate a plan. Once out of sight he stopped to read what was inside the envelope. Dekker wanted twelve sturdy wagons and the promise of safe passage south out of Kansas into the Indian Territory where the sheriff and US Marshal had no authority. He also requested provisions for fifteen men for two weeks.

Jericho slipped the envelope into a saddle bag and headed for a short stop at Mae's place. Ten minutes later he and Lightning were on their way again to Red Bend. Sandy had already entered the restaurant to eat with Doc and Cilla. Just outside, Jericho paused, took a big breath, set a smile on his face, and walked directly to their table.

"You look a little shorthanded," Same Face," Sandy said craning his neck to look out the front window.

"Funny thing about that," he began, purposefully taking a seat across the table from the Deputy.

"This can't be good," Sandy said glancing at Doc and

Cilla.

“Spit it out boy, Doc said clearly upset as well.

Doc seldom made demands, but when he did, there wasn't a person in the county that wouldn't snap to attention.

Jericho handed over the envelope and shared the story, not leaving out a single detail.

“I'm very sure I saw the opening of a cave that is probably where he's making his headquarters. It is where the shot came from. I saw the shooter duck back inside. There was already a fire burning in there. That may help you find it.”

He borrowed Cilla's pad and drew out a rough map of the south-east end of Big Red Rock and pinpointed the cave.

“Up no more than seven or eight yards from the ground,” he said as he slid the sheet across the table to Sandy.

“It sounds like you have come to your senses, saying it is my doing. I'll get a posse together. You understand that you are to stay here: H-E-R-E!”

“I hear your 'here' loud and clear, Sandy,” Jericho said, immediately defining 'here' as meaning 'here in the county'. Just remember the boys' lives are at stake and there is no doubt he's as batty as they come – thinking he's working with the ghost of his great, great grandfather. I counted two men in addition to Dekker. Could be more, of course, since he didn't demand drivers for the wagons.”

Sandy stood, tipped his hat to Cilla, and left in a hurry. He rang the bell in front of his office and within minutes two dozen men descended on him. It was a signal Jericho and Red Eagle hadn't yet learned about. Very efficient, he thought. He figured it would take them another fifteen to twenty minutes to get their horses and lay in supplies before they could leave town. Another deputy was handing out torches that had one end soaked in tar so they could hold a flame for a long time. If light were to be needed, they would be prepared.

“Can you eat?” Cilla asked.

“Something quick, I guess. I plan to wait for them to return at the city limit sign.”

The boy's crossed fingers were out of sight under the table.

Believing there was nothing better for quick energy than a large slab of chocolate cake with a bottomless glass of milk, he managed to fortify himself.

Doc had announced that Jake was awake and needed another 48 hours of care. He insisted on staying in the livery stable instead of up at Doc's so he could be close to Mule. Harry agreed to look after him – provided Mule allowed him to get close enough. Jericho already knew all that. He had stopped at the livery first to enlist Harry's help in his plan.

Jericho strode out of the restaurant as nonchalantly as a fully revved up, eager to ride like the wind, 12-year-old could manage. Outside he mounted up and galloped off as fast as Lightning could carry him. Doc raised his eyebrows. Cilla sighed. He continued past the city limits sign and was soon charging up the lane to Mae's place.

* * *

Back at Big Red Rock, in the cave that Jericho had pegged as Dekker's headquarters, Cal and Red Eagle had been placed against the rear wall. That was some thirty feet from the opening, which itself sat back from a ten-foot ledge that led to a natural stairway to the ground. In addition to them, the cave housed Dekker and two of his men. Red Eagle figured they were new to the man's employ since they gave no indication of knowing each other very well. Maybe he was taking a lesson from the Dutchman and always using a new crew. There were crates of canned food. The men ate, not offering any to Cal and Red Eagle. Being so far back away from the others they could whisper if they kept from moving their lips. They each held the end of the other's slipknot in their hand, waiting. The men had let the blazing fire die down to a much smaller, nighttime size fire. Why they had one at all Red Eagle couldn't understand, but trying to figure what a crazy man was thinking was probably not worth the effort. Perhaps he felt so in charge of things that the idea of anybody coming for him hadn't entered his mind.

