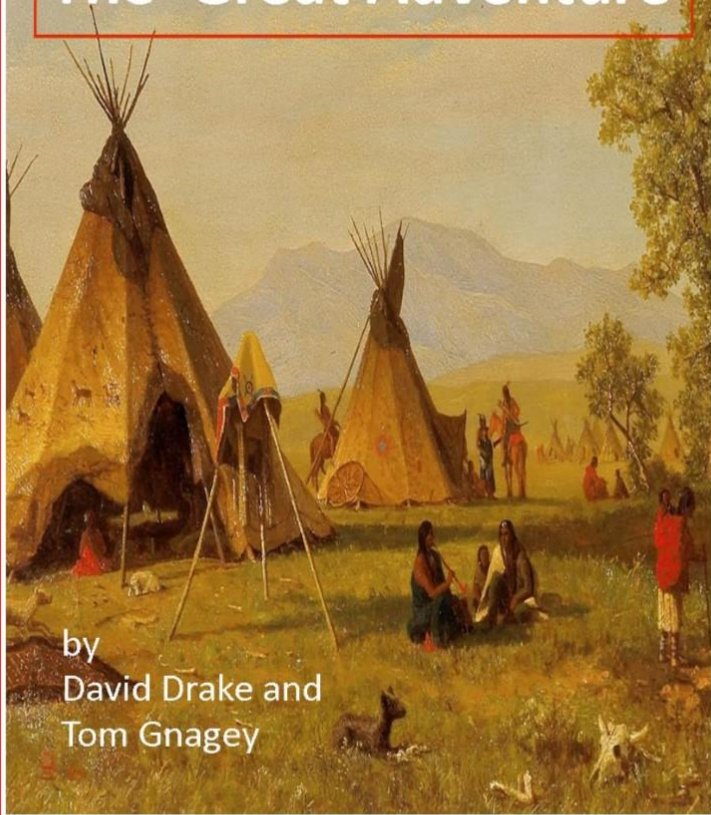


Jericho and Red Eagle
Two Boys' Adventures in the Old West

Book Five:

The Great Adventure



by
David Drake and
Tom Gnagey

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

Best if read in order.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

The story of Jericho and Red Eagle up to now.

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

Twelve-year-old twin boys learn they were separated at birth. One was raised as a Cherokee and the other a white boy. Not knowing that, in 1870, Kansas, they each undertook a separate journey to Red Bend Kansas hoping to discover who they were. They met along the way and soon accepted that they were identical twin brothers. In Red Bend, they discovered the circumstances of their birth and separation, and became friends with Doc Webber, Cilla who was the newspaper editor, Sandy the deputy sheriff and Cal, an older boy who hoped to someday become marshal of the territory. They discovered a secret cave, which they made their home, and a hidden gold mine that presented financial security for them. They each acquired a wonderful horse, stronger and faster than any others in Central Kansas. They outran a prairie fire, handled a runaway stage coach, and captured a band of outlaws that was out to steal their gold. They found the

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

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

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

In Book Three the boys and Cal have to deal with the myth and sudden presence of the ghost of a long dead Pirate who reportedly buried his life time of treasure right there in the area of Red Bend.

In Book Four they begin getting the home for orphans ready in the hills of southern Kansas. Along the way, they experience hardships, adventure, and excitement.

* * *

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

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CHAPTER ONE

Another Night's Sleep Interrupted!

"Red Eagle! Wake up!"

"I am awake."

"Did you just hear shots?"

"Pretty sure, yes."

It was sometime in the middle of the night. From the well-burned looks of their fire it was nearer three than midnight.

They always slept as Cherokees. They got their bows, slipped their quivers over their shoulders and went to the opening of the cave. There below them on the road in the dim light of a half-moon the 3:15 stage from McPherson was stopped. Half a dozen men on horseback surrounded it – guns drawn, bandanas across their faces. The driver and shotgun rider had dropped their weapons and were climbing down to the ground where they were directed to lay face down. While one man remained on his horse the others dismounted. One of them took the horses' bridles and moved them off some ten yards in the direction of the cave. He stayed there with them.

The others opened the door and motioned to what was evidently the only passenger – a well-dressed man – to get out. One of them searched him taking his watch, tie pin and wallet. He then had him lie face down in the grass on the other side of the road.

Now, most twelve-year-old boys might have said something like, "Be quiet," or "Stay down so they won't see

us,” or “I hope they don’t shoot anybody.” Not Jericho and Red Eagle! By that time, they were already halfway down the slope through the darkness to the horses.

“I’ll handle the man holding the reins,” Jericho said. “You scatter the horses.”

Horses have what is sometimes referred to as a ‘herd instinct’. When startled or frightened, they tend to run off in a pack, sticking together. Red Eagle was counting on that. The boys were soon right behind the five horses. The man with them was in front facing the stagecoach. Red Eagle whispered to his brother, “First, untie the saddles.”

Jericho understood immediately. As the horses ran away they would lose them, scattering them over the many acres across which they would be galloping. As quietly as – well, Indians – the boys un-cinched each saddle there in the darkness. That done, Jericho bent low and crossed to a spot in front of the rein-holding man. Drawing an arrow tight in his bow he stood up, placing the point of the arrow head against the man’s throat.

“Quiet or . . . or I suppose you can imagine. . . Drop the reins, unbuckle your gun belt, lay it on the ground silently, and lay flat on the ground in the grass.”

The grass was a good thirty inches high and when Jericho bent low they were both immediately hidden from view. Using his good sense, the man remained quiet.

With the man out of the way, Red Eagle mounted one of the horses and, clinging low to the side away from the stage he began the war whoop of all war whoops. The horses reared and ran. Red Eagle was able to keep his running by gently kneeling it in its side. He soon had them several hundred yards from the coach. He had not been seen. He dropped to the ground and let the horses run on ahead. They had left a string of saddles in their wake (path).

He crawled at an angle back toward the north west in the general direction of the cave. The scene at the stage was chaotic (confused). The man still on a horse rode off after the runaways. Two of the others followed him on foot. Seeing they were all occupied, Red Eagle stood and, bending low, ran back to where his brother lay with Rein Man.

“Cover him, brother,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle soon had an arrow drawn tightly in his bow.

“Not one peep, fella, or we’ll bury you where you lay.”

Fortunately, the man didn’t know that neither Red Eagle nor Jericho could bring themselves to so much as swat flies.

Jericho picked up the gun belt and, following the lead from Red Eagle he bent very low and made his way to the driver and shotgun who still lay in the tall grass. He spoke in low tones.

“Got two guns here,” he told the men handing them over. “I assume you will know what to do. There’s only one bad guy left on the other side of the coach. I’m going to ride for help.”

Without a word, they took the guns and crawled to within feet of the stage. That man was soon pulled to the near side of the coach, tied, gagged and laid out on the ground. Jericho understood their strategy. Remain quiet and wait for the others to return, taking them by surprise. It would take some time for them to get back.

Jericho whistled for their horses. With the rope Jericho had removed from one of the men’s saddles, they tied and gagged Rein Man so he couldn’t move or call out. For good measure, they took his boots.

A few minutes later they were on the road into town urging every bit of speed Lightning and Golden could muster (provide). The horses clearly sensed the urgency and gave it their all.

“I think this is Sandy’s night shift,” Jericho said. “You get him and I’ll go up to the livery and rouse Cal.”

By the time Jericho and Cal were back at the Sheriff’s office, Sandy was saddled up and he and Red Eagle were already heading east at a full gallop. Doc had been awakened by the commotion below on the street. He looked down on the scene and began muttering to himself.

“Looks like trouble. I’ll get the exam table ready. I don’t know why I even expect to sleep clear through the night anymore.”

They were back at the stage in ten minutes. The horses seemed to think it had been a wonderful game. They loved to run full-out.

“We got two of them, Sheriff,” the driver said.

“And we got one more laid out up the slope a way,” Red Eagle said.

“That leaves three chasing horses on east – one mounted – the leader I’m thinking. One passenger over there.”

The boys trotted to where he had been laying on the ground. He was sitting up. It turned out he was a courier for a railroad company carrying important papers from the headquarters in Kansas City to the new railhead south of Sandy Ford. The bandits had not had time to get to the case in which he was carrying them. Sandy wondered if there was some connection. That stage run did not carry a strongbox and seldom had any passengers at all at that time of night. To hold it up with six men made no sense.

Sandy spoke to the driver.

“You guys and your passenger get on your way. Cal and I will go after the other three.”

He stood the prisoners up – hands tied behind their backs – in a row, single file, one behind the other. Cal roped their left legs together at their ankles with five feet of rope between them. Sandy spoke to them.

“These young Indian men will walk you back to town and lock you up for safe keeping. Red Eagle, you have my permission to use them for target practice if they so much as say one word or miss a step.”

“Yes, sir. We do need target practice.”

The boys mounted up. Jericho held the end of the rope that was looped around the men’s ankles and off they moved in a slow procession toward town.

No sooner had they turned the key on the front of the cell to lock the men inside, Doc arrived, bag in hand.

“Hey, Doc. Good morning,” Jericho said cheerfully.

“It’s four a.m., child. What can possibly be good about that?”

“Well, you have the privilege of seeing us for one thing.”

Doc ignored the remark.

“Any of them need my services?”

“Not ‘til after they have to eat some of Cal’s cooking,” Jericho said joking. “The ones coming in with Sandy and Cal may not be so lucky. Sandy tends to get cranky this time of

morning.”

“You boys hungry,” Doc asked then hurried on. “Of course, you are. Let’s go to the Restaurant.”

“It doesn’t open ‘til five,” Red Eagle said.

“Front door’s always open,” Doc said. “I’ll fix you the best scrambled eggs you’ve ever had.”

“We’re up to that – or the best of most anything,” Jericho said.

Jericho put on coffee for Doc, poured milk for him and his brother and squeezed orange juice for the three of them while Doc pattered at the stove. A few minutes later they were gathered on stools at the counter – scrambled eggs, slabs of hot ham, and a stack of buttered toast.

“These really are the best eggs I’ve ever had,” Jericho said. “What did you do to them?”

“The usual question would be, ‘How did you make them so delicious?’ ” Doc said.

“Okay. That, then!”

“Butter and cream – a teaspoon each per egg. Heat the cream and melt the butter in it. Then crack the eggs into that, whip them together with a fork and cook over a medium fire, constantly stirring them away from the bottom.”

“Sure came out fine,” Red Eagle said.

“Fine! Only fine?” Doc said being overly dramatic.

“The women of my tribe added honey to eggs. Ummmm!”

“I do suppose that would be very good.”

“I will fix them next time and you can see for yourself,” Red Eagle said.

Doc left a dollar on the counter to cover what they had used. The boys did up the dishes while Doc finished a second (or third) cup of coffee. Jericho commented on the beverage.

“I don’t understand how something that smells so wonderful can taste so terrible.”

“That is one of the great mysteries of nature, son,” Doc said. “An even greater mystery is why people actually choose to drink the awful stuff.”

As they stepped out onto the sidewalk, Sandy and Cal were pushing the remaining bad guys into the Sheriff’s office.

“Get their story, yet, Sandy,” Jericho called to him.

Cal moved their catch on inside and Sandy walked to meet them.

“Seems they were hired by an unscrupulous (crooked) land buyer. The papers the currier was carrying had the plans for the route where the railroad wants to lay the tracks. I guess the idea was that the land guy was going to buy up all that land ahead of time and then make a killing selling it at inflated prices to the railroad when the time came for them to buy it.”

“White men have a very strange desire to have lots of money,” Red Eagle said. “I just cannot understand that. My people desire health, good friends, happiness and something worthwhile to do with their lives. Those are things no one can buy with money. White people are very strange.”

“You’ll get no argument from me,” Doc said.

Sandy returned to his office to help process his catch of the day.

“Today is the day my brother and I begin our Great Adventure, Doc,” Red Eagle said with some enthusiasm.

“Oh, yes. You were telling us about it last week. South to the Happiness Place first, as I recall.”

“Right,” Red Eagle continued. “Then Rising Sun is going to take us down to visit his reservation – Arapaho. After that we’ll travel on east to my Cherokee reservation and then to Missouri where Jericho grew up. We figure it will be great – it’s why we are calling it our Great Adventure.”

“I think it’s a fine way to really learn about each other’s histories,” Doc said. “If I were just fifty years younger I’d hitch a ride and come with you.”

“I have a hard time seeing you as a young kid,” Red Eagle said.

“I’m afraid I was the book-side of you two.”

“I don’t understand,” Jericho said.

“You two love to learn, and books are the gateway to that. I sort of stopped there while you two have another side – filled with the outdoors and meeting life head on no matter where it takes you. I admire that in you. Lives filled with wonderful experiences inside and outside of books.”

The boys had no idea how to respond. They understood what he was saying about them and they knew it

was true, but nobody had ever told them they admired them. They had no words so didn't speak.

Of course, Rising Sun had really said the same thing, but used different words. So had Benny and his parents and Cilla and Sandy and Cal and Zeke and . . . Well, most people who really knew them believed it was true.

They said good-bye to Doc and poked their heads into Sandy's office to do the same. Then they crossed to Cilla's office. She was just entering through the front door.

"Here pretty early, aren't you?" Jericho said.

"It seems my two best helpers are abandoning me for several weeks so I have to get a head start on things."

"Sorry," Red Eagle said, thinking she was being serious.

In one way, she was, of course. She had come to depend on them to help set the paper during the week and deliver them on Saturdays, but she had not meant to imply they should not follow their dream and have their Great Adventure.

"No sorry to it, Red Eagle," she said. "More than anything I want you two to complete this journey. I got the paper out before you entered my life and I will do so now. I just imagine you will have a whole series of stories for me to run in the paper by the time you get back."

They knew there would be hugs and kisses from her and there were. Neither of them had grown up experiencing those kinds of things, but both vowed their own children would have hugs and kisses every single day.

They had withdrawn a good deal of money from the bank the day before and had stocked Golden's travois (book one or google) with supplies. When they no longer needed it, they would leave it behind. They returned home just long enough for Same Face to become Jericho, saddle up Lightning, and circle south of town to meet up with the road to Sandy Fork. They avoided Main Street not wanting to go through the good-byes a second time.

"Do you suppose we really will have some new adventures on our trip?" Red Eagle said.

"That seems to just be our life, little brother. I expect it to be one Great Adventure after the other."

[Do you suppose he just might be right?]

CHAPTER TWO

A Screech in the Night

They arrived at Sandy Ford mid-afternoon. The first thing they saw was Benny rolling a big wooden hoop up Main Street toward them. He let it drop where it was and ran to meet them. He offered his hand up to Red Eagle who pulled him up in front of him the way they had ridden so many miles together.

“Rising is already here – camped south of town. Said he couldn’t wait for you to get out to the Happiness Place. A telegram from you or something. We’re going to live there, too, did you know that?”

“Yes. We’re really happy about that. How is your little brother?”

“Still no fun. Can’t talk. Can’t catch a ball. Not really worth much as a brother yet. Father promises it will get better if I am patient. So, what you doing here?”

“Beginning a long trip, but we wanted to make sure we saw you first,” Red Eagle answered.

“That’s because we are friends, right?”

“Right.”

“I got tons of new friends here. There are even some girls who aren’t all that bad, I guess. Father had the barrel maker make that hoop for me. I am the best hooper in town – everybody says so. Mother and Father say you are to be sure and come and see them before you leave town.”

“Let’s stop there first, then,” Jericho said.

They dismounted at the hotel.

They got to hold the baby. Benny was clearly afraid

they would break it and offered a constant stream of suggestions for them. There were cookies. Then they stopped at the Sheriff's office – there was Willy, but no cookies. They continued on out past the Trading Post.

Pinto trotted up the road to meet them. It was a horse thing! Rising Sun had meat cooking on the fire and they were soon enjoying lunch and good conversation.

“Do you want to just stay here for the night?” Rising Sun asked.

“I'd rather head out to the creek and find a place,” Jericho said. “You got me hooked on those pictures in the stars.”

They broke camp and were well west by dusk when they came upon a good-looking spot – a grove of pines, a wide deep section of the creek, and a stone fire circle already laid and waiting. With a fire blazing and their stomachs full, they enjoyed a long evening together talking and swimming and finding those interesting pictures in the night sky.

The following morning, they stopped at the Ranch to say hello. It had become a tradition when the boys went to visit their Place that if they timed it right and sent a telegram ahead, there would be breakfast for them. They enjoyed Benton's wife. She was very motherly and knew how to talk with boys. They usually chopped a little wood or managed some other chores for her before moving on south to their land.

That day as they were mounting up to leave, Mrs. Benton hurried out onto the front porch.

“Oh, Rising Sun. Juanita says you left this bag of arrow heads the last time you visited her. She asked me to get them to you when she heard you'd probably be here today.”

“Thanks.”

They boys turned and rode south.

“So. Juanita!” Jericho said. Give. Who? What?”

“Juanita Yellow Bird. Her mother works at the house for the Bentons.”

“And she is how old?” Red Eagle asked.

“Thirteen.”

“And . . . ?” Jericho said requiring more details he hoped were there to be told.

“We got to be friends since Grandmother and I moved up here.”

“Friends. What kind of friends?”

“Good friends. We talk sometimes. I usually work on arrow heads while we just sit together by the creek.”

“Sit close?” Jericho asked.

“Sometimes.”

“And what else,” Red Eagle asked.

“You are a very nosey pair today,” Rising Sun said.

“Yes. We’re twelve. We’re nosey about such things – boys and girls together.”

“Sometimes she takes my hand when we are talking. Hers is very soft.”

“It sounds very nice. Is it very nice?” Jericho asked.

“Yes. I recommend it.”

He grinned, clearly a bit embarrassed.

“Does she have any sisters,” Red Eagle asked.

The other boys heard it as a joke. He had intended as serious, but he smiled and chuckled with them.

A quarter of mile north of their green hills, they stopped to scan the area ahead and check out the progress since they had been there last. Rising Sun pointed out several things.

“That’s the first house. It will be completed in a few weeks. That big hole is the basement for the school. It is mostly what the workers call a ‘scared hole’ – a place to go when cyclones come – if they come. There will be room for everybody who lives and works here. It will have quarried stone walls and floor. The school will be two stories tall with two rooms on each floor. Seems way too big to me. The library has been started next to it.”

“Looks like good progress to me,” Jericho said. “We’ll want to talk to Jake, the Project Manager.”

“He’s been staking out the next two buildings – the medical center and the general store. I think that store thing was a very good idea of yours. The kids can learn to shop for their families and use money. A good thing for them to know if they are going to live in the White Man’s world.”

Jericho explained further.

“We will allot every house so much money a month to spend and all the ‘family’ members will take part in planning

how to spend it for food and clothes and whatever else they require. If they need more, of course, we'll see they get it. Nobody will ever go without what they need at the Happiness Place."

By noon they had seen what they needed to see, had given Jake the instructions they need to give him and explained they might be gone for as long as a month. Jake wished them well.

"Been lots of rains to the south west," Jake said. "Even some flooding I hear. If it gets up here we'll be slowed down some. The land really needs the water though. If they come, just hope they aren't as severe as I hear they've been down there."

They ate lunch with the crew – Rising Sun's grandmother cooked. Once grandmother and grandson had said their good-byes, the three boys set out for the Arapaho reservation in the Indian Territory to the south (later it would become the state of Oklahoma).

In southern Kansas, the terrain became slightly rolling. It was a good break from the vast flatlands to the north. The wide valleys were greener and cooler than the hilltops. August was h-o-t, HOT, in the central part of the country. There were fewer small creeks and streams in that section of the state although the Snake River was good sized and quite long. It flowed east and fed into the Arkansas River. It would be more than a two-day ride to the Reservation.

That night they camped at a spot, which Rising Sun figured was still about a half day's ride to the southern Kansas border. It was only a few minutes off the main trail. He had stayed there before. It was in a narrow ravine between two steep, mostly solid rock cliffs. The deep shadows kept it far cooler than out on the open trail. It went on that way for miles, east from where they left the road. The floor varied from twenty to thirty yards wide. It was one of the few that had a small stream lazily its way east. It hugged the southern wall and was no more than three yards wide anywhere along its length.

Most of the grass was short, wiry and anemic looking, yellow-green – nothing the horses seemed to like (not that they had been spoiled or anything!). They found some

along the stream that seemed satisfactory by comparison. The high sides and narrow opening to the sky allowed no more than three or four hours of sunlight across the floor, thus the poor growth of grass.

By the time they arrived at Rising Sun's special spot, it was early evening, which meant it was already getting dark there in the shadows of the cliffs. There were several trees close to the water and a narrow trail that worked its way up the cliff to the north.

"Ever gone up there?" Red Eagle asked Rising Sun.

"Yes. It is quite narrow and steep and rugged. It goes all the way to the top. I climbed it on foot, but I imagine a sure-footed horse could make it. I wouldn't ride up there, though. It offers a great view of this valley."

They set to finding wood and building a large campfire.

"Lots of fish," Rising Sun said pointing to the stream.

Jericho wondered just where else they might expect to find fish other than in the stream, but just smiled to himself and didn't say anything. They cut poles and soon had caught enough to feed a small community. The idea was to dry some and take it with them.

As they arranged them on the ends of sticks over the fire to cook they heard a noise – squeaks and other sounds – approaching from the west, the way they had come. They shouldered their quivers and picked up their bows knowing it was better to be safe than sorry.

Red Eagle motioned them back into the shadows away from the blazing fire. Their horses, friendly and inquisitive by nature, walked to greet the noise. From that the boys figured it was not a wild animal – no horse would intentionally walk toward danger. As the source of the noise came into view they saw that it was, in fact, not a dangerous situation.

It was a covered wagon carrying a man, woman and three young children – a family. They exchanged greetings. The man said they were heading back home to Arkansas after having had a few bad years trying to farm in western Kansas. Rising Sun told them about another good camping sight on west about a half mile and he offered them the extra fish they had caught to take along for supper. They were very appreciative and had soon moved on.

"I think it will be better if you appear like an Indian from here on," Rising Sun said to Jericho. Those who live south of here are very suspicious of white people."

"Excellent idea. It had been mine as well."

He changed. They talked well into the night even though their plan was to get an early start. The three of them seemed to always have important things to think about together.

Clouds rolled in and darkened the moon. They stoked the fire to last all night and spread their bedrolls.

They had not been asleep long when together they awoke and sat up.

"What is it?"

"Sounds like a water fall."

"Can't be out here, can it."

"Doesn't seem reasonable."

"There is no doubt that's rushing water," Jericho said. "I have an idea and it's not good. We need to get us, our horses and our gear to high ground immediately."

The horses had sensed it, too, and gathered at the fire. They had put things in order to head out early so it took very little doing to be on their way.

"I'm thinking up that trail you pointed out last night, Rising Sun."

They didn't question him and moved in a hurry to the north wall. Five minutes later they were nearly half way to the top. The noise had grown louder – very loud, in fact. Jericho explained what he was thinking.

"It could be that that rain and flooding out west that Jake was talking about got funneled into this narrow canyon and rose rapidly to contain it all. It's rushing between the walls – right toward us. Who knows how high it may be by now. We need to keep climbing."

"What about that family in the wagon?" Red Eagle asked.

"I don't know any way to get to them," Jericho said.

"Let's hurry to the top and go east along the ridge," Rising Sun said. "Maybe from up there we can see their fire and warn them."

"We can't possibly get to them in time," Jericho said.

“Look down there to the west. A wall of water twenty feet high and getting higher tumbling and rushing through the ravine.”

They reached the top. It was a relatively flat area some twenty yards wide with a gentler slope off to the north. They mounted the horses and rode east, managing no more than a trot in and around the rock-strewn surface.

