

Jericho and Red Eagle

Two Boys' Adventures in the old West

Ages 10 to 14



by David Drake

New Beginnings

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

Book 1: New Beginnings

Book 2: Imposters

Book 3: The Greedy Ghost of the Golden Dutchman

Book 4: Dangerous Journeys

Book 5: The Boys' Great Adventure

[Best if read in order.]

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

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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 stage coach lines, which had become the major means for long distance travel. That 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. 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.

NOTE: The term *Indian* is used in this book because that is how they were called in 1870 Kansas.

No disrespect to our Native Americans is intended.

CHAPTER ONE

Jericho Invents Himself!

It was a warm spring evening with a light breeze from the west. There in Bickford the breeze was always from the west. The moon was nearly full and the night sky was free of clouds. Young Jericho had things on his mind. He was sitting on the roof of the two-story General Store with his legs dangling over the back side. He loved that spot. Looking east, to his left, he could watch the sun rise in the morning and looking west, to his right, he could watch the sun set at night. He wondered how the sun managed that – moving across the sky like it did. The moon was even more of a mystery because some evenings it just seemed to suddenly pop into view well up into the sky and some mornings it even returned high in the western sky after the sun had been up for as much as an hour.

Jericho wondered about many things that didn't seem to concern other youngsters. Like his age, for example. He figured he was twelve years old. It was 1870 – about that he was quite sure. He had a piece of paper that said he had been born in 1858. The month and date had been blacked out with ink. He had no idea why. It was things concerning his birthday that were on his mind that night. He had no information about his parents. He had been placed in a foundling home (orphanage) soon after his birth. After that he had been shuffled from one home to another. By the time he was ten, he became fed up with that kind of a life so he ran away. Life hadn't been easy those past two years, but then life had never had been easy for Jericho.

Granted, it had been nice to know he would have food to eat every day and that he'd have a place to sleep every night, but the grown-ups he had lived with were just not nice people. They kept reminding him that he owed them for taking him in and they expected to be repaid in services. Some made him work twelve hours a day and often switched him until he could no longer stand up for misbehaving or making mistakes. He was not allowed to attend school and had almost no time to himself to read or play or be with other children.

It was in that way he had come to be on his own in the world during the previous two years.

The point had arrived where he figured a guy needed a birthday so it was his purpose to select one. He also figured not many kids got to do that, so he took the privilege very seriously. He lay back on the roof and waited for the stars to show up from where ever they wandered off to during the day. A neighbor girl had helped him learn to read when he was seven. He liked to read when there was time and he had learned quite a bit for a boy who had never been inside a school building.

As he lay there looking up into the sky, he began reciting the list of months in calendar order – a necessary starting place he figured when deciding on a birthday.

“January, February, March . . .”

He didn't need to go any further. March, it would be because in his mind it was the ideal month. It marked the end of cold weather and the beginning of warm weather. He also liked to fly kites in the March wind and watch the grass and the sprigs on the trees begin to green up. It was like the beginning of a new year for Nature – like everything that grew was being born all over again.

Knowing the year, and having selected a month, all he needed was a date. March had 31 days in it. His birthday would need to be just a single digit – bigger numbers like 13 or 27 were for some reason disagreeable to him. It would, therefore, need to be something between the 1st and the 9th. He lay there for a long time searching for a number that had some wonderful significance for him. He loved the rainbow. It contained seven colors, but referring to a rainbow for a boy's

birthday didn't seem very manly.

Suddenly it all became very clear. It was right there above him in the night sky – his favorite constellation of stars, Leo the lion. By anybody's standards, a lion would be a great symbol for a boy, a guy, well, almost a man. Leo was made up of 9 stars so, the 9th it would be.

“March 9th, 1858.”

Everything about it felt just right. He repeated it over and over. It never got boring. It slipped off his tongue easily. Because it actually referred to things that were important in his life he would certainly never forget it. He somehow felt more complete – more worthy and equal to others, even. As he lay there, he put his hands behind his head and pretended to try it out.

“And how old are you young man?”

“Me, ma'am? I'm 12. My birthday is March 9th, 1858.”

Yes! That would work perfectly. He kicked his legs in the air with uncontrolled excitement.

He turned over onto his stomach and removed three things from his pockets – a candle, a match, and his precious piece of paper that had been his only real traveling companion as he moved from place to place. He wedged the candle into a mound of tar on the roof and lit the wick. He smoothed out the well-worn piece of paper and placed it on the roof in the light of the candle. He didn't need to read it – he had memorized it years before. There was much about it he really didn't understand, but figured if he went over it often enough, one day it would all become clear.

Some of it was printed like on a printing press, but much of it had been written in ink by someone who had very nice handwriting. Across the top in large letters was printed: The State of Kansas. There were labeled spaces and blanks for name and such. Only his first name remained – Jericho. There had been a last name, but it had been inked out. Soon after he had run away – well, truth be told, Jericho had run away many times, but this refers to the final time when he was ten – he realized he needed a last name. He decided upon Palmer and there is an interesting story about how that came about that will be related later.

On the paper, as already indicated, his birthdate had

been inked out also, leaving only the year, 1858.

Place of Birth was listed as Red Bend. Since the paper seemed to be some official document from Kansas, Jericho had always assumed it was Red Bend, Kansas.

The entries on the line marked Mother had been inked out. It looked like there had been space for two names. There was no entry on the Father line and that had always puzzled him.

The part that made the least sense to him, however, was the handwritten note at the bottom of the sheet that said, 'First of two'. As far as he had been able to determine, babies only got born once – so, the confusion.

The weight line said 6 pounds 14 ounces. He had asked about baby weights and that seemed very small – tiny even. Maybe it was why he seemed shorter than other boys his age. Even so, people had always said he was well built and strong. He had heard himself referred to as handsome when those speaking didn't know he was listening, so he figured it was true rather than just something said to flatter him to his face. He had black hair, which he wore shoulder length not so much because he liked it that way, but because haircuts were expensive and free ones hard to come by. His skin wore a beautiful natural tan.

That was it. Not much to go on, but it was all he had. Partly because of that, the paper had understandably become his most precious possession.

With all that said, his last name deserves consideration – why Palmer? Jericho had been born with a brown spot in the center of his right palm. It was no larger than a kernel of dried corn and he seldom had reason to think about it. The year he was eight, however – and he couldn't be sure why – he had spent a good deal of time thinking about a last name. People had them and he was expected to have one as well. It had become downright embarrassing not having one. There were several names left in the running the night he made his selection – Lincoln, Washington, Madison, Grant, all great men in his eyes. He had even considered 'Kansas' for a short time and Jefferson because he liked the way it sounded – Jericho Jefferson.

As he was washing his hands one evening before

supper, he took note of the spot on his palm. He rubbed his finger across it and gently pressed it like he had done hundreds of times before. In a manner similar to how Leo the Lion had jumped out at him, so had the name Palmer. It seemed right – Palm-er. He knew it was a last name even though he had never known anyone who used it. Jericho Palmer. It was set!

And so it was that twelve year old Jericho Palmer, born March 9th, 1858, in Red Bend, Kansas became the complete and defining history of that wandering boy with no home and no parents, but a determination to build a good life for himself, to learn everything he could learn, and someday, make sure no babies had to suffer through the neglect and painful experiences he had known.

Jericho had been there in Bickford, Missouri, for nearly two months. It was a very small town just south of Independence, the city in which he had lived a good part of his life as he was passed from family to family. Once on his own, he found that he did better in medium sized towns like Marshal, small enough so the streets were safe but large enough so he could blend into the background and nobody got suspicious of a boy out on his own who didn't attend school, had only one set of clothes and was often seen rummaging through the garbage bin behind the restaurant. He arrived in Bickford not knowing anything about it. He soon determined that it was way too small.

He had hitched a ride south from Marshal – his previous stop – and was dropped off in Bickford by the livery driver who made his delivery and then started back north. He had been a nice man. Jericho liked him. All of that should have been good, but it just made the boy unhappy – he was quite certain he would never have a man like that in his life and that was sad. It brought up all the old feelings about why his parents – his mother at least – had abandoned him into such a frightening life. He sometimes even wondered what was wrong with him that she hadn't wanted him. It must be something quite terrible since most children seemed to be loved from the moment they offered their first cry out into the world.

Jericho had made a decision earlier that week. He was

going to Red Bend, out west in Kansas. He understood chances were slim anybody there would know about him, but he figured a guy should at least visit the place he was born. He had pestered stage drivers for information about the town, but learned very little. It seemed to have no claim to fame although a stage line ran through it so he figured it couldn't be a totally useless place. From what he had been able to learn, it was very small with only 200 or 300 people. It sat on a gently rolling plain and was surrounded by ranches with horses and thousands of head of cattle. He was told the summers were blistering hot with blowing sand that could carve a man's eyes right out of his head, and there were cyclones (tornados) that could tear a barn into matchsticks in ten seconds. The winters often saw windblown snow fall two feet deep overnight with drifts up against buildings some ten feet tall and icicles that hung from tall building clear down to the ground. Jericho had seldom seen snow and usually just a smattering that soon melted.

Rather than being put off by such things, it sounded like a wonderful adventure to him. If Jericho was anything, he was a savvy survivor who sought out wonderful new experiences. He also possessed charm and intelligence and good looks and was an excellent worker – not a bad collection of traits for a kid who had to find ways of surviving all by himself.

He had decided there were several steps he would need to take. First, get to Kansas City to the North and west of Bickford and Independence. There were livery runs back and forth every few days. He would work his passage on one of them. Jericho was good with horses and had learned how to mend and care for tack (reins, saddles and such). It was how he supported himself, mostly for food and sometimes hand-me-down clothes.

From Kansas City, his plan was to join a small wagon train going west in the general direction of central Kansas where he understood Red Bend was located. He would just have to convince one of the wagon drivers – preferably a single man – that he ate very little, would be no trouble and could provide a great deal of valuable help. Just what kind of help that would-be, Jericho had no idea since he'd never been a part of a wagon train, but he was confident he would be able

to learn the ropes quickly. He had proved to himself over and over again that he learned new things easily and was soon performing well in whatever new work situation he found himself.

It had been thoughts about that journey that had moved him to tack down a birthday in case it came up at job interviews and such. In only one way did he mind leaving Bickford; one of the pretty women at the dance hall had seen to it he got a meal every night. He had carried her baggage to her room for her the day she arrived on the stage coach. She was a very comfortable person to be around and he had told her more things about himself than he had ever disclosed to anyone before. He couldn't explain it, but something about her seemed especially nice. He enjoyed looking at her. It was a most confusing new element in his life. Perhaps when he moved on such fully useless urges would go away.

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CHAPTER TWO

Jericho figured he should tell the dance hall lady that he was moving on – she was really the only friend he had in the world.

“I just wanted to tell you that I’m going to be leaving town. Didn’t want you to worry.”

“Where you going?”

“Heading for Kansas, a little place called Red Bend – it’s where I was born.”

“You have family out there?”

“Don’t know. One of the things I’m going to look into.”

“You have some money saved up?”

“Some – over a dollar. Never really ever found money necessary.”

She reached for her purse and removed a one dollar gold piece and placed it in his palm.

“Thanks, but I can make it on my own – like I said, I always have.”

“You don’t need to spend I, then. Make it a pocket piece to remember me by.”

Jericho searched his pockets. He removed a small arrow head.

“Here – so you can remember me.”

She accepted it and offered him her wonderful smile.

“I will treasure it, Jericho. Thank you.”

“I suppose that means we’re friends.”

“Oh, I’ve figured we’ve been friends ever since I arrived here.”

Jericho nodded. He could tell he was going to feel sad to leave her. He couldn't remember another time when he had felt that way about leaving anybody – well, there had been the girl who helped him learn to read and that nice livery driver.

She offered him a long hug.

"You take good care of yourself, now, you hear?" she said.

"Always have. You, too."

"Always have."

The shared a smile.

He picked up his bag from where he had left it in the hall outside her room. It was a carpet bag – small, and made out of sturdy material like rugs, with wooden handles by which it was carried. It contained three books, some writing paper and pencils, a jacket, a blanket, some candles and matches, a roll of fishing line, two hooks, and a hunting knife in a leather scabbard (holster for a knife).

It was a warm morning – bright sun with no clouds and no breeze to speak of. Once down on the sidewalk, he shed his shirt and rolled it up, placing it in his bag. He removed his knife and slid the scabbard onto his belt for easy access. He had spent lots of hours practicing throwing it and he had become quite good – able to hit a jar lid tacked to a tree from ten yards away. He also used it to gut and cut up fish he'd catch in streams and trim out rabbits he'd trap in meadows.

He had devised an almost foolproof method for getting rides. He would hang out on Main Street, find a livery wagon unloading, engage the driver in conversation and begin helping with the cargo. Provided the wagon was moving in the direction Jericho wanted to go he would just mount the wagon and take a seat beside the driver. That is how it had worked that morning.

"Thought I'd ride along and keep you company, Sam. I'm heading up for Kansas City. By now you know I'm good help and I won't charge you anything."

He had soon left Bickford behind – forever, he figured. Jericho could chatter on for hours without really saying anything – it was how it seemed to him most adult conversations went. He charmed himself into five different

wagon rides, managed food from most of the drivers and several days later found himself on the northwest side of Kansas City. He had been told that was where the wagon trains formed for their trips west.

He made the rounds of places that looked like they'd have information he needed.

"Next wagon train scheduled to leave here isn't for another three weeks. The wagons will begin gathering any time now. Some will have come clear across country from the East – New York, Pennsylvania, places like that."

Jericho tended to be impatient once he had his mind made up about something.

"Thanks. Can't wait around that long."

"There's a stage that leaves out every morning at six."

"Don't have money for that."

He walked away a bit disheartened, but not beaten. Jericho never felt beaten. The man he'd been talking to at the supply store called after him.

"Son! Son!"

Jericho turned to look. The man motioned to him. He returned on the trot.

"Zeke! He's leaving out west in the morning. He delivers supplies to an army outpost. Makes the run once a week – food mostly I think – flour, salt, lard. He's been known to take a rider. Not sure what arrangements he makes with them."

"Thanks. Where will I find this Zeke?"

"He has a room over the Tankard – it's a saloon down on Pitt Street."

The man pointed. Jericho nodded.

"Has a green sign hanging out from the front door."

"I see it. This Zeke have a good reputation, does he?"

"Son, nobody who who's associated with the Tankard had a good reputation. When it comes to kids I imaging he's all quite harmless. Can't guarantee he'll have anything to do with you, you understand. By the way he drives a covered wagon. Has the word, Faraday, painted on the side. No idea why."

"You've been very helpful, Sir. I have nothing to give you in return."

“You’ve shared your wonderful smile with me, son. That’s more than payment in full. Be careful. I hear there have been Indians moving back and forth to the south across the border between Kansas and the Oklahoma Territory.”

“Dangerous?”

“I haven’t heard anything about such things, but I’d still be cautious.”

“Sometimes people mistake me for being an Indian – my black hair, dark eyes and naturally tanned skin. I’d probably fit right in. What do you think?”

“I hadn’t thought about it, but I guess I can see what you mean.”

“Well, thanks again – Zeke at the Tankard.”

He turned and walked south along Pitt Street. It was going on five o’clock. Jericho’s stomach was whining at him. He stepped up onto the wide plank sidewalk in front of the building and peeked in one of the large front windows. There were lots of men and a few pretty ladies. He wondered if one of them was Zeke. Jericho’s experiences in saloons had not been at all good. He usually found himself back out on the street almost before he entered – often not in what could be considered a friendly or gentle manner.

He moved around to the side of the building where a narrow set of stairs led up to the second floor. He ventured up to the top carting his bag with him. There was a small landing allowing the door to be pulled out toward him. Jericho figured there had to be a number of rooms in such a large space so he pulled the door open just enough so he could see inside. He had been right – there was a narrow, dark hallway with two doors off to each side.

What had not been right was the large man leaving one of the front rooms and walking directly toward him. The man stopped, hands on his waist. He wore a full beard so Jericho couldn’t tell if he seemed pleased or displeased to see him up there. He had learned early in life that in situations that offered an uncertain outcome he needed to take the offensive – to speak or act first trying to stack the deck in his favor.

“Sir. Perhaps you can help me. I’m trying to find my Uncle Zeke. I’ve never actually seen him, but I understand he may live up here.”

“Zeke? Yeah. Last door on the left – to the back. Not sure if he’s there. He leaves out for the post early Monday mornings – tomorrow – so he won’t be drinkin’ this evening. Sometimes he eats over at Rosie’s across the street. I imagine his door is open. Want me to tell him you were here?”

“No. I think it’s best if I sort of surprise him. Thanks for your help.”

The big man waited by the outside door while Jericho knocked at Zeke’s. There was no answer.

“I’ll go check out Rosie’s, I guess,” Jericho said.

They walked down the stairs together, the man leading the way.

“Can you describe Uncle Zeke to me? Like I said, I’ve never met him.”

“Skinny as a rail. Dark brown hair. Mustache. Straw hat. Six gun holstered on the left – he’s a lefty. Always wears a black leather vest. Skin looks like leather.”

“I should be able to find him. Thanks again.”

He took time to slip into his shirt thinking that was more proper for a young man in a place of business.

The big man turned right and Jericho crossed the street. He wasn’t used to entering restaurants through the front door. He was usually at the back looking for food. He went inside and stood to the right of the door surveying the crowd. He had never seen so many skinny men with mustaches in one place at a time in his life. Now, the holster on the left was another thing. He was sitting alone in a rear corner.

Jericho made his way through the maze of tables and people and took a seat at the table across from him.

“You don’t know me, Sir.”

“You’re right. I don’t know you. Skedaddle!”

“If I did that, Sir, you’d never get to know what a loveable and helpful boy I am.”

The hint of a smile crossed Zeke’s face. He remained silent – both good signs, Jericho figured.

“I am known to be very good help and can keep a conversation going with just about anybody, making me a very good traveling companion. I can also keep quiet if that’s your preference. I understand you are traveling west in the

morning. Lucky for you I am also traveling west.”

“Lucky?”

“Yes, Sir. I’m good with horses, used to sleeping on the ground, eat very little, strong for my age, and honest and trustworthy to a fault. I’m just what you need, you see. Where shall I meet you – and when?”

“You any good with a rifle?”

“I suppose that question can’t be answered until I try to fire one. I’m excellent at throwing a knife.”

He removed his knife and handed it across the table to Zeke.

“Pretty nice,” the man said hefting it and examining the interesting carving on the handle. He passed it back. Jericho continued.

“Why you ask about the gun?”

“Could be Indians roaming the territory we’ll be traveling.”

Jericho noted the ‘we’ll’ rather than ‘I’d’, and figured he was well on his way to Red Bend.

“Are you just assuming they are unfriendly or do you have information to that effect?”

“Injuns is Injuns.”

It seemed to be his full and complete answer. Jericho thought it was shortsighted to think everybody in any group was bad. He always figured people were good and helpful until they proved they weren’t. It seemed to simplify life – just trust folks so you didn’t always have to be worrying about them.

“You got a name, kid.”

“Jericho Palmer. I’m twelve years old. My birthday is March 9th.”

“Why you going west by yourself?”

“I have relatives in Red Bend. Lost my parents so I’m heading out to find family.”

Zeke winced, as if sorrowed by the story. Jericho had always been able to spin a tale on a moment’s notice offering all the appropriate facial expressions to seal the deal. Not that he made a habit of lying – quite the opposite, in fact – but when he needed to protect himself he would do whatever was necessary.

“Six at the livery behind the Tankard. Not much room for baggage.”

“I travel very light, Sir.”

Jericho stood to leave.

“You ate?” Zeke asked.

“Last night.”

Zeke raised his hand to catch the attention of the waitress.

“Steak and tater for the boy.”

He turned to Jericho with a question.

“How you like it?”

The question was not clear.

“On a plate, I guess.”

Zeke laughed out loud.

“Make it medium, Rosie.”

Without really sharing anything about themselves, they managed to talk for the half hour it took Jericho to eat. Jericho thanked the man and prepared to leave.

“My wagon’s Ferguson – name on the side. Be there by six – Ferguson don’t wait for nobody.”

Jericho would be there. To make certain, he located Ferguson, arranged his blanket under the wagon and slept there. It was the most food his stomach had enjoyed at once in many months. It was the first steak he had ever eaten. Zeke suggested salting everything and he offered a dollop of butter for the baked potato. It seemed odd – really nice, but odd – when grownups acted like they were taking care of him just because they wanted to.

It was a wonderful set of memories to carry with him into sleep that night – the conversation, the food, the promise of a ride.

Jericho had not been asleep long when he was awakened by unexpected noises. He turned onto his side and soon understood they were coming from men’s feet, shuffling through the straw that covered the livery’s dirt floor. His first impression was that others were leaving out in the middle of the night. That soon changed. The two of them began talking between them.

“Get our team backed in and hitched up. We’ll reload his cargo into our rig once out of town.”

'Thieves,' Jericho said to himself.

He needed a plan. Fortunately, Jericho's brain was never more than the width of a hair away from a plan.

Without a sound, he removed the rope from his bag and carefully tied the wheels to the box of the wagon so they could not turn. Up front he removed the pin that held the tongue to the front axil and reinserted it from the bottom of its hole so, if they did get hitched up and moving, the pin would fall out, disengaging the team from the wagon.

