



"SEE YOU AROUND BOY, EARN YOUR K

This Moment

Bobby W. Lee

He rode at a hard gallop, the little mustang at full stride. Behind and to the side of him rode Comanche warriors yipping and yelling, each wanting to get to him first. They were just out of bow range, if his pony faltered he would be one more white man to disappear on the plain. The wind whipped the horses mane across his face as Tom leaned forward and whispered in the pony's ear, "They'll eat you and torture me baby!" As if he understood the mustang stretched his gait a little further.

Racing across the plain Tom thought back to what had got him in this mess. Listening to that damn fool Jessy about all that money they could make buying horses from the Comanche and reselling them in Texas. Tom's eyes watered at the thought of Jessy lying in the dirt with arrows protruding from his neck and side. Besides, leading a string of ponies was a lot easier than herding cattle Jessy had said. Tom had liked Jessy so he had partnered with him on this crazy venture. Now Jessy was dead and Tom would be too if he couldn't out run these savages!

They had worked together on a ranch in Texas for four years together. Jessy was older, around thirty with long blond hair and blue eyes. Slim and supple he was a good all around hand and nobody could bust a bronc like Jessy! Tom was twenty one and considered himself an old hand. He had been at it since he could ride at age six. His old man didn't tolerate no slackards and his kids were no exception to that rule. He was a hard man scratching out a living in a hard land. His parting words to Tom when Tom left to work for Triple T Ranch was, "See you around boy, earn your keep." He had shook Tom's hand and that had been that. In the four years he had been there Tom had done exactly that.

Jessy had taken a liking to Tom right off. He saw quick that the quiet boy from Wyoming worked hard and didn't complain. Tom was lanky with shoulder length hair the color of a beaver's pelt but in his hazel eyes was a spark of intelligence that Jessy didn't see in most of the other hands. Tom pretty well kept to himself, didn't drink and was dependable as the day was long. But he had a quick temper and didn't take to being poked at much. Jessy took Tom under his wing and taught him everything he knew including how to use a sixgun. Tom was a natural shot and under Jessy's tutelage became fast and a force to be reckoned with if it came to a gunfight. Tom was yet untried and Jessy hoped it would stay that way but he also wanted Tom to have a fighting chance if it ever came down to it.

Jessy had a lot of experience with gunfights, he had grown up in a town in Texas where you couldn't cross the street without seeing one most days. He had killed his share of men by an early age and was getting a reputation. He had tried being a lawman for a while but the Mayor was a crooked sort and had almost gotten Jessy hanged over a dispute about some missing cattle. Jessy had done nothing wrong but the Mayor was powerful and had friends in high places. He had never liked Jessy anyway.

Luckily Frank Gurn who owned the Triple T was driving cattle through town that day and saved Jessy's neck. Frank was well known around that part of Texas as the owner of the Triple T, a man who had started with a dream and carved out an empire. He had a lot of friends in high places too, including even the senator. One of Frank's hands knew Jessy and told Frank that there was no way this man was a rustler so Frank took Jessy's part in the matter and the Mayor dared not go against Frank and the Triple T outfit so they took the noose from around Jessy's neck and untied him. Frank put Jessy to work as a hand and Jessy had been with him ever since. Jessy proved to be a valuable asset to the Triple T and all the men thought highly of him except one or two who seemed to have a beef with everyone.

Tom was branding steers when Jessy first came to him with the idea. Dirty and sweat rolling down his body from the exertion and the heat of the fire, he had listened to Jessy's plan. Jessy had ran a herd into Old Mexico for Frank and ordinarily Tom would have been with them but Frank needed him there to break a herd of mustangs he had bought and help with the branding of the new steers so Tom stayed behind. Jessy had been talking to some caballero's on the ranch down there and asking about the herd of prime mustangs they had for sale. They had told him they were taking the mustangs to middle Texas and the money they had made rounding up wild ones and buying others dirt cheap from the Comanche. They told him for a few blankets and some old rifles they had bought most of the herd he was looking at.

They told him where the Comanche camp was, two days ride from there and took him there to meet Grey Bear, the chief they traded with. That way if Jessy decided to trade with the Indians he could come back on his own. All the way back to the Triple T Jessy thought about it and about approaching Tom as a partner. If the venture went well they could own their own ranch soon. Jessy was excited and

when he finally made his mind up to something,he went after it whole hog.Now he just had to convince Tom.