As the clouds parted and the moon shone through, they saw the water rushing by them down below. The roar was deafening. It was so powerful that it had uprooted trees, which it tossed one way and another, back and forth against the steep, rock walls. The boys could only imagine what it would do to the family.

In the increased light, their horses could move somewhat faster. They keep their eyes peeled on the water.

“The campsite I directed them to would be right down there,” Rising Sun said stopping and pointing.

“It’s under twenty-five feet of water now,” Jericho said.

“Think there is any hope they survived?” Red Eagle asked, great sadness in his tone.

“Zeke says, ‘There’s always hope ‘til there ain’t none’. I think he means don’t give up until you are absolutely sure of the outcome. How long is this ravine, do you know, Rising Sun?”

“I’ve been told, several miles. That seems about right thinking back to how the hills sat in here when we first saw them from back on the trail.”

“Too far for them to outrun the water, for sure.”

“Maybe they somehow survived and were washed down to the east end,” Rising Sun said voicing what they were all hoping even if not believing.

Without another word, they urged their horses on to the east. Under the circumstances, it was a twenty-minute ride. When they reached the end of the ridge, they stopped and looked at the scene below. The valley widened immediately – four times the width of the ravine floor. The water, although it flooded the valley from hillside to hillside, was clearly shallow – the tops of even the shorter trees could be seen. There was no longer the angry swirling of the water that characterized its flow through the ravine.

From where the boys had stopped to look out over the

scene, there was a gentle trail leading down into the wide valley. Red Eagle spotted something.

“Look! Down there. Is that a covered wagon?”

“Sure is,” Rising Sun said. “How do you suppose it got washed halfway up the slope?”

“Don’t know. That makes no sense at all, does it,” Red Eagle added.

“So, are we going to sit up here and philosophize about it or shall we actually ride down and investigate?”

That had been Jericho of course. He was well on his way before he finished the question – which of course had not really been intended as a question, but as a kind way of calling the others dumb, stupid, knuckleheads.

Arriving at the spot, they dismounted. Jericho called out.

“Hey, Arkansas family. You here? You okay?”

“The team of horses is gone,” Red Eagle said.

“And look here,” Rising Sun said pointing. “The rear, left wheel on the wagon is broken into several pieces.”

“It could be that when the water hit this wider space the first of it spread out up this high before flattening out into the wide valley,” Jericho said. “That could account for where the wagon is.”

“That poor family,” Red Eagle said. “What are we going to do?”

CHAPTER THREE

A Wonderful Nest of Rattlesnakes

“The first thing we’re going to do is breathe a big breath of relief,” Jericho said.

The others looked at him, neither one understanding what he meant. He pointed down the slope to their left, away from the water-filled valley.

“It is the family!” Red Eagle said. “With their horses”

“I count seven heads – including the horses,” Rising Sun said. “I think that is all of them, right?”

The boys ran down the slope in the direction of the family. They all waved.

“We are very happy to see you safe,” Red Eagle said as they arrived. “Is everybody alright.”

“We are all fine. Broke a wheel,” the father reported.

“How did you manage it – beating that wall of water?” Jericho asked.

“We owe it all to a wonderful nest of rattlesnakes,” he said.

“I suppose we need a little more,” Rising Sun said.

“When we got to the spot you suggested, the horses got skittish and led me to find a mess of rattlers near the water. I just kept going. Spotted what I figured was a good camp site up here, but we broke a wheel coming up the hill.”

“I think we can help you fix the wheel,” Jericho said. “Do you have tools?”

“Oh, yes. Farmers can’t do without their toolbox.”

Two hours later the wheel was almost as good as new. It would get them to the next town where they could find a

blacksmith to straighten the damaged iron rim. The boys waved them on their way.

"I for one am starved," Jericho said moving to his saddlebags.

Although it was still dark the others agreed and they managed a very good breakfast of hardtack and jerky. They ate as they rode back west across the ridge above the ravine. The water was receding (going down) rapidly. By sunup they were on level ground and had been able to ford the stream – south. Even though the water still sat at four feet deep it had slowed and was safe to enter. They were soon on the main road south again. By noon they were all nodding off in the saddle – tired from the very short and strenuous night. They ate and napped. At about three, they were back on the trail.

"Now we won't be able to sleep tonight, you know," Red Eagle said.

Jericho spoke out of the side of his mouth as if in private to Rising Sun.

"I will bet he is asleep after two minutes on his back. He once slept through a thunderstorm – and we were outside, in the open, with lightning and thunder and upset horses. He'll sleep, alright. Now, you and me – that may be a different story."

"We can play six handed poker with the horses. They are also completely off schedule, now."

"I make it a policy never to play cards with 'neigh-bors'."

"That was worse than Doc's puns."

"Thank you! With puns, worse is always better."

They had camped two nights and covered nearly 150 miles before Rising Sun began pointing out things of interest that he recognized. They were on the Arapaho Reservation and were getting close to his village. They turned east and rode on for several hours.

Presently, he pulled to a stop and pointed.

"My village is in the valley between those two low hills straight ahead. I am excited that you will see it and that my people will get to know you. The older folks will hold back – they are always a bit hesitant to reach out to newcomers. The children will greet us first – they know no strangers."

Rising Sun had been correct. A few minutes after the

village came into sight a wave of youngsters flowed up the trail to meet them.

To the twins, it sounded like they were calling, 'Henico-u', 'Henico-u'.

They turned their heads toward Rising Sun who was riding between them.

"It is my name in Arapaho."

"Quite a reception committee, I'd say," Jericho said.

"I think they miss me. Like I told you. They think of me as the grown-up male in their lives. I often feel guilty about leaving. I would come back more often, but it is such a long journey."

He dismounted and was swamped by two dozen youngsters with hugs to his waist and the arms of the youngest ones reaching up to be held. Jericho and Red Eagle also dismounted, but just stood back allowing access to the children's special person. Gradually they moved on toward the village.

There were tepees varying in size from huge to small. They were made from tan-colored animal skins carefully sewn together to make a watertight skin. The tops of six or eight poles crossed above each tepee, protruding (extending) through a small opening, which allowed smoke from the fires inside to escape. Many were decorated with colorful marks that were no more than colorful marks to the twins, but to the Arapaho had their own special significance. Flaps that covered the entrances were pulled back wide open to allow air to flow in on such a warm day.

There were dogs running free and horses tethered to ropes strung between trees. In the center of the village was a spring fed pond, the source of pure water for the residents.

"How many residents?" Red Eagle asked.

"Beeetosoo – sorry, about one hundred now."

"Arapaho words seem very long," Jericho said.

"The Arapaho language has only sixteen letters from which all the sounds have to be made. It takes long words to make all of the words different."

From outside the edge of the ring of tepees came the voices of several boys. They were running and calling out as if distressed.

“Niiteneibin! Niiteneibin!”

Rising Sun also seemed upset. Seeing him, the boys ran directly to him. They talked excitedly for several moments.

“They say, ‘Help him,’” Help him. It seems they were playing close to the heniisio’hunooo – the basin – a bowl shaped dip in the land not far from here – and part of the ground gave way and one of the boys fell inside.”

“Let’s go,” Jericho said.

Rising Sun motioned for the boys to run back and show them the spot. The three of them followed behind on foot – their horses following along. The ground was very sandy and the grass grew in clumps here and there. Large boulders were scattered across the valley floor. The basin was half way up the low hill that lay to the south of the village. Half of it sat back into the hillside and was solid stone, as was that hill. The front protruded (stuck out) like the lower lip of a small boy who was pouting. They climbed the hill from the west side of the slope.

One boy had remained behind to keep his eyes on the situation. It remained the same. Nothing more had collapsed.

“It’s mostly solid rock,” Rising Sun said. “There was always an area of sand at the very bottom. The younger children play in like it was a . . .”

“A sandbox, if you’re searching for the English term,” Jericho said.

“Thank you. Yes, I was. You can see the area was about ten feet wide and in the center the sand was three feet deep. I played there often as a child.”

“Let’s get down there,” Red Eagle said.

“I suggest we tie ropes to our waists so we don’t also fall into the hole,” Jericho said.

They looped one end of their ropes around large boulders that sat around the periphery (edge) of the basin and let themselves down toward the opening. The young boys had been correct – a hole had opened up in the floor of the area and the sand had fallen through.

“Let me call to him,” Rising Sun said.

He positioned himself closer to the edge of the hole than his friends thought was safe, but understood why. He wanted to be able to call right down into the opening. They

kept a good hold on his rope.

They heard no response. He called several more times with the same result.”

“Can you see the bottom?” Red Eagle asked from several yards away.

“No. Dark. It seems to be like a cave, however. The rest of the floor here is five or so feet thick. Looks very stable and strong to me. It’s like a plug in the cave’s ceiling just fell inside.”

“Any idea how deep it goes,” Jericho asked.

“No, like I said it is dark. I could drop a stone in and see how long it takes to hit bottom, but I’m afraid I might hit the boy.”

“Looks like climb-a-rope-down-inside-time, to me,” Jericho said.

“Dangerous!” Red Eagle said.

Ignoring the caution – just like the others expected – Jericho spoke.

“We will need to tie the ropes together. None of them are long enough to let us down there. I flipped a coin in my head and I won. I’ll go down. You two know more about things up here and the kids and all.”

“You flipped a three-sided coin, brother?”

Again, he ignored it. Rising Sun sent two of the older boys back to the village to get more rope and torches. They tied their several ropes together into one – nearly sixty feet long.

“The boy’s name is Nii’eihii – it means Large Bird,” Rising Sun said. “He is nine and is one who has no father.”

Jericho fed the rope down into the hole, leaving the one rope attached to a boulder. He stuffed two candles and several matches under his belt in front and swung down over the edge of the opening. The others held their breath, needing to make sure the edge did not give way under his weight. According to plan, he let himself down slowly and carefully, hand over hand.

Presently he realized he was soon to be at the end of the rope. He had no idea if it extended clear down to the bottom or not. He continued to lower himself. His arms and fingers ached. It would be a difficult climb to the top in case he

didn't arrive at something solid below him.

"Something here," he called up as his feet finally felt something solid.

After a moment, he decided he had come to a ledge. The area to the south was solid, but the area directly below him was open – the hole continued on down the center of the area.

He was at the end of his rope. He swung himself side to side until he was sure he was above the ledge. He let go and dropped onto it.

'Well, it didn't give away under my weight,' he thought. 'That must be a good sign.'

He called out the boy's name the best he could remember it. He listened. There was no response. He lit a candle and held it high. The ledge on which he stood was about ten feet wide and twenty feet long, curving around about a third of the cave. The opening underground was very large. His little candle didn't begin to light it. In front of him – to what he thought would be the east – the hole continued as a fifteen-foot-wide opening. His candle did not begin to light it.

He called up to the others, describing what he could see.

"I have to think the boy fell on past this ledge on toward the bottom. It would have been a very long fall, I'll tell you that."

Red Eagle called back.

"The boys are back with rope and torches. What do you want down there?"

"Some of each. Pull my rope up and attach them to it and lower them."

With that soon done, Jericho lit the torch. It provided a great deal more light.

"I think I can see the bottom of the pit – another thirty feet below. Let me tie these ropes together and I'll get down there. From here I can't see the bottom very clearly."

Several minutes later he was over the side of the ledge and on his way again. He passed several ledges – all smaller than that first one. The further he went the narrower the hole became. The light from his torch glistened off some sort of particles in the wall – quartz, he figured. Under other

circumstances, it would have been very pretty.

He had draped another coil of rope around his neck. It was good he had because he came to the end of the rope he was on. He climbed back up some five feet and wrapped the rope around his legs so he could just hang there. He left enough free at the end so he could tie it to the extra coil.

He continued his descent, slowly and carefully. Presently he could see the bottom – an irregularly shaped area roughly fifteen feet in diameter. He looked front and back. He looked side to side. There was no boy down there! There was a pile of broken timbers. There was a huge pile of sand, but there was no boy!

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Long, Long Ride

To make sure there was no boy down there, Jericho stood the torch up between several rocks on the floor and searched through the pile of broken and twisted timbers. They resembled the supports in a mine – they were huge, twelve inches in diameter and twelve feet long. He soon found that he could not budge them. He could, however, see through the openings between them and determined they were not covering the boy. They had apparently had been set in place up above, over the hole, and buried in sand at the bottom of the basin. They were rotted through and could no longer support that much weight.

He needed to keep his thoughts on the boy. He picked up the torch and looked around. Off to what he believed would be the west – he saw a small opening in the wall near the floor. It was perhaps four feet tall and several wide. Upon closer inspection, it was the opening to a low tunnel. Maybe the boy somehow survived the fall – had the force diminished by landing on the pile of sand – and had gone into it in search of a way out.

Jericho called up to the others.

“The boy’s not down here, but I think that’s good. It probably means he is okay and started down a tunnel that heads west from down here. I am going follow it now. Drop me another coil of rope and another unlit torch. It is cold down here.”

A few minutes later Red Eagle called down to him.

“Stand back against the wall. Things being dropped.”

Plop! First came the coil of rope.

Plop! Second came the torch.

Plop!

‘A third plop? What’s that?’ he wondered to himself. He went to it first and upon seeing it had to chuckle. Rolled together there were his White Boy shirt and pants – to keep him warm. He’d manage a thank you later to, ‘Mamma Red Eagle’. He was soon into them; they really did warm him up.

He slipped the coil over one shoulder, picked up the burning torch and carried the other one. Bending low he entered the tunnel, holding the fire well out in front of him. The tunnel remained basically the same size although the sides were irregular with jagged rocks sticking out here and there. He walked on for fifty yards or so. It remained fairly straight and level.

From time to time he called out.

“Boy. I’m here to get you.”

He didn’t know how much English the boy knew, but figured if Rising Sun spoke it, the boy might, also. The bigger issue was the patch of blood Jericho found on the side of the tunnel. It covered the front of one of those jagged rocks. With no light to guide him, it was a wonder the boy hadn’t hurt himself before that. He had to have been feeling his way along.

He came to a right turn where he stopped and looked into the darkness. He heard sobbing. Oddly, that made him feel wonderful. It meant the boy was probably still okay. He held the torch to one side so he could see well beyond the flame.

There he was, huddled against the rock wall. The whites of his eyes came into view first, from ten feet away; then the rest of him.

“Hey,” Jericho began. “I’m a friend of Rising Sun and he sent me to find you. Do you understand English?”

“A little. Rising Sun is here?”

“Yes. He’s waiting for you up in the basin. That was some fall you took. Did you get hurt much?”

“Just all over. I cut my side on a rock back there.”

“You must be cold,” he said.

He handed the torch to the boy to hold while he

removed his own shirt, draping it around the boy's shoulders and buttoning it at the collar. It pretty much encircled his small body twice.

"That should help warm you up in a hurry. May I look at the cut on your side?"

"Okay."

The boy raised the shirt. It was a gash, deep and dirty. Jericho figured all the dirt and grime was probably keeping the blood from rushing out so he made no effort to clean the wound.

"Can you walk?"

"Been walking. Yes."

It had been a dumb question and Jericho realized that as soon as he had asked. He hoped it hadn't made the boy lose confidence in him. He held out a hand to pull him to his feet.

"I can carry you on my back if you're too weak."

"I am Arapaho. I am not weak!"

It suddenly seemed everything he said to the boy came out wrong. He'd just shut up. Having been able to look the boy over there in the flame of the torch, Jericho had seen several more gashes on his back and running the lengths of his legs. He figured they had happened during the fall – well, during the landing to be precise. The boy was clearly not aware of them. He had lost a good deal of blood, however and in such a small body there was not much extra to lose. Jericho would not be surprised if at some point, he passed out.

"Here is how we will do this," Jericho said. "I will walk ahead. You hold onto the waist of my trousers (pants) with both hands."

He showed him what he meant in case the words were not familiar. They were on their way. Jericho set a slow pace. Half way back to the main hole it happened. The boy fell to the floor, unconscious. Jericho turned to assess the situation. He lit the unused torch and put out the one he had been using. It was about spent (used up). It would be a tricky arrangement. Holding the torch in his right hand, he managed to slip his left arm under the boy and work him into a carrying position on both arms out in front. Jericho was amazed at how

little he weighed.

A few minutes later they were back at the bottom of the main shaft (hole). Jericho called out.

“Hey, up there. I found him. Badly cut up but miraculously, no broken bones. He is unconscious. Drop a blanket. I will use it to lay him in and then attach the main climbing rope to its four corners and you can pull him up.”

Ten minutes later the boy was ready to be raised. Jericho had attached the extra rope, which they had dropped down to him earlier, to the ‘cradle’ he had fashioned for the boy. He would hold onto it and use it to keep him from swinging back and forth so he would not hit the sides as the others pulled him toward the surface. Jericho explained to the others what he had done.

Carefully and slowly the precious little package was pulled higher and higher until it finally reached the top.

“Got him!” Red Eagle called. “We will untie him and drop the rope back down to you. Are you going to climb or shall we pull you up?”

“I vote for you to pull me up.”

Jericho tied two loops at the bottom of the rope for his feet to stand in and slipped that end down through his belt to help hold him upright. He tied the ends of the torches to a small section of rope that would follow him. He put out the flame.

“I’m ready. Heave ho!”

Far more slowly than had been the case for the boy, they gradually raised Jericho higher and higher. With no one below to control it, he twirled and swayed from side to side needing to carefully guard himself from the sharp protrusions (outcrops) on the sides of the shaft. Lightning provided most of the ‘horse power’ for the pull.

It seemed to be going well.

Then, suddenly, it seemed to be going badly!

The edge of the opening over which the rope was sliding gave way back some three feet. Rock and sand and grit poured down into the hole. A sizeable rock hit Jericho on his shoulder. It did some damage, that much he knew. However, that was not the time to assess how bad it was.

Intentionally, he began swinging back and forth. In that

way he avoided most of the rubble as it continued to fall straight down from above. The larger opening let in more light and with that Jericho could begin to make out features inside the cave. He was at the level of the first ledge he had encountered on his way down.

Holding onto the rope with one hand he unbuckled his belt with the other freeing the rope. As he swung near the ledge he removed his feet from the loops in the rope and let himself fall onto the ledge. That was painful. Fortunately, the weight of the trailing torches flipped them up onto the rock beside him and he managed to grab the rope before it swung away, out of reach, pulling the torches with it.

Rubble continued to fall creating a good deal of noise. The hole up above doubled in size. After the collapse stopped, Red Eagle called down.

“You okay?”

“Depends on what you mean by ‘okay’.”

The boys up top were just relieved to hear his voice. The air in the cave was filled with dust and it took some time for it to settle. It was difficult for Jericho to breath. He coughed on for some time clearing his throat and mouth of the filth. He wondered how it might have affected his lungs. He would tend to his eyes later.

“I think we need a new plan, Brother,” came Red Eagle’s voice from above.”

“You’re an eagle. Just fly down here and take me out.”

“Wish I could. Need something that can be accomplished within the real world.”

“Okay. How about this? I saw several long logs on the ground before we got to the basin. See if you can roll one close to the edge of this cave and stabilize it right at the edge of the new opening with some of those boulders in the basin. Then, arrange the rope over it instead of against the ground that seems to tear away under my weight. It will spread the weight out on both sides. That should make it safe.”

“Glad that falling stuff didn’t kill you.”

“Why’s that?” Jericho asked figuring his brother meant something more than the obvious.

“Well, if you were dead you wouldn’t have been able to offer that plan so we could get you out of there alive.”

“That lost me at several places, Red. How about just getting to work up there?”

“It will take a while. You need a blanket. I’ll lower one on a rope. You watch and tell me when to swing it toward you.”

The blanket had been a very good idea. Jericho wrapped it around himself while he examined his left shoulder. It had a significant abrasion (scrape), but was only seeping blood slowly. It would soon stop on its own. More than that, however, it really hurt when he tried to move it or his left arm. He hoped it was just bruised muscles and not a broken shoulder bone – if he remembered from one of Doc’s books that bone was the shoulder blade and doctors called it the scapula. It looked more like a ‘scraped-ula’ to him. Jericho enjoyed his little joke and pulled the blanket tighter.

“What seemed like half a day later – it had been twenty minutes – Red Eagle called down again.

“We have the log in place. It should work fine. Ingenious, really. I’m going to pull the rope up all the way, now, so I can toss it out over the log and back down to you. You still okay?”

“The problem about defining that term remains. I am ready to get out of here. How is the boy doing?”

“Rising Sun took him back to the village. The women are tending to him. He will be fine. Rising is back now.”

As if to prove his friend’s statement, Rising Sun called down.

“I’m back. The boy is in good hands. Don’t worry about him.”

By then the rope had been raised and was on its way back down, without the torches.

Jericho stood as it began swinging back and forth. He caught it.

“I need a little more slack,” he called up to the others.

Presently he had his feet in the loops and his belt back around the rope to help stabilize him.

“Ready down here. Give me a little warning.”

A minute passed, then Jericho heard his brother’s voice.

“WARNING!”

He smiled and made ready to swing back out into the semi-darkness of space.

He made the trip up without incident and was soon thankful to be on solid ground. Two men from the village had joined the others and had helped roll the boulders in place to secure the log. They had already decided that they would need to construct a fence around the basin to make the area safe for children and animals.

“It looks worse than it is.”

Those were Jericho’s first words as he removed the blanket from across his shoulders.

The younger boys all wanted to see. Boys of all cultures seem to be fascinated by blood and guts! Arapahos were no different.

“Need to get that washed out and covered,” Rising Sun said. “The women and girls of my village will be glad to help. They have talked about you much since you arrived.”

“Girls? Really?”

Older boys of all cultures seem to be fascinated by girls of any culture. Same Face was no different.

By the time Jericho had washed up in the creek and his shoulder had been tended to, it was time for the evening meal. They ate and talked and the boys enjoyed the attention the girls paid to them.

Jericho and Red Eagle remained in the village for two more days – partly to let Jericho’s shoulder mend and partly to enjoy the company of the eight girls their age who insisted on taking care of Jericho’s every need. Two of the men from the village were going to accompany Rising Sun back to the Happiness Place just to make sure he and his grandmother were being treated right. The tribe was very protective of its people. Rising Sun understood that was a good thing and did not object to the men’s ‘mothering’.

After learning more Arapaho than either figured he would ever need, the boys – as Cherokees – moved on across the gently rolling prairie to the east. Only a few hills were higher than 150 feet. Most valleys held small creeks. The Arapaho Reservation was close to 100 miles from west to east, which made it a ride of two, long days. They found their newly acquired language skills actually came in quite handy

as they passed others on the trail and came upon small villages.

Every encounter proved, again, Rising Sun's prediction – it was the kids who eagerly approached them first. That impressed Jericho more than Red Eagle. Jericho's early years had given him few reasons to just flat out trust strangers – he had seldom been treated well. Red Eagle, on the other hand, although he had never been full accepted by the Cherokee, he had seldom been given reason not to trust them. Jericho made a mental note that at the Happiness Place, learning to be completely trustworthy would be goal number one.

Each settlement was friendly and offered food. With each new contact, Jericho was impressed all over again with how they just accepted them without question. The Arapaho boys in each village were always ready for contests with bows and arrows and were more than a little impressed with the twin's skills. They were always happy to perform their special trick shot – a small length of wood tossed high into the air and when it lit, held both Red Eagle's arrow and Same Face's knife.

Upon leaving the Arapaho Reservation they crossed the northern extension of the Chickasaw Reservation, then the Pawnee and finally the Osage. That terrain was gently hilly with many streams and lots of small game. Their tummies stayed full. Red Eagle was able to communicate very well with all the tribes. That leg of the journey consumed another two long days.