With the men busy hitching their team to the wagon, Jericho slipped between the rear wheels and into the darkness. He needed to alert Zeke, but by the time he could get up the stairs and down the hall to his room, the bad guys might already be gone.

Zeke's room was on the back facing the stable. Jericho needed to get his attention. Zeke's window was open. Jericho moved silently through the deep shadows and positioned himself ten yards from the rear of the saloon. He took out his knife, aimed carefully and made the throw of his life. It entered Zeke's room. Assuming it didn't land in Zeke's chest it should get his attention. He hadn't given the plan all the thought it deserved. He was relieved when he saw Zeke appear at the window.

By then one of the men was in the driver's seat and tried to get the team to move out. The wagon would not budge. The men cursed. Jericho stepped out into the moonlight waving his hands over his head.

"They're trying to steal your wagon, Zeke."

He immediately ducked back into the darkness to hide.

Two shots rang out. The man on the wagon clutched his shoulder and fell to the ground. The other man helped him to his feet and out into the darkness. Lights went on in the windows of the surrounding buildings. A few moments later Zeke appeared his gun still in his hand. Other men gathered.

"So?" Zeke asked looking at Jericho.

He explained about sleeping under the wagon, the noise that had awakened him and what he had done to sabotage the wagon. The men were impressed. Zeke pulled him close with an arm across his shoulders, something that had seldom happened before in the boy's life.

The sheriff arrived with the wounded man in tow.

“This the man, sonny?”

“Yes, sir. The other man was bald, walked with a limp, and carried a rifle with silver trim on the stock.”

A deputy arrived with his rope around a second man – bald, walked with a limp and carried a rifle with silver trim on the stock.

After Jericho identified them both, the deputy led them away. The sheriff walked to where Zeke and Jericho stood offering his hand to Jericho. It was a first for the boy – to be offered a handshake. He managed quite well he thought.

“Come back and see me in about six years and there’ll be a silver star waiting for you if you’re interested.”

He leaned in to take a closer look.

“You are white, ain’t you?”

“Never been told any different.”

He pulled up his sleeve as if to offer proof and spoke hoping to make a joke.

“Sure not green or orange!”

The men laughed. The sheriff patted him on his head. They left.

The sheriff’s reference was to making sure Jericho was not an Indian. Indians were treated very poorly even by good folks back then.

Jericho and Zeke were left alone.

“I’m thinking you better come up and spend the rest of the night in my room. All I got to offer is the floor.”

“I’ve spent most of my nights on the floor, sir. If you’ll feel safer with me by your side, I’ll gladly come up.”

They exchanged a smile. Zeke returned the boy’s knife.

“Get your bag.”

They walked toward the stairs.

“By the way,” Zeke began. “About that knife that only missed me by two feet.”

“Yeah. Sorry about that. Didn’t consider the possible danger until it was well on its way.”

“It was fast thinking, I’ll tell you that. Completely silent and, of course, I’d recognize it as yours immediately. You’re a very clever lad, even if I don’t for a minute buy your story

about what you're up to."

"Then I'd say you are a very clever person, as well. I'd hate for your suspicious nature to come between us."

CHAPTER THREE

The following morning Jericho was up with the roosters and back down at the stable. He put on his jacket against the chilly morning and soon had the wagon ready for a safe journey.

"I already checked the ropes and latches on the back," Jericho said as Zeke arrived a few minutes before six. "The sheriff must have come back and took the bad guy's horses away. Show me yours and I'll get 'em hitched up."

They worked together and had things ready to roll in less than ten minutes.

"I noticed the canvas that covers the top is loose – not pulled tight. Do we need to fix that?"

"New canvas. First rain will tighten it up – shrinks. If a new canvas is stretched tight, it's likely to split."

Jericho nodded. He loved to learn new things. He continued.

"One of the reins on the sorrel is about to wear through at the ring." I can repair that when we stop for the night. How long a trip is it to the army post?"

"Three days barring trouble."

"Like what kind of trouble?"

"Horse goes lame or a broken axle, wheel, Indians."

"Broken Indians?" Jericho asked with a smile.

Jericho had noticed that Zeke's face was not used to breaking smiles, but had managed one at his little joke. He had several days to whip the man's face into shape. It was one of the boy's best things – making people happy – and he was well aware of it. There had been times when he was

deeply bothered by the fact he could do that for others, but often found it hard to do it for himself – be happy. Most of those times were behind him since he had been out on his own. Somehow that seemed backward – being happier when he was away from the people who supposed to make a good life for him.

“Keep your eye out for jackrabbits, boy. We’ll get us one to roast for supper tonight.”

“I’ve heard about them – never seen one. Very large I hear.”

“Back legs as big as hams,” Zeke said, kidding – at least Jericho hoped his was kidding. He figured it would take a cannon to kill an animal that big and a two-man cross cut saw to gut it. He smiled at his own humor, but didn’t share it.

At noon Zeke pulled out some jerky and hardtack (dry biscuits) and set the sack between them on the seat. Jericho had never had either. He watched Zeke chew of a piece of jerky and work on it in his mouth for some time. He tried the hardtack first.

“You new to this, I guess,” Zeke said.

“To . . .?”

“Jerky and hardtack.”

“Yes. How did you know?”

“Always chew a piece of jerky first. Gets the juices flowing in your mouth. Then go after the dry biscuit. Likely to choke to death on the dry hardtack when you do it backwards.”

“Thank you. Seems like I have a lot to learn about living out west.”

No response was needed and none was given.

“You ever handled a team?”

“If you mean drove a team, no, Sir. I’ve brushed them and washed them down. Had very little chance to ride, but I can do that.”

“When you finish eating you can take the reins.”

“Really? Thank you. I’ll need direction.”

“You talk like a teacher, boy.”

“Thank you.”

Again, Zeke smiled. He hadn’t intended it as a compliment, but figured the boy’s response said good things

about him.

“Your bag’s heavy for its size,” Zeke said, really asking about its contents without being outright snoop.

“All my stuff. Usual boy stuff I guess and some books. I like to read. When I finish one I try to trade it off to somebody for a different one.”

By mid-afternoon Jericho had mastered the basics of handling a team. He could speed them up, slow them down, turn them one way and the other. He figured once he learned to back them, he’d have it all down pat.

“There’s a creek about two miles up ahead. We’ll let the horses drink and rest a while.”

“I have a question, Zeke.”

“Yeah?”

“What do we do when a prairie fire starts chasing us?”

Zeke thought it was an odd question and put on a puzzled face. Jericho pointed behind them. The breeze was from the east and there was suddenly a wall of flames ten feet tall racing across the tall dry grass toward them.

“Flip the reins hard and get these animals going.”

Jericho figured he understood. He did as he had been instructed and the horses responded immediately. They were soon moving so fast that the wagon bounced off the ground with every tiny rise. He suddenly understood why the wooden crates in back had been tied in place.

“You want the reins,” Zeke?”

“You’re doing just fine. You need to hold them tighter on the gallop. The horses tend to strain against the bit when they run.”

“The fire?” Jericho asked, understanding his full attention needed to be on what was out front.

“You’re keeping a good gap. It’s hardly gaining on us at all.”

“Gaining doesn’t sound all that good to me.”

“My point was that we’ll be at the creek before it will.”

Jericho nodded that he understood.

“What do I need to know about crossing a creek?”

“We won’t cross it. We’ll stop out in the middle. That way if the fire jumps it, we’ll be safe in the water. If it doesn’t, we’ll move on across and continue on our way.”

“You seem so calm about it, Zeke.”

“You see any advantage in being upset about it?”

“Well, no. Thanks for that.”

The fire was gaining on them, mostly getting ahead of them from both sides as the afternoon breeze from the south picked up. Zeke was more unsettled about it all than he let on. If the fire closed on that wind they'd have no place to go.

The horses seemed to understand the danger and pretty much regulated themselves. Jericho kept to his business, yelling encouragement to the team the whole way. He noticed that when he let the reins go loose the horses seemed to run more comfortably. They were a strong team, well matched in strength. He had read in a book about Wild Bill Hickok that it was important to have equal strength on each side of a team, or the weaker of the two would wear out more quickly.

“I see the creek!” Jericho called out.

“Give the team its head and it will slow down to a safe speed when we reach the water.”

Jericho understood and hoped the horses did, also. He was not entirely comfortable about trusting his life to a couple of run-away horses. He was soon to learn it had been exactly the right thing to have done.

A few minutes later they had pulled to stop mid-stream. The fire burned right up to the edge of the water behind them and died out. The horses were already drinking and content just to stand in the cool of the rushing water.

“Okay, move us out and up onto the other side. Pull us over to that grove of trees, yonder.”

It was what Jericho had figured they would do, but didn't mention it. He discovered he was shaking – toes to scalp, shaking.

“I seem to be shaking. Sorry about that.”

“No sorry to it. You did great. A few nerves just help a guy stay alert.”

Jericho understood it had been a very kind way of telling him that his reaction had been normal. It was times like that Jericho wondered if, just maybe, he still needed an adult in his life.

Zeke was different from most adults that had been a

part of Jericho's life. It was hard for him to describe. He wasn't gentle and yet he wasn't rough or hurtful. He provided good lessons, but never in anger – never with put-downs or a raised voice. He was patient – a trait he had almost never seen in a man. He tended toward being kind rather than unkind. He was like a man's version of the dance hall girl. There was one definite difference: she smelled wonderful, Zeke not so much. Jericho smiled about his comparison.

About an hour before sundown they stopped for the night making camp beneath a rock ledge. Jericho took care of the horses. Zeke built a campfire.

"I'll be back," Zeke said, heading off into the tall grass with his rifle. A few minutes later a shot rang out and he returned with a jackrabbit in tow.

It was what Jericho figured was going on and he had fashioned a spit over the fire. The rabbit was soon sputtering toward well done over the flames.

"One shot, one rabbit. You must be an excellent shot, Zeke."

"I've always got by. In the morning, I'll let you try the rifle if you like."

"That would be great. Like I said, I've never been close enough to a gun to pull a trigger. I've read about it and think I may have the general idea – sighting, easy squeeze, lead the animal's path if it's moving. Things like that."

"I guess we'll see how well it works for you."

Many men would have put down the idea of assuming one could learn enough about shooting from a book, but Zeke didn't. He'd let the boy see for himself.

"I'm very good with a knife. I guess I told you that."

"And proved that you can at least hit a two-foot square window opening from twenty yards."

They smiled remembering the nearly disastrous experience the night before.

Jericho picked up a four-inch-thick piece of wood from the pile he had assembled to feed the fire overnight. It was less than a foot long. He tossed it to Zeke.

"Toss it high up into the air – fifteen or twenty feet or so," he said.

Zeke seemed intrigued. He swung it back and forth

several times and then let it fly. Jericho flipped his knife from its scabbard, grasped it by the end of the eight-inch blade and flung it into the air.

Zeke walked to pick up the chunk of wood.

“Impressive, young man. Almost dead center. I’d say you’ve been practicing.”

“Yes, sir. The dead center part was just dumb luck but, I seldom miss such a target completely.”

“You seem to have some natural talent. It will probably transfer to a rifle.”

“I hope you’re right. I understand out west a boy is expected to be a good shot by the time he’s ten. I missed that deadline.”

They both sat back down at the fire.

“So, you say you’re an orphan. You going to share anything else with me?”

Oddly, it was the first time anybody had ever asked that question – cared enough to ask it, Jericho figured. The dance hall lady had just accepted him for what he was – a twelve-year-old boy his own. She never asked for anything further. That felt comfortable in one way and bothersome in another. He felt special when people wanted to know more about him. It also made him feel sad that he knew so little about himself, so it was embarrassing not to have things to relate.

“I have a paper,” Jericho said. “It’s all I really know about my background.”

He removed it from his bag, unfolded it and handed it to Zeke. Zeke looked it over.

“This is somewhat strange.”

“What? All the blacked-out space?”

“Well, yes, that, but down near the bottom. The letters W M I O.”

“One of the women I lived with said she thought those might be the initials of the doctor who delivered me. You think something else?”

“The letters stand for White, Mexican, Indian and Other. None of them are circled.”

“Probably because I was obviously white, don’t you think?”

“Probably, I suppose.”

It was not the 100 percent, completely certain response Jericho expected, but he didn't follow up on it.

"You've lived several places I guess."

"Twelve that I can remember. No telling how many before then when I was a baby."

"I take it you didn't like those places?"

"You are correct. Hated them scalp to toenails and hip to hip would be closer to the truth."

"Zeke didn't ask anything further. Jericho was happy for that. Talking about such things only brought up sad times he wanted to just leave behind him.

Zeke shared a few things about himself and they turned in for the night. He showed Jericho how to lay a fire so it would burn all night. The following morning, he was amazed that there were still low flames leaping up into the darkness. Zeke spent more time helping him learn about shooting the rifle than Jericho had thought he would. He found he was very good. It didn't seem to surprise Zeke one bit. The man wouldn't admit the book learning had helped, but then he didn't deny it, either.

They were on their way again an hour after the sun rose.

"I'm turning south about noon today. Red Bend is on west and a bit north. Probably ten days walking. I'm not really sure. You coming with me or going your own way?"

"I'd like to go with you. You're the most comfortable man I've ever known. But I need to keep to my plan, I think. I can't thank you enough for your kindness and the things you've taught me. I'll miss you."

"Well you know my route – west every Monday and back to KC every Thursday. You're always welcome you know. I've enjoyed getting to know you, boy – I guess that's Jericho, isn't it?"

Jericho smiled. It was as if suddenly the man was thinking of him like he was real person – not just another boy. It made him feel special and more than a little grown up.

They ate together at noon and Zeke insisted Jericho take a sizeable portion of the food he had along – seemed like he must have had that planned from the very beginning since there was also a shoulder bag for him. Zeke was a good man.

Zeke offered his hand for a shake and Jericho headed

off to follow the sun west. He figured he'd walk on for eight days and then begin looking for people who could head him in a more exact direction to Red Bend.

His feet had grown to be almost too big for his boots. A new pair was on his list for the near future. When he stopped to rest, he removed them and massaged his feet. He had one pair of stockings and they each had holes in the heels. He had been meaning to mend them.

Five days passed. (Four of them with newly mended stockings!) He had come upon a road of sorts – two side-by-side wagon tracks through the grass. It could have been the stage route although he had not met one – or anyone, for that matter. He figured he was probably south of the stage road since Zeke had generally just headed southwest out of Kansas City – mostly heading out across the wide fields of grass rather than following roads or trails.

It had been interesting to Jericho that the eastern part of Kansas – close to Missouri – was generally rolling land with lush green hills and valleys of trees and grass. It hadn't been until a full day's journey out that they hit the really flat territory – the way he had been led to believe all of Kansas looked. He was sure flat was easier to walk than hilly would have been.

He approached a narrow stream. He had read they were sometimes called rills or brooks when they were so small and he was pleased he knew that. It was late afternoon and he figured it would be a good spot to make camp for the night. His sudden realization he was going to be spending the night alone in the middle of nowhere produced at least the hint of uneasiness. When he reached the water's edge he noticed a person walking the trail toward him from the other side of the stream. He was still some hundred yards away so he really couldn't make out much about him.

Jericho knelt in the high grass, hoping to get a good look at whoever it was before he had a chance to see him. Simultaneously, the other person did the same. Jericho stood up. The other person stood up and continued to approach the stream – slowly.

Presently they found themselves looking at each other across the ten-foot span of shallow water. Jericho was astonished at what he saw. It was a boy his age – an Indian

boy. But more than that the boy looked exactly like Jericho!

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CHAPTER FOUR

They each just stood there looking across the stream. Jericho, shirtless and barefoot by that time of day, was still holding his bag at his side. The other boy was dressed in summer, Indian garb with a quiver and bow hanging from his shoulder. He was pulling a travois (two long sticks with shorter sticks tied between them on which supplies were carried. The back end dragged on the ground. Often pulled behind horses. Google for picture). He released it to the ground. Humorously, at the same instant they made loose fists and rubbed their eyes in disbelief. Jericho spoke first. It was profound.

“Hi!”

“Hi!”

“You’re an Indian.”

“You’re not.”

“You have my face.”

“No, you have my face.”

They chuckled nervously.

That was followed by an extended moment of silence. Jericho broke it again.

“I was making camp for the night. I have food. Come and join me.”

The Indian lad picked up the travois, held it above his head to keep it dry, as he waded the stream. He set it down and walked to within several feet of Jericho. He reached out and touched Jericho’s long, straight hair and cheek. Thinking it might be some expected Indian greeting ritual, Jericho repeated the motions. The other boy wore his black hair in in

long, thick braids tied with leather bands.

They chuckled again, partly from the awkwardness of the situation and partly from nervous excitement. The Indian boy spoke, using very good English.

“I am called Red Eagle.”

“That’s a great name. I’m just plain Jericho. I’m from back east – the Kansas City area – Missouri.”

“My people live south in the Indian Territory (later to become Oklahoma).”

He looked around.

“I see no family.”

“Got no family. Just me. I’m heading west.”

“Same for me.”

“No family or heading west?” Jericho asked for clarification.

“Both, like you.”

Jericho asked the obvious question although it didn’t come out quite right.

“Where did you get that face?”

Red Eagle smiled a wonderful smile.

“I was about to ask you the same thing. Couldn’t figure the right words.”

“As you can see, I don’t always wait for the right words I just start somewhere and see what comes out.”

Red Eagle broadened his smile and laughed out loud.

Jericho put down his bag and offered his hand for a shake. Red Eagle was clearly puzzled as showed on his wrinkled forehead.

“A shake – shake hands?”

“I do not know very much about the White Man’s ways.”

Jericho reached out and took his new acquaintance’s right hand and demonstrated how it was done. Red Eagle nodded and held the hand way too long, not knowing when to let go.

“Now we let go,” Jericho said.

They saw them at the same moment. They looked into each other’s palms. They looked back into each other’s puzzled faces.

“The spot,” they said as one.

“We really need to talk,” Jericho said.

“I think our faces and our spots have already done the talking,” Red Eagle said.

Jericho nodded, but as far as he was concerned there was lots of talking left to be talked.

“Let’s make camp,” he said. “We’ll need a fire – already turning chilly. I have a blanket. I’ll share.”

“I have blanket.”

Red Eagle motioned for Jericho to be quiet. Jericho complied although he didn’t understand. In one smooth, well-practiced motion, Red Eagle slowly removed his bow and fitted an arrow into the string. He whispered something in his language. Swish! A rabbit fell some thirty yards away.

“Good food,” he said.

“Good shooting! That was remarkable!”

“Remarkable?”

“Very good.”

Red Eagle nodded.

“I learned your language from a missionary,” he offered. “This year she was going to teach me to read your words, but that won’t happen.”

“Why not?”

“Dry lightning – it struck the grass at our village at night and everybody died in the fire.”

“You don’t look dead. Sorry, that didn’t come out right.”

“I had things to think about and had followed the stream a long distance from the village. I was asleep, I guess. When I returned the next morning, I saw the destruction.”

“Your parents?”

“I never had parents. I lived with the old women. I had decided it was time for me to set out on my own.”

“Me too – the setting out part not the old women part.”

Their sad expressions brightened a bit at Jericho’s remark. They moved their belongings to a spot alongside a grove of trees through which the stream ran.

Jericho built a fire on the dried mud bank of the stream. Red Eagle tended to the rabbit. There were half a dozen large potatoes in the bag from Zeke. He removed two and was preparing to arrange them right in the fire to bake. Red Eagle reached out and took one. With his knife, he cut a small round hole all the way though its center and explained.

“Bake much faster – outside in and inside out.”

“Thanks. I had never thought of that. Very clever.”

An hour later they were leaning back against tree trunks and feasting on rabbit and almost baked potatoes.

“You said something to yourself just before you let fly with that arrow,” Jericho said really asking why and what.

“It is proper to thank the animal for giving up its life so we may eat.”

“Fascinating!”

Red Eagle gave him a puzzled look.”

“Fascinating means really interesting.”

Red Eagle nodded, not understanding why that should seem fascinating. It was just always done.

“Can you teach me Cherokee?”

“Depends on how smart you are, but probably not in one evening.”

It brought up the next important question between them. Would they remain together or go their separate ways.

“Do you know where you’re going,” Jericho asked.

“A town name of Red Bend. West of here.”

Jericho decided things were getting far too weird. Way too many coincidences between them. He momentarily wondered if he might be dreaming. It was time to straighten out a few things between them.

“How do you know about Red Bend?”

Red Eagle scooted over to his travois and searched a leather bag. He removed a piece of paper and handed it to Jericho.

“My teacher read it to me many times. I know what it says. Do you read?”

“Yeah. I read.”

Jericho ran his finger down the page as he read to himself. It was the same form he had, from the ‘State of Kansas’ printed across the top to the four letters at the bottom – W M I O. He removed his own sheet and handed it to Red Eagle.

They studied each other’s faces for a long time, then Jericho moved closer to his friend’s side and began pointing back and forth between the two sheets. He pointed out the similarities and the differences.

"This says name. On the line on mine it says Jericho. On yours it says Jacob. All the same things are inked out on both sheets. At the bottom mine says, 'First of two,' and yours says, 'Second of two'. Now I understand what that means."