By ten o'clock, Sandy and his men were spread out deep in the shadows some twenty yards across the rocky ground from the cave. They had orders not to shoot until Sandy gave the order. They understood the boys were probably in the cave. Sandy's plan was to take Dekker alive

and protect the boys. Unfortunately, that was his entire plan. Dekker had everything going for him, higher ground and the hostages. The biggest thing Sandy had going for him was the swell of thick, dark, summer clouds that had developed at sundown. The world was dark. He and his men couldn't be seen. The fire in the cave had given it away immediately. Although Sandy couldn't see actual men in the cave he could see their shadows on the cave walls as they moved about.

Sandy was ready to move. He called out.

"Dekker! This is Deputy Sanders. I have a posse of two dozen men with me. I want you to release your prisoners immediately. Don't fire at us unless you want two dozen rifles filling your cave with shot."

He realized his plan had a hundred holes in it, but he figured it was a starting place. A minute later he saw Red Eagle and Cal appear at the cave entrance. A man stood behind each boy with a six-gun pointed at his head. Dekker was off to one side holding a rifle.

"You willing to get these kids killed, Deputy? I don't think so."

There was a moment of silence. Sandy had no next step in mind. It was too risky to shoot at the men as they stood there behind the boys. Then, out of nowhere, there he was – the ghost of the Golden Dutchman on the ground just to the east of them. White from top to bottom. Two of Sandy's men lit torches providing some light. The Dutchman's Ghost faced the cave and raised his arms up toward it. It spoke.

"Ditmer, my progeny, my grandson. Hear me, now."

Ditmar took a step forward nearer the edge of the ledge for a better look. The men guarding the boys did the same thing. Immediately the boys ducked back into the cave freeing their hands. The ghost spoke again taking several steps toward the hill, commanding everybody's attention.

"Ditmer, my son. I have so much more treasure for you. Come to me now. I can protect you."

Three fireballs appeared to shoot out of the Dutchman's right hand and splatter against the rock close to the opening – Swish, Splat! Swish, Splat! Swish, Splat! Dekker's men dropped their guns and ran down the stairs. They were apprehended immediately by members of the posse.

The ghost left one arm up as if beckoning Ditmar to join him. It moved toward the base of the steps. Ditmer slowly moved down the stairway, spewing the unintelligible gibberish of the mad man he was. Dekker raised his rifle ready to take on the posse all alone. Cal and Red Eagle rushed down the steps after him. Just as he reached the bottom step and took aim, they took flying leaps from ten feet above him and wrestled him to the ground.

As quickly as the ghost had appeared it vanished into the night.

It was Sandy's voice.

"Does anybody know what's going on here?"

Red Eagle ran up to him.

"I'm not sure about the 'what', Sandy, but I'm very sure about the 'who'."

Sandy turned toward the spot where the ghost had last been seen and spoke in a loud, less than friendly voice.

"Jericho, Same Face, Palmer!! Show yourself this minute!!! Men, light the torches."

At first it was impossible to figure out what they were seeing. Well, there was Jericho, sanding there, legs spread, bow in hand, with his quiver filled with flammable arrows. That, was no surprise. But there were Harry and Bea and between them the ghost. Not really the ghost, but enough of a lookalike that there in the darkness nobody had considered it wasn't the real thing.

Jericho explained.

"At Bea's place, I built a frame out of two by fours in the shape of a man – the arms move and are attached at the wrists to these saplings painted black; they moved the arms. With Bea working one arm from about ten feet away on one side and Harry to the other and me with fire arrows I think we made a pretty believable ghost. Bea arranged some sheets around the frame, including one of her wide brimmed straw hats and she soon fashioned the wonderful ghost you have all seen. Across its back we draped a black blanket so when we turned it around it would appear to disappear – we owe that trick to Dekker. Harry provided his deep voice and that's how we created the illusion. By the way, Sandy, we owe Bea for one steel bowl I used for the top of the head – had to put a nail

through it to keep it in place for the hat.”

Some of the men began asking about the treasure mentioned by the ghost.

“Oh, that,” Jericho began. “Just the ramblings of a very insane man, I mean, a pirate’s treasure here in the middle of the Kansas prairie. Come now, gentleman – think about it.”

They all nodded and chuckled. Cal and Red Eagle offered Jericho a thumb’s up and a nod. He returned it.

Back at the cave the three young men were exhausted. Only Jericho had difficulty falling asleep. He was already wondering about what exciting new adventure would await them when the sun rose the next morning.

THE END