The Cherokee Reservation sat just east of the Osage. It was a good deal longer north to south than it was wide. It ran on to the Arkansas State border. It was covered with grass and trees and presented what Red Eagle referred to as 'friendlier terrain'. Along the way, the horses munched the abundant grass and enjoyed standing in the water of the many small creeks. The boys also enjoyed the water and kept to the shadows offered by the tall trees. It more closely resembled the part of Kansas where they lived than had the areas they had already crossed.

They stopped for the night just inside the Cherokee Reservation. It would be half a day's ride north east to where Red Eagle's village lay along the Verdigris River not far from

the Kansas State border. They made camp beside a small lake. It had appeared like a sparkling light blue gem on a green background as they began descending a low rise a short distance west of it. A small stream exited it to the south so they assumed it was spring fed.

Apparently, it was a frequent stopover for travelers since there was a small lean-to nestled within a small group of trees. It was shaped like a triangle – front higher than the back, which sloped to the ground forming the roof. It was constructed of a sapling frame and covered in thatched (woven) grass on the sloping roof and sides. A leather hide was draped across the narrow opening in front. Close by, there was a stone fire-circle and even a few sticks of kindling somebody had left behind. They spent time cutting more wood than they would need, since it seemed that each person who used the area did something to improve it for the next – the shelter, the hide, the place for a fire, the stack of wood.

“It is a Cherokee belief to leave things better than you found them,” Red Eagle explained. That had always been Jericho’s belief as well so it worked out just fine.

“I am growing to appreciate the Indian side of me,” Little Brother. “Indians really care about each other and the land they live on.”

“They believe the land is a sacred gift to them from the Universe – not an exact translation, but very close,” Red Eagle said. “I never know whether to say ‘they’ or ‘we’ when I speak about Indians – since I’m just part.”

“I vote for ‘we’,” Jericho said. “We the Indian and we the White Man. That says we belong to both. To say ‘they’ suggests that we don’t belong to either. We’ve said it before; being both is a very special thing. Maybe we don’t stop to appreciate that often enough.”

“We’ll have to put that in our schedule,” Red Eagle said, grinning and only partly kidding.

That schedule would have to wait, however.

“Look over there,” Jericho said. “Looks like a runaway team and wagon. Is that a little girl struggling to control it?”

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CHAPTER FIVE

Wasps!

Red Eagle whistled and the horses that had been playing in the water came on the gallop. There was no time for bridles or blankets. The boys jumped mounted them from the rear and were off in pursuit of the wagon. It was an open, wooden wagon that looked to be empty except for the young driver.

The team of horses was running wildly as if they had gone crazy. They darted one way and then the other, clearly not responding to the signals from the driver and, in fact, working against each other. They would stop and rare up on their back legs and snort, pawing the air, then tear out in another direction.

“Gone Crazy?” Jericho said/asked.

As the horses took a hard right, the young driver was flung to the ground screaming. Unlike his brother, Red Eagle had things figured out.

“You tend to the child. I’ll get the horses. They’ve been stung – probably stung a lot. I need to lead them to the water.”

Jericho pulled up beside the youngster who lay limp in the grass, not moving. He slid to the ground in one easy motion. It was a boy with long blond hair – certainly not an Indian. He was nine or ten and wore only short pants. A quick examination revealed a gash on the back of his head, and – just like his brother had predicted – his body was covered in welts from stings of some sort.

Such things were not a part of Jericho’s experiences,

but he figured if his brother said water was good for the horses it would probably be good for the boy. It was immediately obvious to him that trying to take him on the horse would be too awkward so he picked him up and ran with him back toward their campsite.

Lightning chased after Golden and the runaway wagon. He had a sense about him and seemed to understand what Red Eagle was trying to do. He got up even with team and nudged against them, forcing them to follow Red Eagle's lead back toward the lake.

They all arrived at the water at about the same time. Rather than leading the horses into the water, Red Eagle tied them to a tree at the water's edge and began packing the stings in mud. Each horse had dozens. The boy was some better off. Jericho counted ten stings to his back, chest, and legs and soon had them packed. The boy's body relaxed immediately. He remained unconscious. Jericho fixed a blanket on the ground and arranged him on it, cushioning his head on a bedroll. With that done, he went to help Red Eagle with the horses, which continued to show their discomfort by moving from side to side and trying to rare up against their tethers.

Five minutes later their stings had been packed in mud and the pain had clearly eased. They calmed down and stood relatively quietly. Humorously, Golden and Lightning hung around and moved closer as if expecting to get their own coat of mud. When that didn't happen, they returned to the water – clearly disappointed.

“Honey bees, you think?” Jericho asked.

“No. Wasps. Bees leave stingers behind. These stings do not have stingers in them.”

“You know, Little Brother, I don't think a single day has gone by since we first met that I haven't learned something new from you.”

“I can say the same, you know.”

Jericho seldom thought about it working that way, but nodded understanding it was probably true. He returned to the little boy who had begun moaning.

“Let's hurry and wash out this gash on his head before he comes to and can feel what we are doing,” Red Eagle

suggested.

It was done. Jericho started a fire knowing late August nights became chilly. By pulling the blanket, Red Eagle moved the boy closer to the warmth.”

A few minutes later the boy began to rouse back into consciousness. His eyes fluttered open and he took on a puzzled look – the strange surroundings and two Indian boys’ faces looking down at him. He began to cry.

“Hey, little buddy. No need for crying. We are your friends. I’m Jericho and this is my brother, Red Eagle. You fell off your wagon and got a nasty bump to your head. You’ve been sleeping it off.”

“You’re Indians!”

“It sure looks that way, doesn’t it?” Jericho said offering a broad smile.

The young boy clearly thought it was a strange response. Red Eagle tried to explain well enough to satisfy the frightened youngster.

“We are not your usual Indians. We live with the White Men north of here in Kansas. We would never harm you.”

The boy nodded as if mostly satisfied with the explanation. Red Eagle’s calm voice and quiet tone had an immediately reassuring way about it.

“I got stung and then the horses got stung and then they ran away with the wagon. I couldn’t control them.”

“How did the wasps come to attack you?” Jericho asked.

“I sort of banged on their nest with a stick to see what would happen. It was up in a tree and I pulled the wagon under it so I could reach it with the stick when I stood on the seat. I’m thinking it wasn’t such a good idea.”

“I’m thinking you are right,” Red Eagle said. “I suppose you learned something?”

It had been offered as a question in the hope it would underscore a lesson.

“Sure did. Next time get a longer stick and do it from the ground so I can out run ‘em.”

That wasn’t the lesson Red Eagle had hoped for, but it could be attended to later on.

The boy began trying to wipe off the globs of mud.

“The mud is covering your stings. We put it there. It keeps the air away and that makes them feel better,” Red Eagle explained. “As the mud dries it will suck the sting poison out of your skin and by morning you’ll hardly remember you got stung.”

“Oh, I’ll remember. I’m gonna get my bottom tanned good and proper for all the trouble this will cause my family.”

“What about your family?”

“My father and mother run a trading post just up on the Kansas border. We come down here to buy pelts and pottery from the Indians. We were camped for the night when I got my great idea. I sort of snuck off with the team.”

“How far do you suppose your camp is?”

“I don’t know distance very well, but I bet them horses was running for fifteen minutes.”

“Do you parents know what happened?”

“Doubt it. I was supposed to unhitch the team and tether them for the night up by a pond. Mother was making supper. Father was playing with my sisters. They’ll know by now, though.”

“Do they have other horses?”

“No.”

“We better get you back to them,” Jericho said. “How does your head feel?”

“I got what Father would call a world class headache. It hurts worse whenever I move it.”

“We’ll make a bed for you in the wagon and we’ll all go find your family. You’ll have to point the way for us. It will soon be dark.”

While Red Eagle fixed a place for the boy to ride, Jericho watered down the fire. Within a few minutes, they were headed north. They soon came to a trail that the boy recognized and before long came across a man on foot carrying a rifle. He lifted it more for protection than as a threat.

“I imagine the man ahead is your father,” Jericho said.

He was handling the team while Red Eagle rode alongside on Golden.

The boy sat up.

“How mad does he look?”

“I have no idea how to answer that. I just imagine he is

far more worried than he is mad, though.”

Jericho pulled the team to a halt as they came face to face with the man.

“I got a precious little package here that I believe belongs to you,” Jericho said. “He has been stung many times and fell off the wagon and got a bad gash on his head when the horses went on a wild rampage from their own stings. He was unconscious when we found him an hour or so ago.”

“Thank you. Is his still unconscious?”

“Nope, been talking a steady stream for the past half hour.”

“That’s my boy, for sure. Mark!” he called out.

The boy – apparently, Mark – sat up.

“They say I’ll probably live with tender care,” he said clearly playing the sympathy card.”

“You’re a Zimmerman, son. Of course, you’ll live. Your mother has been worried sick. I’m glad you’re okay.”

“These two Indians took good care of me.”

“I can tell. How can I repay you boys?”

“Just the fact that you understand boys do incomprehensible things sometimes is payment enough, Sir,” Red Eagle said hoping to short circuit the ‘tanning’ Mark had suggested was in his future. “My brother and I have been there many times – learning good lessons every time.”

Jericho jumped down as Mr. Zimmerman examined the dobs of mud on his horses.

“Horses stung pretty badly the way it looks.”

“Dozens of times each,” Red Eagle said. “They were running crazy when we came upon them.”

“Can’t tell you how thankful I am you seemed to know just what to do.”

“You’re welcome,” Jericho said. “My brother knows everything about living in the outdoors. Mark’s head really hurts every time he gets jostled. Probably need to boil up some willow bark for him to drink to ease the pain.”

The man nodded and took to the driver’s seat. Jericho mounted Lightning and they waved Mark and his Father on their way.

“Think the man is going to beat on the boy?” Red Eagle asked as they turned the horses around and headed back

toward their camp.

“From what I saw in the Father, I think the punishment thing was mostly just in the boy’s head. He seemed like a very good man.”

“I sure hope so.”

Back at the lean-to they started all over with new, dry wood for a new fire. They had rabbit left from lunch so Jericho arranged it on skewers over the fire to heat while Red Eagle dug, washed, and fried up a batch of wild vegetables.

“We must be getting fat from all the food people have been feeding us,” Jericho said.

“We seem to have used up a lot of energy since our trip began,” Red Eagle said. “I imagine we have worked it off. We will weigh ourselves on Doc’s scales when we get home. What were we last time?”

“Both exactly one hundred pounds and sixty inches tall – that’s right at five feet. He said we were like thirteen year olds – six to eight months older body-age than birthday age. It reminds me, that kid that fell into the cave at the

Arapaho village hardly weighed anything. He sick do you think?”

“Rising Sun said his whole family if very thin. What do you call it? Genetics, I think.”

“Right. Genes get passed down from parents to their children and they contain traits like height, weight, looks and such.”

“Our father must have been very handsome,” Jericho said. “Just look at the two of us.”

It was worth chuckles, even though they did know it was true. Cilla and the girls had testified to the fact.

“There is so much to learn,” big brother. “Do you think we will ever learn it all?”

“Probably not. Doc says a person has to try and know a little bit about most things and then specialize so he knows a lot about one or two things. My problem is I’m really interested in knowing everything about everything.”

“It seems to me that you do know a lot about everything,” Red Eagle said.

Jericho smiled and added one more thing to the discussion.

“If the two of us divide the ‘knowledge pie’ in two, then together we can probably know almost everything.” [In 1870 that was probably even true.]

“We haven’t had time to do much reading on this journey of ours.”

“We do get busy, don’t we? Maybe from here on things will calm down.”

[Yeah. Sure!]

They went for a swim, mostly to remove the trail dust, and were asleep early. It was a toss-up as to which one of them was the most eager to get to Red Eagle’s village – Red Eagle to see his people and show them off to his brother, or Jericho, to get to know the people who were important in his brother’s past.

To say it was going to be his village was not completely accurately. The fire earlier that year had wiped his place out, but it had been a part of a cluster of a half dozen tiny villages all within a quarter of a mile of each other. In many ways, they functioned like a single village with many arms. He knew the people there and they all knew him. So, it would be a sad time to see where the fire had taken the people who were closest to him, but wonderful to reunite with the others.

They slept well beside a blazing fire that kept them both warm and safe from any animals they would rather not have snooping at them overnight.

They were awake, had found apples to eat, and were ready to ride just as the sun came up over a low hill to the east.

“We should be there by noon – maybe sooner,” Red Eagle said, clearly excited.

He set a pace that was faster than the one they had been keeping to. It made Jericho feel good to see his brother’s growing enthusiasm.

“And you say two dozen girls our age will be there to meet us?”

“I wish! If anybody is back there, it will probably be old women. I love the old women – they are wise and very protective of young people, but they are not girls our age.”

“How far is the Kansas line north of us, do you suppose?” Jericho asked.

“A three-hour ride – maybe fifteen or so miles – very close. I have never come to my village from this far west before, but when we hit the Verdigris River, I’ll know exactly where we are. I’m pretty sure we will need to go still north a way. I think we will come to a trading post within the hour. I have been there. An older couple runs it – Mario and Maria Serge – or something like that. It is where I got my very first stick of candy – for free. They are very nice people. I think they are Italians. I’m not sure what that means.”

“It means they come from a country in Europe called Italy. I’ll show you on a map when we get back home.”

“That’s really nice, isn’t it,” Red Eagle said.

“What? That there are maps?”

“No. That we have a place to call home – a home together with all the important people in our life.”

“It really is. We need to do something to show all of them how we appreciate them for the way they’ve – well, almost adopted us, I guess.”

“We will do that. We will call it Family Appreciation Day,” Red Eagle said, obviously ready right then and there to plan it all out.”

Those plans would have to wait.

“You smell that?” Jericho said pulling Lightning to a halt and sniffing the air.

“Smoke!” Red Eagle said. “Look there! Lots of smoke. It is coming right from where I figure the Trading Post should be.”

CHAPTER SIX

Where There's Smoke, There's Fire!

Golden and Lightning were soon at a full gallop, tails flying, heading slightly north across a generally flat expanse of prairie toward the rising billow of smoke. As they came close, Red Eagle confirmed it was the Trading Post. There were no horses or wagons in front, which suggested there were no customers. Whatever needed to be done would be up to them.

"It is built beside a stream, but I'm not sure how to use that water to put out the fire," Red Eagle said as both boys tried to formulate a plan.

"Let's make sure the old couple is safe first thing," Jericho said.

The building was made in two sections – the large front section was the actual trading post. A much smaller section, looking like an add-on with a sloping roof, was attached to the rear. It was that section that was on fire.

"That's where they live – in the back," Red Eagle said.

They rode to a spot directly behind the building and dismounted. The horses were clearly uncomfortable being in the presence of such a large fire and they retreated some thirty yards toward the creek. The flames leaped high through the roof of the living quarters. Red Eagle went right to the door and opened it. Smoke poured out. All quite unsuccessfully, he tried to wave it away with his hands and called to the couple. There was no response.

In the meantime, Jericho had run around to the front and entered the Trading Post. An elderly man stood smiling behind a counter, clearly unaware of the fire that raged just a

few feet behind him. The front section was made of ten inch logs. It would take quite a fire to burn through from the rear.

“Sir. Your living quarters is on fire. Is anybody in there?”

“On fire! Yes. My wife is there resting. She wasn’t feeling well this morning.”

He turned toward a door behind him that connected to the other room.

“Don’t open that. The flames may spread in here. My brother is searching that room now. We need to go around the outside of the building.”

The old man moved slowly.

“You run on ahead, son, and help. I’ll be along.”

Jericho did just that. There was no sign of Red Eagle. The room was filled with thick smoke. He entered the rear door calling out.

“Red Eagle!”

“Over here to the right of the door. I found the woman. She is trapped beneath a beam that fell from the ceiling.”

“The man said she wasn’t feeling well today. Is she burned or hurt?”

“She says she isn’t. Coughing something terrible, though. The flames are still mostly to the left. Looks like the cook stove started it all – maybe that old, rusted, metal chimney above it. I need a long pry bar of some kin, here.”

“Got it. Give me a minute. I just saw a long pole out back.”

Jericho left and returned quickly. He held out one end of it to his brother so he could place it properly.

“Okay, push now so we can get it in place,” Red Eagle said at last. “We need to hurry. The fire is quickly spreading across the roof in this direction.”

The old man appeared at the back door carrying a bucket filled with water from the stream. Jericho went to him and took the bucket inside. He poured some of it directly onto the woman, hoping a wet woman would not burn up. He splashed the rest up and down his brother.

Jericho returned to the free end of the pole and put all his weight on it. The opposite end under the beam did not budge. It was a very heavy beam and had her pinned on the

bed. The smoke became thicker and by then they were all coughing.

Jericho motioned the old man to come to him and add his weight to the end of the pole. That was sufficient to raise the beam a few inches.

"I think I can pull her out now. Hold it like that," Red Eagle said.

A second ceiling beam crashed to the floor hitting the pole near where Jericho was holding on to it. Actually, that added weight helped raise the first beam and they soon had the woman freed and outside.

"She has breathed in a lot of smoke," Red Eagle said.

Jericho went to her and began speaking – as much to her husband as to her.

"Ma'am. Take shallow breaths and blow out gently. It will remove the smoke from your lungs better than deep breaths. Okay?"

He had read about that in a story when younger and hoped it was true.

She nodded and did like she had been instructed. Her husband tended to her while the boys began carrying water in buckets from the stream. It was less than ten feet to the east.

"Let's wet the inside wall that connects to the main room," Jericho said. "Maybe we can save it that way.

It was not a long wall and had soon been soundly soaked. They then turned their attention to the rest of the room, working back from the wall nearest the stove. Much to their amazement, the fire was soon contained to a smoldering, foul smelling mess. The walls still stood with very little damage, although the roof had mostly burned or collapsed. The floor was flat stone so it was filthy, but had not been harmed in any other way.

After a few minutes the woman began breathing relatively normally. Her husband sat on the ground beside her, holding her close. She sobbed. He patted her hand. The boys thought it was sweet. They hoped that someday they each had somebody that precious in their lives.

"Looks like we need to build a new roof here," Jericho said, directing his comment to the couple. "You have wood? None of the old roof will be worth trying to reuse."

“You will really help us?” the man asked, surprised.

The boys weren't sure why that had been his reaction.

“Of course, we will. People help each other.”

It had been Red Eagle who then continued.

“There is no way you can remember this, but when I was three or four or so I came here with an old woman who brought pelts to trade and you gave me the very first stick of sugar candy I ever had. Back then that piece of candy was worth more to me than a dozen roofs would be today. I made it last a week.”

“We don't know what to say. Thank you, I guess for starters. There is lots of wood of various sizes in the shed back there. We have nails of every sort inside the trading post.”

“First, we need to feed them,” Maria said. “They are growing boys. I can fix beans and bread and carrots and potatoes. You just give me thirty minutes and we'll fill your risibles.”

“Risibles?” Red Eagle asked.

“My wife's word for whatever is inside of one's body that needs tending to.”

“Well, then, our risibles will be quite appreciative if you are sure you are up to it.”

“Been through a lot worse in my lifetime. I'll be fine. The secret is just to keep going.”

The boys smiled, not knowing what words would be appropriate. They helped the man get a fire going out back so his wife could do the cooking. It seemed somewhat humorous to them that they had just spend two hours battling a fire only to, at that moment, be starting another one.

“You speak excellent English, the two of you,” the man said suggesting his great surprise and implying a question.

“We can offer an explanation while your wife tends to our Risibles,” Jericho said. “You can show us the lumber while we wait.”

By one o'clock, sun time, they had been well fed and were ready to clear away the charred wood that had once been the roof. They used ropes and tied the partially burned beams to the horses and soon had them dragged away. It took longer than they had figured to clear out the trash from

the inside, but by three they were ready to lay in the new roof beams.

Maria served an endless supply of lemonade and cookies while they worked. It seemed she knew a lot about boys. They worked late into the evening wanting to get the boards all in place across the roof so the couple would have a cozy place to sleep that night. Mario ordered new chimney sections by telegraph – they were the telegraphers for that region of the reservation. By nightfall all that was left to do was strip and tar the roof. The boys had never done that before, but Mario said he could direct them the following morning.

After a wonderful evening meal they sent telegrams to Red Bend and to the R bar B for Rising Sun, letting their people know where they were and that they were safe. It read in part, 'A NICE RELAXING JOURNEY'. That sent Red Eagle into hysterics.

By nine they were tired and ready for sleep. They slept outside near the creek and enjoyed the babbling of the water as it swirled its way through the rocks on its way to join the big river just downstream.

By noon the next day Mario pronounced the roof perfect. With one more home cooked meal under their belts they said their good-byes and were on their way due east to the village. Maria packed them a lunch large enough to last several days. That would keep them in meals until they arrived at their next destination.

By nightfall they had again made camp close to a creek – smaller than most, but it served its purpose, to fill their water containers, provide drinks for the horses and allow the boys to clean up. They lay on their backs looking up into the sky as they talked themselves to sleep.

"I can see why you like this country," Jericho said. "It is wonderful in every way – hills, valleys, streams, game, fish, stands of trees."

"And my people – the Cherokee. You will love them."

Red Eagle proceeded to review Cherokee words and phrases he felt sure his brother would need to understand and use. Finally, Jericho had one final question.

"What's the phrase that means, 'please shut up and go

to sleep brother who talks way too late into the night?’

“Do you really want to know?”

Jericho turned over on his side and made pretend snoring sounds. Red Eagle smiled to himself feeling particularly close to his brother that evening. He couldn’t imagine life without him. The day they first encountered each other across that stream was the dividing line in his life. The past had been filled with sorrow and little hope. The present offered happiness and the prospect of a wonder-filled future. And family – he would not forget family.

By midafternoon the next day they found themselves on a hilltop overlooking the river for which they had been searching. It was wider than Jericho had imagined and ran with great speed and volume (amount of water) at that particular place.

“My village is just north of here in the valley beyond that hill.”

He pointed. Jericho just sat there on Lightning paying more attention to the look on his brother’s face than to the view. Clearly, Red Eagle felt a true connection to the Cherokee and the place where he had grown up. Jericho had no such feelings about his childhood and allowed just a twinge (bit) of jealousy as he thought about it. It made him wonder how he would feel when he returned to the places he had called home as a child. He quickly decided it wasn’t about feelings for him. It was about helping his brother better understand about his early life and how he had survived.

“Ready for a swim?” Jericho asked as they moved on down the hill toward the river.

“Not a good spot for that here. Strong current and many sharp boulders out in the main channel.”

“I can see that now that we are closer. Is your village on this side or the other side?”

“The other, but there is a shallow ford on north of here – the water is wide and runs at a lazy pace. It is where I learned to swim. The old man I have spoken about taught me. I miss him.”

“I learned to swim in a creek. I was six. Just me and the water. Had to figure it all out by myself.”

“I am not surprised. I imagine if you decided to learn

how to fly you could teach yourself to do it.”

It was worth chuckles as they turned and moved on north along the water. It was a beautiful day – just warm enough, a slight breeze, not a cloud in the sky. It was the lazy sort of a day that allowed a rider to sleep in the saddle as he moved along the trail.

There would be no saddle-sleeping that day, however.

“Oh, oh,” Jericho said. “Isn’t that a person out there caught in the current?”

“It sure is,” Red Eagle said. “I guess my village will have to wait.”

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Thieves!

“Let’s ride south and get well ahead of him downstream,” Red Eagle suggested. “Then we can swim out to intercept him.”

They turned around and urged their horses to give them everything they had. No two horses had ever enjoyed running full out any more than theirs and they covered the distance in no time at all. They dismounted and urged Golden and Lightning to follow them into the water.

The boys began swimming across the current, which, of course moved them a bit downstream as they went. The horses stayed in close as if knowing they were there in case something went wrong. The boys stayed upstream from them. The activity was more strenuous (difficult and tiring) than they had expected. Red Eagle had been correct; the current was extremely strong.