Red Eagle shrugged indicating he didn't understand.

"First of two means I was the first born of two children. Before, I wondered if it might mean I had a younger brother, but then I realized that wouldn't have been known at the time I was born. Second of two, means you were the second born."

"And you know what it means?"

"It has to mean that my version of our face was born first and your version of our face was born second. We're twins. You're my little brother. I'm your older brother, probably by just a few minutes or so."

"You really think so?"

Jericho remained silent giving Red Eagle time to think it through.

"But I am Cherokee and you are White Man."

"Yeah. That's a bit of a problem, I suppose. It can't be, of course. We both have to be the same. Do you know about how you came to be a part of your village or people or whatever?"

"The missionary brought me. She found me when I was a tiny baby."

"Found you?"

"That's all I know about it."

"Tell me this. Put it all together. Our faces, our papers, no family, both found when were new babies – what does that just have to tell us?"

"I see what you are saying. It is troubling."

"Why?"

"I am proud to be Cherokee, but what if I am not?"

"I see. The name on your birth certificate does call you Jacob."

"Jacob is not Cherokee. Jacob is White Man."

"Here's an idea. Maybe our Cherokee mother wanted the white man's life for us – more accepted in our society – so she gave us both white man's names."

"Do you think we can find out for sure?"

"I'm on my way to Red Bend to see what I can learn. I

imagine that's why you are going, too."

"Yes. I'm not sure what I thought I would find. Even if you are right about what the papers say is true, there is one thing I do not understand."

As if reading his mind, Jericho said it.

"Why we are both on our way out there at the same time and how we just happened to meet here in the middle of nowhere."

"That is it."

"Have you wanted to leave your village for a long time?"

"Yes. I guess it was fine when I was very young – I knew no different. But since seven or eight years I started feeling out of place. Other boys had parents. They started treating me badly – teasing me because I was different – saying I was bad – an outsider – somebody to stay away from. When I reach twelve I decided I finally had the skills to make it on my own."

"Just about the same thing happened to me. I admit it seems like an unlikely coincidence – meeting like this – but at the same time it does make sense – the first age when we believed we could make it on our own and all. We both knew where we needed to go."

"My people have a saying: 'Many things do not have an explanation'."

"Like, we just have to accept some things because the reason can't be known?"

It had been a question to make sure he understood.

"Yes. Like that. You have such a saying, too."

"I had a woman friend who used to say, 'What is, is'. I suppose it means close to the same thing. I think we have every reason to believe we are brothers even if we don't know the whole story and can't understand the Indian/White part of it all. Nobody has ever questioned that I am white. Have they questioned that you are Indian?"

"No, never that I know of."

Jericho reached out his arm and held it beside Red Eagle's. They ran their hands up and down each other's arms. They chuckled somewhat uneasily.

"It is the first time I have touched a white boy."

"And the first time I have touched an Indian. Not much

difference as far as I can tell.”

“Our skin is exactly the same color. I suppose it is sort of in between, isn’t it – Indian and white, I mean?”

Red Eagle ran his hand up and down both arms as if needing to prove it one more time. He nodded.

“Maybe we will find our story in Red Bend,” Jericho said. “Maybe we won’t. I’m not sure that even matters to me.”

“It is all so new, you understand. Even though it does make sense, it does not. It will take time for my soul to feel comfortable with it.”

“That seems reasonable. For what it’s worth, I think it’s the greatest thing ever to have Cherokee Indian for a brother. You have so many things to teach me. You know all about riding, I suppose.”

Red Eagle nodded. It was the very first time in his life that he had ever considered that the differences between people could be a wonderful thing. It would be still something else his soul would have to get used to.

“And you can teach me to read the White Man’s words?”

It had really been more a statement – a wonderful revelation – than a question. Still, Jericho nodded. The idea produced a long smile and extended gaze into each other’s eyes.

“I suppose that without saying it we have agreed to head for Red Bend together,” Jericho said.

“It seems that way to me – Same Face.”

Red Eagle bent over in laughter holding his belly.

As laughter will do, Jericho began chuckling, also, even though he had no idea why.

“Explain?” he asked, finally.

“Well, if I also have a White Man’s name – Jacob – it only seems right that you have a Cherokee name – Same Face.”

“I love that. Question?”

“All right.”

“Do Cherokee guys hug each other?”

“Yes, and we hug girls, too.”

“Seems to me brand new twelve-year-old brothers should at least share a hug.”

They stood. It lasted a long time. It was the most wonderful hug either had ever experienced and neither wanted it to end. In a way, it never would.

The moon was high in the sky before they stopped talking and finally tried to settle in to sleep.

In the morning, they figured they had slept, but only because they woke up. For breakfast, they heated slabs of salt pork that had been in Jericho's bag. By the time they were packing up, making ready to leave, the sun told them it was still early morning

"What do you call the device you drag along behind you," Jericho asked.

"Device? Ah, travois." (tră voy)

"Seems pretty big for the small amount of stuff you brought along."

"You never know what wonderful things you may find along the way – like you, Same Face."

"You're going to pull me?"

"I'm sure I could if you needed to be pulled. I meant your bag."

"Okay. Fine. We can trade off pulling it. You have any way of knowing where Red Bend is?"

"West!"

"Big help."

They exchanged a grin and stepped off following their long shadows with the sun at their backs.

"I have reason to believe it's five or six days walk," Jericho said.

Conversation flowed easily back and forth between them. They had so many questions for each other. Some could be answered and some could not. It soon became clear that they both liked to be helpful to others. Whether they shared that because of some inborn trait or that it arose from their need to keep the people around them happy so they would be well taken care of, would not be known. Their favorite fruit was plums – not at the top of many guy's lists. They both liked to run and swim. Neither liked wrestling or other forms of fighting – well, truth be told, neither had ever had a friend with whom to wrestle. They both liked to think about unsolvable questions like how many stars were in the

sky, how fast could man travel and survive, did the universe ever end, why different groups of people seemed to hate each other – things like that. Things quickly became very comfortable between them.

The questions became more personal.

“You ever cry anymore?” Jericho asked.

Red Eagle became uncomfortable so Jericho offered his own answer.

“I cry sometimes when I’m really sad about things. I used to cry myself to sleep almost every night.”

“Really? Me, too! Cherokee men don’t cry.”

“Neither do White Men, except they do of course. Sort of dumb for men to contend they don’t when they do.”

“Contend?”

“Keep up the story.”

“I guess I can contend to my brother that I still cry sometimes. I cried all day when I got back to my village and saw what had happened. I have never been so frightened and so sad in my life. I was alone and terri . . . what’s the word?”

“Terrified. Been there. Felt that, too.”

Jericho smiled to himself thinking he would have to do a better job of offering definitions for words. He felt bad for Red Eagle and didn’t know what to say. He tried. Jericho always tried.

“I can’t even imagine how terrible that must have been. I’m really sorry you know.”

Inside, Jericho felt some guilty because he knew he would have never found his brother if that terrible thing had not happened and he was so very happy that they were together.

The sun was straight above them before they realized the morning had passed. They were hungry.

“I have apples,” Red Eagle said. “Let us stop a minute and I will get them out for us.”

The search was interrupted.

“Up ahead,” Jericho said, pointing. “A cloud of dust. At least one rider – maybe more – coming toward us at a full gallop. I vote we hide behind the boulders over there.”

“Vote?”

“Later, on that. Two kids out on their own raises way

too many questions. If they are 'do gooders' they'll want to cart us off with them and see we're put some place to be taken care of. I've had way too much of that. If they're bad guys, who knows what they might do – make slaves of us maybe. Either way, I think we should hide from them.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Red Eagle nodded, agreeing that hiding was the wise move. Hunching low, they hurried off to hide in the tall grass ten yards north of the trail.

As the cloud of dust got closer they could see it was a single rider. He was slumped way down in the saddle, his arms hugging the horse's neck, the reins flying free in the air.

"I think he's hurt," Red Eagle said.

"Looks like that. Should we do something?"

Red Eagle began calling out – not words. It was the sound of a horse – whinnying. Loud. He pulled Jericho back down into the grass when he moved to stand up.

"First, we wait until the horse stops. Then we watch the rider and decide if he is dangerous to us."

"You speak 'horse', little brother?"

Red Eagle smiled.

"I imitate horse sounds. No idea what it means, but I do know horses will stick together if given the chance. It is a way we trick wild horses to come in close enough to be roped. This one is probably scared or hurt, still running like that with nothing chasing it. I hope it can hear over the noise from its hooves."

He offered the sounds again – still quite loudly – longer that time.

"It often takes great patience."

As he was finishing his whispered explanation, the horse slowed and stopped, looking in their direction. The rider's arms fell to the side of the horse's neck. Red Eagle made the sound again – quieter that time. The horse took

several steps in their direction, offering his own whinny in return and moved its head up and down. It was the most fascinating thing Jericho had ever witnessed.

"I will stand first," Red Eagle said. "Slow and easy. Once I get to him you come."

Jericho understood and remained on his knees while Red Eagle approached the horse. At first it backed up a few steps and made a move as if it were going to bolt and leave. He spoke to the horse in Indian – well, in Cherokee, Jericho assumed. The animal calmed and moved in to nuzzle Red Eagle's chest.

Red Eagle calmly motioned to Jericho who slowly made his way to his side. He looked at the man's face – mid-thirties he figured.

"Looks like we got dead, here, Red Eagle."

"I saw. Look in his back."

"An arrow? Killed by an arrow," Jericho said.

"Looks like it."

"You recognize the arrow. I read that each tribe makes its arrows in its own way."

"This one is from the Tribe White Man."

"I don't get it. White men don't use bows and arrows."

"Look here. Feathers tied on the back of shaft with string. Indians insert feathers in slits in the shaft. The arrow head is also just tied on. Indians insert it in a slit at the front of the shaft for a perfect balance. This is not the arrow of an Indian."

"I don't understand."

"I have heard the men in my village talk. It is done when White Men want it to look like Indians did the bad thing."

"Awful. Let's save the arrow for evidence in case it's ever needed."

Red Eagle nodded.

"We'll need to bury him," Jericho went on. "Ground's baked brick hard out here. We'll cover him in rocks so the animals can't get to him. Probably should go through his pockets and saddle bags to see if there is any clue about somebody who should be told about it."

They approached the body, neither really wanting to touch it. The horse moved and the man fell to the ground. The

boys jumped back. It was creepy.

“I’d say he just picked his own burial spot,” Jericho said. “Probably need to keep the horse and take care of it, don’t you think?”

“I will tether it while you start searching for things.”

Red Eagle found a six-foot-long section of a three-inch-thick limb. He tied the ends of the reins to it and laid it back on the ground in front of the horse. It allowed him to walk, but if he tried to run, the branch would hit against his lower legs and he would stop.

The man had landed face down so Jericho went through the back pockets first. There was a wallet with a few dollars in it. No information about the man. Jericho straddled the body, took a big breath, closed his eyes and pulled the arrow out of his back. Red Eagle had come in time to watch.

“Strange,” he said.

“I suppose riding about with an arrow sticking out of you is a bit strange.”

“Not what I mean,” Red Eagle explained. “The arrow head was in too far. Look. It is a very large arrow head – like used for hunting buffalo or deer with long bows. A warrior’s arrows have smaller, slender arrow heads so they will slip inside the flesh with less force – like from the back of a horse to a target not all that far away.”

“So, what are you saying?”

“First, look at the back end of the shaft. Look closely.”

“You mean how it’s bashed up, like the end of a stake after it’s been driven into the ground. And there is no groove left to fit into the string on the bow.”

“Good eyes for a White Man, Same Face.”

They grinned.

“I still don’t get it, Red Eagle.”

“The arrow was pounded into the body – maybe with a stone or mallet.”

“Oh! Ouch!”

“Maybe no ouch? I need a long narrow stick.”

He held his fingers six inches apart while he looked around. Jericho handed him a long pencil. Red Eagle nodded and took it, slipping it inside the wound – further and further and further. It stopped

“There.”

He backed it out about an inch.

“You push it in.”

Jericho did as instructed.

“It stops. There aren’t any bones down that far on the back. What the . . . Oh, I get it. He was shot with a gun and what we’re feeling is the slug still inside the body. Then somebody hammered the arrow into the same hole to make it appear to be the work of Indians. Clever, but evil. Why?”

“Somebody wants to blame Indians for the man’s death. Old White Man’s trick,” Red Eagle said clearly ignoring the fact he was speaking to a . . . well, a White Kid. “Lots of Indian haters out there, Jericho. I have taken the whip from them several times.”

Jericho grimaced and nodded. This new brother of his was very clever.

“So, we have a cowardly White Man who hates Indians,” Jericho said, thinking he had summed it up rather well.

“Cowardly?”

“It means . . .

“I know what it means. But why you say it?”

“This man was shot in the back – that’s the coward’s way.”

Red Eagle nodded. This new brother of his was very clever.

Using grass, Red Eagle wiped the arrow clean of blood and placed it in his quiver. There were some coins and a pocket watch in the man’s front pockets. Jericho slipped them into his pockets. There were two saddle bags. Jericho went to remove them so they could do the search on the ground.

“Wow! Heavy. Like filled with rocks. I’ll need help.”

Red Eagle went to the other side and together they slipped the off the back of the horse and set them down. Each boy began going through one.

“Shirt, gloves . . .” Red Eagle said, listing what he was finding.

“Pants, two boxes of ammunition . . .” Jericho said doing the same.

“Wow, I think you said,” Red Eagle offered trying to

mimic Jericho's emotion and expression.

"Wow over here, too," Jericho said.

Then as one: "Gold!"

"No wonder the bags are so heavy," Jericho said.

"It's not raw gold fresh out of a mine," Red Eagle said.

"It's not gold coins from the Mint in Denver," Jericho said.

It was instead miniature ingots – gold melted into somewhat irregular pieces about three inches long and one inch wide and tall. Although small, each one was quite heavy. Jericho tried an explanation.

"Some mines melt down the gold ore and remove the worst of the impurities – like zinc – before they transport it. They cast it into molds – each mine has its own mold shape. Cuts down on weight and size for transporting. I read that in a book once. I think that's what we have here."

"What will we do with it?" Red Eagle asked.

"In the long run I'm not sure. In the short run we need to hide it really good some place."

"And stay away from whoever shot Horse Man," Red Eagle added.

"First, we bury the man, alright?" Jericho said.

It took nearly an hour to find the necessary number of large rocks. Eventually the deed was finished.

"I suppose I should say a prayer, or something," Jericho said.

He removed his hat and bowed his head.

"God, I figure you'll do with this man's soul whatever you've had planned for it regardless of what I say and since I don't know him I guess that's that."

It had been short and to the point and perhaps the strangest burial prayer ever offered in the entire history of human beings.

"Now we dance," Red Eagle said.

"White people don't dance at funerals."

"Then how do you free his soul so it can escape his body and float forever in the heavens?"

"I don't rightly know. Do your dance, I guess. Can't see how it could hurt."

It was a slow, solemn dance and lasted about five

minutes. Red Eagle sang a song while he danced – no, less a song than a . . . Jericho couldn't describe it, but it was both sad and hopeful. He would ask about it later.

"I suppose the horse is ours to use until we find its owner," Jericho said.

"One problem with that, I believe?" Red Eagle said.

"What?"

"Do they not hang horse thieves in Kansas?"

Jericho put his hands to his neck and nodded.

Red Eagle went to the horse and walked around it giving it their first really good looking over.

"No brand. I wonder why."

"Lots of horses back in Missouri don't carry brands. I can say I'm from there in case anybody asks."

"You think it will work?"

"I have no idea. They wouldn't hang kids would they?"

Red Eagle shrugged.

"Probably not a white boy. The White Man's ways are very difficult to understand."

Jericho couldn't argue with that, considering how they'd treated him when younger.

Red Eagle lifted one of the horse's hooves.

"Freshly shod. New nails. Odd for a four-year-old."

"How do you know all this stuff?"

"It was my life, I guess. It was not yours, I guess."

He went on not waiting for a response.

He looked into the horse's mouth.

"Yes, about four."

He loosened the saddle and slid it to the rear of the horse's back.

"Ah. I had guessed it. Look!"

"My goodness. Did you really guess that? I must say you are good."

Red Eagle looked at him with a strange expression. Jericho smiled.

"I have absolutely no idea what you see. I was trying to make a little joke so I didn't look so foolish. Carry on. What's what?"

"It is an Indian horse – stolen maybe. See, no impression from wearing a White Man's saddle for a long time.

And see here, red thread in its hair, from a Indian blanket. See how he seems uncomfortable with the iron bit in his mouth. He is not used to it. He is an Indian's horse for sure."

"What does that mean for us?"

"I'm Cherokee. I will be riding what is certainly an Indian's horse. No hanging, I'm thinking. Can we sell the saddle?"

"I'm sure we can. You certain you're only twelve?"

Red Eagle smiled, but offered no answer.

They lifted the saddle back onto the Travois. There was a rifle holstered on the front right side of the saddle. They covered it all with a blanket.

"See!" Red Eagle said as if its meaning should be obvious.

"See, what?"

"You asked why I pulled such a large Travois. Now we need it. Like I said."

"Yes. Like you said. I'll give you that one."

Red Eagle looked puzzled.

"Why would you give it to me when it is already mine?"

Jericho smiled.

"Not the Travois. It's an expression. It means, 'I have to admit you were right and I was wrong.'"

"Good for me, then, I guess," Red Eagle said, offering a smile in return.

"I think you were saying something about apples before."

"Oh, yes."

Jericho secured the saddle bags to the travois with lengths of strong, narrow, leather thongs.

They hooked it to the horse and folded a blanket to lie over its back as they munched. Red Eagle gave an apple to the horse.

"So, how do we do this?" Jericho asked. "One ride and one walk?"

"That would be kindest to the horse."

"Speaking of kindness to the horse," Jericho said, "If that iron bit is bothering his mouth shouldn't we do something about it?"

"If we had rope I could make a rope bridle. I'm sure

that's what he's used to."

"I just happen to have rope in my bag."

"Fine. While you remove the bit and reins I'll fix a temporary bridle. When we stop for the night I'll make a better one."

They each went about their tasks. Jericho had soon stashed the old, leather and iron version in among things on the travois. Red Eagle tied several small loops in one end of the rope and snugged it up around the horse's nose. The horse seemed much more comfortable. He turned its head to nuzzle Red Eagle as if in thanks.

"I should ride first," Red Eagle said. "Horse seems comfortable with me."

"That's what I was going to suggest. We can't just keep calling him 'horse'. We need to give him a great name."

They moved out returning to their westward journey, Jericho walking beside Red Eagle's right side.

"How about something like 'Gold' or 'Goldie'," Jericho asked.

"That would be better than, 'Dead Man's horse,' I suppose," Red Eagle said.

Jericho laughed.

"You made a joke! Good for you."

"I find it easier to joke in Cherokee than the White Man's language."

"By the way, the White Man's language is called English."

"I know. Is 'White Man's language' unpleasant to you?"

"Not at all. Just wanted to make sure you knew."

"Thank you, then."

"We need to begin thinking about that gold," Jericho said.

"What about it?"

"Things like, should we return it to somebody – like if dead guy stole it? Or, if we're going to keep it, how to get money from it so we have some to spend. It would take a large bank to cash it in for money – one little ingot will be worth a whole lot of money."

"Do you have any idea how much? I don't know about your money."

“I saw a sign in a bank window in Kansas City about a week ago that they were paying \$22.00 an ounce. I figure each of those little ingots weighs about two pounds. Since there are sixteen ounces in a pound that would be about \$350.00 a pound or \$700.00 for one of those little ingots.”

“Is \$700.00 a lot of money?”

“It’s more than many families have to live on for an entire year.”

“Wow!”

“I’ll say, Wow! We’ll count the number of ingots tonight and I’ll figure what it’s worth. But, if each saddle bag weighs about fifty pounds, which is what I’ve been thinking, that would be close to \$35,000 dollars (equal to about a half million dollars today).”

“That’s a lot?”

“That’s a really, really lot.”

“Is that good?”

“You really don’t know?”

“The Cherokee doesn’t have money. A person is like your word for rich if he is in good health for his age, has loving people around him, laughs often, is able to care for those in need and has a job to do that he enjoys and does well.”

“Sounds like the world would be better off if we were all Indians – er, Cherokee at least.”

Red Eagle smiled although he wasn’t completely sure why. The sun was shining directly into their faces. They had four hours of sunlight ahead of them. Lots of time had been lost that day with a runaway horse, a dead guy to bury, and a whole bunch of gold to be responsible for. All that bad stuff couldn’t equal the main good thing, however: Brothers had found brothers and the prospect of getting to know each other the way only brothers could, was the most outstanding part of life either of them could imagine.

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CHAPTER SIX

They moved on for some time. Jericho was riding.

“How about Golden?” he said.

“How about Golden what? Red Eagle asked, puzzled.

“For the horse’s name.”

“Hmm. Golden. Has a nice sound. Is it a boy’s name?”

“I figure it could work for either one. I suppose ‘Goldie’ would be more for a girl.”

“So, it will be, then,” Red Eagle said. “Golden. It is a strong name. He is a strong animal.”