Tom heard him out and told Jessy to let him think on it a spell.Frank had been good to him and leaving weren't going to be no easy matter. As Tom was washing up and putting up his gear he told Jessy to give him a week and he would give him an answer one way or another.Jessy was dissapointed Tom didn't get as fired up about it as he was but agreed to wait for his answer.

Tom went to Frank that night after chow and explained the deal to him and asked his advice in the matter.Frank thought it over for a few minutes with a serious look on his face.He stood to lose two of his best hands,and hands like Tom and Jessy were hard to come by.He looked young Tom in the eye."Son,I can't tell you what to do,that's your decision.I will say this though,anything you and Jessy do will probably be a success.Your both good men and have grit.I don't know if I would trust the Comanche myself but if I were your and Jessy's age I would most likely give it a whirl.I wouldn't hold a man back for wanting to better himself and the two of you work hard and there ain't no reason you shouldn't have something to show for it.If its what the two of you want to do then you have my blessing and if it don't pan out then the two of you can always come back here."

"Just some friendly advice from an old man who cut out on his own along time ago.Things are never as simple as they seem though,you two watch each others back.The two of you get together and let me know what you decide so I can hire on a few new hands if ya'll decide to do this thing."Tom shook his hand and promised to let him know something after he talked with Jessy. He walked out into the cool Texas night and headed to the bunkhouse to think it over and get some sleep.

Frank Gurn watched Tom go.Frank was getting older and the grizzled grey hair above his steely blue eyes testified to that fact.Running a ranch the size of the Triple T took a lot out of a man but it was worth it to Frank.The pot belly he had grown after forty didn't slow him down any but he knew his best days were behind him at sixty three.Part of him(the younger man who longed to come back in him)wanted to ride out and seek adventure with his two cowhands,but the older wiser part of him knew he had responsibilities here that required his attention.

He missed his younger days when the world still seemed new and adventure lay at every turn instead of the daily grind of decision making and playing mediator between the ever constant gripes of thecowhands.He remembered full well the thrill of exploring the unknown and the excitement of not knowing what the next day would bring sleeping under the majestic star blanketed Texas sky.He sighed and went back to his well worn oak desk.

First thing after breakfast he went and found Jessy down by the horse corral and told him,"I reckon we got to take some risk if we want anything out of this life so if you still want to do it I'm with you partner!" Jessy grabbed him up in a bear hug and shook him."We gonna have our own ranch to run partner just you see!"Then throwing his well worn hat in the air he let out a loud whoop."Lets go tell Frank so he can cut us loose!" Side by side they walked to the ranch house.

Frank was doing figures and looked up as they came in."From that shit eating grin on Jessy's face I guess he talked you into it Tom!If you boy's will give me till [next Saturday](#),I'll get some new hands and have the two of you some money ready! You two will need all the help you can get."They shook hands and agreed to wait till Saturday."Are you sure we won't put you in a bind"Tom asked."Naw,I'll just pick up a couple of cowboys from town to cover ya'lls share of the work.Or maybe just one small girl!"Frank teased.Jessy rolled his eyes and Tom flushed red.Frank laughed and told them to get out of there so he could get some work done.

They left the ranch house,Tom scuffing dirt with his boot heel."Frank has sure been good to us Jessy,you think it's okay to leave with all this work coming up?"Tom asked.Jessy grinned and grabbed Tom's hat throwing it up in the air making him run to catch it."Don't you worry about Frank Gurn partner,if any man can figure how to squeeze some extra work out of some hands it's him!Besides,you better start worrying about our ranch and what we're going to call it!"Jessy laughed.Tom looked at his friend smiling with that easy grin and his heart was lifted."The T and J ranch!"he said to Jessy.Jessy rolled his eyes again,"The J and T more like it!Hell,I always have to pull your weight any way!"he said and punched Tom's arm."I like that,the T and J it is!"