By the time they spotted him again, the person, who had been screaming, lay limp and silent as the rushing water tossed him about. They knew every second counted. As they got close they saw it was a young man – perhaps in his early twenties. He was fully clothed and was not an Indian.

The river had logs and branches and other debris (junk) in tow, so the boys not only had to fight the current, but had to avoid being hit and hurt. They swam on, almost side by side managing to avoid the hazards, usually by submerging and letting whatever it was float on by, above them. They hoped the horses would not be harmed, but had to focus their attention on their task.

“He’s going to slip on past us if we don’t hurry,” Red Eagle said.

They put every ounce of strength into their effort and intercepted him just before the water would have propelled him beyond them. Jericho managed an arm around his neck and Red Eagle caught his arm. He was unconscious. Holding his head above the water, they let themselves float right into Lightning’s side and urged him back toward the shore. Golden, uncertain what his role was to be, moved in on the downstream side of Lightning and just stayed up against him. Their combined weight and bulk slowed the boys’ journey downstream, and the strength of their legs steadily moved them toward the bank.

When they finally dragged the man out onto the ground, they had moved nearly a half mile, south, down the churning river. Jericho arranged the man’s body on its stomach with his head toward the lower edge of the slanting bank. He straddled him facing toward the back of his head, slipped his arms under the man’s chest, and picked his torso up several inches off the ground. He let him down and picked him up over and over again. Presently, water began draining from the man’s mouth and eventually he started coughing. At that point, Jericho stopped and turned the man’s head to one side allowing a clear path for the water.

The man attempted to get up. Red Eagle spoke to him.

“Just lay there, sir. We need to make sure all the water is out of your lungs. You’ve had a very bad time fighting the river. Just lay still. We are taking care of you. You will be fine.”

The man relaxed a little and nodded his head ever so slightly. They rolled him onto his back.

Red Eagle continued.

“Things are looking good, sir. Were you alone in the water?”

The man managed to nod again.

“I take it that means you were alone, correct?”

He nodded again.

Eventually they helped him into a sitting position. Jericho left to collect wood for a fire. He built it close to a tree some ten yards from where his brother was still attending to

the man. Once it was blazing, the two of them helped him to a spot against a tree close to the heat. He was shivering uncontrollably. The boys were as well, but hadn't noticed. They each began rubbing one of the man's arms, hoping that would warm him up – get the circulation going as it was called.

He began talking.

"Thanks, of course. Cherokee?" he asked.

"Sort of. It's a long story. How can we help you now? Where do we to take you?"

"Not sure on any of those counts. My name is Tony. I'm from Joplin, Missouri. I was making ready to ford the river north of here when my horse was bitten by a snake – a rattler or a moccasin. He threw me and I ended up in the water. I must have hit my head in the process because the next thing I knew was being carried downstream coughing up water. I guess you can imagine the rest. I also suppose you can imagine that I can't swim. I was on my way to my grandparents' Trading Post somewhere to the west of the river – half a day's ride, I'm told. I have arranged to stay with them and help out. They say if I like the work, the post will become mine."

"You mean, Maria and Mario?" Jericho asked.

The young man was clearly surprised.

"Well, yes. You know them?"

"You might say we have had some 'heated' conversations with them recently."

Tony didn't understand. The boys went on and explained about the fire and such.

"So, the first order of business seems to be to find your horse," Jericho said. "When you feel you're ready to ride, you can take my horse – the black – and my brother and I will double up on the other one."

It was an hour later when Tony felt ready to continue. They rode north along the river assuming the man's horse would stick close to the water. Within a half hour the animal came into view standing in the water on north from the ford.

"Seems she's tending to her bite in the cool water. We'll pack it in mud and you can be on your way. We will be glad to ride with you if you think you need us," Red Eagle said, again willing to put off arriving at his village if that was what

was needed.

“I will be fine. You say due west from here?”

“Yes, sir,” Red Eagle said. “Anybody you run across will be able to direct you.”

“I can’t thank you enough for helping me and my grandparents. I wish there was something I could do for you.”

“You just take good care of Mario and Maria. They are very special people.”

“You can count on that. Thanks again.”

The boys watched him ride west and disappear over the ridge. It was mid-afternoon. They headed across the river back at the ford and up the bank on the other side.

“North for an hour,” Red Eagle said. “Should be there in time for the evening meal. I am looking forward to Cherokee food again.”

“Just what is ‘Cherokee food’?” Jericho asked.

“Regular food cooked by Cherokee women.”

He grinned at the absurdity in his statements.

They rode on. Sometime later Red Eagle pointed ahead.

“Smoke, there, there, and there. The villages. I am much more excited than I thought I would be.”

“I think it’s wonderful to be returning to a place you hold so dear. I don’t really have the same kind of place.”

“You have Red Bend!”

“Well, yes, now. I meant while I was growing up.”

“Listen to us,” Red Eagle said. “We sound like a pair of old men talking about the old days. Most people still think of us as kids, you know.”

“I know. It makes a really great disguise, doesn’t it?”

That was definitely worth prolonged chuckles.

“How do you think about yourself?” Red Eagle asked getting serious.

“How do you mean?”

“Kid or grownup?”

“When I see my reflection in a store window I am always surprised there is that kid looking back at me. I guess I feel older. Probably because I’ve always really been on my own. How about you?”

“I have mixed feelings. When I look at you I see

myself, do you understand – a kid – a big kid, I suppose. When we were back there battling the current heading out toward Tony, I felt like a man. So, I guess it depends on what is going on around me.”

Jericho nodded, not sure he really understood, but figured his brother’s feelings were more like those of other twelve year olds than his were; sometimes like a kid and sometimes like a man. That was how it should be, he thought. Be able to try out being grown-up, but also be able to retreat back to being a kid if the going got too rough.

Doc had once told the boys that being a teenager was the time in life when young people could try out different ways of going about being grown up without having to stay any certain way forever. It was like, try something out and if it worked well, keep it; if it didn’t, throw it away and try something different. By the time the teen years were over, a thoughtful young person with supportive parents could have sorted through things well enough to have become a really great and capable person. That seemed how it should be. Jericho thought he had missed a lot of that by having to grow up so fast and felt very lucky that, mostly, at least, he seemed to have made good choices about the kind of person he wanted to be.

Red Eagle urged Golden to a full gallop. Jericho maintained a pace right beside him. They pulled up atop a gentle rise from where they looked down on the several small settlements.

“My village was the furthest south. It looks like some tepees have been put up again. I guess I did not expect that. It probably means new people. I am not sure how I feel about that. Is that being selfish?”

“I’d say it was being protective of what used to be – of the memories you had.”

His brother nodded as if to say he would think about that.

“Where, first?” Jericho asked, moving on down the slope.

Red Eagle followed.

“I guess with my village. I hope I will know the new settlers.”

As they drew near, a dog came running in their direction. Red Eagle dismounted quickly and fell to his knees. The dog was immediately all over him. Red Eagle looked up at Jericho.

“This is Niisih'eiht (Brown). He is a dog from my village. We spent many years together. I didn't think he had survived the fire. I called him Neesie.”

“Not your dog, then,” Jericho asked.

“No one owns animals. They are just living parts of our village.”

“Well, I'd say Neesie sure thinks you belong to him.”

Red Eagle smiled. The boys walked with their horses on into the village. It was a large flat area, filled with new grass and surrounded by trees, many of which still showed signs of the fire that had destroyed the village. There were five new Tepees and several horses tethered to a line between trees. An older woman walked to greet them.

It was clear the two of them knew each other. They talked on for some time. She returned to her tent where she would prepare them lunch. The boys freed their horses of the riding gear, and they moved off to get acquainted with those on the tether line. Neesie didn't leave Red Eagle's side for as much as a second and, mostly, kept his eyes glued to the boy's face.

Red Eagle motioned to his brother to follow him; they stopped at the south end of the clearing.

“The woman's tepee was here – it was twenty-five feet across at the base. It is where I grew up.”

He pointed still further south.

“The stream where I played. I often slept, nights, along its banks.”

He motioned for his brother to follow him further. They walked into the woods that formed the western border of the area. Presently, Red Eagle stopped and pointed up into a tree.

“I have heard you call them, tree houses. I started it when I was six and just kept working on it until the fire. It has two levels. I often slept there.”

Neesie walked to a spot beneath it and stopped.

“He thinks it is time to take the elevator,” Red Eagle

explained.

“More, brother!”

“I made a cradle and hung it by rope so I could pull Neesie up into the tree with me.”

“Well let’s get him up there. I’m sure not leaving until you give me the grand tour.”

A few minutes later all three ‘living parts of the village’ were fifteen feet up the tree.

“This is great!” Jericho said. “I can see how it was a special place – for both of you.”

Red Eagle nodded – more than the usual number of nods, indicating memories that bore that out. There may have been a tear on his cheek, but Jericho would not look to verify it. They sat dangling their legs over the edge of the floor of the bottom story. Red Eagle spoke about some of his good memories. The ‘upstairs’ above them, was enclosed with a roof sealed in tree sap, and had been used mostly during rain or snow or when Red Eagle needed to be alone. Jericho understood it was bringing back lots of memories and he remained quiet, not wanting to interrupt.

Presently, they heard clanging below.

“The old woman is hitting the skillet with a spoon to call us to eat.”

A half hour later they had eaten, drunk, and their tummies were full. While they ate, Red Eagle and the woman chatted. She caught him up on what was going on there and he gave her some of the highlights of his life since he had left. Their smiles never stopped.

The boys chopped wood for the woman – a lot of wood. Several men returned from their day’s hunt and Red Eagle spent time talking with them. Jericho sat back letting it be his brother’s time.

Between the wood chopping and their ‘pleasant little swim’ in the river earlier, the boys were exhausted. They set up camp on the creek to the south and were asleep by the time the sun touched the horizon.

Jericho had no idea how long they would stay there and decided not to ask. That was his brother’s decision. There was no reason to be in a hurry – they were twelve with a long life ahead of them.

The following morning Red Eagle had been awakened when a very restless Neesie had nuzzled him out of a fine dream. Looking around to see if there might be some problem they noticed their horses were no longer nearby. That was unusual. Neesie remained agitated (restless) running toward the village and then back to the boys' campsite.

"Maybe they went to be with the other horses," Jericho said.

They doused what was left of their fire, picked up their bows and quivers, and trotted back toward the village. As they approached, they heard loud voices. There did seem to be a problem. And the problem was, the horses were all gone – they had been stolen during the night.

It made no sense to the boys that Golden and Lightning would have allowed themselves to be taken away. In fact, since they had been with the boys at the creek 100 yards south of the horses on the tether line, it made even less sense.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Jericho Dancing! Really?

Red Eagle talked with the men. They didn't know any more than the boys knew. The horses had been stolen during the night. Thinking the men would not let boys go with them on the search, Red Eagle urged his brother to follow him as he walked back toward their camp. Once out of the men's ear shot he explained his reason for leaving the group of men and continued thinking out loud.

"It becomes flat to the north and east of here – no place to hide the horses. The river is to the west – crossing it with a herd of horses would really slow them down and make quite a commotion. With the woods right here up against the village to the east, I'm thinking south along this side of the river is the only reasonable route for them. There are low hills and narrow, wooded valleys down there. I believe that is the best way for the thieves to go."

He broke into a trot and without a word Jericho took up the run at his side. Neesie ran on ahead and was soon out of sight. When White Boys ran from place to place they started out as fast as they could go and gradually slowed as they tired. Jericho had noticed his brother maintained a steady, medium paced trot the whole way. That way he never really tired out so he never had to stop and rest. It was an ingenious approach. They trotted on for ten minutes without speaking.

Red Eagle kept his eyes out for tracks, but the ground was hard and most of it high in grass so that was probably not going to offer any useful information. Presently, they came upon a broad area, which had only spotty, tufts of short grass.

“Looks like a herd of cattle has recently spent the night here before crossing the river the next morning. They ate the grass down to its roots.”

“Cattle and not the horses?” Jericho asked.

“Way too large an area for the dozen horses we’re looking for.”

“Look there,” Jericho said pointing to the ground. “Looks like a star from the boot of a cowboy’s spur.”

He bent down and picked it up placing it in his palm so they could both look it over.

“Shiny – hasn’t been here on the ground long or it would have dulled, and it’s not even damp yet from the morning dew.”

Red Eagle nodded and knelt near the spot from which Jericho had retrieved it. Come here. Look. Do you see what I see?”

It was a game they often played – a way to see if the other would verify what the first one thought about something. They both enjoyed the challenge.

“I think in English we call that ‘ground’,” little brother.

“Ha! Ha!” Red Eagle said deliberately as if making light of Jericho’s attempt at a joke. “Something else.”

Jericho searched the area with his eyes for most of a minute.

“Ah! I think I got it. That tiny hole in the ground – more like a tiny slit. You’re thinking that’s where the star fell off the boot and one of its points made the slit. The star lay right there beside it as I remember. So, what does that tell us?”

“There are the prints of horse hooves here – see, there and there. Two things. First, the horses were running – walking, they would not have made such deep, angled impressions in this hard ground; back deeper than front.”

“And second,” Jericho asked.

“And second, the rider that belongs to this star was riding behind them because it wasn’t trampled into to the soil.”

Jericho continued the thought.

“And, since it is unlikely a lone rider came this way last night, it must mean he was associated with the horses – herding them along in front of him.”

“That’s what I’m thinking. It was cowboys, not other

Indians.”

“So, we know what we’re looking for, then,” Jericho said. “I assume there are no ranches around here.”

“Not on the reservation and it runs hundreds of miles on south of here.”

“So, let’s think about that. Who and for what purpose?” Jericho asked.

“They could be taking them on east to Arkansas. I don’t think there are ranches there, but everywhere needs good horses,” Red Eagle said. “Or, they could be hoping to sell them to other villages to the south.”

“Would other villages have money?” Jericho asked.

“Sometimes they receive money for pelts from trading posts. Usually it’s a trade for supplies, though.”

“East to Arkansas is most likely, then, is that what you’re thinking?”

“I guess so. They would have to go on south past the hills and then turn east.”

“Most of these valleys are short and cut up. Do you know of any that run clear through to the east – like one the bad guys might use to move the horses?”

“There is one, but it is quite far ahead. Do you think they would just keep moving them? I mean, they know we will be looking for them. By now the men of my village have gone to the other villages for horses and help. They will be riding on their way after them any time now.”

“And, the thieves should know the Indians will know the area better than they do so they have a good chance of catching them. I’m thinking if I were a horse thief in such a situation, I would try to hide them for a while before moving on with them.”

“Interesting, big brother. If being a kid doesn’t work out for you, perhaps you can become a horse thief.”

They chuckled. Red Eagle continued.

“There is a box valley just ahead – hills on three sides, narrow, lots of trees. It can’t be more than 100 yards long. It is not very wide and has a secluded (hidden) narrow entrance. The hills around it are steep and high. If the men of my village think the thieves are trying to drive the horses out of this area in a hurry, they would never look there because the only way

through it is over the steep hill that boxes it in to the east.”

“Lead the way, brother.”

They picked up their speed, believing they were close to their destination.

“I still don’t understand why Golden and Lightning went with them. They’d have to have ropes around their necks,” Jericho said.

“I guess we’ll see.”

They continued on their way. From time to time Red Eagle would point and they would make a slight change in their path. Presently, Red Eagle reached out and grabbed Jericho’s shoulder to slow him down.

“The next valley. It is tricky to find the opening.”

“Or, maybe not so tricky,” Jericho said, pointing.

Out of the brush and heading toward them at breakneck speed was Neesie. He stopped twenty yards in front of them and turned, barking, watching for them to follow him. They did.

He disappeared back into the brush.

“That’s the entrance,” Red Eagle said.

“We need to begin being cautious, then,” Jericho said.

Red Eagle chuckled.

“What,” Jericho asked.

“Did you hear what you just said – ‘we need to begin being cautious’? Have you ever in your entire life said that before?”

“We can discuss the history of my verbal phrases later. Let’s get in close enough so we can see what’s up.”

Instead of following Neesie into the entrance, the boys climbed up and over the near side of the hill to a point where they could look down on the valley floor. They found just what they expected – the dozen Indian ponies, plus Lightning and Golden, plus the three belonging to the thieves. Lightning and Golden were grazing by themselves well into the valley some distance from the others.

“No water down there,” Red Eagle said. “They aren’t planning to keep the horses there very long.”

“Until dark, maybe?” Jericho asked.

His brother nodded.

“That’s my guess.”

"I count only three men. You?" Jericho asked again.

"Yes. All down here near the entrance. I suppose that makes sense."

"I don't understand why our horses went with them."

"They were probably afraid they were about to miss out on something. You know them. Inquisitive."

Jericho shrugged not sure that made any sense.

"So, what do we do?" Red Eagle said, more thinking aloud than asking.

"That herd instinct thing you used at the stage coach robbery," Jericho said still thinking about just how to apply it in the current situation.

"The men have undone their horses – removed the saddles and such," Red Eagle said for whatever that might be worth. "At least two of them have their boots off taking it easy. It is a long wait until dark."

"Neesie laid down near the entrance," Jericho said. "What's that all about?"

"Neesie has been trained to watch over our horses when they are taken out to graze. Like the sheep dog you read to me about in that story about the shepherds in the Alps Mountains in Switzerland."

"What would he do if they got loose – outside the valley, I mean?"

"I imagine he'd head them back to the village. That's what he's used to doing."

"What do you think of this for a plan?" Jericho said.

He went on to explain it to his brother who nodded. The plan was set. They moved back down the slope toward the entrance.

Red Eagle crept close to the open valley and called to Neesie in a whisper. The dog went right to his person, tail wagging and tongue licking. They moved back outside and joined Jericho.

"I'll go up and over this hill and stand behind the men in the brush ready to draw my bow on the three of them once the horses have either run past them or trampled them," Jericho said. "Count to 250 to give me time."

He disappeared in among the trees on the slope. Red Eagle knelt beside Neesie, holding and stroking him.

‘Two hundred and fifty,’ he whispered to himself. He put his fingers to the sides of his mouth and whistled. The idea, of course, was that their two horses would begin running toward the sound – toward the entrance – forcing the rest of them on out ahead of them. Red Eagle released Neesie. The first horses emerged from the entrance. Red Eagle shooed them back to the north along the river toward their village. Understanding, Neesie took over barking and running back and forth sending them north in a more or less orderly fashion.

Lightning and Golden stopped when Red Eagle whistled a second time. He swung himself up onto Golden and rode into the valley, bow and arrow at the ready. Seeing him enter, Jericho stepped out of the trees and spoke.

“We would now like you men to unbuckle your holsters, drop them to the ground and take six steps forward.”

“One already had his holster off, hanging over a low tree limb. The other two reached to draw.

‘Thwamp!’

‘Thwamp!’

The boys each sent an arrow into the holsters effectively blocking the draws. They each had reloaded an arrow before the men understood what had happened.

“I asked you nicely,” Jericho said. “Now look at what you made us do.”

From the blood that began trickling down the men’s pants legs it appeared the arrows had gone completely through the leather and into their thighs. Not what the boys had planned, but what was, was.

The men dropped their holsters and took the position face down on the ground. While Red Eagle kept his bow at the ready, Jericho went about tying the men’s ankles together and their wrists behind their backs. His brother then helped him drag them to nearby trees to which they were tied – legs up to a low branch so their shoulders were dragging on the ground.

Jericho spoke to them.

“We will do our best to convince the men of the tribe – who will come for you soon – not to scalp you. You haven’t seen an angry man until you’ve seen an Indian whose horses have been stolen. Pray it doesn’t rain before they come for

you, or your nostrils will probably fill with water and you'll drown."

They collected all the guns and all the boots and rode off after the herd of horses. No more than half way to the village they met five of the men from the village. They had borrowed horses just like Red Eagle had predicted. The boys explained the situation to them. The men went to get the thieves while the boys followed the horses home.

"You do know that my people would never scalp anybody," Red Eagle said.

"Of course, I do. I was counting on the fact that the thieves didn't."

"It was a good plan, like usual, big brother."

"We make a very good team, little brother. It's almost like we have twin minds or something."

Back at the village they were greeted like heroes – well, they were heroes, actually. A dozen horses was a very big deal to a small, poor village like that. There was a feast that night. Another village was invited – their men had helped in the search for the horses. There was dancing the likes of which Jericho had never seen – heard of, just never seen. Even Red Eagle did a dance by himself. It must have been well done because he got great praise upon its completion.

They had drums of several sizes. The smaller ones made higher pitched sounds. The larger they were, the lower the sounds. Some were slapped with hands and some hit with sticks. The young children beat sticks together in order to be a part of it. At the end – amid much laughter – the smiling men drug Jericho out into the circle and told him it was his turn to dance. By then, they all knew he had not been raised Indian, and that didn't seem to matter.

Now, dancing was NOT Jericho's thing, but his brother had whispered to him that anything would do – he should just not offend them by not giving it a try. To his people, the willingness to try was far more important than succeeding.

Well, TRY, he did. He had watched the moves of the others with great interest. The drums began. He moved one way and then the other. He shook his fists in the air. He high stepped. He shuffled. He bent his shoulders low and raised them high. He sang – that had seemed to be an important

part of the dances he had watched. So, to a tune no mortal had ever before heard, he warbled at the top of his voice – “One potato, two potatoes, three potatoes, four. Five potatoes, six potatoes, seven potatoes, more!”

No one understood, of course, but clearly that was unimportant to them. They smiled and laughed. Several of the younger boys joined him trying to mimic his moves.

When Jericho finished, Red Eagle began clapping. Enough of the others seemed to understand that was the White Man’s response to things well done that soon they were all clapping and smiling and nodding and crowding in around him to pat him on his back. The girls asked him to teach them the song. Knowing his big brother would never be able to remember how it went, Red Eagle explained that it was just for young white men to sing. And it was, of course, because no one other than that young white man had ever sung it before! (or ever would again!)

By ten they were back at their campsite with Neesie, Golden and Lightning.

“I suppose I am finished here, now,” Red Eagle said as they lay back on their bed rolls looking up at the stars.

“You are the one to say. I can’t tell you how great it has been to be here and meet your people and see how you lived and . . . and, well, just to be here where you were for so much of your life.”

“It is important for me to hear that. Thank you. It is a part of my past, now, but it is a part of me that will always be with me, I think.”

“I’m sure it will, Gigage Wohali.”

“Red Eagle in Cherokee!” Red Eagle said. “I didn’t know you remembered. I only told you that one time.”

“I probably should be using it all the time instead of Red Eagle, do you think?”

“No. Red Eagle is my Cherokee name coupled with your English. It is like a forever tie between the former and the present. You may use it when you want to, of course, but I like it the way it has been, Utloye Ukadv.”

“Utloye Ukadv?” Jericho asked. “Oh, I get it. That must be Same Face in Cherokee.”

Red Eagle looked over at the dog that lay beside him.

“My brother catches on very fast, Neesie. Shall we keep him?”

Neesie barked his approval and crawled in between the two boys as they drifted off to sleep,

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CHAPTER NINE

Something to Chase the Blues Away

Red Eagle decided he didn't want to go through the ordeal of saying good-bye to his people, so the boys were up early and well on their way before the village would have been stirring. As they rode into the early morning darkness, Jericho made an observation.

"Regardless of what you said last night about being ready to leave, Little Brother, you seem a bit sad this morning."

"I'll get over it. It's just that I'm leaving something precious behind and I hadn't thought to prepare myself for that."

"Your childhood, you mean?"

"No, but something that was an important part of my childhood."

He sighed.