“And he’s mostly a Palomino, wouldn’t you say – his sort of gold coloring.”

“He is. A perfect name, I think.”

Red Eagle lifted his arm and ran his hand along the horse’s neck.

They continued on their way a bit later than planned, not having come upon a good spot to make camp for the night. They needed water for Golden. Red Eagle pointed to their right. There was a hill with jagged features – mostly huge vertical (up and down) slabs of red rock.

Red Eagle pointed above the hill.

“What?” Jericho asked.

“Bats. They are coming out to feed as darkness approaches.”

“Out?”

“From the cave where they stay during daylight hours. The ceiling will have rugged features they can hold onto. Bats hang upside down to sleep.”

“Interesting, but do you mean something more?”

“There may be other caves in the hill – a place to get out of the bad weather tonight.”

“Bad weather? Tonight?”

“Smell the air – damp. It will rain tonight.”

“I have a brother who talks ‘Horse’ and predicts the weather with his nose. You are unbelievable.”

“Not among my people. I could say the same for you – he reads marks on paper and he knows about pounds and ounces, and how much gold is worth.”

“So, we make a good team – brothers.”

“If we are twins – and it seems we are,” Red Eagle said, “we are more than brothers you know. My people believe we share the same soul. Part of us feels what the other feels. We know each other’s minds.”

“That’s alright with me,” Jericho said. “I have no secrets – well, a couple, maybe, but they aren’t anything I won’t share with you.”

They angled off toward the hill. It was further away and larger than it first appeared – long and narrow with the narrow end visible from their direction. Golden raised his head and sniffed the air.

“He smells water,” Red Eagle said. “Get off and give him his head and let him take us to it.”

“He seems to read horse’s minds, as well,” Jericho said as if speaking to nobody in particular.

Red Eagle smiled at the silliness. He had a very nice smile – warm and friendly and safe. Jericho wondered if his was the same – the two of them wearing identical faces and all.

Down through the year’s small rocks had fallen from the face of the hill and formed a gentle incline that lead up to its base. Once up close, the boys could see it was a massive chunk of rock, split here and there from weathering. The horse move on ahead.

“Look at that!” Jericho said.

It appeared the horse had disappeared right into the stone face of the hill.

“Like he walked right through the rock,” Red Eagle said.

They hurried to the spot. They found a narrow passage hidden behind a rock outcropping. It opened back into a large

cave. By the time the boys entered, Golden had made his way to the rear and bent his head low.

“He’s found water and is drinking,” Red Eagle said.

The boys hurried to his side letting their eyes adjust to the lower level of light. They found a large pool of clear water twenty feet from side to side, ten feet front to back. It looked to be eight or so feet deep. Water bubbled up above the surface at the far right. They figured there was an outlet at the left, perhaps returning into the earth – to an underground stream.

Red Eagle knelt at the right end and scooped up a handful of the fresh, bubbling water to smell. He tasted it with the tip of his tongue.

“Good water,” he said. “And warm. Feel!”

Jericho did as his brother had done.

“Good taste.”

He stood and looked around describing the cave as if his companion couldn’t see for himself.

“Ten or twelve feet high. Like inside a big dome. Thirty feet square. Temperature is very comfortable. No bats in this ceiling. Three narrow slits up high that let in light. I could live in a place like this. Isn’t it great!”

“It is. And look around the floor. Nothing left from others who have been here ahead of us – no ashes from fires, no cans or bottles. I think Golden has found a secret cave that is unknown to anyone else.”

“Good going, Golden, ol’ man,” Jericho said running his hand down the horse’s mane. “I guess we’ll stay the night, right?”

“I guess we will stay forever,” Red Eagle said looking around in awe.

“Maybe one problem about that,” Jericho said.

They looked each other in the face and broke sheepish smiles as they said together:

“No girls!”

They laughed nervously. It was a topic they hadn’t talked about. It was a topic they really didn’t know much about. It was a topic that could and would wait until later.

“I’ll go collect wood for a fire before the rain arrives,” Jericho said.

“I will free up Golden from the travois and bridle then go out and get a rabbit or something for us to eat. That apple did not last me very well.”

“We still have food that Zeke gave me. I feel like celebrating. Things just really seem to be going our way. I can’t remember a time in my whole, entire, complete life when I’ve been this happy. It’s definitely time for a celebration.”

“Whole, entire, complete?” Red Eagle asked more than stated.

“Probably way over done English, but it’s just how fantastic this is. I’ve never felt this way before.”

Red Eagle nodded and smiled.

“Me, too, for the whole, entire, complete.”

Jericho smiled at the interesting use to which his brother had put the words. Jericho twirled around, arms straight out, for no particular reason other than just joyfully twirling around. Red Eagle joined in. They soon both fell, dizzy and staggering to the floor. They lay on their backs watching the ceiling swirl around above them. They laughed on for some time. Red Eagle reached out and took Jericho’s hand. They just lay there that way for a long time. Guys their age didn’t hold hands, but they figured they had twelve years of not knowing each other’s touch to make up for.

Sometime later, when they could again walk a straight line, they went about the tasks they had set for themselves. By the time Red Eagle returned with two rabbits, trimmed out and ready to roast, Jericho had a good-sized cooking fire going within a circle of rocks. The white smoke rose and was sucked out as faint wisps through the slits high in the front wall.

Before long, thunder boomed and lightning flashed its jagged presence across the darkened sky.

“It will be a big rain – most of the night I think. We are lucky Golden found us such a safe place,” Red Eagle said.

Jericho nodded and walked to the entrance to look outside.

“An angry sky – rolling black clouds. Seems to be coming in from the north. The rain is already very heavy.”

“In here you would not know it is even raining,” Red Eagle said.

Jericho walked to the rear of the cave and stopped at the edge of the pool. The fire lit the entire inside and cast flickering shadows across the floor and up the walls to the ceiling. It lay a golden glow across the top of the water through which they were unable to see.

"It'll take a hour to cook the rabbit. How about a swim. I for one am filthy with dust from the road."

They were soon in the water. After a few minutes to adjust, it felt pleasantly warm – about eighty or eighty-five degrees, Jericho figured. They were both tired so mostly just moved around slowly, swimming just a bit from time to time.

"You and I swim different," Jericho said.

"I noticed that," Red Eagle said. "Sometime when we're not so tired we'll have to teach each other. You take your arms out of the water and push it behind you. I keep my arms under the water and pull myself along. Your way is very noisy. You would never surprise your enemy swimming like that."

"Lucky for me then, I guess, because I have never had any enemies I've needed to sneak up on in the water."

The rabbit tasted especially good for some reason. They could have fed another person. Red Eagle cut what was left over into thin strips and laid them on flat stones close to the fire.

"What are you doing?"

"Making waga hawiya akayotanv."

"Oh, I should have known."

They smiled at each other. Red Eagle explained.

"I think you call it jerky. Waga hawiya akayotanv really means dried beef meat, but It's also used for all meat dried this way. By morning it will dry and won't go bad. We can carry it with us. It is usually first sprinkled with salt that you pound into the meat, but I do not have salt."

"I noticed you fed our apple cores to Golden this afternoon."

"Horses like apples very much. Must not waste food so it was good for all of us."

Jericho went to his bag and removed a small metal box.

"I have a surprise for our celebration. Maple sugar squares – candy!"

“Candy?”

“Sweet treats. I have been saving them.”

He handed the first one to Red Eagle who immediately sniffed it.

“They are to eat. Just put one on your tongue and let it dissolve. It will taste wonderful.”

He watched expecting to get some fantastic response. He did!

“Sweet like fruit,” Red Eagle said, eyes wide.

“Even sweeter, I’d say.”

They sat back and enjoyed the treat. Jericho closed the box. He would save the rest for later special times. It was the first full box he had ever had. The good smelling dancing lady from the saloon had given it to him that last time he saw her.

Red Eagle spoke, changing the subject.

“Look what I found when I moved the saddle off the travois. It was heavier on one side and I was rearranging it to make it easier for Golden to pull.”

They walked to the saddle. Red Eagle turned it over.

“Some marks on the underside. You think it is important?”

“Have you ever known a saddle with marks there, underneath?” Red Eagle said.

“Well, no, but I haven’t been well acquainted with many saddles.”

Red Eagle offered a puzzled look.

“A joke, brother.”

“I thought so, but didn’t want to laugh until I was sure. Not want to hurt your feelings.”

“There is no way you could ever hurt my feelings because I know you will always be honest with me.”

Red Eagle nodded and smiled. It was a new kind of relationship from any either boy had ever known. Sometimes they felt they would just burst because of how it filled them with joy.

“Anyway, the markings,” Jericho said. “Let’s take a close look at them. You have any ideas?”

“I think it may be a map of someplace. My people often draw maps.”

“It sure could be. A long narrow someplace. See these small heavy dark lines along the edge – the outer lines. Behind each one is an area enclosed in another line.”

“Like a door into a room, maybe?” Red Eagle said.

“It could be. Odd arrangement though. Most of the area inside the main outline doesn’t have those little lines – like the doors or openings. Sure not a building.”

They sat back on their legs and thought. Red Eagle saw it first.

“You know, it could be the outline of this big red rock hill. See. Narrow and long.”

“That just hit me as well.”

Red Eagle ducked and looked around.

“Hit?”

Jericho smiled.

“It’s another expression that means it just came to me – like just hit my mind.”

“You have many interesting ways of saying things.”

“I just imagine Cherokee has those, too, if you think about it.”

Red Eagle nodded and smiled.

“You are right. I will teach you Cherokee, you know.”

“That sounds like I have no choice in the matter.”

“You do not. To know my mind, you must know how I think and I think in Cherokee, like you think in White Man’s . . . I mean, in English.”

“It makes sense, although I must say I’ve never thought about that before.”

“Back to the map or diagram or blueprint or whatever it is.”

“You will tell me about diagram and blueprint later.”

Jericho nodded as he ran his finger around the outline.

“See this up here above the drawing. I thought it was a ‘Z’ but now I think it’s a ‘N’.

“Explain.”

“Oh. Yes. They are letters in our alphabet. I imagine that didn’t help one bit did it?”

“Red Eagle smiled and shook his head.”

“When we put our words on papers with the symbols you’ve seen we call each symbol a letter. We have 26 letters.

That is called our alphabet – all the letters we have to choose from – our sounds. A word usually needs several letters to represent it. I'm going to show you later on."

"I understand. Now, about 'Z' and 'N'?"

Jericho drew a 'Z' in the dust on the floor. Then an 'N'.

"This is a 'Z'. It represents the sound zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz like in buzz. The 'N' makes the nnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn sound like in noon or north. On maps or blueprints one side is usually marked with a 'N' for north. So, you see when I looked at that letter from one angle it looked like a 'Z' which made no sense. But from another angle it looks like a 'N'. When I realized that I also put map and 'N' together and got North. Now, with that information we can think better about this picture. What it tells me is that it sure could be this hill. The 'N' is at what we see as the back – we are up here in the front – the south end of the hill."

"But there is no heavy mark for an entrance into this cave."

"Right. What did you call it? Our secret cave! A secret cave wouldn't have an entrance marked on any diagram or map."

"You are a very clever boy, Jericho. Smart. We have the same face and the same body. Do you think we have the same smart, too?"

"I'd bet on it. That means yes, I'm sure of it. You've already proved your brain is equal to mine in every way. They have each just recorded lots of different things."

"So, put us together and we are twice as smart as we are by ourself."

"A great way to think about it. Watch out World, here come the . . . blank . . . brothers – Jer and Red."

"Blank?"

"Cherokees seem to have just one name. White folks have a first and a last name and sometimes a middle name – the last name is passed on to the children. We don't know our last name so I just filled in with the blank. I'm not sure how we are going to fix that. I just invented my last name – Palmer, from the mark in my palm on my hand."

"I can be Red Eagle Palmer, can't I?"

"I suppose so. The first Red Eagle Palmer in the whole

history of mankind, I'm betting."

"I would still be me even if there was a . . . what's a big number?"

"Million."

"I would still be me even there was a million Red Eagle Palmers, right?"

"As usual, you are right. Okay then, what do you say in the morning the Palmer Brothers . . .

"Twin Palmer Brothers," Red Eagle interrupted.

"Yes. What do you say that in the morning the Twin Palmer Brothers explore this big rock and see if the map really fits it?"

They laid up the fire for the night, spread their blankets close to each other on the floor and prepared to go to sleep.

What about Golden. Should we block the entrance so he can't leave?" Jericho asked.

"He believes he is part of us, now. He knows he has water and protection from the weather here. If he leaves he will soon be back."

"So, it's more like the Palmer Triplets, then I guess – triplets mean three."

The exchanged a smile at the humor. They offered and held a long embrace. It would become an important part of their good-night ritual.

It could have been frightening - the wind roared, the thunder clapped and banged and the lightning flashed just outside, yet neither boy had ever felt safer in his life.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

When Jericho awoke the next morning, Red Eagle was sitting by the fire cooking something that smelled wonderful.

“Hey, early riser. What you doing?”

“I gathered some things from the soft ground outside – I forget your word.”

“Rocks?”

Red Eagle laughed.

“No like potato and carrots.”

“Ah. Vegetables. It would be helpful if we had a cooking vessel.”

“Like a skillet?”

“I don’t know. But this flat stone will work.”

He scraped them away from the fire and closer to them.

“Will be hot.”

“That’s often the case with things that have been in a fire.”

Red Eagle smiled.

“You make jokes a lot. I like that.”

“Here, I carved us adidoti.”

“Look more like spoons to me. You did all this already this morning. I must have really slept in – not like me.”

“I woke up early and couldn’t go back to sleep. It was still dark outside. I like to keep my hands busy – it is what Cherokee do – keep busy.”

“Were you worried?”

“Just the opposite, but I don’t know a word for it.”

“Hmm. Carefree, untroubled, cheerful I suppose are possibilities.”

“Your English is wasteful.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You have many words that mean the same thing. We mostly have just one word – we don’t waste words, you see?”

“More efficient, I think you are saying. Probably avoids lots of misunderstanding.”

“It is cool enough to eat I think now,” Red Eagle said.

He waited for Jericho to taste it first, the way Jericho had waited for Red Eagle with the candy.

“Really good. We need to get some salt. Two things for our ‘To Get’ list – a skillet and salt.”

They both continued eating.

“I taste wild onions, for one thing. Something like carrots and maybe thin sliced potatoes, but not really. Other things I’m not familiar with. Did I say it was really good?”

Red Eagle smiled and nodded, his mouth was full.

“Where’s Golden?” Jericho asked.

“Grazing out front. He’ll come in when he gets . . .

Red Eagle was interrupted when the horse entered the cave, apparently needing some water to wash down the grass. It was worth more chuckles.

Red Eagle had apparently done more than harvest, cook and carve that morning. He spoke of it.

“I was looking more at the inside of the saddle. You need to look. There might be two more of your alphabet letters we overlooked.”

They scooted back to where the travois lay on the floor. The saddle remained upside down from the night before. Red Eagle pointed.

“I see. Sitting on top of an arrow pointing left – west, if the ‘N’ really means north. They are letters: ‘R’ and ‘B’ and after that the number 1. Hmm. The two sounds would be rrr like in red and bu like in berry or boot or brother.”

“What do you think it means?”

“Two things come to mind for me: Red Brother and, more likely I think, Red Bend.”

“Red Bend! Really! And the one?”

“One something – week, day, mile, if it’s indicating time or distance. I suppose it could be minute or hour if it’s about time. I don’t think of anything else it might mean, can you?”

“Do you think we might really be only on day away?” he asked excitedly.

“Zeke didn’t seem real sure when he told me so I suppose it could be.”

“So, we have some new information, but we are not sure what it means. How shall we do it?”

“We said we would examine this hill first today. I think we should keep to that. We talked about making the cave our place – our home. We could still go on west for a few days and try and find Red Bend. We both still want to find it I think. We can always return here.”

“Good thinking,” Jericho said. “How about this? We take one hour to look over this hill. Then we move on west. If we are getting close to Red Bend, we might meet up with travelers who could answer our questions about it. We set an amount of time to continue west before we return here.”

“That is a good plan.”

“Okay then, ready to nose around?”

Puzzled look.

“It means look around and investigate, see what we can find at the end of our noses.”

Red Eagle went to Golden and spoke to him in Cherokee then joined Jericho at the entrance. No explanation was necessary. Jericho assumed he told the animal they would return. He only wondered if he’d delivered the message in Cherokee or Horse. He smiled to himself about his unbelievable brother – twin brother.

Once outside, they turned left – east – to begin their ‘nose around’. It was mostly what they thought it was – a huge chunk of red rock, maybe 150 yards long and varying from 50 the 75 wide. It was higher toward the center and rear – 25 to 35 yards top to bottom. It was more flat than pointed on top.

Remembering the map on the saddle they walked to where the first opening should be and there it was. It was a cave like they has expected – dark, large. They didn’t go inside. Continuing to the rear the found the second. It was very much like the other one, only smaller and the opening was fifteen feet above the ground. There was a fairly easy way to climb up to it. On the west side, some thirty yards

away, there was a sizeable stand of trees.

“The ground is wetter than from the rain,” Red Eagle said, stooping down to feel it.

“Maybe the water from our pool empties out here just below the surface and keeps it wet,” Jericho said.

“Good thinking. It would mean the water has been running for many years to support all these trees to grow to their current height.”

“Yes. How tall are the largest ones in the center?”

“Forty or fifty feet tall” Jericho said supplying the measurement.

“That is a lot of years. The younger trees grow in circles out from those original ones.”

“I see that.”

They moved on to where the last opening should be. They couldn't see it.

“Look there,” Red Eagle said at last. “It is manmade – like a narrow, loose rock, ramp from the ground slanting gently up to . . . how high?”

Red Eagle still had trouble with using distance in feet and yards.

“Twenty-five feet – 8 yards or so. Let's climb it, okay?”

The ramp appeared to just end at a blank stone face that jutted out from the hill six or eight feet.

“It is like our cave entrance – completely hidden from view,” Red Eagle said. “It has a thick wooden door blocking our way in. Large . . . what?” he said pointing.

“Large hinges. They are in pretty good shape – usable.”

Jericho moved close and examined them.

“Been oiled recently. The door is still in use. And there, a padlock. Not too old, I'd say. Need a key to open it – maybe.”

“Maybe?”

Jericho reached into his front pants pocket and removed a short length of medium weight wire. He explained what he was doing as he set to work.

“Back where I lived before I started for Red Bend I used to get food the restaurant threw away in a bin in the alley. It had a padlock on it like this one, to keep the possum and dogs

out of it. I fashioned a key out of this wire so I could open it.”

Keys and padlocks were clearly foreign concepts to Red Eagle, but he didn't ask. Time was too important. First, Jericho slipped the straight end of the wire into the hole and felt around. Then with the other end he made a series of tight bends, more or less key shaped. He inserted it and tried to turn it. Nothing happened. He felt some more and changed the bends. That went on for several minutes. Finally, pop! The curved bar at the top of the padlock sprung open. He put the wire away and removed the lock. It was a heavy door and it took both of them to pull it open.

They entered into a cave twenty feet in diameter – a bit smaller than theirs. There was a tunnel leading out of the south side of that main room. More important than that, there was a very long, very sturdy wooden table and on it were the molds used to make the little ingots they had found in the saddle bags – length, width, all the same. There was a cast iron pot that sat on top of four sturdy rocks with a deep fire pit below it. There were an assortment of miner's tools – picks, sledge hammers, shovels, buckets and the like.

“Do you understand what we have here?” Jericho asked.

“Partly. Not really I guess.”

“This is a gold mine in the strangest place I've ever heard of for a gold mine. I'm thinking it had to belong to our dead man. I'm thinking some bad guy knew he had gold, waited for him to leave with it and waylaid him. He shot him in the back and did the things he had planned ahead of time with the arrow, but before he could search the saddle bags somebody must have come along and scared him off – a sheriff, maybe. The Sheriff took off after the bad guy leaving our guy for dead, but he wasn't quite dead and managed to set off to the east on his horse, probably in search of help. That's just all a possibility, but we know the rest of the story from firsthand experience.”

“You are a very good story teller. My people place high value on that. You would be an honored member of any Cherokee village.”

“Let's get out of here and lock it back up. We can fix a string on the door that will break if it's opened so when we

come back we will know if anybody has been here.”

He pulled a short strand of string from another pocket. Red Eagle smiled at the endless number of things his brother seemed to carry with him. Jericho continued.

“One thing bothers me. If the mine did belong to Dead Guy, there should have been a key on him and we didn’t find one.”

“He could have hidden it somewhere close by,” Red Eagle said.

“He could have. We still haven’t emptied out the saddle bags to count the ingots. I’m betting the key is in with them.”

“Or the person who shot him took it from him first,” Red Eagle added.

Jericho nodded and finished attaching the string where it couldn’t be seen. He relocked the padlock. They started back down the ramp.

“So, saddlebags or start west, first?” Red Eagle asked.

“We can count at night. I’m thinking we need to hide those saddlebags, just in case. Let’s go back and look for a good place in the cave.”

They each moved around the cave searching for a good spot. Red Eagle pointed high up on the east wall.

“A ledge.”

“I saw it but didn’t know how we could reach it.”

“One of us stand on the other’s shoulders.”

“That just might reach it. Probably should take a look first,” Jericho said. “You up on my shoulders – your moccasins will be softer on shoulders than my boots.”

With the help of small outcroppings in the wall, Red Eagle was soon standing straight in position to examine the ledge.

“Wider than it looked – from my fingertips to my armpit deep. As long as you and me laid out head to head. A lip along the front. That will hide the saddle bags good if we flatten them out. Lots of room. Big enough for both of us to hide on if we ever needed to.”

He jumped to the ground. Jericho brought the saddle bags. At the same moment, they realized they really couldn’t just stash them without looking for the key. They each took one bag and did a one-handed search that didn’t require

removing all the ingot's. Red Eagle spoke first.

"Is this a key?" he asked removing it and handing it to Jericho."

"That sure is a key and the same shape as the one I made. Do we carry it or hide it?"

"I'm known for losing things," Red Eagle said.

Jericho offered a huge grin.

"Me, too, twin brother. So, up on the ledge?"

"Looks like a very good hiding place. No man would be tall enough to see it up there."

It only took a few minutes for them to have the bags and the key out of sight. Golden entered the cave. He had been grazing near the stand of trees. He turned toward the entrance and just stood there.

"What's he doing?" Jericho asked, referring all horse-related questions to his brother.

"It's how they react to possible danger. In clear danger, they run away. He is just waiting to see if it will pass. Soon he'll go take a look."

"Maybe we need to take a look, first, then."

"I agree with you."

They went to the opening and then on outside, still hidden behind the wall of rock that concealed the entrance.

"Men on horseback – five of them. Look to just be passing by."

It had been Jericho, again pointing out the obvious to his brother. Red Eagle thought it was an odd habit and would ask about it later – why white men wasted words like that.

The men turned and rode toward the far side of the trees. The boys continued to watch. They disappeared from view. Five minutes later the riders were on their way back toward the trail and were soon headed east again.

"Must be a watering hole over there," Red Eagle said.

"We can check it out on our way. Do we take the travois or not?"

"We might find something that needs to become a part of our life," Red Eagle said.

"Never heard it put that way before."

"How would you say it?"

"We might find something we could use or something

that might be of use to us.”

“I see, for you it is something to help you. For my people, it is something for us to care for. A very interesting difference.”

“It will need talking about later. Let’s hitch up Golden and start west. We can leave the saddle here. Let’s put what we may need in my bag and lay it on the travois. That will leave lots of room to collect stuff we need to take care of.”

It was worth a long grin between them.

They were walking side by side. Golden was following, his new bridle tied in a bow swinging beneath his head so it wouldn’t drag in the dirt.

No more than they had set their pace west on the trail than several things became obvious – things that had been hidden in the dark of the late afternoon and evening the day before. Again, it was Jericho delivering the description out loud. Again, it was Red Eagle who smiled about it.

“A ranch house over there to the right. A quarter of a mile. Small. Another set of red stone hills behind it. Much larger than our hill. Look to the south of us; a main road, also east-west. Looks well used. I’ll bet it’s the stage route that goes to Red Bend.”

“See the smoke up ahead,” Red Eagle said pointing.

Jericho had noticed that Indians seemed to do a lot of pointing. He smiled and nodded. Then, he realized it could be another prairie fire – heading right toward them!

CHAPTER EIGHT

They stopped to more carefully survey the scene in the distance. Jericho spoke.

“The smoke. Lots of narrow bands. Not like a grass fire. I’m thinking chimneys, like from houses in a town.”

“You think it is 1 something from our cave.”

“What?”

“Like on the saddle. 1 something to Red Bend.”

“One mile? It could be. I didn’t think were nearly this close however. There could be lots of small towns along a main road like that, though.

The trail merged with the main road just before fording a stream – a stream with water that looked red red as blood.

“I’ll bet it is Red Bend. Look at the water. That’s how the town got its name from the reddish hue the rocks give the water where it turns east.”

They followed the road into town. Red Eagle pointed to sign painted on a small, well-aged piece of wood nailed to a post. He spoke.

“Rrrrr and Buuu. ‘R’ and ‘B’. Does it say Red Bend?”

“It sure does. Good Rrrring and Buuuing!”

They exchanged smiles and stopped to look down the wide, dirt, Main Street. There were puddles left from the rain, but most of it was more just damp than muddy. A small white church with a tall steeple sat just on the other side of the creek to their right – north. There was a cemetery behind it. They moved on past the undertakers, the general store, the sheriff’s office, the newspaper, the hardware, the leather and saddle shop. At the far end to their right they saw the livery stable and

the black smith's shop. Several streets lined with houses sat behind the Main Street to the north and south.

"I have been in only (he held up three fingers) White Man's towns before."

"We call that three".

Jericho held up three fingers as he spoke, then went through one, two, three, four five with words and fingers."

"Ffffffffour. Ffffffffive. Cherokee does not have a fffffffff sound."

It was the fffffirst time Jericho had considered that all languages didn't share all his English sounds. He felt some ashamed as if his thought about it had been somehow selfish – self-centered at least.

"I was hoping there would a doctor's office and that the doctor might know something about our papers," Jericho said. "Let's go ask at the sheriff's office."

There were two large windows in front, one on each side of the door. One had the word 'SHERIFF' painted in large letters. They entered into a relatively small room with a large desk sitting just in front of four cells with iron bars that sat across the back wall. There was a small potbellied stove near the right wall and several wooden chairs with spindle backs. A gun rack to the left of the desk held a dozen rifles. A tall, slender man was sitting behind the desk. He looked up and smiled a nice smile.

"Can I help you?"

"We hope so," Jericho said. "Wondered if there is a doctor in these parts. Have a question for him."

"You hurt or ill?"

"Oh, no sir. Just questions."

The man stood and walked to a front window. He pointed across the street.

"Top of the wooden stairs above the newspaper office."

"Oh, over there where the sign says, Doc Weber, Upstairs?"

"That would be the place."

"Not sure how I missed that. Thank you."

"You boys new to the area, aren't you?"

"Just passing through, we think."

It had been intended to dismiss any attachment to the

town, but had come out jumbled up.”

The big man smiled and put his hands on his hips looking them over – back and forth – but made no comment about what he saw.

“I’m deputy Sanders – folks call me Sandy. If you need anything while you’re here just let me know. I think Doc is in. Saw him walking back from breakfast no more than a half hour ago.”

“Thanks. Oh, by the way I see you have a bank.”

“Not plannin’ on robbin’ it are you?” the deputy said, again with a smile.

“Sure we are, me with my knife and my brother with his bow.”

It got a chuckle from the man and a frown from Red Eagle.

“I thought you two looked alike, but one white and one Indian? Now, that’s confusing for me.”

“For us, too. It’s a long story and that’s partly why we want to talk with the doctor. About the banker – is he trustworthy?”

“He’s my Uncle. Hard to get any more trustworthy than that.”

“Would he answer a question for us and then keep it all under his hat?”

“You can count on it. Tell you what, if you like, I’ll take you over and introduce you after you’re done at Docs.”

“You are very kind, Sheriff. Thank you.”

“Like I said, I’m a deputy. I either take care of you or I shoot you.”

The boys each took a step backward, not at all sure what he meant.”

“It’s a deputy joke. I guess you have to be one to really think it’s funny.”

The boys left almost as confused about Sandy as he was about them.

“He was pleasant,” Red Eagle said.

“Pleasant with a strange sense of humor, I’d say.”

“Are you nervous, Jericho?”

“Some. And excited. You ready?”

“Oh, yes.”

At the top of the stairs Jericho knocked at the door before reading the sign that read, 'Come In'. He pointed to it.

"It says, 'Come In'."

He pushed it open. Several chairs were lined up against the wall just to their right. In the opposite corner was a table covered in a sheet. There were cabinets and a green curtained door to another room right across the way.

"Just a moment, please," came a man's voice from inside that far room.

Presently a gentleman in his sixties, pulling on his suit coat, entered through the door. He was more short than tall and his hair was more gray than black. He had a narrow mustache that was a match in color to his hair. He wore black pants and a white shirt and tie that was not pulled up tight. He stopped, put his hands on his waist and looked back and forth between them.

"Tell me," he began, "am I seeing double or are you what I think you are?"

"We can't answer that for you of course, Sir – not knowing what you think," Jericho said in return.

They exchanged a smile and Jericho continued.

"We believe we are twins, but have never lived together – just getting to know each other the past couple of days."

Doc looked off for a moment as if figuring something.

"Twelve?" he said as a question.

"Twelve years old? Yes, Sir. I'm Jericho and my brother is Red Eagle."

"Every time you open your mouth you prompt additional questions. I assume there is something I can do for you?"

It had been a statement offered in the tone of a question.

They presented their papers to him.

"Do you know about these?"

Doc put on his reading glasses – half lenses with gold wire frames. He read each sheet carefully, top to bottom and then looked them over once more over the top of his glasses. He turned and went to a wooden file cabinet beside the inside door. After a few minutes, he turned back toward them.

"Come over to the examination table here."

He laid out four pages – the two well-folded ones they

had handed him and two he had removed from the cabinet. He remained silent as the boys looked them over.

“You have what we have,” Jericho said. “Tell us what that means.”

“Come into my living area and we will talk.”

He pointed to door covered in the thick, green curtain.

It was a smaller room the same length front to back, but only half as wide. There were two narrow, floor to ceiling windows in front and shelves filled with books of all sizes. There was a single bed across from the door. Up front, there were also three very comfortable looking large chairs. Doc motioned for them to sit.

“Let me be sure I am starting the story at the proper place,” he began.

He thought for just a moment while he eased himself into a chair and folded his glasses, returning them to his shirt pocket.

“It began for me on a cold, late winter night back in '58 - March. It was after dark and there was a knock on my door. I called out for whomever it was to come in, but nobody did so I went to open it – it opens in as you will recall. There on the landing, in a small wooden crate with a blanket across the top, were two crying babies – appeared to have been no more than a few hours old. They were crying their head off and kicking up a storm. I knew right away they were very strong babies. I brought them inside. They were wrapped together – rolled up side by side, I suppose – in a thick horse blanket.

“I signaled for the sheriff – a white flag I can raise right there outside the window when I need help. His deputy came immediately and I asked him to get Cilla and a quart of milk – she is the editor of the newspaper downstairs. She came and together we got the babies fed and into dry diapers and cozied into fresh blankets. They were healthy babies, strong and actually big for twins – though small for single births. They both had black hair – most babies are bald – didn't know it you knew about such things.”

Somewhat humorously Jericho shook his head, ‘No’, and Red Eagle nodded his head, ‘Yes’. Doc continued.

“Cilla and I took care of the babies for several weeks. A missionary and his wife came to town, passing through on

their way back to Kansas City. They heard about the babies and offered to take them and find them good homes. At the time, there just were not any families that could take them in here in town – only 100 people lived here back then – mostly men. With great reluctance, we placed them in the Missionary’s care. I completed what I could on the birth certificate forms and pinned one to each baby’s blanket.”

“May I interrupt?” Jericho said.

Doc nodded appearing amused at such a formal request.

“How could you have known things like names and the order we were born?”

“Your mother, I assumed, had pinned a note to each of your diapers. One said, ‘Jericho, born first’, and the other, ‘Jacob, born second. Each note was signed with a woman’s name. Originally, I put that name on the certificates, but Cilla pointed out – wisely – that we could not be sure if that were the mother’s name or somebody else’s who for some reason had come to have the babies in her care and left them here. So, I marked out that name. She also pointed out that since we didn’t know the exact date that it also needed to be inked out – I had filled in an approximate date based on how old the babies appeared to be.”

Red Eagle spoke again.

“You call them ‘the babies’ and not us. Do you not think they were us?”

Doc looked the boys over again. He held their chins and moved their heads up and down and side to side, studying what he saw.

“I do have a way of knowing for sure if you are certain you want to know.”

The boys turned their heads and looked at each other. They turned back to Doc and without a word held up their right palms.

“Something like this, maybe,” Jericho said.

“Yes, it would be exactly like that. I now pronounce you the long-lost twin boys from early March of 1858, Red Bend, Kansas.”

A tear trickled down the old man’s smiling face. It was matched by the boy’s own wet smiling cheeks. He held out

his hands and each boy took one. They held them like that for some time as if reliving that moment twelve years before.

"I'll not press you for your story unless you want to relate it, but I do have to wonder what my information does for you boys."

"It says what I've been thinking about me for a long time and about the two of us for the past several days," Jericho said. "You got any ideas about the white boy and Indian boy part of it all?"

"I think I do. One thing I do know for sure."

The boys sat forward eager to listen.

"Twelve-year-old boys are always hungry. Let me treat you to breakfast over at the restaurant."

"But Sandy said you've already had breakfast."

"Let me tell you a secret. Even 65-year-old boys are always hungry."

"But we don't have money for that," Red Eagle said looking at Jericho.

"Well, we do and we don't," Jericho said reaching into his rear pants pocket.

He took out one of the ingots.

"I brought one to show the banker and ask his advice."

He offered it to Doc for his examination.

"We came across this and figure it's probably worth a little money."

Doc hefted it and nodded. He pressed his fingernail into it.

"I'd say so. Best not to show that around. Your idea about talking to the banker is a very good one. An honest man."

He handed it back and Jericho returned it to his pocket. Doc stood and reached for his hat.

"You're not going to let an old man eat alone, are you?"

Red Eagle whispered behind his hand into Jericho's ear.

"I've never been in a restaurant."

Jericho returned the whisper.

"Neither have I. I'm willing. You?"

Red Eagle nodded. They stood.

"This is going to give us the biggest hoot of our lives,

boys,” Doc said through a chuckle.

“Us,” Jericho asked. “And what is going to and why?”

Doc seemed to understand. He pulled his tie up tight around his neck. Red Eagle wondered why white men wore a tie if it clearly was so uncomfortable as to so frequently be loosened. Doc continued.

“We’ll pick up Cilla from down stairs – that’s the ‘us’ – she and I. She did the lion’s share of taking care of you those first two weeks. If you don’t mind, it just seems right to have her in on this wonderful reunion. And it will be a ‘hoot’ because of all the heads we’ll turn walking into the Restaurant with a shirtless white lad and his look alike Indian companion wearing only a breechclout (Google image) and moccasins. Don’t get me wrong – folks here in Red Bend are very open minded – been against slavery and intolerance for Indians for years before it was fashionable and treat everybody with respect – white, red, black, yellow. It’ll just be that first wide-eyed look on everybody’s face that I don’t want to miss.”

“I’m not sure I understand, but I guess we’ll take your word on it,” Jericho said.

The boys liked him. There was certainly something about the old man that made him immediately loveable. He spoke straight. They knew they could trust him.

They descended the steps behind Doc. He motioned for the boys to wait on the wooden sidewalk while he went inside the newspaper office. He was soon back with a well-padded woman – not as old as Doc, but not young. She stood back and put her hands on her waist. (Red Eagle made a mental note to ask about that odd custom.)

Then, she stepped toward the boys, extended her arms and gathered them into her. The boys allowed it although it was a new experience for them both. She smelled very good. When she finely released them, they all walked across the street to the Restaurant.

Inside, Doc got exactly the reaction he had predicted. Things immediately grew quiet. Eyes followed them from the door to the table. Cilla guided them to a round table at the rear of the big room. They took seats. Doc stood back up immediately and spoke to the silent, gawking gathering.

“These are Cilla and my twin grandsons, Jericho and

Red Eagle.”

He sat back down.

People looked from one to another, clearly puzzled, as they whispered together. Then, someone said in a loud voice.

“Aw, Doc is just spoofin’ us. Right, Doc?”

Doc shrugged and threw his arms in the air not confirming or denying it. Everybody clapped and chuckled. The waitress came to the table. Doc spoke to her.

“I will have toast and coffee. Cilla will have her usual. See that these lads each get a good-sized sampling of everything you have.”

Several people stopped to welcome the boys to town clearly hoping to learn more. They didn’t.

The boys grinned enjoying whatever it was that was happening. Neither of them had been the center of fun in their entire life. It was wonderful. Their grins would not go away.

Sandy had entered and took note of what was going on.

“So, this is where my bank robbers are hiding,” he said in a loud voice, hands on his hips.

He walked to the table swinging his handcuffs. The people there roared again.

Cilla offered a loud whisper across the table.

“Stand up and take a deep bow, boys.”

Jericho understood and pulled his brother up with him. He offered a very low bow. Red Eagle mimicked him. The people clapped again. Some stood up. A few offered finger whistles.

Jericho offered a tentative wave. Red Eagle put his hands on his waist figuring he’d try it out. It produced lots of laughter, but gave him no useful information.

“These are certainly nice people here in Red Bend,” Jericho said as the boys sat down. It sort of feels like it could be home.”

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CHAPTER NINE

After the other diners turned back to their own business, Doc spoke to the boys. He folded his hands on the table and took a serious tone.

“Let me tell you my best guess about you two. I believe the missionary couple headed south into the Indian Territory on their way back to Kansas City and found a place for you, Red Eagle, with their Cherokee friends. The Cherokee are known as wonderful parents. You both arrived in this world with a beautiful tan, black hair and dark eyes. You could have easily passed for Cherokee. Then in Kansas City, they found a place for you, Jericho. And as a baby you could certainly have passed for white if that was how you were presented. I believe that has to be how you came to be separated. What has me baffled is how you possibly found each other.”

Mountains of food arrived, much to twin boys' amazement. Four plates for each of them – eggs, sausage, bacon, flapjacks, potatoes, steak, thick cut toast, butter, jelly, maple syrup and more.

Red Eagle again whispered to Jericho: “I only know about eating with a knife and spoon.”

“No problem. I'll eat with a knife and spoon too. We can watch the others and see how they use things – then try the forks if we feel like it.”

Between the two of them, they told their stories, bringing things right up to the moment.

“What wonderful stories,” Cilla said. “Well, maybe not the unhappy things, but I guess we all learn important lessons even from the sad times in our lives. This is just about the

most wonderful thing I can imagine – that my precious little babies found each other and came back.”

“You have made us feel wonderful, too,” Red Eagle said. “I have one question.”

He paused as if waiting for permission to ask it. Doc nodded and motioned with his piece of toast.

“Which are we, White or Indian?”

Doc wiped his mouth with his napkin.

“That may be impossible to answer. I have a pretty good idea if you really want to know. You may want to think about how you will react to the answer – to knowing.”

The boys looked at each other for some time. Their furrowed brows relaxed. Doc knew their decision before Red Eagle stated it.

“We want to know.”

“I have been studying your faces. Your cheek bones are higher and more pronounced than most white men, but they are not as high and pronounced as most Indians. Your noses are neither as narrow as most white men’s nor as wide as most Indians. I feel very sure that one parent was Indian and one was White.”

“I guess that makes us half breeds, then, doesn’t it?” Red Eagle said, sadness in his voice.

“I’m not familiar with the words, half breeds’,” Jericho said.

“Just what Doc said,” Red Eagle began explaining. “One parent Indian and the other white. Mixed up like that. Sort of like Golden – part Palomino and part something else. Half breeds are not treated well by either the White Man or the Indian.”

Red Eagle seemed to know what he was talking about.

“Well, I’m thinking that’s everybody else’s loss,” Jericho said. “Just think of it. We both have the best parts of two great groups of human beings. Everybody says our skin color is beautiful and I’ve always been called handsome – so, of course, you are, too. We know we are smart. We are strong. I’d say all that makes us two really great kids.”

“Two really great young men,” Cilla added as if modifying Jericho’s thinking.

“Yeah! Like she said. Young men.”

“You certainly do go on about things, sometime, Same Face.”

“It is strictly for your further education, Little Brother of Same Face. That’s a big brother’s job.”

Doc and Cilla sat back and enjoyed the interchange. They were coming to understand what fine young men they had become, better for sure because they had grown up in such diverse (unlike) cultures. They had many wonderful things to share with each other.

Red Eagle spoke, mostly to his brother.

“We have learned much about ourselves that we have to think about. At first I saw it as a problem. But now I see it as a chance to grow into people we could never have been if we hadn’t been through all that we’ve each been through.”

Jericho turned to the others.

“That was my brother who said that. Pretty fine wouldn’t you say?”

“Indeed,” Doc said.

Cilla was still dabbing tears from the corners of her eyes, but she forced a smile and managed a sincere nod.

Some of their interesting differences surfaced during the meal. Jericho spread his flapjacks with butter and drowned them in syrup. He attempted to eat them with the fork like Doc. Red Eagle rolled each one up, and ate it like a candy bar – no butter or syrup. Jericho cut his bacon into sections. Red Eagle picked up each slice and slid it into his mouth whole. Jericho held his milk glass with one hand. Red Eagle cradled the bottom in one palm and steadied it with the other. Jericho cut his steak into small pieces and then used his fork to transfer it to his mouth. Red Eagle cut his into large pieces, stabbed each one in the center with his knife, raised it to his mouth and chewed his way around it. There were other things. Neither of them considered the other one was doing it wrong. They were both fascinated as they studied each other.

Eventually the plates were clean. Doc turned to Cilla.

“You owe me a brand new shiny nickel.”

[The nickel was first issued by the mint in 1866 – just four years earlier – replacing a silver coin that was called the half disme – half-dime.]