The conversation was interrupted by a commotion behind them. They stopped and turned in their saddles to look. There came Neesie, barking and running his heart out as he came to catch them. Red Eagle hit the ground and knelt down to accept his old friend into his arms.

"Ah ha! Would that be the something important you left behind?"

"It would be."

He looked up at his brother who was still sitting astride Lightning.

"Should I let him accompany us?" Red Eagle asked.

"To quote a famous brother of mine – well, sort of –

nobody owns a dog, especially, Neesie, the way it seems. I believe he has made up his mind where he belongs.”

“When I left the first time – earlier in the summer – I had the boys in the next village keep him behind. I figured they needed him for the horses, night guard duty, and things. I’ll admit I shed a few tears.”

“He clearly wants to be with you, Red Eagle. I think the decision has been made for you.”

“He was born when I was seven. That makes him five, I guess. We still have quite a few years left to be together. Looks like our quartet just became a quintet (4 became 5).”

“There is only one down side to it, I suppose,” Jericho said pretending to be quite serious.

Red Eagle looked bothered.

“All four of you can sing better than I can.”

They laughed on for some time. Red Eagle saddled up and Neesie trotted along at his side. Things seemed right.

The night before, they had decided to head north along the river and enter Kansas before turning east toward Missouri.

At the southern Kansas border, they changed into their pants, shirts, and boots and were transformed into White Boys. Humorously, it was Jericho who mentioned it first.

“I’ll tell you, these white kids’ duds are really terrible. I guess the last week as a Cherokee spoiled me.”

Red Eagle raised his eyebrows as if to say, ‘I told you so,’ but said not a word out loud.

It would be a day’s ride to Missouri. They would enter the state close to its southern border with Arkansas. The land immediately became rolling and exceptionally green for early fall. They stuck to the valleys since many of the ridges were thick with trees. There were several sawmills in the area, which supplied lumber for the rapidly expanding cities of Topeka, Kansas City and Independence.

Southeastern Kansas was sparsely populated (few people). There were a few ranches, but virtually no roads or trails. It had been why Zeke would just take off across the prairie on his way from Missouri to the army outpost that sat on the southern Kansas border. That post was well behind them to the west.

There was a cool breeze out of the north. As the world began to brighten, they came to see the sky was populated by lots of gray clouds that mostly blocked the sun. The result was a cool, early fall day. Although neither of them would admit it, they were glad they were wearing shirts and pants for warmth.

“What day is it?” Red Eagle asked.

“Not sure. Thursday, I think. I guess if that’s right it it’s actually the first day of September.”

“When do the snows begin in Kansas?” Red Eagle asked again.

“I have no idea. Back in Independence they sometimes came as early as September, but usually not ‘til October or November. I suppose it is similar at Red Bend. It’s on about the same latitude.”

“Latitude?”

“Imaginary circles around the World that divide it into north and south strips on maps. There are also Longitude lines that cut it up east and west. If you know both of those things for a place – latitude and longitude – you can locate it on a map or globe.”

“I have so many things to learn about, don’t I?”

“Not nearly as many as you did a month or so ago.”

Red Eagle smiled and nodded.

Jericho pointed toward the eastern horizon, some distance ahead.

“Smoke. This time a thing wisp. It looks to be from a chimney and not an uncontrolled fire like at the trading post. We are heading right toward it so we can check it out. Maybe we can buy some supplies from them.”

Ten minutes later they found themselves in front of an isolated, small, white house. There was a corral behind it and a large, unpainted barn behind that. A young boy came running around the corner of the house.

“Hey, misters. Do you know about sick calves?”

It had been an unusual greeting, but the sick calf seemed far more important to the lad than good manners or getting acquainted. Jericho spoke without committing them to knowing anything.

“Depends on the problem, I suppose.”

They dismounted; the boy beckoned and they hurried after him back to the barn. A woman – the boy’s mother, they would find out – was sitting on the ground with a calf’s head on her lap. Its eyes were glazed over and it was breathing heavily. The woman looked up as they entered.

“Hello. Sorry for looking a mess. Got a calf down. Can’t get her up.”

“How long she been down?” Red Eagle asked moving to kneel beside it and look it over.”

“Since Tuesday night. Jethro, here, found it when he came out to water the livestock. My husband and the hands are driving our cattle to market up in Kansas City. Be gone another week.”

“Has it been drinking?”

“A little,” the boy reported. “Hard to get water to her when she’s lying on her side like this.”

Jericho, having no idea how to help just stood back and watched and listened to his brother who at least appeared to know something.

“I have seen this before. I know once a cow is down and can’t get up it usually dies, but maybe I can help. Cannot promise. I have watched men perform a procedure in such cases.”

“Trying something is better than just sitting here watching her die,” the woman said. “Go to it if you have an idea.”

“I will need garlic and hot peppers, a small bowl, strips of gauze or cloth and iodine or alcohol if you have those things.”

“You know where they are, Jethro. Bring something from the rag bag that we can tear into strips.”

The boy took off on the run and returned several minutes later. Red Eagle selected a bulb of garlic and a small pepper.

“Your knife, brother.”

He diced (cut) them into tiny pieces and then, with the butt end of the knife, he began smashing those pieces into a pulp in the bowl. That done, he added about a teaspoon of iodine and stirred it together with the knife blade.

“Now, you three will need to hold the calf down

because the next part will be painful for her.”

Jethro frowned. His mother spoke to him.

“You know sometimes things have to hurt before they can get better. We will need your strong arms to help.”

With the animal secure on the ground on its side, Red Eagle used the knife to cut a four inch long slit down from the very top of the calf’s tail. The animal made very little reaction. Not at good sign, he figured. He then proceeded to pack the concoction from the bowl down into the open slit with his fingers. When the opening would hold no more, he wrapped it with the rags to hold it in place.

Within a few minutes the calf’s eyes began to water. Fifteen minutes after that it made sounds of pain, which indicated it was beginning to acknowledge the burn. It rocked a bit, trying unsuccessfully, to stand. A half hour later it was able to make a much better effort to stand, but still failed. Two hours later it was on its feet, drinking from a bucket Jethro held up to its mouth. Its eyes had cleared and it took a few faltering steps toward the feed trough. It stood there sniffing for some time. Eventually, it lowered its head and lapped up some food. It alternated between water and the dry mixture of oats and sorghum that was the staple food for calves.

“You think she is really going to be okay?” the young boy asked.

“In my experience once they are up on their feet again they are usually okay,” Red Eagle said. “Again, no promises. There is one odd side effect of the treatment, though. In a week or so you can expect her tail to fall off. She’ll hate it, but the flies she won’t be able to swat will love it.”

“Can’t thank you enough. I guess we didn’t even give names, did we? I’m Mary – Mary Farnsworth.”

“This is my brother, Jericho and I am . . . Jacob. As you can see we are twins.”

“Yes. I did notice that. At least let me fix you lunch. I have salt pork and beans that just need to be heated. Can have hot biscuits in twenty minutes.”

“Please stay,” Jethro asked taking Jericho’s hand and pulling him toward the house.

“We will be delighted to stay with you for lunch.”

It was both filling and delicious.

“Never had such good salt pork and beans, ma’am,” Jericho said. “Something different about them.”

“My mother’s secret recipe – add a dollop of sorghum to the pot before cooking.”

“I will have my brother, the vet, remember that.”

The little joke was worth chuckles.

It was early afternoon by the time they were on their way again.

“Probably won’t make it to Missouri by nightfall now,” Jericho said.

“That’s fine. It always feels so good to be helpful, you know?”

Jericho nodded. Words weren’t needed. The two of them had been there often. He did have a question.

“So, what’s the story behind your cow doctoring skills?”

“I think you would call it an Indian Thing.”

“I figured. That was a really good thing for me to learn, you know?”

Red Eagle frowned not understanding.

“For those mornings when I can’t get you up. I’ll just mix up some garlic and peppers and . . .”

That, was worth full-out laughter. For some reason the horses figured that signaled it was time to run, and run they did – full out for the next ten minutes. Neesie barked and joined in the celebration. He had no trouble keeping up and, in fact, from time to time found himself well ahead and had to stop and wait.

After things calmed down, Jericho had another question for his brother.

Back there you introduced yourself as Jacob. I’ve never heard you do that before.

“I figured it fit the situation. Plus, didn’t you see the sign painted on the side of the barn?”

“I guess not. What did it say?”

“No Injuns! I figure it was the boy’s handiwork, but saw no reason to make a big deal out of it.”

“I was thinking while I watched you work on the calf. You realize we’ve only been together about two months? Seems we’ve lived a lifetime together since then.”

“Two months. It does seem longer.”

He paused, thoughtfully and then continued.

“You ever think about our mother and father?”

“Sure. I assume you do, also, considering that question.”

“Not as much as I did before we found each other – you?”

“Yeah. The same,” Jericho said. “I hope they are alright – safe and happy.”

“I wonder if they are together. I guess I doubt that.”

“I used to have the fantasy that my father was a pony soldier fighting Indians,” Jericho said.

Silence. Then Red Eagle spoke.

“Believe it or not I used to fantasize that my father was an Indian Chief that led raids against the pony soldiers.”

“Hmm?”

“Hmm?”

“I guess we’ll never know which could have been – Indian or White.”

“That’s probably best considering how things have turned out,” Red Eagle said.

Jericho nodded. The discussion was over. It had helped them both. It just didn’t matter what he had been.

The dark clouds thickened and rolled in lower. The air grew colder as the day went on. Well before sundown they were looking for a sheltered spot to camp for the night. They moved in closer to the south hillside hoping to find a cave or at least a rock outcropping under which they could stay the night.

“A rock shelf there,” Jericho said, pointing.

They urged their mounts up the hill. It sat back no more than five yards above the valley floor.

“Even better than it looked from down below,” Red Eagle said as he dismounted in front of it. “Sort of a cave back there.”

“What is, sort of a cave, little brother?”

“Take a look.”

“Oh, I see. You’re right. Sort of a cave.”

They smiled and nodded as Jericho dismounted.

There was a layer of rock some three feet thick extending ten feet out from the hillside. Under it was a depression back into the hill another ten feet. It allowed six

feet of head room. They both thought of caves as having a smaller entrance into a larger 'room'. This one just sat open clear across the front, but would provide good protection for the night. So, it was, definitely, a 'sort of' cave.

The cool breeze soon whipped up into a cold wind directly out of the north – always the coldest winds in Kansas. They removed the saddle from Lightning and the saddle bags, blankets and bridles from both horses. That was usually a signal they could go and play or graze or stand in a creek. That evening they stayed close as if they sensed a bad turn in the weather was soon to arrive.

The boys gathered more fire wood than they figured they would need and laid out a large, rock, fire circle halfway in under the overhang. It gave them ten feet behind it in which to spend the night. They built a sizeable fire over a ten-inch-thick log and were soon enjoying its heat and light. They broke out the food supply and enjoyed a good meal of jerky and hard tack with a jar of peach preserves Jethro's mother had handed them as they left.

The wind was blowing directly at them and whipped large flames dangerously back toward them.

"Let's stack up some rocks in front of the fire," Red Eagle suggested. "Like a little wall. It will keep the wind from whipping the fire around."

There were lots of rocks in the area and they soon had a three-foot-high wall set in place between them and the entrance. They had enough rocks to extend it three feet on each side of the fire and in the end, had built a very comfortable shelter. The warmth of the fire reflected off the wall, back toward them, and the flames 'behaved' themselves.

As the light of evening dimmed into the dark of night, rain set in. Blowing through it, the air became even colder, but wrapped in blankets close to the fire, the boys remained 'toasty warm' as Doc would say. They talked some. They read some. They just sat and watched the storm some. Neesie took a place between them. It might have been that he was a little jealous about having to share his boy with Jericho. On the other hand, it couldn't have been all that bad getting stroked from both sides.

Golden and Lightning stood at each end of the little,

rock wall, their big bodies providing even more shelter for the boys. Whether that was their intention or, more likely, that they just enjoyed the warmth of the fire, the boys would never know for sure.

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CHAPTER TEN

The Beautiful Dancing Lady

It had been a gentle rain with little thunder or lightning. Had it not been for the strong northerly wind, it might have even been considered pleasant. The fire burned high throughout the night and was still providing lots of heat when the first light of dawn awakened them. They decided to wait to eat until later in the morning after they came across a good big Jackrabbit to roast. It had been a while since they had dined on such a delicacy.

They continued on toward the east following a wide valley between the rolling hills. There was a small stream for water and lots of wild game.

“We probably look strange – two white kids carrying quivers and bows,” Red Eagle said.

“I doubt if the rabbits and prairie dogs will be bothered,” Jericho replied thinking it was hilarious.

It got no more than a faint smile from his brother, but that was sufficient. Neither one of them required the other to think or react the way he did.

With the stop to hunt and eat, it was noon before they entered Missouri. A few miles from the border they came upon a road and followed it north east. At one point, there was a sign, ‘Entering the Great State of Missouri’.

“I guess we are here,” Jericho said. “There will be lots of high, rocky hills and more streams and rivers over here. More towns as well and small farms instead of huge ranches. You’ll notice many of the horses are larger and stronger than back west – they need to be to pull the plows and large farm

wagons.”

Red Eagle could tell from his brother’s expression that being there again was exciting for him even though he had indicated his life there had not really been all that great. But then, his had not been so great on the reservation either, and still the visit there had been very comfortable for him. Someday the two of them would discuss why that might have been.

“What do you think about this plan?” Jericho said. “We will travel straight east from here and visit some of the smaller towns I lived in. Then we’ll head north and visit Independence and Kansas City where I really spent most of my early life. It’s backwards in actual order, but it makes more sense in terms of a travel plan. Actually, I’m feeling the need to get back to Red Bend. I had never thought about that before – missing Red Bend. It’s home for us, isn’t it?”

“It is,” Red Eagle agreed. “When I started out to find it I never thought it would be more than just a short stopover for me. I had no idea what life would hold beyond that.”

“The same for me,” Jericho said. “I had never been so excited and so frightened in all my life.”

“The same for me. After half a day’s walk I was farther from home than I’d ever been before. I wonder where we will end up.”

Jericho thought for a moment before responding.

“I think our time will be better used living our lives day by day than wondering about how the future will be.”

They shared shrugs. They were different in as many ways as they were the same and that was fine.

“A small town ahead,” Jericho said. “We can get directions to Bickford. That was the last place I really lived. There was a dance hall lady I really liked there. I think I’ve told you about her. If she’s still there, I want you to meet her.”

“Was she like the dance hall girls Cal told us about – fancy dresses, perfume, stockings you can see through and lots of make-up on their faces?”

“I guess, but I liked her because she was a nice person who I think really cared about me. She was about the first person I ever believed really did care about me. The day I went to say good-bye she cried about me leaving.”

“She sounds like a good person.”

Jericho nodded, and continued.

“Then, we’ll go north to Marshal. That’s where I was living when I was ten and decided to run away and start a life on my own. It’s where I lived when I killed that man. I’m not sure why I want to visit it again.”

“We don’t have to, you know.”

“I know. Something inside me says I need to see it at least one more time. I learned to swim in a creek just east of the town. It’s also where I became so good throwing a knife. I swept out the hardware store to earn money to buy my first knife. I must have put a hundred miles on that broom.”

“Really or are you exaggerating?”

“Exaggerating to make the point that it seemed to take forever – to earn enough money not to finish the floor.”

They entered the little town of Carly and stopped at the hotel. The sign out front said it served the best food in Missouri. That seemed hard to beat. It was very good. They had apple cobbler for dessert and managed some table scraps for Neesie. Bickford was northeast a half day’s ride. There was a well-traveled, hard dirt road the whole way.

“I had a special place there on the roof of a two-story building on Main Street. In good weather, I often slept up there at night. We can spend the night there.”

They hit the eastern edge of Bickford at dusk – still light enough to see most of the features – the Main Street, the church, the school, the ice house and the livery. After the short ride-around, they made come-and-go arrangements with the livery stable for the horses. The man there really didn’t understand about wanting open stalls, to which the horses could come and go as they pleased, but he was happy to take their twenty cents for the night regardless.

“Do we dare eat in restaurants twice in one day?” Red Eagle asked. “The stall boy at the livery said they have the thickest, juiciest, steaks here than anywhere in the universe.”

“First, I assume he really hasn’t been everywhere in the universe to find that out and second, of course we can. Our money in the bank earned enough interest just today to feed everybody in this town and then some.”

“Really. I guess we are rich, then. Did you know the

stable boy – before?”

“Yeah. Like most of the kids in this town he wasn’t very nice to me. Name’s Burt something.”

“An interesting last name - Something.”

“Doofus!”

“Him or me?”

Jericho ignored the question except for directing a smile in his brother’s direction.

They entered the restaurant and got looks from everybody. They all remembered Jericho and were clearly amazed that there seemed to be two of him. Nobody spoke – no different than it had been those months and years before. The steaks were excellent. Jericho liked to load his baked potato with butter and salt. Red Eagle preferred his plain. They did, however, agree that medium-well was the only way to have a steak done. Add some green beans and a pitcher of milk and they considered it a feast. It was a struggle to put away the strawberry shortcake (but they managed!).

There were a dozen other patrons eating that evening. Jericho remembered most of them. When the boys paid at the register near the door, Jericho spoke in low tones to the manager.

“We want to pay for everybody’s meals this evening. You aren’t to tell anybody who did it.”

The man thought it was a joke and chuckled. Jericho handed over a twenty-dollar bill. The manager gulped. His eyes grew wide. He began adding up the charges. He wrote the figure – \$11.16 – on a piece of paper and slipped it across the counter toward the boys. Jericho looked at it and nodded. The man counted back the change. Jericho handed two dollars back to him.

“For the waitress,” he said. “Make sure she gets it!”

They left.

“That felt good, Little Brother.”

“It always does – when we can do something for others. But, why that? You say they weren’t nice to you when you lived here.”

“I figure it’s a good lesson for unkind people to know that there are some good-hearted people in the World. Maybe it will convince them to re-think their own position.”

“And, even if it doesn’t,” Red Eagle went on, “it really does make us feel good so that’s worth something.”

It didn’t call for more than a nod.

Jericho stopped on the sidewalk out front and pointed to a second-floor window across the street, above the saloon.

“That’s where my dancing lady lives or at least used to. The light is on. Let’s go see if she’s there.”

Red Eagle followed his brother through the narrow space between the saloon and the boot shop to the alley behind. They climbed the outside stairs and entered the door at the top.

It was a dark hall, narrow and not what you’d call clean. They walked its length and Jericho pointed to the furthest door on the left. He knocked. It took a long minute before it was opened. She was every bit as beautiful as Jericho had described her.

“Well I’ll be! My one and only love. I never expected to see you again, doll.”

She pulled him close and administered a lingering hug. It is when she first got a good look at his companion.

She looked at Red Eagle and took a step back looking from one to the other. She pinched herself as if to make sure she was not asleep.

“I decided one of me was just not enough for the world so I split into two,” Jericho said smiling.

“I suppose that’s as likely as you finding a twin brother out in the middle of God Forsaken Kansas. Come in. It seems I have some catching up to do.”

They entered and sat and gave her their story. Tears came to her eyes.

“That is just the most beautiful story I’ve ever heard. I often wondered if Jericho, here, didn’t have some Indian blood running through his veins – his handsome features and beautiful skin. So, you come back to stay?”

Jericho explained the purpose of their great adventure – what had already taken place and what yet lay ahead. A half hour later she had to leave to go dance. She administered wonderful hugs and they walked her down the back stairs to the rear door of the saloon.

There weren’t actual good-byes, but both she and

Jericho understood it would likely be the last time they would see each other. Clearly, they were keeping one another in their hearts and nothing, including separation, would ever take that away.

They made their way through the alley to the livery, which was at the west end of that block. They had convinced Neesie he needed to stay there in the stall. Golden and Lightning had accepted him from the very beginning – probably thinking he was a very small horse that required their protection. The boys stopped by to get their bedrolls and saddle bags, then crossed the street to the alley behind the hardware. There was a wooden ladder attached to the building, which led the two stories to the roof. They were soon up top.

“If it’s too chilly up here I know some sheltered places we can go,” Jericho said.

The night was still – no hint of a breeze and a cloudless sky. They spread their blankets. They searched the sky for constellations. Jericho would point one out and name it in English and then Red Eagle would give the Cherokee name. They each knew some the other didn’t.

“When I let my eyes float up into the sky like this, I feel like I am flying among the stars,” Red Eagle said.

“That was a very interesting way to say it,” Jericho said. “Cilla would certainly call it pretty or flowery. We need to get you writing more. I think you have a talent in that direction.”

That part of the conversation ended with a shrug from little brother, but they talked on for several hours. They enjoyed talking with each other. It seemed they would never get finished – there were so many things on their minds, like: ‘How long would it take to walk around the earth and get back to where they started’, ‘If they could make a lasso long enough could they lasso the moon and climb up to it?’, ‘How much did their Little Red Hill weigh?’, ‘How fast could a person travel and live through it’ (They figured about one hundred miles an hour was the limit.), ‘Who was the smartest person who had ever lived?’, ‘Why did hot air rise and cold air fall?’, ‘How many germs could you line up next to each other on the edge of a ruler’, ‘If stars shine onto each other do they reflect each other’s light making them each seem brighter to people on

Earth than they really are', and many, many, other things.

Jericho hoped his brother was not uncomfortable there on the roof that he had found so very comfortable during the years before. He understood Red Eagle had no attachment to it like he did and, when he thought about it, thinking of a tarred roof on top of a hardware store as being one of your best friends was really pretty crazy – if not crazy, at least very sad.

By the time the moon was directly above them they had fallen asleep.

Later on they were awakened. Somebody was up there with them going through their saddle bags. Barely stirring, Jericho reached for his knife.

“Drop the knife, boy,”

It was a man's voice. It was an unpleasant voice. It was a scary voice.

“Where you keep all your money?” he said pointing a six-shooter in their direction from only several yards away.

“Money. Whatever do you mean?” Jericho said. “We're just a couple of poor boys who can't even afford a room for the night.”

“That's not the way I hear. You paid for everybody's dinner this evening at the restaurant. Don't tell me you don't have money here somewhere.”

“Where did you hear that?”

“The dishwasher at the restaurant. Said you pulled out a twenty like it was nothin' more than a nickel to you.”

“Does that really make any sense to you – a couple of twelve year olds with a twenty-dollar bill?”

“I know you got money. How about this, mouthy one? You give me the money or I'll plug your friend there in his leg.”

He moved the gun against Red Eagle's upper leg.

“Okay. Don't do that. It's in an envelope in my hat.”

He pointed to where it lay a few feet away on the roof. The man turned it over and removed the envelope. Without opening it, he stuffed it into his shirt pocket under his leather vest.

“Now hear this, you two. I'm leaving down the ladder. First face I see looking down after me gets a bullet through his forehead. Got that?”

“Yes, sir. We got that,” Jericho said.

The man backed to the ladder and took the first two rungs down. He stopped with one more thing to say.

“Count to one thousand before you leave this roof. I’ll be watching.”

Both boys understood that would be impossible. If he were fleeing with their money, he couldn’t also be sticking around and watching. Little good that insight did them. Once he reached the dark shadows of the alley below he’d be gone. Even the most accurate arrow was useless if the bowman couldn’t see the target.

Once the man was out of sight down the ladder, Jericho carefully held his hat out over the back edge of the roof. The man had been serious in his threat. The hat was immediately shot out of Jericho’s hand.

The sound of the shot would surely alert other people in the area – that had been part of the plan – but probably not before the man made his escape.

At the moment the boys heard the man’s feet hit the alley, he began yelling and cursing. They eased toward the edge some distance to the left of the ladder and cautiously looked over the edge.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Mountain of Ice

Although they couldn't see much other than shadows rolling around on the ground, they heard a tell-tale sound. It was the unmistakable angry growl of one very displeased Neesie.