They exchanged a smile.

“What?” Jericho asked eager to be a part of whatever was going on.

“I said you boys would eat everything set before you. Cilla doubted you could. Now, she has to pay up.”

It was worth smiles all around.

Jericho turned to Sandy who had taken a chair alongside him.

“I guess we need to visit the banker if you have time.”

“Sure do.”

The boys thanked Doc and Cilla and promised to say goodbye before they left town. Once the boys were out the door, Doc turned to Cilla.

“Thank goodness they are strong and smart. They have no idea about all the problems that lay in their futures.”

“I’m betting on them,” Cilla said. “Like Jericho said, they have twice as much going for them as most kids – once they get it all sorted out.”

At the bank, Sandy introduced them to the owner and suggested they talk in his uncle’s office. The boys showed him the sample of their ‘treasure’. He examined it with an eyepiece. He put it to his nose and smelled it. He even bit into it and rapped it on the desk. After all that he offered an opinion.

“A well smelted (boiled down) piece. We will need to have it assayed to find how pure it is, but I can tell you it is very pure. My first impression is that this piece is worth in the neighborhood of \$700. That’s a lot of money for boys your age.”

“What do you suggest?” Sandy asked thinking some next step needed to be laid out for the boys.

“You can keep it here in the bank’s vault if you want. I will issue you a receipt. We can even have Sandy here witness it if that will make you feel safer about it. I know that’s a very large amount of money. Once it’s assayed I can arrange to get you cash for it or open an account for you here in the bank.”

Neither boy understood about assay, vaults or bank accounts. They looked to Sandy for advice.

“Nowhere is safer than my Uncle’s vault. He will show it to you. If you leave it with him he will set up an account where

you can come in and get what money you need and leave the rest in the bank. The bank keeps track of how much you have left and you check the figures every time if you want to.”

“Is that what you think is best?”

“Yes. You can also talk it over with Doc and Cilla. They are both very smart people.”

“Do they have accounts here in the bank?” Red Eagle asked – a very smart way of getting their new friends’ answer without asking them.

“Yes, both of them,” the banker said. “Cilla has two; one for herself and one for the newspaper.”

“We need to talk in private,” Jericho said.

“We will leave,” the banker said, “and you can use my office.”

“So, what do you think, Jericho?”

“It sounds like it would be safer here than with us.”

“I agree. What about rest of it?”

“I suppose the same. Shall we ask?”

“They seem like honest people. They must be to have so many folks trusting them with their money.”

Jericho opened the door and the others returned.

“We will do the account thing. We also have one other question. What if we had more than just this one piece of gold? Could we put that here, too?”

“More? How many more?” the banker asked.

“Say about fifty more. We aren’t really sure. We will count them this evening.”

The old man gulped and looked at Sandy.

“How many did you say?” Sandy asked just to make sure they heard it right.

“Fifty – maybe a little less maybe a little more.”

The banker did some figuring on a piece of paper. He wiped his suddenly perspiring head with his handkerchief.

“For that amount we will need to set up an arrangement with a larger bank in Kansas City. It is too much for a bank this size to handle. I will be happy to make arrangements.”

The boys looked up at Sandy. He shrugged. The banker continued, suggesting options.

“It needs to be kept safe. I will arrange armed guards when it’s shipped to the bank. I can telegraph the bank and

have things set up in two or three days.”

“We’ll let you know very soon,” Jericho said. “Thank you for your time and help.”

“Do you want some money from your account now?” he asked. “I can fund your account with say \$500 dollars until the official assay is completed on this first piece.”

Somewhat humorously to the men, Jericho removed his wallet and counted its contents.

“Three dollars and thirty cents”

He looked at Red Eagle.

“I can’t imagine needing more than that.”

Red Eagle shrugged and nodded. He knew nothing about money and left it up to his brother.

“Well, alright then. You know where it is.”

Outside on the street, Sandy had one more caution for them.

“You make sure you never tell anybody about the gold. People can be very greedy and I doubt if the two of you could put up much of a fight.”

The boys looked at each other. Red Eagle stooped down and picked up a short length of wood – a foot long, 1 X 6. He handed it to Sandy.

“Tell him how high to toss it, Same Face.”

Jericho understood.

“Twenty feet.”

The boys just stood there. Sandy was puzzled, but prepared to do as he had been instructed.

“Ready?”

The boys nodded. He made the throw. Before it had reached the top of the arc, Jericho had his knife in position for a throw and Red Eagle had an arrow in his bow. The knife sailed. The arrow flew. Swish! Thump! Thwamp! The board landed ten feet away out in the street. Sandy walked to it and picked it up. It held the knife and the arrow.

“Never seen anything like it,” Sandy said.

A dozen people had gathered to see what was going on. They moved in close. Sandy held up the board so they could see. They clapped. A boy who was several years older walked up to them.

“Never seen anything like that in my whole life. People

would pay to see it. I'm Cal, by the way. I'm going to be marshal someday. What are you going to be?"

The boys moved their twin shoulders in twin shrugs offering twin uncertainty.

"Well, it will be something great I can tell you that. The restaurant just made a batch of ice cream. I'll treat you."

Jericho knew about ice cream. He had enjoyed it twice before in his life. He knew how delicious it was. He nodded, agreeing for both him and his brother. They walked down the street and inside the restaurant. Cal, a very friendly young man had kept up a constant chatter. There was a counter with tall stools. Cal directed the boys to them. He sat between them and ordered.

"Three double scoops, please."

Red Eagle hadn't asked about it and was clearly eager to see what was coming. Red Eagle was as patient and Jericho was impatient. The man beyond the counter set three bowls in front of them. Cal scooped a spoonful into his mouth first, then Jericho. Red Eagle took longer to begin – say five seconds. His eyes got wide. His face looked puzzled. He nodded. It was easy to tell that ice cream had his full approval. He figured that maybe having money to buy things like that just might not be so bad after all.

Cal wanted to talk.

"So, what is it with you two?"

"I don't understand your question," Jericho said.

"You appear to be something you can't be."

Jericho shrugged indicating the second attempt hadn't really helped.

"Your faces say you are twins, but the rest of you says one is white and one is Cherokee."

"Two things: we are twins and we are each both white and Indian."

"There must be a lot more to your story than that."

The boys gave him the short version. As often as it seemed to be called for, they were getting quite good at condensing the facts.

"That is the best thing ever, guys. I love it. Where are you living?"

There was a moment of silence. They were not

prepared for the question. Red Eagle gave it a try first.

“We are traveling, but are thinking about settling down around here somewhere. Camping east of here for now.”

“I hope you do – settle down here, I mean. We could be great friends, I think. What are you about twelve?”

“Yes, twelve,” Jericho said. “Most people think we’re younger.”

“Then they haven’t taken time to listen to you speak. Actually, you talk more like guys my age. I just subtracted your bodies from your talk and got twelve. I’m seventeen, by the way – still waiting for my growth spurt. I work at the livery stable. Love animals. Sandy lets me help around the sheriff’s office. I’m leaning everything I can about Sheriffing.”

“We haven’t met the sheriff, yet.”

“His office is down at Sandy Creek. Gets here for a couple of days several times a month. Deputy Sandy is the law around here.”

They pronounced the ice cream the best food ever invented and left.

“You two look me up before you leave town – if you leave for good, I mean. I live in the loft at the rear of the Livery Stable.”

Cal walked west on Main Street.

“He is a very nice person,” Red Eagle said. “I can’t tell if he thinks he is a boy or a man.”

“I suppose that’s hard to know at his age.”

Golden had spent the morning in front of the Sheriff’s office. There had been shade for him from the only tree on Main Street and a trough of water within easy reach so he seemed quite content. When kids passed, they stopped to pet him and chat a while. He was a beautiful horse, so it was not just the children who stopped to admire him. Golden offered friendly, gentle responses.

As they approached Golden, there was a man messing with his bridal. He untied him and began leading him away.

“See what I see?” Jericho said.

“I do. Horse thief. Can’t allow that.”

“How shall we handle this?”

CHAPTER TEN

The boys were almost directly across the street from where Golden had been tethered.

“I got the man,” Red Eagle said, preparing his bow. “You get Sandy.”

Again, it was, Swish! Thump! Thwamp!

The man had an arrow in his heel and fell to the ground unable to walk. Jericho’s shiny knife decorated the door to the Sheriff’s office. Sandy was quick to open it to see what the thump was all about.

The boys ran toward the man. Golden moved a few steps forward and the man was neatly held to the ground under the travois.

The boys and Sandy arrived at the scene at the same moment.

Jericho turned to Red Eagle.

“Like I said before – triplets – you, me, and Golden.”

“I suppose you get the picture, Deputy,” Jericho said.

“Well, I see the picture. I’m not sure I really get it and yet, of course, I do. That was some shooting – again – Red Eagle.”

Jericho beamed for his brother. He figured it was the first time he had ever really felt pride for somebody else. It was a magnificent feeling.

Jericho offered his hand to his brother for a shake. Red Eagle put his hand up as if in a traditional Indian greeting. The hands, of course, didn’t meet. It seemed extremely humorous to them and they laughed until tears came.

A crowd gathered. The commotion caused Cilla to

open the door and look across the street. Doc looked out his window from above her. Sandy removed the arrow and handed it back to Red Eagle. Jericho retrieved his knife from the door. The boys trotted across the street to explain to Doc and Cilla. With that done, they said goodbye for the day and promised to return soon.

There was one more stop – at the grocery. Jericho spent a nickel for a bag of salt, fifty cents for a used iron skillet and thirty cents for a slab of bacon.

They took their time walking back to their cave. Golden followed behind like a big dog nuzzling them in the back from time to time as if wanting their attention. They suddenly had many new things to think about and major decisions to make.

“You have to show me how to use a bow, you know,” Jericho said.

“And me, your knife.”

“I have to ask you. Why did you shoot him in the heel?”

“I have been taught never to use more force than is needed. I wanted to keep him from running away, but saw no reason to hurt him badly. The two things just sort of said, ‘heel’ to me, I guess.”

Jericho nodded. It seemed he was learning something new and important every time his brother opened his mouth.

“Why did you throw your knife at the door instead of just going to get Sandy?”

“It was one of those times when I needed to be in two places at once and getting his attention with the knife freed me to help you go after the horse thief.”

Red Eagle nodded. It seemed he was learning something new and important every time his brother opened his mouth.

“Didn’t you think it was odd that nobody in town recognized Golden,” Red Eagle asked. “If his owner worked that mine he must have come into town now and then.”

“I’ve been wondering about that also. It has to mean our Dead Guy didn’t use Red Bend for shopping and things like that. I wonder why.”

“It could be he didn’t want it known he was in the area.”

“Or, he could have been a wanted man. Maybe he was not the one who worked the mine – just the one who stole the

gold from the person who did.”

“Interesting,” Jericho said. “I suppose we’ll never know.”

“Unless that person comes back to the mine.”

From what the banker said it sounds like we are rich – in money,” Red Eagle said.

“Sure does. A week ago, I would have thought that was the greatest thing ever. But, since you have moved into my head, I understand it’s not so important.”

Red Eagle chuckled.

“That was a funny way to say it – about how I have affected you. It’s not really me it is the teachings of my people.”

Jericho nodded. He wouldn’t debate the topic.

“About Golden,” Red Eagle said. “If he lived there at the red hill with Dead Guy, don’t you think he would have gone to the pond on the other side of the trees to get a drink instead of going into the hidden cave.”

“Interesting. Yes. There were no signs of horses in our cave – no droppings. I’m thinking you are right. So, what does that mean?”

“Like you suggested, Dead Guy found out about the mine and took the gold. That might mean the miner was away and will be coming back.”

“Or it means he was killed during the robbery,” Jericho said.

“Maybe he is the one who killed Dead Guy – knowing he was that thief.”

“I guess we’ll never really know, but for a while at least we should probably be more careful than we’ve been.”

“Careful how?” Red Eagle asked.

“We need to see if the smoke from our fire can be seen when it leaves the cave and tonight we need to go out after dark and see if the light from our fire can be seen through those slits in the outside wall.”

That much of their plan was set. Upon returning they went directly to the door of the mine to see if it had been opened. It had not. That provided immediate relief.

It was mid-afternoon by the time they entered their cave. The afternoon had grown hot. The breeze had kicked up a continuous curtain of dust on their way back from town.

Several times Red Eagle had taken water from his leather water pouch and washed the dust from around Golden's eyes.

Inside, they drank and refilled their canteens from the bubbling water at the end of the pool. The temperature of the water kept the cave at a constant, comfortable temperature – cooler than the outside during the day and warmer at night.

“Let's swim and make plans.”

As strange as it may seem, eighty-degree water does seem a bit cool when a 96-degree body slips into it. That soon passed. They were never at a loss for things to talk about.

“I was wondering,” Jericho said, “what's the word for ‘twins’ in Cherokee?”

“Dinilawi.”

“And horse?”

“Soguili.”

“Water?”

“Gagisdi.”

“I have a lot to learn, don't I? I admire you for knowing two languages.”

It needed no response.

“How about we make a list of all the things we need to make decisions about?” Jericho said.

“A good way to start. Like what to do with the rest of the gold.”

“And where are we going to live?”

“And how will we continue our education?”

“And how will we learn about girls?”

They giggled like a couple of five year olds.

“I think Doc would talk with us about that,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle nodded, not sure why the topic seemed embarrassing.

The list continued for some time.

An hour later they were rested, clean and ready to get on with other things. They took the saddle bags off the ledge and Jericho set to counting the gold while Red Eagle took the new iron skillet to the water and scrubbed it clean of rust using sand and leaves. It had been half a day since they had eaten so he fixed a place at the fire for the skillet and cut strips of bacon. He took a few minutes to gather a few vegetables and

soon had a wonderful smelling meal cooking.

“Sixty-three,” Jericho said at last, referring to the number of little ingots. A few more than we figured. Sometime we need to explore that tunnel in the mine and see if there’s more gold to be mined.”

“Do you know about such things?” Red Eagle asked.

“Not really. I guess if there are chunks of gold in the walls, it will tell us something.”

“What will we do with the money we get from the gold?” Red Eagle asked.

“There has always been one thing I wanted to do – make a wonderful place for orphans to live, where they are well cared for, have clothes and food and their own place to sleep at night. It would have the nicest people in the world working in it and a doctor that can come and help sick kids any time of day or night. There would be books and teachers and toys and lots of love. The kids would all learn they are precious people. Any time a little kid needed to crawl up in a grown up’s lap there would be a lap just waiting for him. There would be one person whose whole job is to find wonderful parents to adopt the kids.”

“It sounds like Galáladi tsosá.”

“What’s that?”

“I think you say heaven. It is a great idea. I cannot think of any better way to use the money. Will we have enough?”

“Enough to make a dozen places like that, I’m thinking.”

“How will we learn how to make such places?” Red Eagle asked.

“That’s one of the best things about my new dinilawi.”

“What?” Red Eagle asked grinning.

“You keep pulling me back to the practical side of things. I tend to think in dreams and you in things of the world. Always keep doing that.”

“I used to also dream about things when I was young. Maybe you can help me be that way again.”

“Sounds great. You know, there are times I just want to hug you for no reason at all.”

“I think that feeling is gágeyui.”

“And that means?”

“Love.”

They grew quiet.

The meal was ready.

They shared it.

When they finished, Red Eagle looked Jericho in the eyes.

“Time for dadaskwaniyisgá.”

“What does that mean, do the dishes?”

Red Eagle smiled and chuckled.

“Hug.”

They held each other for some time, then sat cross-legged, facing each other close to the fire.

“Love is very strange,” Jericho began.

“How?”

“A week ago, I didn’t even know you existed. I didn’t even really know there was the possibility that you could exist. But right from that first moment our eyes met across that stream, something about you settled down somewhere inside me. It was confusing. I’d never had such a feeling before. Now, I’m pretty sure it was love – or at least the first step toward love. I’ve never thought much about love before.”

“It is hard to think about things you have never experienced,” Red Eagle said. “I have to admit my first feeling about you was fear. My life has taught me White people are cruel to Indians. I’m sorry that was my feeling.”

“No sorry to it. It’s what it has developed into that counts. I hope I’m not wrong thinking that you love me, too.”

“Oh, no. Like you say it is the most wonderful feeling I have ever had.”

There would be many more discussions about love, but just knowing they shared it was enough for right then.

Well into the evening, Red Eagle helped Jericho begin learning about the Cherokee language. Jericho, in turn, would print each word in English on paper and help Red Eagle learn to read them.

They decided it was time to sleep when Jericho meant to say, ‘my mind is tired’, in Cherokee, but instead said, ‘my mother is fried chicken.’

It was worth unending laughter. It had been another interesting day. They would return to Red Bend the following

morning.

* * *

They hung the saddle bags on Golden, lay the blanket across his back in case either of them decided to ride, and attached the travois.

“I notice you always attach that with slip knots. Why?” Jericho asked.

“In case we need to ride in a hurry. Just pull the two rope ends and Golden will be free of his load. It is how I was taught – a safety precaution.”

They were on the road soon after sunup. Golden seemed uneasy about something. He kicked his rear legs into the air.

“What’s with Golden?” Jericho asked.

“I think he wants to run. Horses love to run. We have not let him since we have been caring for him.”

“Nothing says we can’t let him run right now is there?”

“No.”

“I will feel better if he has a rider in case he decides to just run away,” Red Eagle said.

“You are a much better horseman than I am. You give him a good run. I’ll stay here with the travois and practice my fried chicken.”

Again, they both doubled over in laughter. They untied the travois and in one easy move, Red Eagle mounted their beautiful horse. He left the bridle loose and gently placed his knee against Golden’s side. They raced across the meadow in a wide circle, repeating it several times. His brother was an excellent horseman. With just a gentle touch here or there he could signal the animal to make dozens of moves – turn left and right, slow, speed up and stop. It was fascinating to watch. After fifteen minutes, they were back.”

“You love to ride, don’t you?” Jericho said.

“About as much as anything. It frees my spirit.”

Jericho really didn’t understand what he meant, but he let it go. They were soon heading west again and shortly found themselves at the Red Bend sign. Red Eagle stopped and went over to it. He pointed to each letter and pronounced it. He looked at Jericho for approval.

“Perfect my dinilawi. Perfect. You learn fast.”

"I want to read one of your books so I have to learn fast. I saw you put one of them in your bag on the travois this morning."

"I was going to try and trade it for a new one today – Doc or Cilla. I didn't get the idea that Sandy or Cal were either much into reading."

Red Eagle just nodded. He figured it didn't matter what book he started with. They walked on into town and down Main Street. Sandy was sitting in a chair on the sidewalk in front of the Sheriff's office. He waved as they came into view.

"Nice day, huh?" he said.

"It sure is," Jericho said.

They stopped and Red Eagle tied Golden to the same spot as the day before. The horse drank its fill.

"Horse is lathered up. You been runnin' him?"

"He told my brother he wanted to run a while so they took off around the meadow back there. Did you know Red Eagle speaks horse?"

"I had my suspicions."

It was worth a smile but not a chuckle.

"If you're going to be in town for a while you might want to put the horse down at the livery. He'll be in the shade, have hay and oats."

"Can we afford that?" Red Eagle asked.

"Cost you a nickel for the day," Sandy said providing the information rather than directly answering the question. "He'll give you special rates if you come to town frequently."

Cal came down the street and waved when he saw them. He trotted the rest of the way.

"I was just telling the boys about using the Livery."

Cal nodded.

"Let me know. I can get you the best deal in town."

Sandy chuckled.

"Of course, you boys need to understand there's no other place in town."

They smiled. Before they could talk about it the stage coach entered from the east end of town. The horses were running wild. There was nobody in the driver's seat.

"Looks like there's been a robbery," Cal said.

"Need to stop that team," Sandy said running into the

street.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

One thing had always been true about the boys; when their help was needed, it was there in a minute – or in a second in this case.

“The travois,” Red Eagle called out as he leaped onto Golden’s back.

Jericho understood and pulled the slip knots loose. The travois fell to the ground. The horse reared and turned on a dime, racing out into the street at an angle to intercept the team gone crazy. The lead horse knocked Sandy to the ground as he attempted to mount it and bring the stage to a halt. Jericho was immediately at his side and dragged him out of the way a split second before the sharp wheels of the stage would have been upon him.

Red Eagle leaped from Golden and mounted the lead horse. Golden ran along beside, keeping his head against the frightened horse. They slowed. They stopped. Jericho was immediately up onto the driver’s seat on the coach and set the brake. He then returned to the ground to and the six horses to rub them and pat them and offer calming words.

Due to Jericho’s quick thinking, Sandy had not been hurt – well, perhaps a major bruise in a place he’d not be mentioning. The station master was soon on the scene, tending to the passengers; there were four – a mother and her young son and older daughter, and a business man.

Cal had immediately run to move the people back against the buildings not knowing what the runaway team might do.

Doc and Cilla came to offer help.

“Doesn’t seem to be any injuries to the passengers,” the Station Master said to Doc.

Sandy addressed the business man as he stepped down from the coach.

“Can you tell us what happened?”

“About two miles back, four men on horseback held us up. They shot the driver first thing. Can’t be sure of his condition. They only wanted the strong box. Didn’t even look inside the coach. Then, two of them took out bull whips and struck the horses sending them on their way in the frantic dash you witnessed.”

“I saw the open cuts on several of them,” Sandy said. “No wonder they were out of control with that awful pain.”

He dispatched a rider to go check on the stage driver.

The horse handler from the Coach Station began taking the horses two at a time around back to the stable. They would get water and attention to their wounds.

Sandy walked to where the twins were standing back away from the crowd. He pointed at them and spoke in what could not be thought of as a quiet voice.

“Well, that probably wasn’t the dumbest things a pair of twelve year olds have ever done, but it comes darn close. You both could have been killed.”

“You’re welcome,” Jericho said attempting to lighten the moment.

Doc moved in.

“What you tried to do, Sandy, couldn’t really be considered a well thought through plan of action.”

“But I’m paid to take such risks.”

“Okay, so you had to. The boys didn’t. I suppose that makes them genuine heroes, then, doesn’t it?”

“Of course, it does. I was getting to that.”

Sandy offered his hand to the boys. Playfully they both raised their right hand, Indian style and died laughing about it. It was contagious and soon everybody was laughing.

“You seem to be missing a boot, son,” Sandy said to Jericho. “What . . .?”

“Seems the front wheel of the coach caught my heel and when I fell forward with you I left the boot behind. It’s out

there somewhere.”

The young boy who had been on the coach trotted up.

“I think this is yours, Sir,” he said handing the boot to Jericho. “Are you a real cowboy?”

Jericho was caught off guard and hesitated. Cal answered for him.

“These two are about the best cowboys you’ll ever meet. Who knows what might have happened to you and the others if they hadn’t jumped into action.”

“Gee, thanks!”

The boy beamed and returned to his mother and big sister. She had not gone unnoticed by the boys, but she was over there and they were not.

The Station Master approached them.

“They’ll be a reward for you two. You have my everlasting thanks.”

“We do not believe people should get rewards for just doing what is right,” Red Eagle said.

“Hmm!” the Station Master said massaging his chin. “How about this then; stage line rules say I have to replace any item broken in the service of the line, so we will get you a new set of boots.”

Jericho shrugged. Sandy looked at Red Eagle.

“Hold up your right foot. Just as I suspected, it is plain as can be that in the past few minutes he wore the tarnation out of the soles of his moccasins. I’m thinking you owe him a pair. It had been a clear exaggeration, aimed at milking as much as he could for the boys.

Before either boy could respond Cilla opened her mouth.

“And just look at the condition of their clothes. Filthy. They’ll never get them clean. I think a new outfit apiece is also in order.”

By then it had become a joke and everyone was smiles and chuckles. Jericho spoke.

“But none of you seem to have noticed all the energy we expended during the activity, which, I’m thinking can only be properly replaced by a two-scoop bowl of ice cream from the restaurant.”

It brought laughter and applause. The Station Master

looked around at the gathering and made a pronouncement.

“For one reason or another, I hereby proclaim ice cream for every soul here under the age of fifteen. The little boy’s eyes grew big and he looked up at his mother.

“I did hear you say seventeen, didn’t I,” Cal said playfully.

The young people moved on across the street to the restaurant.

Half an hour later, tummies filled and some actual conversation with the girl – Sally, they learned – they were back on the street. Golden, who had mostly been ignored in the excitement was waiting patiently just outside.

“I guess the bank’s next, huh,” Jericho said to his brother.

They walked west down the street and entered the bank – Golden chose to stay outside in the fresh air. They carried the heavy saddlebags between them. The banker met them at the door and motioned for them to go right into his office.

“That wouldn’t be what I think it is, would it?”

“I’m going to guess, yes,” Jericho said, “sixty-three more little ingots.”

“And you didn’t have Sandy guarding it?”

“Who’d think two kids would be carrying this kind of thing around. We’d have got lot more attention and questions with a guard riding with us.”

“I suppose, but still.”

He opened the door and motioned to a boy probably fifteen.

“I’ll have our runner go bring Sandy”

[In the days before telephones, businesses employed runners to carry messages and deliver small items around town.]

“I’ll need to put on extra guards here until Sandy can figure a way to safely move it to Kansas City. In the meantime, it will stay in vault.”

“Sorry to be so much trouble, Sir,” Red Eagle said.

The runner returned with Sandy. The banker explained the situation and when he was done he added – to Sandy: “There is no need to lecture them on how irresponsible it was

for them to bring it in alone. I tried, and they buried my argument almost before I got it said.”

They all grinned. The banker from nervousness, Sandy from his growing respect for the two young ragamuffins who seemed to be working their ways into the hearts of the little community, and the boys because life seemed very good at that moment – money in the bank, ice cream in their stomachs, and a full half hour talking with a girl!

Back outside the boys sat on the raised sidewalk, their feet down on the hard-packed dirt street.

“I have a question,” Red Eagle said.

“Okay.”

“The girl seemed very uncomfortable around me. Did I do something wrong?”

“No. Let’s see, how can I say this? White girls and not used to seeing boys without their clothes on – that came out wrong. I mean, almost all of you isn’t covered – no shirt or pants, you see. Just your breechclout.”

“I don’t understand. All Cherokee boys and men wear very little.”

“And that’s just fine for Cherokees when they are among Cherokees. She just isn’t used it because she is not familiar with your Cherokee ways. You are likely the very first Indian she has ever seen.”

“I am sorry. I didn’t mean to make her feel uncomfortable. What shall I do?”

“I see two possibilities: One, cover up with a blanket around you when you’re in town or Two, get a set of clothes like I wear for times like this.”

“Hmm. I think it would be awful to wear your clothes – uncomfortable – they rub you all over – they are tight when you move your arms and legs. In the summer, they look like they are very hot. And, like Cilla said, they are always getting dirty.”

“I can’t argue with a single thing you said. Tell you what, when we get home this afternoon you can wear mine for the evening and see what you think. It seems we both have a new set coming to us from the Stage Line.”

“Alright. I guess if I am going to live partly in the White Man’s world I need to make some adjustments. I’ll do my best

to get used them.”

“I want to get that book from my bag and go see Cilla about a trade.”

A few minutes later they were inside the newspaper office. Cilla stood and pulled them to her in that hug that seemed to be her trademark. Neither boy struggled against it. She smelled good!

She showed them around – the printing press, the type that was set into words to print the paper, her library and the sitting area near the front corner by the large windows. She was happy to have the boys borrow any of her books any time. There would be no need for trades.

“Doc has hundreds of books upstairs,” she said.

“We saw them. I can hardly wait to see what they are.”

“I am learning to read,” Red Eagle said not wanting to be left out. “My brother is a fine teacher. In just one night I learned lots of words – R-E-D B-E-N-D spells, Red Bend.”

Cilla went to the bookcase and ran her finger along the spines until she found the one she was looking for. It was a McGuffey Reader, the first book all school received when they entered school.

“This is what you need to begin with. It will seem pretty juvenile, but if you can ignore that you will soon be ready for interesting stories.”

“What is ‘juvenile’?”

Jericho answered.

“For young kids.”

“I guess in reading I am a juvenile young kid.”

He clutched it to his chest as if it were his magic key that would open up the universe to him. It was, of course.

They turned to leave.

“Don’t leave town without saying goodbye to Doc,” she said. “He and I feel a very special bond to you two. Our inclination is to tie a rope around your waists and never let you out of sight – you could call that overprotection, I suppose. When someone is precious to you, you want to protect them from everything that could ever possibly go wrong or harm them. It can’t be, of course, so we have to learn to trust that our loved ones will be able to take good care of themselves. Every time a child proves that to his parents – that he is

responsible and trustworthy it makes it easier to let go a little more. Doc and I know very little about you boys you must understand. We do trust your judgment and as we get to know more about you we will come to trust it even more. You just have to understand that when we give you too much advice or try to protect you more than you need protecting.”

“You are talking about gágeyui,” Jericho said.

“Yes, the Cherokee word for love,” Cilla said.

Red Eagle brightened.

“You speak Cherokee?”

“Very little. And yes, I guess I was talking about love.”

“Can I ask you something, Cilla?” Red Eagle asked.

“Sure. Anything.”

“Does my lack of clothing bother you – make you uncomfortable?”

“No. What are you really asking?”

He explained the problem and the several possible solutions Jericho had proposed.

“Well, Jericho is correct. However, when you go visiting your Cherokee people they will think it is very odd that Jericho covers himself up. Two cultures. Two sets of beliefs. The two of you will come up against lots of such situations. Use your good heads and you will find ways of working them out.

The two turned to leave, but stopped at the door whispering back and forth.

They turned, smiling, and opened their arms, Cilla fashion.

That time it was she who was enveloped by four young arms. Like often happens for the female of the species, she had tears on her cheeks. She smelled wonderful!

The boys raced around the corner and pushed and shoved their way up the stairs and into Docs place. They entered laughing.

“Cilla said if we didn’t come up and say goodbye you’d soon have the Sheriff and the militia out looking for us.”

“She did, did she? Women! It was a nice gesture on your parts, though. Old guys tend to worry when worry may not be warranted. You leaving town now?”

“We’ve finished our business at the bank and that’s

really all we had to do in here today.”

“You going to get those boots? You not only look silly, one barefoot and one in a boot, but you look so uncomfortable.”

“I guess I am – uncomfortable. We’ll see if we can take care of that. The leather shop?”

“That’s where I’d start. The General Store has some, too. Don’t settle for the cheap ones. The Stage Master will allow you the most expensive ones they have.”

“Red Eagle, too?”

“Absolutely.”

“I feel funny taking gifts we can easily afford ourselves,” Jericho said.

“How did you feel after you got the stage stopped this morning?”

“Good.”

“Great!”

The boys looked puzzled.

“That’s’ how people feel when you allow them to do things for you. It really isn’t the boots. It is the good feeling people will get inside when they are able to give them to you. Like at Christmas.”

The boys looked at each other, puzzled again.

“I assume that was a poor example. No Christmases I guess.”

Each boy shook his head, confirming Doc’s take on it.

“Still, did you get my message about the boots?”

They nodded.

Doc pointed.

“I see you have some books.”

“Cilla loaned them to us. I read everything I can get my hands on and soon my brother will be doing that, too.”

“The more you learn the easier life becomes. I congratulate you on that plan. You know you’re welcome to mine, too.”

“Do you have a book about girls?” Jericho asked before he thought.

Doc chuckled into his hand trying to conceal it.

“I think instead of a book we need to have a long chat about girls and related things. We’ll set aside some time next

week. Don't let me forget."

The boys looked at each other.

"We won't!" Jericho said.

"Thank you," Red Eagle added.

They flew down the steps. At the bottom, Jericho had a suggestion.

"We need some supplies. Let's get some money out of the bank and get a few things. If we do that every time we come to town, we'll soon have a good supply laid in."

"It sounds like you're ready to make our cave our home," Red Eagle said.

"Not my decision to make alone, but it felt like that was how we're thinking – for a while at least."

"That was my thinking, too. We just had not really talked about it. It is a fine plan."

The travois was loaded down. On the way home, Golden really earned his oats – they had bought him a sack from the livery. They figured if they got ice cream, then Golden deserved a double helping of his own treat.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

According to their plan, the boys traded clothes and spent the evening working on reading and Cherokee. It had been a fine time filled with laughter and good feelings. In and around everything else they hatched a plan, which they thought would be hilarious. The next day they would go into town, each looking like the other – clothing and hair.

Red Eagle braided Jericho's hair after his style. Together they unbraided Red Eagle's.

"Well, what do you think?" Jericho asked. "Do I look like you?"

Red Eagle walked around him several times getting a good view from several angles.

"Well, you look the way I think I look. I have never seen my back."

Jericho chuckled.

"Well, you certainly look like me. I've seen me in many mirrors. We need to do something about the little twists that remain in your hair from being braided for so many years. Maybe wetting it, do you think?"

"We can try it."

They got into the pool and repeatedly wet his hair. Jericho would pull it straight and hold it tight. Red Eagle would complain he was pulling his scalp right off his head. For some reason, it was a laughter filled undertaking with dunking, sputtering and full face grins. By time for sleep they could see they had made very good progress. Once more in the morning before they left for town should do it.

When Golden had entered their lives, he immediately

took up with Red Eagle, which pleased both of them. Although they both loved horses, horses had in many ways been Red Eagle's best friends while he was growing up. He would ride many hours every day and often sleep where they were tethered at night. Being with a horse made him feel safe and comfortable.

That next morning as they attached the travois and prepared to leave, Golden was clearly confused. He sniffed one and then the other. He nuzzled one and then the other. Red Eagle sensed the problem and put his arm around his neck and began talking to him. The confusion was soon over. For Jericho, it had been a fascinating thing to watch.

Not five minutes down the road, Red Eagle spoke.

"I really, really, really, really hate these clothes. They are just as awful as I figured they would be. Did I say I really hate the?"

"Sorry. I really like yours. Much cooler, like you indicated. My arms and legs feel free. The biggest problem is getting used to the moccasins. I can feel every pebble in the road."

"Feet need to get hard. Your boots are also uncomfortable. They make me feel like my feet are trapped in a black smith's fire. They squeeze my toes. I do not think this is working very well."

"We need to give it a good try. I think it will help us understand each other better."

Red Eagle nodded.

They stopped at the Red Bend sign and looked at each other.

"Ready?" Jericho asked.

"Probably not," Red Eagle answered tugging at his shirt.

Golden worked his head up and down.

"I think that's two against one," Jericho said grinning.

Very soon they were walking down Main Street. It was early and there were very few folks out and about yet. Doc was crossing the street to the restaurant.

"Does he never cook for himself?" Red Eagle asked, baffled at the idea of buying meals prepared by others.

Doc stopped in the middle of the street and raised a

hand in their direction. The boys picked up their pace to a trot and were soon at his side.

“You’re up early,” Jericho said (looking like Red Eagle).

“Haven’t been to bed yet. Mrs. Kuntz had her baby last night. The little bugger just didn’t want to give up his nice warm spot and join us out here in the cold world.”

He chuckled.

“Keep me company over breakfast. You can fill me in on all the wonderful adventures you have had in your lifetimes.”

Both boys immediately saw the problem – neither one yet knew enough about the other to tell details of their story in a convincing manner. Doc moved between the boys and urged them on with his arms across their backs. They soon found themselves in the restaurant at the same, rear table as before. They were coming to learn it was ‘Doc’s’ table – morning, noon, and night.

Doc turned to Red Eagle (Jericho).

“What do Cherokee boys like to drink for breakfast?”

He squirmed a bit and exchanged a quick glance with his brother, eventually speaking.

“Water.”

Doc turned to the other one (Red Eagle looking like Jericho).

“Tell me about Independence, Missouri where you spent most of your life. How tall is that new building they put up last year.”

The boy had no idea how to respond so settled on, “Very tall.”

The real Jericho spoke to his brother.

“I think we’ve been found out.” Then to Doc, “What gave us away?”

“First, the way you both hobbled down the street indicating your feet hurt. Second, the way your horse kept close to the wrong one of you. Third, the slightly lighter skin color on the neck of one of you, a neck that was usually covered with long hair instead of darkening from the sun allowed by his braids. And fourth, Red Eagle doesn’t use contractions.”

“The man is good, I’ll give him that,” the real Jericho

said.

“And, after being up all night, too.”

The boys were disappointed, but could smile about it.

Doc spoke.

“Cilla will be here shortly. See if you can fool her. You really do make the switch very effectively. Very few will be able to tell the difference.”

He chuckled.

Cilla arrived. She leaned down and gave each of the boys a quick peck to his cheek. She smelled good.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning.”

It had been the boys.

Doc raised his hand and the waitress came. They ordered.

“Doc went on playing along with the boys.

“Red Eagle, I didn’t get a chance to tell you how impressed everybody was at the way you and your horse worked together yesterday. You had him a long time, I suppose.”

“Not really. Just came by him a week or so ago. We sort of hit it off, you could say.”

Cilla looked at him. Then she looked at the other. Then she looked at Doc.

“I sense there is trickery afoot,” she said.

The boys’ shoulders slumped together.

“What’s wrong this time?” the real Jericho asked.

“Red Eagle would never have said, ‘We sort of hit it off’.”

Jericho turned to his brother.

“What would you have said?”

“We found each other comfortable right away.”

“You’re right. That’s what you’d have said.”

Cilla had more to say.

“You each really do look like the other one. It is amazing. You will fool almost everybody. The real test will be when you both have girlfriends and try to make the switch on them.”

They blushed, well, as much as tan-skinned boys could blush. Neither boy had any idea how to respond so they sat in

silence. The food arrived. They were happy to just listen – and eat – while Doc and Cilla talked.

Sandy entered with a man the boys had not yet met.

“Doc, Cilla, boys,” he said. “This is Deputy James from down at Sandy Ford. He’ll be here tending to things while I’m escorting a package (he winked) to Kansas City. I’m leaving out first thing in the morning – me, a two-horse team and wagon, and to other two guards the bank has sent from Kansas City. I’ll be gone a week.”

Jericho whispered to his brother: ‘Do you think we should go along?’

“I have never been to a city. That would be good.”

The real Jericho turned to Sandy.

“We figure you need two strong, intelligent young men to make your group complete.”

Sandy looked from Doc to Cilla. Doc shrugged with a frown. Cilla bit at her lower lip. Sandy summarized the situation.

“It seems to be unanimous then; all the adults think it is a terrible idea, but since I’m sure you will just follow along behind if I say no, welcome aboard.”

“You are a wise man,” Jericho said.

“One thing, Red Eagle, you will need to get some White boy’s duds to wear in K.C.”

Jericho spoke, hoping for a joke.

“I refuse to go against my people’s teaching.”

He hammered his fist against the table.

“Then you and your people’s teachings will remain here.”

The real Red Eagle broke out laughing. Cilla and Doc did as well.

“What’s going on,” Sandy asked.

“Just a little inside joke,” Doc said. “Red Eagle will comply with your request.”

Sandy had clearly been fooled. He and James turned to leave.

“Leaving at daybreak. Being your horse. You can take turns riding in the wagon with me.”

They left. The boys doubled over in laughter.

“Doc leaned forward and spoke in a confidential tone.”

“I suppose we need to have that talk before you leave for the sea of painted lady’s in the big city.”

“We didn’t understand anything after ‘talk,’” Jericho said.

“You will by noon. Come up to my office.”

By noon the boys knew more about girls and such than they had any idea there was to know. They suddenly had answers to a great many questions they hadn’t even had to ask. Doc was a good man.

The boys withdrew some more money from the bank and bought additional supplies. The nature of their purchases changed somewhat in light of the trip, suddenly in their future. Then, they visited the General Store where they were both soon fitted out in new outfits – all courtesy of the Stage Line. The man threw in a neckerchief each, two pair of stockings each, and a new hat for Red Cloud. Jericho wouldn’t part with his old one. Fortunately, the boys were identical in every dimension.

Outside they traded hats so Jericho would have his own. They tied their packages to the travois.

“We need to see Cilla for a second,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle followed. Jericho stuck his head in the door.

“Cilla. I was wondering if we could take the books we borrowed along to Kansas City. Should be lots of time for reading while we’re traveling.”

“Certainly. Have a safe trip.”

* * *

The boys were at the Sheriff’s office well before daybreak. They brought a few supplies, which they would transfer from the travois to the wagon – leaving the travois standing up against the newspaper office according to their arrangement with Cilla.

It was a strange time of day in a town – no people on the streets and very few lights in windows. The hitching rails in front of the stores were empty. The only signs of life were a cat and dog playing chase. Cats always won so Jericho wondered why dogs insisted on continuing the contest. Jericho wondered about odd things.

It had grown quite cool during the night. The boys sat on the sidewalk in front of the Sheriff’s office. Red Eagle had a

full set of buckskins he just hadn't shown to his brother yet. They had come with him on the travois. That morning he decided to break them out. They were medium brown, soft-tanned leather. The top was a loose, pullover and worn on the outside, extending well below the belt line. There was a large pocket near the bottom on each side. They could be worn with or without the breechclout. Jericho thought his brother looked great – much like a drawing of an Indian in one of the books about the west he had read when younger. He had left his hair straight and had brought his 'white kids' outfit and boots along for when they got to the city.

Two men, strangers to the boys, came out of the hotel, looked up and down the street and started toward them. They each wore a holstered six-shooter on each hip and carried a rifle. They dressed in black from boots to hats. It could have been a scary situation.

One of the men raised his hand as they approached. That seemed friendly the boys agreed.

"You two must be the kids with the 'package' we came to get," the other said as they stopped a few steps away. "I'm Buck and this is Chuck. I really don't understand what I'm seeing here."

"You mean how two such handsome lads could be on the same street at the same time?"

"Yes, that, of course!"

They all chuckled. Jericho tried an answer, offering the well-practiced short version. It seemed to satisfy him.

"We ride matched blacks. Stayed the night at the livery. What will it take to get you boys to go get them for us? Saddles and tack in the stalls with them."

"All it will take will be safe passage to Kansas City," Jericho said.

"Never lost a set of twin boys yet, have we, Chuck?" Buck said elbowing his companion. The other one shook his head and broke a smile.

Buck leaned in close to Jericho and whispered loud enough so they could all hear.