About that time a man arrived, lantern in one hand and a rifle in the other. Seeing that, the boys hurried down the ladder. Neesie had the robber by the throat. The man was flat on his back. His legs were flailing in the air. The newcomer with the lantern didn't seem to know whether to turn his attention to the man or the dog.

"The man just robbed us, sir," Red Eagle said. "That is our dog." Then in Cherokee he continued: "It's okay Neesie. Let go. We got him now."

Neesie obeyed, but remained at the ready, every muscle tensed. Jericho picked up the man's gun, which he had dropped on the ground when the dog had attacked him. He tossed it aside, some distance away. He was explaining the situation to the man as the Sheriff ran up. He repeated the story for him. The Sheriff searched the man and found the money just the way the boys indicated he would.

"This is a lot of money for two boys to be carrying," the Sheriff said.

"There is a letter in the envelope from our banker," Jericho said. "It will explain that it belongs to us. You may telegraph him to verify it or contact our good friend, Sheriff Mason over in Sandy Ford, Kansas."

The sheriff looked Jericho up one side and down the

other.

“Aren’t you the kid who can stick a fly with your knife from twenty paces?” the Sheriff asked, by then looking back and forth between the boys, humorously confused.

“Yes, we are that kid,” Jericho said, then explained. “This is Jacob, my twin brother. He wasn’t here when I was before.”

“There has to be a lot more to your story than that.”

“There is, of course, and if you have a week or so we will be glad to fill you in on the essentials.”

“Tell you what,” the sheriff went on. “You come to my office about eight in the morning. I’ll keep the money safe for you overnight. By then I should have a wire back from Sheriff Mason. He and I were in the same regiment during the war. His word on it will be good for me.”

“Sounds fine,” Jericho said looking at his brother for his agreement.

Red Eagle nodded.

“Count it and write the amount on the envelope so you’ll know nothing’s gone missing in the morning.”

“We trust you, Sir.”

“I appreciate that, but it’s official procedure. Okay?”

Jericho took care of it, amazed they had spent so little of what had brought along. The man with the lantern and the Sheriff escorted the thief to the jail. The boys returned to the roof. Neesie made himself comfortable at the foot of the ladder – where he had been ever since he had managed to follow his boys’ scent there sometime earlier.

The next morning, they met the Sheriff at his office.

“Seems you two caught a wanted man last night – Lefty Lawson, a highwayman with a string of robberies following him from Dodge City to Joplin. There’s a \$300-dollar reward for his capture.”

The boys looked at each other and rolled their eyes, each silently thinking, ‘Oh no. Not more money!’

“We’d like you to see that the money goes to the school for new books and supplies. Will you do that for us?” Jericho said feeling certain Red Eagle would approve.

“Very generous. Of course. I guess that explains Mason’s warning in his telegram about not trying to force the

reward money on you or risk dire consequences. I won't even ask what those might have been. I hope my own son grows up to be a fine young man like you are."

He boys shrugged twin shrugs, never knowing how to react to such things – and it seemed to happen often.

The boys treated themselves to breakfast at the restaurant and then rode north along the well-used road to Marshal.

"We are getting soft you know," Red Eagle said.

"Soft?" Jericho asked not understanding how he was using the term.

"That was three restaurant meals in a row. We've never done that before. Soft!"

"I see. I read a newspaper editorial in a paper at Cilla's and the writer said the younger generation – us – was having it way too easy. When I asked Cilla what she thought she said that same editorial could have been written by somebody in every generation ever since man showed up on the planet. She said there was even a book written in ancient Egypt, about 3,000 years ago I imagine, that said the younger generation was spoiled and self-centered – that everybody wanted to write a book about their own life, thinking it was more fascinating than anybody else's."

"I can believe that," Red Eagle said. "I thought about something related to that last night while we were looking at the stars. That was the universe out there and I was at its center. It was me considering it. Everything that I know about, I center on myself. I think everybody does that."

"Fascinating! I see what you mean. The things in my mind are more important to me than any of the things in anybody else's. I judge everything in relation to what I have stored in MY mind – not in anybody else's. I guess that does make me the center of the universe as far as I'm concerned. It helps explain why people have such a hard time understanding each other – especially our beliefs when they differ. We probably first each think that mine are right and yours aren't. You have great thoughts, brother. Thank you for sharing them. I've probably never told you that."

"Considering our most recent conversation, I assume there are many things you haven't told me."

“I’m working at it as fast as I can. A person’s mind holds thousands, maybe millions of thoughts. It will take more than two months to release them all to you.”

They arrived at the outskirts of Marshal at mid-afternoon. Like he had done at Bickford, Jericho stopped them and pointed out the little town’s important features.

“I lived in several different houses while I was here. I suppose I want to see them one more time. They were all two-story houses – not many of them in this town. I always had an upstairs room and I liked looking out over the town from the window.”

“Did you like little towns or the city best?” Red Eagle asked.

“I was given more freedom to just roam around in the small towns. I’ve always liked to have my freedom.”

“I would have never guessed,” Red Eagle said kidding him.

It deserved and received smiles and chuckles.

“There was always more going on in the city – up in Independence, Missouri – but I was younger then so wasn’t allowed to enjoy most of it except from out a window.”

Red Eagle nodded, not thinking a response was called for.

“I think we’ll camp for the night out by the creek,” Jericho said. “A neighbor boy – older – about fourteen, I’d say – would come by for me sometimes and we’d go to the creek and swim. He was probably my best friend ever until you.”

“Not the dance hall lady?”

“She was more like a mother or an aunt than just a friend as I look back at it.”

Again, Red Eagle just nodded. There had been one or two like that in his life as well.

Jericho urged Lightning forward at a slow walk. They crisscrossed the town on the wide, dirt, streets. Jericho would stop in front of the houses where he had lived and offer some tidbit from his time there. Red Eagle just listened without comment. He understood it was important for his brother.

Eventually, they galloped east, out of town to the creek. It was lined with tall trees and low bushes and set between carpets of low, green grass. At one point Jericho dismounted

and walked to the water. Red Eagle followed.

“This is the swimming hole – maybe six feet deep over a span of thirty feet up and down stream. That’s the diving tree – from that limb that juts out over the water.”

“Do you allow newly acquired brothers to try it out?”

“Of course. Last one in is a monkey’s uncle?”

Red Eagle chuckled at the saying. He would, however, become that monkey’s uncle. They swam for a half hour then built a fire and broke out things from the saddlebags to eat. By then it was going on five o’clock.

“See that big building down on the creek,” Jericho said. “That’s the icehouse. It’s not as big as the one at Red Bend. I used to play in it. Wilbur – the owner – knew I did and he never scooted me out like he did the other boys. I was never sure why – maybe he felt sorry for me.”

“Or, maybe he liked you better than the others.”

“I must say I never ever even considered that. I know he did check on me every once in a while, when he knew I was in there. We never really talked much.”

“Well, we just gonna sit her on our backsides or are we going to go explore it?” Red Eagle asked.

“Didn’t think you’d be interested.”

“I demand a guided tour, big brother. The purpose of this journey is to learn all we can about each other’s past, right? That ice house seems to be an important part of yours.”

“It’s like a small ice mountain in there. I used to take a rope along and pretend I was actually climbing up the side of an ice cliff.”

He took his coil of rope from a saddle bag.

“Race ya!” Jericho said.

They knew, of course, that it would be a tie. It was always a tie. That one was no exception.

“From that mound of dirt, there, up onto the shed roof. From the shed roof into that little door near the top of the main building. In really cold weather – below freezing – it is opened to help keep the inside cold. This time of year, the ice supply is low so we may have to drop down a way from the door.”

“Is that pond where the ice comes from?”

“Yup. It was dug special just for making ice. About two feet deep. Wilbur floods it with water from the creek before

the first freeze. Once the water is frozen a foot thick, he saws it into foot square chunks and stores it in the building. He lets in more water, refreezes it, and cuts it over and over again all winter long. The bales of straw along the sides of the building inside keep out the heat and keep in the cold so it hardly melts clear up until when winter starts again. He delivers it to houses and businesses every day. It keeps everybody's food cool all year long."

"Very clever. We did not have such a place. It is a great convenience. We had to use all the milk and meat we got every day or it would go bad."

A few minutes later they were inside.

"It is really cold in here," Red Eagle said hugging himself to keep warm.

"At least 32 degrees – that's the temperature where water freezes."

"When does it unfreeze?"

"At 33 degrees, I guess."

"So, what did you do in here besides shiver?"

"I'd climb the stacks of ice and sometimes move the blocks around and make a igloo."

"Igloo?"

"Like a rounded tepee made out of ice blocks. The Eskimos who live up at the North Pole make them for their houses. I have read that one of them that's ten feet across and six feet high can be kept warm from burning a single candle inside."

"You'd think they'd just be freezing cold like in here," Red Eagle said.

"If we get a good ice storm this winter we can build one and try out the candle thing."

They climbed and moved blocks around for some time. Interestingly to Red Eagle, when they stayed active like that it didn't seem so cold – except on their hands.

At one point the front door opened. The boys ducked down behind the ice and peeked through cracks. A very large man – tall and round – wearing a red and black plaid wool coat, leather gloves and a matching floppy-eared hat, entered. Oddly, Jericho thought he didn't immediately close the door. Instead he stood there in the opening and raised his big hand.

“Good to see you again, Jericho. Be careful.”

He turned and left, closing the door behind him.

“What was that all about?” Red Eagle said.

“Not sure. It’s a first. I suppose we could stop at his office and say hi when we leave.”

“Well, I think the water on my eyeballs is now frozen,” Red Eagle said. “Does that mean it is time to leave?”

“Probably.”

Jericho smiled thinking it had been a clever remark. The turned to leave.

“Wait. What’s that noise?” Jericho said holding up his hand.

They grew quiet and listened.

“Sounds like a kid crying,” Red Eagle said.

“Where?”

They listened some more.

“There, to our right,” Jericho said.

The right side of the building was still piled fairly high with blocks. They climbed their way to the top and stopped to listen again.

“Down there,” Red Eagle said indicating a narrow, deep opening between two walls of ice blocks. “I can’t see anything. It is dark in here and especially way down there.”

“I have candles,” Jericho said. “Let’s tie the rope to some chunks of ice and I’ll lower myself into the hole. Can’t be more than 20 feet deep.”

“Should we get Wilbur in here to help?” Red Eagle asked.

“We are here. Let’s check it out first. Time will be important if the kid’s been down there very long. He could be freezing.”

Red Eagle saw the wisdom in it and nodded. Together they secured the rope. Jericho was immediately over the side and hand over handing himself into the darkness below. He called out.

“Hey there. I’m Jericho. I’m on my way down to get you.”

All he heard in return was increased crying. He figured it was a boy. Girls had too much sense to play in there by themselves and, yes, he understood what that made him – an

irresponsible, risk taking, young male.

His feet hit the floor. He lit a candle. What he saw was not good – not good at all!

CHAPTER TWELVE

Candle Power

The boy was six – maybe seven. His shirt was soaked in congealed (set) blood. It was frozen solid. His legs were twisted underneath him. The tears on his face had turned to ice – layer after layer of ice. Jericho spoke softly.

“I am here to help you. Did you hear me?”

The boy continued to sob, but did not answer. His eyes were closed – whether frozen or that way due to some other reason Jericho could not determine. He called up to his brother.

“A distressing situation down here. Small boy. Multiple complications.”

He had tried to use words the child would not know so as to not frighten him any more than he already was.

As he took off his shirt and snugged it around the boy he continued to call up to his brother.

“Need your shirt. Probably need Wilbur and his hoist that he uses to move ice blocks around in here. Blankets if he has them – the quilted kind he uses on his delivery wagon to keep the ice from melting.

“The shirt is on the way down,” Red Eagle said. “I’m off to find Wilbur. There’s an office?”

“To the left of the front door.”

Jericho wrapped the second shirt around the boy. It wasn’t enough, but it was something. Not knowing what bones might be broken he hesitated to begin rubbing his arms and legs the way he had read about doing in such cases to keep the circulation going.

Carefully he began 'unwrapping' the boy's body from its awkward and unnatural position there on the floor. Very gently he rolled him onto his side and slowly straightened out his legs. From the amount of moaning he figured they were both damaged in some way. He needed to warm the boy up. An idea struck.

He slid several large blocks of ice into position so they formed a ceiling a few feet above the boy. With columns of ice on three sides and the roof, he moved the candle in close to the boy and closed up most of the remaining opening with his own body. He lit the other two candles he had on him. The effect was dramatic. The little cubicle grew warm immediately.

Jericho wondered what was keeping his brother. Five minutes passed, then ten. Finally, he heard his voice up above.

"Wilbur seems to have left with the wagon – maybe to deliver ice. I went and got our blankets. Shall I drop them?"

"Yes."

Jericho thought for a moment and then spoke.

"Here's a plan. You come down and be with the boy. I will climb up and operate the hoist – since I know how to do that. I am replacing our shirts with the blankets. It is really cold down here."

"Not summer-like up here either, big brother."

He dropped the blankets and was soon down the rope. It was close quarters there between the walls of ice.

"Ingenious," Red Eagle said looking at the heated cubicle.

Together they retrieved and donned (took back and put on) their shirts, wrapping the boy up like a very thick cocoon.

"What's the hoist you're talking about?"

"A long, wooden, moveable boom with pulleys and a rope with a leather hide fastened on two sides at the bottom of the rope. He moves it to the ice he wants to take to the front and load onto his wagon. Then puts the ice onto the leather, lifts the load by turning a winch that winds up the rope, and swings it to the wagon he has backed inside through the double doors.

"My plan is to lower the leather hide down to you here,

you move the boy onto it, tie him in place, and I will raise him up while you climb up to the top. Then we can get him outside to warm up and figure the next step.”

“Sounds good.”

Jericho made the climb. Red Eagle figured just how he would tie the boy to the hoist rope. He heard the creaking noise, which he figured was the hoist moving up above. Looking up there was enough light at the top to see it being lowered.

“That’s good!” he called up to his brother. “One problem. It will take both of us to load him onto the hide. Every time I touch him he moans.”

Jericho followed the suggestion and they soon had carefully moved the boy into position. He climbed the rope back to the top of the ice walls and went to the winch. He began turning the handle. It was not as difficult as he had imagined it would be.

Red eagle put out the candles, pocketed them, and began the climb back toward the top. Five minutes later they had the boy outside.

“I’ll run for help,” Jericho said.

He headed directly for the Sheriff’s office.

“You go get Doctor Smith, Jericho,” the Sheriff said. “I’ll go to the boy. And, get a wagon or buggy.”

Jericho followed the plan. The doctor’s buggy was parked on the street. Ten minutes later, the two of them were at the ice house. The doctor did a quick examination.

“Not good! Looks to be a broken right femur (leg bone), a broken right ankle, a broken left shoulder and dozens of contusions (cuts). He also has a concussion (jostled brain) and frost bite in places I’ve never seen frost bite before.”

It had been nearly an hour since finding him when the Sheriff finally lay him on the doctor’s examination table.

Doc looked at the Sheriff.

“I’ll need a bottle of brandy.”

The Sheriff left.

Doc looked at Jericho.

“I’ll need hot water.”

He pointed to the pitcher, kettle, and the kerosene stove.

Doc looked at Red Eagle.

“We need to cut off his pants and shirt. There’s the knife. You do that while I tend to the cuts on his head.”

“The Sheriff returned and the doctor got the boy to sip some brandy.”

[Back then it was thought that alcohol – especially brandy – warmed up the body. We now know that it doesn’t. In fact, that treatment is actually very dangerous.]

“Before he regains consciousness, we need to swab all his cuts with rubbing alcohol.”

He poured some alcohol into a shallow bowl and handed each of the boys a large wad of cotton.

“When we finish the front we will turn him on his side and do his back.”

With that accomplished they helped the doctor wrap his torso (chest and stomach areas) in several layers of blankets and returned him to a reclining position on his back. He took three pie tins from a cabinet and laid them on top of those blankets and addressed Red Eagle.

“Pour half an inch of hot water in each one. It will begin to warm up his body. When the water cools change it.

He turned to Jericho.

“Go to the hardware and bring back twenty pounds of plaster.”

He left on the trot.

Three hours later doc had set the broken bones and fashioned plaster casts to hold them in place. It was nearly ten o’clock and pitch dark outside.

The sheriff returned to check on things.

“You find out who he is – who he belongs to,” he asked. “I don’t know him.”

“I have no idea,” Doc said, “and I know everybody within fifty miles of here.”

It took little more than the mention of a mystery for the boys to jump into action.

“I’ll need paper and pencil, Sir,” Jericho said to the doctor. “I can draw a sketch of his face. We can show it around and maybe find out something.”

Ten minutes later the drawing was complete. Red Eagle made a few suggestions and Jericho made the

changes.

“A great job,” the Sheriff said.

“Let us show it around town in the morning,” Jericho said. “Surely somebody will know.”

“You might start with Wilbur in case it’s a kid he’s had to run off before.”

The boys stayed the night taking turns staying awake with the boy. He slept – doc had given him something so he wouldn’t have to deal with the pain just then.

By seven the next morning, Doc had a woman there to help him with the boy through the day so the boys left, had breakfast and then began making the rounds with the picture.

They started at the east end of Main Street and worked their way east through the stores with no success.

“Here’s an idea,” Red Eagle said. “From what you’ve said there are several homes here that take in foster children. Since nobody knows him, maybe he is a new foster kid.”

“I knew there was some reason I kept you around, little brother. Follow me.”

They took off on a full run two blocks north and one east. It was a two-story house.

“These people hate my ever-loving-guts, brother. You better talk to them. I’ll hide behind the tree.”

“But I look just like you, brother.”

“Hmm. I hadn’t thought of that. Still, I’m afraid my bad feelings about them will ruin things.”

Red Eagle pulled his hat low to hide part of his face and knocked. He related the problem to the woman who answered the door and showed her the picture. She shook her head and closed the door in his face. It had been no more than Jericho would have expected.

They ran on to the second house. Red Eagle again approached the door and adjusted his hat. That time a woman and a young girl came to the door. He showed the picture. The woman spoke as if thinking out loud.

“Could be Simon Jackson.”

She turned to the girl.

“Run upstairs and see if Simon is there.”

She returned immediately.

The report seemed to surprise her.

“He ain’t up there nowhere.”

The woman tried to explain.

“He’s an unruly type (misbehaves). Climbs out the window and off the porch roof and takes off. Tanned his hide a dozen times for it. Where is he?”

Red Eagle explained.

She responded.

“Well, you tell the Sheriff that somebody else will need to take care of him ‘til he gets healed up. I ain’t getting’ paid to put up with that.”

Red Eagle just stood there unable to believe what he had heard.

“Believe it, brother,” Jericho said from the street. “Let’s get back to the Sheriff.”

They delivered their report and he said he would check it out. He was sure the new minister and his wife would help take care of Simon until some better arrangement could be worked out.

Back at their camp site the boys had big things to discuss. When they left their Happiness Place, Doctor Fox said they would be ready to begin taking children in time for them to spend Christmas there. Maybe they could speed it up and bit and make room for Simon a little earlier than that.

They returned to town to send a telegram, check on Simon, and speak with the Sheriff.

They sent the telegram then went to the doctor’s office. Red Eagle couldn’t understand why all doctors’ offices seemed to be on the second floor – a very hard place for sick and wounded people to access (get to). Jericho explained that doctors were generally poor and couldn’t afford first floor space so they used the upper floors that were less expensive.

Simon was awake and in a lot of pain. Doc made the introductions.

“Simon, these are Jericho and Jacob. They are the boys who found you in the ice house.”

“You look just alike.”

“Yes, we do,” Jericho began. “We are twins.”

“That must be great. Like having a built in best friend, I’ll bet.”

“A very good way to put it.”

"I don't have friends."

"We have a feeling that is going to change for you pretty soon."

"Don't know how. I'm not a likeable kid – everybody says so."

"You let us work on that. Your job is to mend those broken bones and heal up all those scratches."

"Don't know how to do that, either."

"Luckily, your body knows how to. All you have to do is lay around and wait for it to happen."

"I'm no good at all when it comes to laying around. I need to be moving. Mrs. Pickford don't understand that. She wants me to stay in my room all the time."

"Well, like I said, we're working on something. Can you read?"

"Of course. I'm going on seven."

"We'll find some books for you before we leave."

"You leaving?"

"Soon. But, we can talk about that later."

Red Eagle looked at Doc.

"Anything he shouldn't eat, considering his conditions?"

"No. He could use a little fattening up. Pretty scrawny, for a boy his age."

Red Eagle looked back at Simon.

"We have to leave now, but we'll be back later – with a surprise treat, okay?"

"What kind of a surprise treat?"

"It wouldn't be a surprise if we told you, would it?"

The boy shrugged and smiled, really for the first time.

"How long before Simon can travel, Doc – like a long stage ride?"

"A week if things go well. You have ideas I take it."

"My brother always has ideas," Red Eagle said, smiling. "We will fill you in later. We have a few things to work out."

The boys left and checked back at the telegraph office. They already had a response. It was from Rising Sun who sent it for Doctor Fox.

OF COURSE WE CAN MAKE ROOM FOR SIMON
STOP HOW DO WE GET HIM HERE STOP. RS

[Telegrams were all in upper case letters and did not

use punctuation so wrote 'STOP' in place of periods.]

Jericho sent a response.

GREAT STOP WILL SEND DETAILS LATER STOP J
AND RE

They trotted across the street to the Sheriff's office.

"Find out anything about Simon, yet?" Jericho asked.

"Mrs. Pickford had information. He is an orphan with no uncles or aunts to help out. He was placed in that home by a social agency in Independence."

"So was I," Jericho said. "Who has custody?"

"A judge in Independence."

"We need to have you transfer custody to Dr. Benjamin Fox at The Happiness Place at Sandy Ford, Kansas. It is our new place to provide homes and families for children who need them. Sheriff Mason will vouch for it. Maybe he and the Judge should exchange telegrams."

They went outside to make plans.

"What sort of treat can we take Simon?" Jericho asked.

"I saw a sign in the restaurant that they were making ice cream today."

"What a great treat! One problem, though."

"Problem? What?" Red Eagle asked.

"He's a sick kid. I think anything we take to him probably needs to have us check it out first, don't you?"

Red Eagle broke out an ear-to-ear grin. Half an hour later they had tested and approved of the ice cream (two bowls each, just to make sure!) and delivered one to a very appreciative little boy. (There was also one for Doc.)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Bats!

By that evening, arrangements had been made to get Simon to The Happiness Place. The boys arranged to rent a private stage coach to make the run. They would go spend time in Independence and Kansas City while Simon recuperated (got better) so he could travel. They visited Simon one more time and explained they would be back to take him to a wonderful new place to live – a place from which he would never be removed for as long as he needed a place to live. They presented him with two books Jericho hoped would be easy enough for him to read. From the way he was able to race through the first page, it was clear they had made a good choice.

At dawn the next morning they headed north. The trip to Independence would take two very long days on the road. It was less than twenty miles from Kansas City so the major part of the trip would be that first leg.

The weather was getting cooler and before they left they purchased jackets and warm, long, wool stockings. They also stocked up on supplies for the trip – food, candles and matches, two extra, winter blankets, as well as a few other things.

Independence would be the largest city Red Eagle had ever seen – over 120,000. He was excited and just a bit frightened.

“So, when will we arrive?” Red Eagle asked.

“About five or so tomorrow afternoon if everything goes according to schedule.”

“Nothing we do ever goes according to schedule, big brother.”

They shared a chuckle.

“How about if I change my answer to, ‘sometime later in our lives’?”