"Does your brother ever speak?"

Jericho mimicked Bucks manner.

"I was about to ask the same about Chuck."

Chuck addressed Red Eagle, also in an undisguised whisper.

“We save our words for things that are important, right boy?”

“And only things that are important, Sir.”

There were chuckles all around.

“Give us ten minutes to get your horses.”

The boys took off on the trot west down Main Street.

“Did anything strike you about those two men?” Red Eagle asked.

“You mean that they look as much alike as you and I do?”

“Yes, that. I wonder why they didn’t mention it.”

“I suppose because it was obvious so they didn’t think it was necessary.”

They entered the livery and found the two blacks – absolutely identical blacks – and set to saddling them with absolutely identical saddles and tack.

By the time they left the livery, Sandy was at the bank with the team and wagon. They arrived at the same moment as Buck and Chuck crossed the street to meet them.

Sandy looked them over.

“I seem to be seeing double, double, double.”

“You are, you are, you are,” Red Eagle said. “Guess you and Golden will have to cozy up.”

“You sayin’ I look like a horse?”

“Not just any horse, Sir. The most beautiful Palomino in the territory!”

“Oh, well, that’s different, then, of course.”

More chuckles.

“I take it you and the Bank Men haven’t met,” Jericho said. “One of them is Buck and the other Chuck – they seem to be interchangeable.”

Red Eagle spoke.

“Buck has the red hat band. Chuck has the blue one.”

Jericho looked at his brother as if to say, ‘Nice catch. I hadn’t caught that.’

The guards offered their credentials to Sandy. He read them each carefully then turned to Chuck.

“The sunset was interesting last night. Did you notice?”

“Yes. Red and purple bands.”

They shook hands.

Jericho had to intervene.

“No, it wasn’t. It was bright orange right to the end.”

“It was a code,” Buck said, “sent ahead by the bank so the deputy could confirm we are who we say we are.”

“Very clever. A+ I’d say, wouldn’t you, Red Eagle?”

“No, since I have no idea what A+ means.”

“I’ll explain later. Just take my word for it.”

Doc walked up on his way to breakfast.

“You men have a safe journey.”

“That’s our intention,” Sandy said. “We’ll see you in about a week. I’ll send my office a wire (telegram) when we leave KC on our way back. Should be a nice vacation!”

Little did Sandy know, that was not going to be the case.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

They traveled directly into the sun and the world warmed rapidly. By ten o'clock the boys had shed their shirts. Sandy drove the team. Red Eagle took the first turn on Golden. The road followed Red Creek for a long distance before the water turned south east and the road began veering just a bit north east. The land was still flat and covered in grazing grass with a smattering of low, woody bushes. Trees were clumped into occasional groves often enclosing a spring-fed watering hole. It was such a grove where they stopped for lunch.

As was the custom at that time, they first watered the horses, then they ate. If it hadn't been for Jericho's endless chatter, the morning would have likely passed in silence. By noon he had learned everything about the others that they were willing to share and many things they would have rather not shared. Jericho had a way about him that people trusted and, therefore, he could coax things out of folks before they realized what was happening. It wasn't that the lad was nosey . . . well, yes it was that the lad was nosey.

They let the horses rest for a long hour before they were back on the road.

Sandy pointed ahead. Red Eagle was riding on the seat with him.

"Painted Pass just ahead. Only real pass in eastern Kansas and, at that, it isn't much of one. The road winds up a low hill with rock outcroppings on both sides – streaked in lots of colors – mineral deposits, I'm told. Once beyond it the geography slowly begins growing into the green hills that

provide much of the lumber for a six-state area.”

The boys knew it would be cooler once they got into the area of tree covered hills and valleys. At the top of the hill between the huge, streaked rocks things suddenly took a turn for the worse.

A group of ten men on horseback appeared from out of the rock hills on both sides. They wore bandanas covering the lower halves of their faces. Their guns were drawn. Two of them dismounted and took hold of the horses, pulling them to a sudden halt.

“You will unbuckle your side arms and drop them to the ground. Same for your rifles. Then get off your horses and down from the wagon.”

They had no alternative. At that point it was ten guns to none. The leader spoke again.

“The boys will lay face down in the wagon. If you follow us the boys will be hurt – broken arms and legs and such.”

They swatted the saddled horses and sent them high tailing it back down the road to the west. The two men who were handling the team, mounted the wagon and moved it on down the trail. The others followed.

Between the noise of the horses and the wagon, the boys were able to whisper undetected.

“There is a large wooded area at the base of the hill,” Red Eagle said.

“Up and over the sides of the wagon, you’re thinking?” Jericho said.

“That’s what I’m thinking.”

“How will we know when we get there,” Jericho asked, really thinking out loud.

“The shadows of the trees will make it darker – block out the sun.”

“Good thinking. I have my knife. For some reason, I decided to carry it inside my boot this morning. Your bow and quiver are still on Golden.”

“Golden will find us. Here is an idea. Once out of the wagon, we will go into the woods in opposite directions – right and left across the road. We will run one hundred steps straight ahead and then climb the tallest tree we can find. We’ll remain quiet up there until the men leave. Then we’ll

move on east for two hundred steps and circle back to the road.”

“Good plan. I have an idea once we catch up to the wagon.”

Just as Red Eagle had predicted the world suddenly grew darker.

“Ready?”

“Ready!”

“Up and over on three. One . . . two . . . three.”

It was as if they had practiced the move for weeks. They vaulted over the side, lit on their feet and ran into the trees at full speed. They each carried out the plan and were high atop the tree limbs when the men came searching for them. None of them even thought to look up. They soon left. Jericho would have to hear just how his brother had come by that up-the-tree strategy. Most likely an Indian thing he figured.

Once down the tree, Jericho made his way east the way they had planned. When he got back to the road he stopped, still among the trees, to determine what was happening. He heard the wagon and the men’s horses just to the east. They had apparently stopped to search for some time. That was a good thing because it kept them close. He could not, however, see Red Eagle. Should he wait or should he follow the thieves? He opted to follow them, thinking his brother would be able to catch up. Red Eagle could run like the wind.

Jericho set out at a trot that he figured was just a bit faster than the team and wagon. They wouldn’t dare risk running the horses in the heat.

A few minutes later he heard a horse galloping at a good clip behind him on the road. Had they left one man as a rear guard or to continue the search? Either one made sense. Maybe the rider had come upon Red Eagle and captured him. Jericho figured his best course of action was to retreat just far enough into the woods to keep an eye on the road and see what was actually happening.

He took a place behind a tree some ten feet from the road. The horse was soon upon him. It was certainly not what he expected. There he was, Red Eagle on Golden at a

full gallop. He stepped onto the road waving his hands above his head. Golden stopped. Red Eagle dismounted.

“I won’t even ask,” Jericho said.

“What was your idea about the wagon?”

“We need to catch the wagon first.”

They doubled up on Golden and were soon within easy view of the wagon. It was on a dry stretch of the dirt road and kicking up quite a cloud of dust behind it. By that time, the riders were leading the way – most likely to keep clear of the dust.

Red Eagle guided Golden into the stand of trees to their right and urged him on to continue closing the gap.

“There is another long hill just ahead,” Jericho said.

“I saw it.”

“We need to pass the wagon here among the trees and wait for it at a spot where the trees close in on the road,” Jericho said.

They were soon at such a spot. They dismounted.

“There and there,” Jericho said pointing. “We each need a length of a fallen branch about as tall as we are and about four or five inches thick.”

With his hands, he showed his brother what that thickness would be. He set to trimming off the few small branches that protruded from them.

“When the wagon passes, we toss the limbs into the back wheels – you do the one on this side. I’ll cross and do the other. That should break spokes on the wheels and disable the wagon.”

In less than a minute they were ready. The wagon approached. Using every ounce of strength they had, the boys sailed the limbs toward their targets. The plan worked perfectly. The wagon jolted to a stop sending the two who were riding on the seat forward with sufficient force that they ended up under the feet of the team. As the boys took off on the run into the woods, they heard the men screaming in pain. Golden followed his boys.

All quite unexpectedly they heard gun fire – a lot of gun fire. The boys stopped. The gun fire stopped. They turned and crept back toward the road stopping a safe distance from where they could observe the scene and yet not be detected.

They looked at each other in disbelief. There were Buck and Chuck on their black horses with Sandy doubled behind Buck. The outlaws were lying face down on the road their guns tossed into the grass along the side. The men dismounted and proceeded to tie the men to trees.

The boys moved out onto the road.

“Somebody has lots of explaining to do,” Jericho said.

Sandy tried an answer.

“A few minutes after they carted you off in the wagon Golden came trotting back leading the other horses. Chuck and Buck had extra guns stashed in their saddle bags. Golden took off east on the road somehow knowing that’s where you two were. Now, what happened here?”

Uncharacteristically, Red Eagle offered the explanation. Sandy responded.

“Excellent work, but remind me to give you two the bawling out of your lives after all this over. You could have been killed!”

“So, could you, of course,” Jericho pointed out.

“Yes, but let me remind you that we get paid to take that risk. You don’t as if that will really ever change anything with you. Now, we have two problems. First, we need to get these men to Green Hills. It’s about ten miles up ahead. There is a Marshal there. We also need to get this wagon repaired. In case you hadn’t noticed the wheels somehow got broken into little pieces.”

Red Eagle cleared his throat. Jericho looked at him.

“What’s percolating in that Cherokee brain of yours?”

“I think I see how we can solve both problems at once.”

“I’m listening,” Sandy said.

“We cut a strong sapling three times as wide as the wagon. Tie it in place across the wagon, under the bed, just behind the wheels. The extra length will extend out on both sides. Then tie the ten banditos’ hands to the sapling – five on each side – and let them lift and carry the rear end of the wagon.”

Sandy looked at Buck and Chuck. Buck replied.

“Can’t see why it won’t work. Actually, very clever. You sure those boys are just twelve. Sandy, you drive the team and the two of us will ride along behind.”

A half hour later the modification was made to the wagon, the men were tied in place and they were back on their way. Sandy stopped every mile to let the men rest and drink. They couldn't afford losing any of them to heat exhaustion. The boys tied the outlaws' horses into a string and Golden led them along behind.

They drew quite a crowd as they started down the Main Street of Green Hills. A deputy friend of Sandy met them and once the wagon was at the wainwrights' (wagon builder) building, they deposited the men in the jail.

Sandy spoke to the boys.

"You lodge the horses at the livery for the night. Then go get a good meal at the restaurant. You really deserve some sort of reward."

He handed the boys a dollar to eat on while he continued.

"We'll stay here in town tonight while the wheels get fixed. Probably room for you two in the livery."

"We'll take care of things," Jericho said. "Can't take your money – we were only protecting our own property. In fact, we'll treat you all to supper tonight."

Eventually the several things that needed doing were finished. The wainwright got to work. Sandy asked his friend for the loan of two deputies to guard the wagon overnight and they enjoyed a meal of steaks, baked potatoes, rolls and apple pie.

The boys bedded down in the hay loft of the Livery Stable.

"That was a great feeling, wasn't it," Jericho said.

"You are referring to being able to buy everybody the evening meal?"

"Yeah. I've never been able to do something like that before. I didn't know how it would feel, but I figured it would be wonderful."

"Do you not feel like that after you help somebody?"

"Yeah, I do. I suppose it may be a White Man's feeling – to use his money to buy something for somebody else. Do you think Doc feels that way when he buys us breakfast?"

"I'm sure he does."

They were soon asleep.

By morning the repairs had been made, the horses had been fed and rested and they were ready to continue the journey.

“We want to pay for the repairs, Sandy, but we didn’t bring enough money to cover it,” Jericho said.

“I’ll leave an IOU from the Sheriff’s office. You repay me and I’ll see the wainwright gets it. That be satisfactory?”

“Yes, Sir. Thank you. I can see there is a whole lot about money we still need to learn.”

“I just believe you will have the opportunity to do that.”

They were back on the road by seven. Again, Red Eagle started out on Golden. Sandy spoke to Jericho on the seat beside him.

“If this is none of my business just tell me, but what are you and your brother going to do? I mean are you staying at Red Bend and if you are where are you planning to live? According to all the rules, boys your age should really be supervised by a responsible adult.”

“I will respond to the last thing first. It seems to us that with you, Doc and Cilla following almost our every move, we are in good adult hands – the responsibility and supervision thing. We haven’t had time to think through where we will live in the long run. As for a place to stay for now, we have a safe place that meets all our needs and we would rather keep its whereabouts to ourselves. I hope you will respect that.”

“I assume you will keep me informed as you make decisions.”

“We will.”

“You know, you could build the fanciest house in the territory and have money left over to build 100 more.”

“I think you know better than to suggest fancy anything to either of us. I’m telling you we have everything we need. Well, I’m probably going to get a horse of my own. We are thinking about an ice chest. We talked to the man at the Ice house and he says the ice he makes in the winter, lasts clear through the summer and fall. He let us look into the ice house. Did you know the insides of the walls in that building are packed four bales of straw thick floor to ceiling, and the same across the attic floor? He calls it insulation. It was 32 degrees in there the day we visited and it was in the upper 90s

outside. That's about the best modern convenience I can think of – a ice box. My brother and I drew up plans for a two-wheeled cart to pull behind a horse that's all insulated with straw in between double walls so we could transport it to our . . . the place we live."

"That sure sounds to me like you intend to stick around."

"It does, doesn't it? I just caught that, too. I wonder if my brother knows that."

Sandy laughed and flipped the reins to move the team out on the final leg of the trip.

"Should be in KC by midnight. I've decided we'll just push on straight through. The animals had a good rest and we're into cooler country now."

* * *

The boys – especially Red Eagle – were amazed at the City – wide streets paved with cobble stones and brick, cement sidewalks, buildings five stories tall, beautiful carriages with beautiful women riding in them. People dressed in church clothes every day – suits and ties, hats, gowns. The train station was larger than any they had ever imagined with trains going off in all directions many times every day. One even went clear across the country to California. That was amazing!

The boys met with the man at the new bank and he showed them the huge vault and explained how they could get as much of their money any time they wanted it, just by arranging for it through the bank in Red Bend. They could even have money transferred anywhere they wanted across the whole United States. They boys felt very good about the safety of their funds.

Time came to begin the return trip. They were sorry to leave the city before they had seen all it had to offer, but figured that just gave them good reason to come back again.

They had stayed two nights and one day in a hotel. Although Jericho enjoyed the real bed, Red Eagle soon gave it up for the floor. When they checked out they went to the stable behind the hotel. They hitched the team to the wagon. Buck and Chuck had come to say goodbye.

"Looks like Golden has made a friend," Buck said

pointing to a beautiful black about four years old.

"I saw him," Jericho said. "A real beauty. That's some expensive saddle and tack he's wearing.

Red Eagle mounted Golden and moved a few feet forward. The Black followed along, nose to nose.

"Buck turned to Chuck.

"You know, Chuck, that black looks a lot like our horses. Did you notice that?"

"Now that you mention it, didn't your horse sire (father) a colt about four years ago?"

"Why, I do believe you're right."

Jericho understood the conversation had taken a turn toward strange, odd, peculiar, and bizarre. He put his hands on his hips and looked at the two men.

"What's going on?"

Buck spoke.

"Well, Golden seems lonely. Black seem lonely. We figured it would be a shame to break up such good, new friends."

The information really hadn't helped. Jericho frowned.

Chuck took the reins and handed them to Jericho.

"You two take good care of each other. Just be careful when you give him his head. He's as fast as lightning."

"Really. For me? I don't understand. I mean I . . ."

Red Eagle poked his brother in his shoulder and spoke.

"Just close your mouth, tell the men thank you, and give the animal the hug of its life. Daylight's burning and I, for one, have been away from Doc and Cilla far too long."

The black got its hug, but not until after Buck and Chuck each survived one of his own.

///

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Like Golden, the black loved to run full out and the boys spent a good deal of time on the return trip doing just that.

“If you don’t watch out, you two are going to travel twice as far as the wagon,” Sandy said.

“Probably,” Jericho said. “The horses love to run and we are energetic kids – unlike you older types.”

“You been thinkin’ about a name – for the black?” Sandy asked as the two boys took up places alongside the wagon?

“I have,” Jericho said. “I remember what Buck said about him when Chuck handed me the reins: ‘He’s fast as lightning’. I’m thinking, lightning. What do you guys think?”

“Sounds good to me,” Sandy said.

“It’s great!” Red Eagle said. Golden and Lightning.

Somewhat humorously, the horses moved their heads up and down.

* * *

They kept to long hours on the road and short nights, and arrived in Red Bend after just two and a half days on the road. Sandy drove on down Main Street to the livery while the boys held up at the city sign.

“It sounds right, coming home to Red Bend,” Jericho said.

“I know,” Red Eagle said. “I suppose we’re staying.”

“I was thinking that way. Nothing says we can’t move on later.”

“At the cave, I imagine,” Red Eagle said more like providing both a question and answer

“Sounds good. Sandy said we could build a house.”

“A house? With beds? No thank you, Same Face.”

“I wasn’t suggesting one, just passing on what he said.”

“So, what’s the plan, for the rest of today?”

“Doc and Cilla will be at the restaurant. We could start there.”

They gently urged their horses forward and soon arrived out front.

“I sort of feel different. I cannot explain it,” Red Eagle said.

“Yeah. Me, too. Strange. You look the same.”

“You, too.”

“I suppose outsmarting the bad guys.”

“I suppose. And being with the men. Not once did they ever treat us like kids.”

“I noticed that, too. Makes a guy feel special.”

“Like we moved over some sort of wall or hill.”

Silence.

The conversation was one that would need to be continued later, so they entered the restaurant and walked to Doc’s large table in the rear.

“You know those ragamuffins?” Doc asked Cilla, pointing to them with his coffee mug as they approached.

“They do look vaguely familiar.”

Cilla stood to administer hugs. (She smelled good!)

The boys took seats.

“A successful trip I assume,” Doc said.

“Yup,” Jericho said as if the conversation about it were over.

The three guys grinned knowing they were torturing Cilla.

“Enough of that male stuff. I want all the details.”

They were, of course ready to do just that and laid out a blow by blow account. It took bacon, four eggs scrambled and a platter of flapjacks, but they eventually finished.

“I think you left one thing out, dinilawi,” Red Eagle said.

“One thing?”

“One four-legged thing.”

“No idea what you mean.”

The boys grinned at their secret. The others allowed it

without comment.

The four of them left together. Red Eagle had taken to not tying Golden to the rail when they were in town. Golden liked to follow them from place to place. Out of habit, Jericho had not tied Lightning, either. As they left the restaurant, Golden came up to nuzzle Doc. He always seemed to have sugar cubes in his pocket. Lightning followed along.

"What's this all about?" Doc said thinking he knew the answer.

"Doc, Cilla, meet Lightning," Jericho said.

"Yours?" Doc asked digging in his pocket for more sugar.

"Yes. Buck and Chuck the guards from the KC bank. Wasn't that nice of them?"

"I'd say so," Cilla said moving to pat his head. "Welcome to the family, Lightning.

"He's as fast as Golden. They get on really well. Golden has always really been Red Eagle's. I think I even see a facial resemblance, don't you?"

Fully unexpected, Red Eagle jumped Jericho and they fell to the street. They rolled one way and then the other. They giggled like five year olds. The purpose of the contest seemed to be a pin, but after five minutes neither achieved that. They ended up rolling apart and laying on their backs, grinning up into the faces of their two new friends as they continued breathing hard.

Doc turned to Cilla.

"I think the two young men have just sealed the deal about being brothers."

"Is that what they did? I assumed a hand shake would serve that purpose."

"Doc looked down at the boys and together the three of them shook their heads, saying:

"Women?"

"You are filthy," she said as they got up.

"Of course. We are boys," Red Eagle said.

Sandy walked up having just heard the last part of it all.

"More like men, after the way you came through on the trip to KC," he said.

The boys stood and put their arms around each other's

shoulders. The horses nuzzled each other and whinnied. Doc and Cilla allowed a special look to pass between them. Suddenly the word, 'family', really seemed appropriate.

* * *

The boys soon arranged a very comfortable place in their secret cave. They agreed that no one would be told of its location. Red Eagle mostly kept to his Indian heritage and clothing while Jericho continued with his upbringing as a white boy. They figured blending their two cultures gave them a very special foundation for life. They arranged for Cilla to help them with their school work. Neither of them really fit very well into the school. Due to his lifelong love of reading, Jericho was way ahead of other youngsters his age and Red Eagle had such a unique mixture of knowledge and skills, plus needing to learn to read, that the school wouldn't be right for him either. Cilla knew just what they needed. They came to enjoy helping her set the type and delivering the papers on Saturday. Doc and Sandy were always there for those times when guy questions came up.

Something about the brothers – the dinilawi – just seemed to draw them into one exciting exploit after another and they were often seen galloping together across the range on their ways to brand new, wonder-filled adventures. Look for new books about the boys and their fascinating lives.

The End

I hope you will read the rest of this series. If you liked the stories about Jericho and Red Eagle, you may enjoy the six-book series called, *The Doc and Johnny Old West Mysteries*. They are also set in Red Bend with Doc and Cilla and another lad, Johnny. Those stories are set in 1880, ten years after this one. Cal did in fact become the Marshal. - DD