“Less helpful, but probably more accurate.”

They stopped briefly at noon to eat and to rest and water the horses. They had maintained an easy pace to keep the horses fresh. That night they built a good-sized fire and laid their bed rolls close. Nessie still managed a spot between them.

The next morning, they were, again, on the trail by dawn. They were glad for the jackets.

“I’ve been wondering, Jericho. How can that same sun up in the sky make us so hot in the summer, but hardly even warm us up at all in the fall and winter?”

“A good question. It has something to do with how far the earth is from the sun and whether the earth is tilted toward it or away from it.

“Wow! The Earth does all those things. I thought we just hung out like a star. We will need to find books about it when we get home.”

Jericho nodded. His brother always had the best questions. Doc said that until a person asked the right question, no problem could be properly solved. Since Jericho had always been able to spin questions like yarn off a ten foot spinning wheel, he felt he was on the right track.

Red Eagle pulled up and stood high in the stirrups, shading his eyes. He pointed ahead on the trail.

“Somebody waving.”

“Somebody waving and running toward us,” Jericho added

They kneed their horses to move ahead. It was a girl – a teen age girl. They met her.

“My boyfriend fell into an old mine shaft. I told him to be careful, but you know boys – well, I guess you do being that you are boys. Anyway, he doesn’t answer when I call down to him.”

“Where is this mine shaft?” Jericho asked.

“Must be a half mile over there.”

She pointed.

Jericho dismounted.

“Let me help you up behind my brother and you can guide us.”

It was the first time he had ever lifted a girl. He was amazed at how light she was. With all the layers of clothing girls wore they looked much bigger.

They were soon moving at an easy gallop and quickly had the mine in sight.

“What kind of mine, do you know?” Red Eagle asked.

“Lead and Zinc. This area of southwest Missouri has lots of them. When the minerals run out they just move on. My father warned me about the dangers.”

“Don’t you have a horse?”

“We came in Darrel’s grandmother’s buggy, but when I went to use it a while ago the horse reared up and ran off with it. Can you help us?”

“There is nothing my brother cannot do, ma’am.”

“I’m Amy.”

“I’m R . . . Jacob. My brother is Jericho.”

“Good biblical names. My father would approve. He’s a Reverend at the church up in Haskell.”

They arrived at the mine. There was what remained of a small building – nothing more than a twelve-foot square shack – open on one side. That was apparently where the ore was removed from the shaft and loaded into wagons. There was a huge pulley wheel still attached to a set of cross beams near the roof. It would have been used to lower and lift the containers of ore and provide a means for the men who worked down below to enter and exit. Whatever rope had been there was long gone.

“You said his name is Darrel?”

“Yes. This is the first time my father has allowed us to be together away from the house.”

“How old is he – Darrel, I mean, not your father?”

“Seventeen. I’m fifteen.”

Jericho knelt at the edge of the shaft and called down.

“Darrel! Darrel!”

There was no answer.

“Any idea how deep the shaft is?” Red Eagle asked.

“None. He said there are hundreds of bats that live in there and he was going to throw stones in and make them fly out. I have no idea why he thought that would be fun.”

“I suppose it’s a guy thing,” Jericho said, imagining how great it would be to see hundreds of bats emerge from inside the earth and hear the fluttering noise that would make.

“Anyway,” she continued, “he was right; as he started falling the area up here around the opening became black with the flying creatures. It was simply terrifying.”

The boys nodded, but mostly ignored the story, talking between them.

“We’ll need to tie all our ropes together, I guess, not knowing how deep it is. What will that be – a hundred feet of rope? Red Eagle asked moving back to the saddle bags to get started.

“Close to that I think.”

They soon had them tied end to end.

“Secure one end up here to that beam beside the pulley, I suppose,” Red Eagle said.

Jericho nodded and began shinnying up the support to the cross beam. Presently he was sitting on top of it. He scooted out to the middle and grabbed the end of the rope his brother threw to him. With the rope secure he climbed back down.

“Shall we toss a coin until you win or do you just go down?” Red Eagle said with a grin, knowing how it would be.

Jericho dropped the other end of the coil of rope into the mine shaft. He made ready to swing out under the beam and climb down the rope.

“You have the candles and matches?”

“White boy’s pockets, remember.”

Most of that short exchange between them was fully meaningless to Amy but she didn’t question it – after all, they were risking their well-being to rescue her friend.

“Keep calling up how far down you think you’ve gone,” Red Eagle said as the top of Jericho’s head slipped into the darkness below.

“Twenty feet. . . . Thirty feet. . . . Forty feet. . . . Fifty feet and I’ve hit bottom. Let me get some light in here. Can you hear me?”

“With that new, deep voice you have been acquiring they probably heard you clear back in Red Bend.”

“Got light, here, now. Three tunnels – north, east, and west. About six feet high and the width varies from five to ten feet. I don’t understand why the kid isn’t here if he fell all this way. I’ll soon be able to write a story about, ‘Where’s the Kid who’s supposed to be at the bottom of the hole’. I’m going to look around.”

Amy spoke to Red Eagle.

“He has been out here many times before with his friends. He didn’t come right out and say so, but I think he’s probably been down in there before.”

Red Eagle relayed the information to his brother, not sure what difference it might make.

Down below, Jericho eeny-meenie-minie-moed the entrances and chose the smallest of the three. He moved inside with his candle held high. The floor was relatively smooth and level, which would have been necessary for the carts of ore to have been easily rolled to the main shaft. Upon entering the tunnel, he sensed the air was filled with dust – not a good sign he thought. He began wondering if he should blow out the flame for fear it would catch the dust on fire and cause some sort of explosion. He had to be able to see, so he just continued. Twenty feet into the tunnel he understood. There had been a partial collapse. A beam holding up the ceiling had somehow come loose and fell.

He moved several of the larger chunks of rock, rolling them aside.

“This can’t be good,” he said out loud, but to himself.

When he moved the second big rock a hand came into view. It also removed support from the upright beam on that side and more of the ceiling fell covering Jericho’s legs in debris (junk). He had been knocked to the floor. He sat up and began moving the rocks and wood off him. He heard Red Eagle calling to him. He had undoubtedly heard the crash. His legs really hurt but he could use them so let it go.

Free at last, he stood and ran back to the shaft. He figured if he could run, his legs hadn’t been damaged. It had probably been a backward approach from what most would have done – examining their legs first. He called up to Red

Eagle.

“I need you down here right now. First, toss down some blankets and a canteen.”

In three minutes flat, Red Eagle was by his side in the tunnel. He saw the situation and immediately began assisting his brother in removing the rocks and splintered wood that covered the boy.

“How did you get so filthy, brother?”

“A long story that I will make into a longer and very exciting story later

They continued to work.

“Luckily, the boy’s head was protected from most the falling rock by a beam that landed across two huge stones,” Jericho said. “Let me feel for a pulse in his neck while you continue to uncover him.”

He remained silent for some time moving his fingers around on the boy’s neck like he had seen Doc do.

“Got it. I think it’s really weak – never felt a pulse in the neck before. Regardless, we need to get this junk off him.”

“His breathing is really shallow,” Red Eagle said as he worked to move part of a beam off his chest.

“Maybe it’s just because all the weight on him won’t allow him to breathe deeply,” Jericho said.

“You are right. With the beam off he is breathing deeper.”

“Better go reassure Amy.”

Red Eagle moved back to the shaft and delivered what information he had.

“I need to go back and help my brother now. I will keep you posted.”

Ten minutes later they had him free from the debris and had begun examining him. His clothes had been torn to shreds. They were soaked in blood. His head was covered in scrapes and splinters and his hair was matted red.

“Arms and legs don’t seem to be broken,” Jericho said. “The way that beam had pinned him, there may be damage to his ribs. I’ve heard of cases where broken ribs punctured the lungs and they filled up with blood and the person drowned.”

“Whatever you say. I know very little about what is inside a person’s skin. More books, I guess.”

“I don’t know if we should douse his face in water and try to wake him up or leave him unconscious while we work to get him out of here. That will certainly be a painful process. Leave him alone, I guess.”

Red Eagle agreed with a nod.

“I’ll get my hands under his shoulders,” Jericho went on. “You take his legs. You will need to walk backwards and lead the way to the shaft. Be careful.”

No matter the circumstances, whenever Jericho said, ‘Be careful,’ they couldn’t help laughing.

They really did move with great caution as they began raising him. It wouldn’t do for them to stumble and drop him. The boy called out in pain.

“I think he felt pain when I picked up his left leg,” Red Eagle said.

They lay him back down. Jericho slit that pants leg with his knife so he could examine it more thoroughly.

“It wobbles below the knee. That’s not normal. Maybe a bone is broken but not displaced. As a precaution, I think we need to splint in.”

Red Eagle understood and began gathering pieces of wood for them to use. Jericho searched his back pants’ pockets. He removed a roll of fishing line.

Without needing to speak about it they went to work. Red Eagle held the sticks of wood in place – one underneath and one on each side – while Jericho bound them in place with round after round of line. In the end, it was quite secure and they were pleased. Having had lots of recent practice, they seemed to be getting good at that!

“Ready to try again?” Jericho asked.

“Ready. I think if I hold under his knees that should be less painful.”

Apparently, it was. There was no reaction. They soon had him at the bottom of the shaft. Red eagle called to Amy, making it all sound like good news. It was far better than it could have been, of course.

Red Eagle spoke more softly to Jericho.

“Should she ride for help?”

“Good idea. First find out how far she would need to go.”

They learned she lived in a small town about two miles west.

“We need you to take the black horse and ride for help, Amy. His name is Midnight and he will give you a good ride if you use that name with him very softly.”

She agreed and left.

“Now, we need to arrange some sort of a harness for this kid,” Jericho said.

“Does it seem to you that we have arranged a lot of harnesses during the past few weeks?”

“Like Rising Sun said, ‘our lives are just filled with one dangerous adventure after another.’”

It hadn’t really been Rising Sun’s exact words, but the intention was the same so Red Eagle let it go.

“At least we have plenty of rope, Big Brother. A rope around his body under his arms, I suppose should do it. Make it as a loop that won’t tighten up like a lasso.”

“Good. We need to fashion something to keep his head from flopping around.”

“How about that long flat board back in the tunnel. We stick it under his belt in back and tie it in place around his chest and tie his head flat back against it with a rope across his forehead.”

“That should work fine,” Red Eagle said. “Like a papoose (a way Indians wrapped and carried babies – Google for a picture).”

Jericho rolled him onto his side so the board could be slid in place. They made a loop to slip under his arms which also held the board against his back and Jericho cut a length of rope to hold his head in place against the wood.

“This will be a lot like that cave rescue,” Jericho said. “We’ll trail a rope from his feet back down here so one of us can keep him from twirling or moving back and forth, hitting the walls.”

“Who will go up?” Red Eagle said.

“We’ll need Golden to pull the rope, so why don’t you go up. You’ll need to string the end of the rope through the pulley wheel up there. First, make sure that wheel is fastened to that beam in a sturdy way.”

It was a long hard climb. He stopped several times to

rest, winding the rope around his leg to hold himself in place.

At last he called down to Jericho.

“Everything is arranged up here. I had just enough rope to get it around Golden. No sign of Amy, yet. You ready?”

“Ready. Take it easy and, yes, I know I’m saying that even though I know you are the twin who typically takes things easy.”

Red Eagle managed a smile. He nudged Golden and they slowly moved toward the north, beginning the process of raising the boy slowly and steadily up through the dark shaft. Red Eagle searched the sky, hoping the bats would not decide to return to the mine.

Forty feet.

Thirty feet.

Twenty feet.

Ten feet.

“He’s here. We have a problem we hadn’t anticipated. We will need both of us up here to move him from the hanging position out onto the ground.”

“Give me a couple of minutes and I’ll climb this trailing rope I’ve been using to hold him steady.”

“Take your time. He seems to be doing fine and it is a really hard climb.”

Presently, Jericho found himself in another dilemma; he was hanging onto the rope just beneath Darrel’s feet and had no way to get around him to the top.

///

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Babushka?

Jericho remained hanging in the mine shaft just below Darrel's feet. He called to his brother.

"Any sight of Amy, yet, and that help she went for?"

"No. Looks like this is going to be on us."

"Okay, then. Here is the situation. I can't go higher because I will have to climb right over his body – holding on to him to make the climb. That could do even more harm to him. We need to get the rope around him loosened up. It's bound to be cutting off circulation. Hmm?"

He wound the rope he was climbing around his leg for support the way he had seen Red Eagle do.

"How about this?" Red Eagle suggested. "Can you pull up the rope you have climbed and somehow toss it up to me? Then I can tie off the end up here on the cross beam and you can climb that rope."

"Excellent. Let me get to doing that. . . . It's amazing how heavy that rope is, just hanging there like it is."

He continued to pull it up to him until the end was within reach, not an easy task since he had to continue holding on with one hand or take the plunge to the bottom, himself.

Eventually, he had the rope arranged into a 'sort a' coil so he could throw it up to his brother who was bending far out over the top of the shaft to catch it.

"Here it comes."

"Got it. Nice toss. Let me get it tied off. . . . There. Solid and safe."

Jericho switched from where he was to the end of the

rope dangling down against the shaft. His arms ached and had grown weak. Those last ten feet were more difficult than the other forty had been. Presently, his brother was helping him up over the side.

Through it all, Golden hadn't moved a muscle, maintaining just the proper amount of tension on the rope holding Darrel. They swung the boy to the side of the shaft. At Red Eagle's urging, Golden backed up giving them some slack and they soon had him laid out on his back on the ground. They rolled him onto his side and slipped out the back board that had been supporting his head.

Darrel's eyes fluttered. He moaned louder. He looked up – Jericho on one side and Red Eagle on the other. He spoke, obviously through a great deal of pain.

"I think I took a little tumble."

He looked up at Jericho.

"You're not Amy."

"Afraid not. She's gone for help."

He looked at Red Eagle.

"I seem to be seeing double. That can't be good."

"Actually, that is great!" Jericho said. "It took both of us to get you out of that big hole. I'm Jericho and that is my brother, R . . . Jacob."

"You are twins."

"We are, and we have been told we've been that way since birth."

It got the hint of a quick smile.

"I really hurt. What's wrong with me?"

"We think a broken lower left leg and likely rib problems," Jericho said. "A body full of scrapes and scratches. None of them are really bleeding badly though. You are going to be one huge bruise from head to toe. You're filthy and your clothes are virtually destroyed."

Red Eagle spread a blanket over him.

"It has taken Amy a long time to return if the town is only a couple of miles away."

"She may have decided to go on over to Winston – there's a doc there. It will add another half hour round trip."

"Looking at the size of the cloud of dust heading our way from the north, I would say she is bringing the whole town

with her,” Red Eagle said.

It turned out to only be a dozen riders – Amy and her father, Darrel’s father and mother in a buggy, the doctor, a deputy, and a pack of teens who turned out to be Darrel’s friends.

The doctor verified the twins’ verdict – a fractured left leg, several broken ribs, and dozens of cuts and scrapes; perhaps a concussion as well. Most every joint in his body was sprained – ankles, wrists, knees, elbows. The doctor congratulated the boys on how well they handled him.

Darrel spoke again.

“I don’t remember much of anything after I lost my footing and started to fall. I think maybe I hit my head on the side right away.”

“The fact you were unconscious when you lit may have saved your life,” the doctor said. “Your body was limp instead of tense. Even so it was a miracle you survived. I’ll save my ‘reckless-teen-boy-lecture’ for when you’re feeling better.”

“Somehow you walked twenty feet into one of the tunnels after you landed,” Jericho said puzzled. “It looked like you stumbled into a rotten beam support and it crumbled causing the beams up above to fall, releasing sizeable chunks of the ceiling on top of you.”

“The back of your pants is in shreds,” Red Eagle said. “We believe for a good part of the fall you were sliding down right up against the wall. That would have slowed you down a lot and probably helped save your life.”

“We need to get him back to my office where I can give him a plaster leg for a month or so and do what I can for the ribs. They are the most difficult of the bones in the human body to help mend properly when they get broken or dislodged from the sternum (breast bone).”

His friends lifted him into the back of the buggy and they left for town as a slow procession. Two of the boys rode off in search of the buggy the young people had been using. Jericho and Red Eagle retrieved their ropes, untied them and put the coils back on their horses. Lightning moved close to Jericho and began sniffing him. It seemed like an odd behavior – one he had not exhibited before.

“What do you suppose?” Jericho asked.

“I think that four-legged boy of yours really liked the perfume on that two-legged girl and is wondering where yours is.”

“She did smell wonderful, didn’t she?”

His brother nodded and shrugged as if just a bit embarrassed to be speaking about it. He changed the topic.

“I suppose this delay means we won’t arrive in Independence by five this evening,” Red Eagle said.

“In the future, shall I just stop answering your ‘how long will it take’ questions?”

“Of course, not. Then I would not have those things to tease you about – since you are always wrong.”

There had not been an all-out tussle between them for some time, but, even nearly exhausted, that certainly demanded one. Red Eagle had already mounted up. Jericho flew off the ground, taking his brother down into the tall grass on the other side of Golden. They rolled. They pinned each other’s arms. One would be on top and then the other. Had it not been for the way their laughter made them weak they could have gone on for some time, but a few minutes into it they were both on their backs smiling and breathing hard.

“You’re getting stronger, Little Brother.”

“So are you, Big Brother.”

Eventually they helped each other up. Neesie had been more than a little disturbed by the activity – the first time he had witnessed such a thing between them. Their tussles were always puzzling to their horses and they were clearly glad to see them end. They nodded their heads, swished their tails and nuzzled their boys.

“We need to clean up. Let’s give the horses their head and see if they’ll find water for us,” Red Eagle said.

Half an hour later they were washed up at a pond and looked presentable in a change of clothes.

“I’m starved,” Jericho said. “Suppose one of these little towns will have a restaurant?”

“One way to find out,” Red Eagle said.

They set off at a good gallop and fifteen minutes later came to the roadside sign that read Winston City Limits. It was where Darrel had been taken and looked some different from the small towns out west. The Main Street was graveled

and it had cement sidewalks along both sides. The wooden buildings were painted. There were brick and stone structures in addition to the clapboard the boys were used to.

“So, this is what civilization looks like?” Red Eagle asked.

“In one of its copious manifestations.”

“What?”

“Copious means many. Manifestations means forms.”

“I know you used those words to get back at me for winning the fight, back there.”

“You most certainly did not win the fight. You want to go again?”

“No! Getting that reaction just now was more than enough.”

“You are the lowest down, sneakiest twin I’ve ever had.”

With a chuckle, it was over and they urged the horses on down the street.

As they entered the town, several small boys ran to greet them.

“You two are the kids that risked your lives to save our Darrel, aren’t you?” one of them said.

“We’ve met your Darrel, I guess. He get back here alright?”

“Up at Doc’s now. He was covered in blood. The girls all screamed. I hoped he would be dripping with it, but he wasn’t.”

“Sorry you were disappointed. Next time we’ll try and not do such a good job.”

The little boys understood it had been a joke.

“Any place for hungry boys to get a meal here in town?” Jericho asked.

“Babushka’s Place,” one of the others said.

“What is a Babushka?” Red Eagle asked.

“It’s a very big woman who is the best cook in the whole county, I’ve been told,” the tallest of the boys said. She’s from Canada or Russia or maybe Hawaii, I think. Some place not close to here, anyway.”

As a group, the boys pointed on down the street. The sign did read, Babushka’s Place. Another boy ran by rolling a

hoop and the boys gave a quick good-bye and gave chase, doing what they could to knock it to the ground. Boys!

Jericho turned to his brother as they urged their horses on down the street.

“I’m pretty sure, babushka is Russian and means something like grand lady and I don’t know if grand means wonderful or large. There was a meat cutter in Independence who called his wife that – they had come from Russia.”

Red Eagle nodded and tucked it away in his head. He wondered how his head could be big enough to hold all the new things he was learning from his ‘loser brother’. He smiled and chuckled at the silly thought.

They dismounted and entered the small café. A large woman with her graying hair pulled into a roll on the back of her head smiled and walked to greet them. She was wearing a floor length, dark red dress, a long blue apron and heavy black, leather shoes.

“Two starving boys here, ma’am,” Jericho said as they both returned her wonderful smile.

She pointed to a small table near the front window and they took seats. She spoke in a thick accent that Red Eagle could hardly make out. Jericho did some better with it. He had spent a lot of time pestering the friendly meat cutter when he was a little boy.

“You will have milk to drink. You will have steak and baked potato and beets.”

Jericho was not sure how to respond. Apparently, she had just told them what they were to order. Aside from the fact that seemed very strange it was just what they would have ordered – well, without the beets. They both hated beets. From the menu painted on the wall, beets seemed to come with everything. [Beets were a staple food in Russia like rice in China or potatoes in the United States.]

The food was delicious – even the beets, which were smothered in sour cream – in fact, everything was covered in sour cream including the steak.

“It must be a Russian thing,” Jericho whispered across the table. [It was!]

She cleared the table and then brought them each a large portion of pear cobbler – at least that was as close as

Jericho could come to identifying it. It was sliced into section with freshly whipped cream inserted in between.

When they finished, Jericho put money on the table and had a question.

“We are interested in the meaning of the name of your café.”

“Babushka?”

“Yes.”

She opened her arms out from her body.

“Can you not tell? Look at this. It means wonderful, beautiful, kind and generous woman. I am right, no?”

They boys mounted face-busting smiles.

“Oh, yes, ma’am,” Red Eagle said. “And more. The food was very good.”

“The food was the best you have ever eaten, no?”

They shrugged and nodded. It seemed to satisfy her. Red Eagle thought it would be pretty hard to ruin a steak and potato, but didn’t mention it.

She picked up the three dollar bills Jericho had laid down and stuffed them into his shirt pocket.

“You are the heroes of the mine, no? The two who like alike. There can be no charge for heroes.”

“You are very kind, ma’am. Thank you,” Jericho said having been taken by surprise.

They stood to leave. Babushka opened her arms and pulled them to her, kissing both of them on each cheek [another Russian ‘thing’]. Not knowing how to respond they put their hats over their hearts and bowed ever so slightly.

“We need you to stay and teach our boys manners. They are like animals here. Animals, I tell you.”

“We appreciate the invitation, but have to get up to Independence.”

“We are all grateful to you. Our Darrel is going to college next year. We are all very proud of him. He will be the first home grown boy to go to college from our town.”

The phrase ‘home grown boy’ tickled them and they chuckled their way out to their horses.

That night they camped a half day south of Independence. With the sun low in the western sky, the stream water seemed too cool for a comfortable swim so they

sat by the fire and chewed jerky while they talked and read.

“I’ve been thinking,” Red Eagle said.

“Really? Thinking? You? Tell the newspaper!”

“Doofus. I was thinking that none of the people there at the mine said thank you. I mean, it is okay, but it just seems strange.”

“I noticed it, too. I figure the terrifying circumstance captured their full attention. As we have learned, their Darrel is something of a local treasure. Their attention was all focused on his situation – his safety.”

Red Eagle nodded.

“I suppose Babushka made up for it,” he said. “She was like the ambassador for the town in thanking us, I think.”

“She was a BIG woman, wasn’t she?”

“And a big heart for sure. I loved her accent.”

“I have to admit I didn’t understand much of what she said. Do I have an accent like that when I speak English?”

“You don’t. I have wondered about that. Neither does Rising Sun. I guess it’s an Indian thing. You both did start learning English when you were very young. I imagine that helps. Do I have an accent when I speak Cherokee?”

“Not really. You have been fortunate to have a very excellent teacher.”

They exchanged grins. Jericho knew it was true. His brother was an exceptional person in many ways. He realized they were only twelve, but he figured it was time that they began thinking about the time when they would also go to college.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Doctor Doc!

Most of their journey into the cities was both unexciting and uneventful for Jericho. Neesie had a wonderful time getting acquainted with every small child they encountered, and the horses just always seemed to enjoy whatever they were doing. Jericho loved watching his brother through it all. He was amazed at everything and had a billion questions. How fast can the trains go? How many cars can a steam engine pull? How tall could a building be built before it just sunk down into the ground? How did they make all the glass for all the windows? Where did perfume come from (all the ladies they passed smelled wonderful)? Why did most of the men dress up in suits? And those were just the questions he had during the first few minutes.

He remembered the trip to the Kansas City bank months before, but he admitted he was too scared to be inquisitive that time. Many things about life among the white man had been scary. If it hadn't been for his complete faith in Jericho, he was certain he would have just run back to the reservation and stayed there.

They rode by a half dozen places where Jericho remembered living while in Independence – he first went there when he was just a baby so he wasn't able to find the first several buildings.

He did even less well in Kansas City. He was just a newborn baby when he was there. Neesie made many four legged friends on the streets even though he seemed somewhat distressed with all the commotion in the cities.

Despite Jericho's uncertainty about the locations of his old houses, he was quite certain where Zeke lived. The ride took them clear across Kansas City. It was early Sunday afternoon when they arrived there. They tied up in front of the saloon. His friend lived upstairs.

First, they peeked in the front window.

"Zeke seems to spend lots of his time in here when he's between trips to the military outpost with supplies," Jericho said. "I think he likes the ladies. He bought me supper the first time I met him. You know what he looks like – do you see him in there?"

"What I see in there are lots of pretty women for him for like. They look like your dancing girl lady back in Bickford."

They looked 'things' over for some time.

"Isn't that Zeke at that table in the very back? Hard to see through all the smoke."

"It sure is," Jericho agreed. "I should have looked there first. That's like his table I guess. It's where he was when I first found him. I think we'll have less chance of getting thrown out if we go around back and enter through the rear door. Unaccompanied kids aren't welcome in there."

Neesie was content to lay down beside the door and wait.

A few minutes later they were inside and edging their way toward Zeke. They came up behind his chair. Jericho put his finger to his lips and then spoke.

"So, old man. Who's your favorite set of mixed race twins in the whole world?"

"Well there are those two old black mules out back in the corral."

He turned with a huge smile and stood, hand out. He looked from one to the other several times. Red Eagle spoke.

"That is Jericho. I'm the other one."

They chuckled.

"Sit! Sit! How, why in the world are you two here?"

The boys pulled out chairs and Jericho explained. Zeke motioned for a waitress.

"Steaks and all the trimmings," he said.

The man's smile wouldn't stop. The boys filled him in on their life from the last time they had seen him when he had

been in the hospital in Topeka. That took them through the steaks, baked potatoes, green beans and apple pie with ice cream. Zeke's life was the same as always – a round trip to the outpost every week. The mention of being ready to start the trek back west, brought something to mind for him.

“I was talking to a stage driver earlier this afternoon. He's just come in on the run from Denver. Says they had a freak, September blizzard out there. Looked like it was heading this way. They outran it. No paper on Sunday so I don't have the latest information. I'll telegraph the outpost later to see what's going on down there. If there's a blizzard, I'll skip the trip this week. You should, too.”

In all, they had three hours together with him. Red Eagle could tell the two of them had a very special relationship. Many brothers would have been jealous of it. He was just very happy that his brother had such a fine friendship with a grownup.

Of course, back in Red Bend both of them had their 'grownups', but Zeke seemed to be Jericho's very first, really good, adult man friend and he understood how special that must be.

Zeke walked them to the front door and they had a final round of hand shaking. Jericho received a lingering hug. Red Eagle understood the one he got was an afterthought, but that didn't matter one bit.

Outside, they found their horses were gone! They looked up and down the street. They stood silently, thinking. Red Eagle's first thought was horse thieves. At the same moment Zeke and Jericho figured it out.

“The corral out back,” they said as one.

They rounded the building and sure enough, there they were having a 'chat' with Zeke's team. They had met while Zeke was hospitalized.

“You wouldn't think they'd remember,” Jericho said.

“Maybe they don't, really,” Zeke said, “but if you were a person in a land of horses don't you suppose you'd look for other people to be with instead of all the horses?”

Zeke would have made a great father. The boys were sorry that hadn't been his lot in life. So was Zeke, but he didn't speak of it. They accompanied Zeke to the telegraph office.

The telegrapher said he had received a number of wires from the west and none mentioned any snow in Kansas so Zeke didn't bother sending his telegram. It was a relief to the boys. The last thing they would need was a snow storm as they carted Simon two thirds of the way across Kansas to the Happiness Place.

Being at the telegraph office reminded the boys that when they were ready to start back they should telegraph their people in Red Bend explaining things about their trip. They would take the southern stage road so wouldn't be going through Red Bend on their way west. They mounted up and made their way south east back through the city. They wanted to reach the countryside beyond the city before dark. Neesie would run ahead sniffing this and that and then return clearly impatient with the unhurried pace they were setting. Red Eagle wanted to see everything there was to see and Jericho was determined not to rush him past a single thing of interest to him.

They arrived back in Bickford after dark on Tuesday. They camped again at the site on the creek just north of the ice house. They were excited about the next leg in their journey. Their first stop, however, was the doctor's office. Simon was thrilled to see them.

"I could a thought you was never comin' back, you know?"

"Could have?" Jericho said as a question.

"Yeah. I mean I knew you'd be good to your word, but it seems like a year since you left."

"A year, indeed, to more than just Simon," the doctor said repeatedly raising his eyebrows. Apparently caring for the lad for a week had been quite a challenge.

"Doctor Doc got me lots more books to read from the school. I read 'em all, didn't I Doctor Doc?"

"Several times and usually out loud," he said forcing a smile.

"What is the Doctor Doc thing all about?" Red Eagle asked.

"Elizabeth – she's like his nurse – said it wasn't polite for a boy my age to just call him Doc, so I decided on Doctor Doc. They all seemed happy with that."

Jericho turned to the doctor and offered his hand.

“My brother and I appreciate the good care you’ve given him, Doctor Doc.”

They all laughed.

“Will he be ready to begin the trip in the morning?”

“Oh my YES! And I wish you good luck, I mean, a good trip.”

“We will be back for you early in the morning, Simon.”

“Can I tell you a secret?” Simon asked in a confidential tone.

“Sure,” Red Eagle said. “What?”

The boys leaned in close.

“I’m pretty scared.”

“About what?”

“I’ve never been on a stage and it’s gonna be a new place to live with new people and that’s all pretty scary to me.”

“First,” Red Eagle began, “my brother and I will be right there with you the whole way. You aren’t scared of us are you?”

“No.”

“The place you are going is filled with people that Jericho and I handpicked to be there. They are wonderful people and we give you our word that you will like them and they will love you.”

“I figured, but still. I never knowed a place like that.”

Red Eagle felt moved to offer something else.

“A few months ago, I started out on a long trip all by myself and I can tell you I was scared, too. But it all worked out wonderfully. I know it will for you, as well.”

“I didn’t think big kids ever got scared.”

“Sometimes.”

“Okay, then. I’ll try to turn off my ‘scared key’ like Doctor Doc said I should.”

They didn’t question him about it and figured Doctor Doc was a pretty wise man. They stopped at the telegraph office and sent a wire. They stopped at the livery stable and made sure the private stage and drivers had arrived and were ready for the trip. It was going on ten when they finally lit the campfire and spread their bed rolls.

The fire they built was huge and provided good heat for

the cool night. Blizzard coming or not, the air had cooled noticeably since they had left for Kansas City.

They both had restless nights. They had several things to be excited about. Delivering the first true resident of the Happiness Place was a really big deal to them. Heading back home to Red Bend was a much bigger deal than either of them expected it would be. They hoped the girls at the park remembered them.

They met the stage out front of the doctor's office at seven. It was bright red with yellow wheels and trim around the windows and doors. The inside had padded, leather upholstered seats. They had added several bed pillows and a half dozen blankets for the trip not knowing what would be needed to keep Simon comfortable. They had candy and jerky and hard tack to keep his mouth occupied and a dozen books for him to read. They had milk and cheese packed in ice in a bucket and enough additional non-perishable food to last a week.

They carried lanterns to light the inside of the coach in the evenings and a five gallon can of kerosene to keep them fueled. The coach had windows that closed with leather flaps to keep out the cold night air.

The idea was to keep moving with a fresh team at every stop and new drivers every 12 hours. They would find restaurants as they came upon them for occasional good meals. Between the two of them they had planned the trip well. If things went as expected, they should be sleeping in their own cave one week from the day they left Bickford.

Simon fit perfectly across a seat – widow to window. At least one of the twins rode in the coach with him at all times – often both of them. The horses got tired of just running along with the coach so the boys would take turns riding them on short side trips.

Neesie would always accompany them on those jaunts, but otherwise was content to ride up on top with his nose between the driver and the shotgun so he could keep watch on the road ahead. None of them doubted that in his mind, he was in charge of the whole show!

The boys traveled in their white boys' clothes – mostly for warmth. Simon, with all his casts, was not a good fit for

clothes of any kind so they kept him wrapped up in blankets. The three of them started out together in the coach.

“Tell me more about the Place,” Simon said, really asking.

Red Eagle took that upon himself and went on about it for some time. Simon’s eyes grew wider and wider.

“Ponies, and dogs and cats and swimming and a bed all to myself, and moms and dads and other kids?”

“That’s right.”

“Sounds like heaven. I suppose there have to be girls, too, huh?”

“Eventually there will be girls. Like we said, you are going to be the first.”

“Do you suppose when they come the other kids will like me? Kids don’t usually like me.”

“Why don’t they like you? Do they tell you?”

“They call me ‘Windmill Mouth’. I guess I talk too much. And then, sometimes I take their stuff. They call it stealing. I call it using other people’s stuff for a while. And, I seem to hit kids a lot. They don’t seem to like that about me.”

“So, what do you need to do so you have a better chance of keeping friends?” Red Eagle asked.

“I knew you was gonna ask that. I had this same conversation with Doctor Doc. He asked it, too.”

“What did you tell him?”

“That it is was none of his doggone business and I clamed up.”

“Was that helpful for you?”

Simon looked down into his lap.

“No. There’s just so many things bad about me I’ll never be able to fix everything.”

“The Cherokee Indians have a saying. Translated it roughly comes out like this: “If I do what I am thinking about doing, will it make life better for everybody who is involved?” Then, if you cannot answer yes, you need to rethink it. People generally like other people who make life better for them.”

“Like you two and Doctor Doc, huh?”

“Why do you say that?”

Simon went on for ten minutes enumerating (listing) the kind and helpful things the boys and the doctor had done for

him for no reason at all as far as he could figure.

“You mean you actually liked us because we did those sorts of things for you?” Jericho said, making it sound like it was an unbelievable position to be taking.”

Simon looked up.

“That was like a joke, right? To make me think,” he said more than asked.

“It was.”

“I like your jokes. Can you teach me how to make them?”

“I guess you’ll just have to study us and discover how for yourself.”

“I’m smart. All the grownups say so. I bet I can study you two.”

“We bet you can, too. You can probably learn other things about making friends that way, too. Watch people with the kind of friends you want to have and see how they act.”

“I think you are going to make a very good father someday, Jacob.”

“Thank you. I hope so. I want to be the best father there has ever been.”

“You can both practice on me,” Simon said all quite seriously.

“I thought we already were,” Red Eagle came back with a big grin.

He reached out and ruffled the boy’s hair.

“I don’t let just anybody do that to me,” he came back with a stern look.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean anything bad by it.”

“Oh, it’s okay if you do it and maybe Jericho can, too. It just seems awful personal – a guy’s hair is like his own property you know.”

“I understand. I’m glad you felt like you could tell me that.”

“I think I tend to tell my feelings about stuff way too often. Lot’s a kids and grownups don’t like it when I correct them or tell them what they say or what they’re doing is stupid.”

“Yes. Most people react that way. You’ll need to do some thinking on that.”

“Thank you – both of you. I didn’t say that to you. I didn’t say that to Doctor Doc or Elizabeth either. I should a done that.”

“Have you ever written a letter?”

Simon looked puzzled.

“Like A, B, C letters?”

“No. I guess I should have been more clear. Like a ‘Dear Elizabeth’ letter.”

“No. I could do that, though couldn’t I? You’ll help me?”

“Sure. Jericho even has paper and pencils in his saddlebags. Next time we stop we will get some for you to use. We can get an envelope and a stamp at the next stage station and post (mail) it.”

“I’ll need two envelopes – one for each letter.”

“Of course. We will see to that.”

Jericho loved to watch his brother with little kids. He was a lot like Rising Sun. He just seemed to know what to say. Maybe it was an Indian thing. Like it was for Simon, Jericho figured he, too, had learned a lot from watching his brother.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Home Again!

By noon the first day both letters had been written and mailed. Simon slept a lot; his little body had gone through a great deal and needed time to mend.

The news from the third stage station manager was not good. The stages from the west told of a storm brewing just behind them. From where they were, the boys could already see the low, angry, gray clouds forming a wall along the far western horizon. The driver figured they could at least make one more station before they would have to make a decision about whether to hole up and wait out the storm or not. They continued.

It grew cold. The boys slipped into their new, long, wool stockings and buttoned up their jackets. They added another blanket around Simon. The driver and the shotgun had borrowed winter coats from the station. Their animals seemed to enjoy the lower temperature and the growing breeze. From time to time they would take off running just to warm up. Neesie had medium long hair and didn't seem to even notice the drop in temperature.

They were finally crossing the first really flat expanse of prairie, which meant they were expected to make better time; therefore, the stations were further apart. The weather deteriorated more rapidly than they had been given reason to expect. During one ten minute period the wind came up significantly and the temperatures dropped twenty degrees. The view toward the horizon up ahead became blurry.

"Snow commin' in up ahead," the driver called down to

the boys.

“Will we make it to the next station?” Jericho asked.

“Not a chance. We’re gonna head for that little stand a trees and wait it out.”

“What does, ‘wait it out,’ really mean?” Red Eagle asked raising his voice so the men up top could hear.

“Not fer young ears.”

He was referring to scary news not meant for Simon to hear.

Jericho opened the door, pulled himself up top, and closed the door with a foot so he could have a quiet conversation with the men about the real danger.

The shotgun pointed at the sky.

“Them is two foot clouds.”

“I don’t understand.”

“There’s two foot a snow hangin’ in em just waitin’ to fall on us. I seen it often. The trees will protect us some – especially the animals.”

The men pulled as far into the little wooded area as possible and stopped with the right side of the coach facing west. Jericho had a suggestion.

“I don’t mean to tell you your business, sir, but wouldn’t the coach have better protection from the west wind if the rear of the coach faced that direction?”

“You are right of course. Hadn’t thought about it I guess.”

It took a few minutes of maneuvering (backing and turning) to pull the coach into proper position. That immediately made a difference inside. Simon was asleep.

“You’ll need a good story to tell Simon when he wakes up,” Jericho said to his brother.

“Me?”

“Yes. You’re clearly his go to guy. I’ll go help care for the horses.”

By the time Jericho returned to the coach, he found Simon drawing pictures of snow scenes with pine trees and sleds and houses with icicles hanging from the eaves. Whatever the story had been it must have been great because Simon was fully unconcerned about the weather.

Jericho brought two more lanterns down from up top

along with the can of kerosene.

“They will provide a good deal of heat,” he explained.

With the arrangements finished outside, the men joined them inside. It was crowded – the men and Jericho on the front seat, Simon spread out across the back seat and Red Eagle – Jacob, to all of them – on the floor with his back against a door.

The wind came up even more. The snow set in, at first just individual flurries, dancing in the breeze. Very soon it was so thick they couldn't even see the trees out the windows. The coach shook and rocked. At one point, it leaned dangerously to one side and had there not been a tree there to save things the coach would have turned onto its side. It righted itself, but continued to quiver (shake).

Simon was clearly enjoying the goings on. Jericho and Red Eagle not so much. The men, clearly not at all. They had been through prairie blizzards before and knew about lots of folks who hadn't survived them. A storm of that magnitude (force) could rage on for days at a time.

One of the men took out a mouth harp (Google it) and began playing songs. The other removed a small block of wood and a knife from his coat pocket and began to carve. The boys engaged the whittler in conversation, hoping to hear tales of highwaymen (thieves) and outrunning grass fires and the like. They did and figured some of them might have even been true.

Simon had many interesting observations about their situation, such as:

“It's like we are a cork hiding inside a cotton ball.”

It grew dark outside.

“I bet to people outside we look like the sun in here.”

There were others. He wanted to know how it was to be twins and how it was to be twelve and how it was to be old men (they were thirty).

The storm raged on through the night. Simon slept. The others caught what they could. The twins were concerned by the chorus of coyotes howling throughout the night. At one point, Red Eagle asked the shotgun about them.

“Those coyotes sound close. Are they a danger to the horses?”

“They’re just howling to protest the snow – think they can chase it away like they can most everything else. Rabbits all in their holes in the ground and squirrels all deep inside their holes in dead trees. Their just hungry – that’s all. It would tire out any one a ‘em trying to cover fifty yards. Anyway, they’re too smart to attack a large group of horses.”

“How about a small group of people?”

The man took it as a joke. Red Eagle wasn’t really sure that’s how he had meant it.

By morning, when the men tried to go check on the animals, the snow had piled up against the stage door and it took some time for them to get it open. They could not see the sun, but the falling snow brightened like a million swirling chips of glistening gold telling them daytime had arrived.

Jericho figured they had enough food to last two days – it had been a four-day supply, but with the addition of the men that cut it in half. In the end the men didn’t eat, saying they weren’t hungry, but really saving their portion for Simon in case the storm lasted longer.

The horses from the stage team were doing well and just waited patiently. Using his Indian common sense, Red Eagle had cut lots of grass before the snow had covered it, and stashed it under the coach so the horses would have something to eat.

Golden and Lightning stood close together. Neesie remained under them, very well protected from the worst of the storm. They were all used to being active so were becoming impatient with Mother Nature’s unwelcome surprise.

“Even after the snow stops the road will be too high with snow to travel, won’t it,” Jericho asked the men.

“Depends on how high. Hard to tell in here among the trees. Trees and bushes slow down and catch the blowing snow so it may have piled up higher in here than out on the level. Just have to wait and see.”

They waited. They waited some more. On the third morning, they awoke to actual sunshine. The snow had stopped. The men had already left the coach by the time Jericho first opened his eyes. He poked his brother in his side.

“Ouch!”

“Good news,” Jericho said pointing out the window.

“I see. By the way, your elbows are as boney as . . . mine, I suppose.”

It was worth a chuckle between them.

The driver returned.

“Looks like we can give it a try. Three foot drifts in here among the trees, but no more than one out on the road. It will be a long, hard walk for the horses but if we rest them often they’ll get us there – probably by early afternoon. The sun sure feels good.”

His words delivered a good deal of relief to the boys.

“I’m hoping lots of the snow will have already melted west of here,” the driver added before he left to work with the team.

It was colder there among the trees where the sun couldn’t really penetrate – like an insulated ice-box – than it would be out in the open. The cold temperatures really hadn’t been much of a factor with their good sources of heat from the lanterns. They would need to find a telegraph station and let their people know they were okay, but would be delayed by several days.

The biggest problem with the horses was convincing them to try and move through the snow banks piled up around them. The narrow wheels of the stage coach would actually slice their ways through the snow with little difficulty once the horses began to move.

Red Eagle had the solution for the team. He led Golden and Lightning back and forth ahead of them to stomp out a path. With the driver and shotgun pulling on the two lead horses they gradually coaxed the team back out onto the road. It was true; the snow was no more than a foot high out there. The boys’ horses continued to lead the way. They took turns riding in the cold to keep the procession on, or at least close to, the road. Neesie was content to ride up top after making an initial attempt to bound through the snow. He soon decided it was no fun.

They rested the team five minutes out of every fifteen. It seemed to work well. When they forded streams the horses would stop and enjoy the warmer water – still warmer than the snow by a good deal.

The driver had been right; soon after noon they pulled

into the next station. Everybody there was relieved when they saw the stage approaching and were outside waving their hats to encourage them on.

Not an hour earlier a stage coming from the west had also stopped. Their word was that the snow was well on its way to being melted out there. To err on the side of safety, the twins decided they would spend the night at the station and start out again the following morning – assuming the snowfall was actually over.

They ate a good meal and slept much better that night. The next morning after they had carried Simon to the coach and arranged him on his seat, the driver who had been carving, handed something to the boy.

“It’s a horse. You carved this? For me? It’s wonderful. I don’t got nothin’ fer you.”

“Your smile, your bravery, and the enthusiasm that you’ve shared on the trip so far is all I’ll ever need from you.”

Simon had something new to contemplate (think about). Later in life he would look back at the unselfish gesture as a turning point in his life.

* * *

When they pulled into the Happiness Place there were flags and banners lining the last twenty-five yards of the lane – all in honor of their first special resident – Simon.

Benny was there to open the coach door. He looked at Simon.

“Gee, kid. You’re a mess.”

It was worth laughs.

“You’re going to be like my brother. There is a bed room just for you, but you can share mine with me if you want to. Father says you don’t have to decide that right away. You can try it out both ways if you want to. Do you like ham because we’re having ham for supper with sweet potatoes and lima beans and stewed tomatoes? We got a dog at our house. Haven’t named it yet. Thought you should help with that.”

Simon looked up at the driver who had made him the horse.

“What’s your name, driver?”

“Momma named me Rupert. My friends call me Tex.”

“That will be the dog’s name then, RupertTex – we can

call him Rupe. That be okay with you, Driver.”

“Sure will. Never done had nothin’ named after me afore. Thank ya.”

He tipped his hat. Since rough and tough men from Texas surely didn’t cry, that couldn’t have been a tear that trickled down his cheek.

The boys stayed that night and the next day and night to get caught up on the progress there and to make suggestions. It also served to transition Simon from them to his new family. They managed lots of Rising Sun time for themselves, and their horses clearly enjoyed running the hills with Pinto.

* * *

“I had no idea I would be this excited about getting back to Red Bend,” Red Eagle said.

He was dressed in his more comfortable Cherokee garb. Jericho opted for his white boy clothes. He wasn’t sure why. It may have had to do with things he had learned about himself on the journey.

They had stopped at the west end of Main Street just to have a minute to take it all in before announcing their arrival. With that moment over, they proceeded to announce their arrival in a fashion typical to them.

With the reins tied loose around the horses’ necks, they stood up on their backs and, whooping and hollering as only those two could, they sped down the street moving back and forth between them.

Knowing what it had to be, Sandy and Cal came out onto the sidewalk. Cal fired a few shots in the air. Doc opened his window and waved. Cilla moved clear out onto the street. A half dozen young boys were soon giving chase. The only thing missing were the two girls (or were they. Curtains moved behind the windows of several houses near the park.).

The boys were back. The townsfolk had missed them as much as they had missed the town – their town, they were happy to be able to say. Life was good and just seemed to keep getting better for these twelve-year-old twin boys living their great adventures in 1870, Old West Kansas.

The End

[You will also enjoy the series of books called, The Doc and Johnny's Old West Mysteries. They take place ten years later right there in Red Bend and, in addition to your old friends, Doc, Cilla, and Cal (who has become the Marshal) you will come to know, young Johnny, the star of those books. Jericho and Red Eagle have moved on by then, but the old, familiar characters help Johnny solve one mystery after another. And, oh, yes, Johnny lives with Mae, his real-life aunt and guardian. The first book in that series is, *Johnny's Secret*. Good reading!]

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