The week flew past and [Saturday morning](#) rolled around.Jessy was at the wood slatted bunkhouse before daylight shaking Tom awake."Get up partner,grab some coffee and grub,we got to pack!" Tom rubbed his eyes then threw his pillow at Jessy.He let Jessy lead the way to the

kitchen and they ate, Jessy talking excitedly about the venture the whole time. Tom listened and nodded but his mind was on the eggs and bacon and hot coffee in front of him. There would be plenty of time to talk on the way to Old Mexico. After breakfast they went to see Frank and get their pay. He had given each of them a bonus and wouldn't take it back when both of them offered. "You two are like son's to me, ya'll might need that impress them pretty señoritas they got down there." He awkwardly hugged both of them in turn. "Jessy, you look out for Tom. And Tom, you got to really look out for Jessy, he likes to try to get his next stretched sometimes! If you boys don't sell all them ponies bring what you got left to me and we'll trade for cattle or I'll give you fair price for them. Now git out of here before I change my mind and want my money back!" Frank said with a wink. "I'll check around for some land while you two are gone, I know some people and we'll get you fixed up." They thanked him again and went to pack their belongings and saddle their horses. Jessy picked up Tom's rifle sighting down the barrel. "When we get to town you need to get you a real rifle and get rid of this old squirrel gun! It's about to rust plumb through!" he chided Tom affectionately. "I might just do that, I might just get me one of them fancy repeating rifles like Jeb has a over at the Diamond X!" Tom said patting the bulge in his pocket. "No telling what we're likable to run across in Mexico, maybe even one of them Chupacabre's Jeb was telling me about. You ever seen one Jessy?" Tom asked. Jessy laughed. "No but I seen prairie wolves as big as mustangs afore. I heard them Chupacabe's eat Texans for breakfast and lunch though when they can get them!". Tom looked a little worried. "Don't worry partner, your'e to skinny and tough for one of them Chupacabre's to eat you, he'd get a bone in his throat and choke to death! Besides you can pop him with this squirrel gun if he licks his lips!" Tom grabbed Jessy and they wrestled around for a minute both laughing and out of breath then got busy packing their belongings.

They rode out from the ranch and toward the town to go to the general store to get supplies they would need on the trail and buy some blankets and rifles. It was early September and the weather was gorgeous. The early [morning sun](#) warmed their backs as they rode side by side down the dusty road cut with tracks from the iron wheels of wagons travelling to and fro. Frank had given them a two year old mule for a pack horse to carry their supplies.

Even Tom was excited now about the prospect of owning their own ranch. What had seemed like a far fetched dream was beginning to look like a possibility. They rode into town and hitched the animals in front of the general store. "You want to get a good rifle for yourself," Jessy reminded Tom. "We may have to hunt for food and you never know what you'll run into on the trail, maybe even a prairie wolf or a Chupacabre!".

Tom grinned. His old single shot had seen better days. The storekeeper showed him the latest new arrival, a Winchester repeater. It had a lever action and Tom fell in love with it on the spot. Tom loved the way the store smelled, like cinnamon and spices mixed with the smell of gun oil. Toeing the dirt floor with his boot as Jessy looked at guns. He bought the Winchester and some cartridges with it and put his old rifle with the ones they were going to trade to the Comanche, some lesser grade bolt actions and single shots. Jessy bought a double barrel shotgun for himself joking about his eyesight but Tom knew Jessy's eyes were like a hawks. The shotgun would be for close range if they got in trouble and it would take out more than one man in a single shot.

Hefting his new rifle they left the store in high spirits. Tom noticed a couple of hard looking men hanging around the front of the saloon, watching them but if Jessy saw them, he didn't let on as he loaded the mule and distributed the weight on his back. Tom had an uneasy feeling wash over him and some of the joy of the new adventure dissipated as the looks became stares and Tom could sense the eyes on his back as he and Jessy rode out pulling the mule behind. Once they cleared the town he asked Jessy if he had noticed. "Yeah I saw them, maybe they were just curious but we'll keep a check on our backtrail just in case. They rode on into the now hot Texas sun, hats tilted low and only the occasional jackrabbit or gopher to keep them company.

Three warriors rode into Grey Bear's camp just after dawn when the women were cooking on the fires and gathering wood by the river. They were Limping Coyote, White Eagle, and Buffalo Wolf named for the wolfs head cape he wore that his squaw had as a joke fastened buffalo horns on either side giving a frightening appearance. He was a mighty warrior and had counted coup many times as well as taking scalps. He was fierce and the other two rode behind him in respect for their leader who had heaped glory on them and had

caused many songs to be sung around their home camp.

Buffalo Wolf loved to raid and explore and their wanderings had brought them to Grey Bear who had a reputation among the Comanche as a mighty chief with more than his share of women and horses. Looking around Buffalo Wolf saw and he wanted! White Eagle and Limping Coyote stopped at the edge of the camp at a sign from Buffalo Wolf.

Buffalo Wolf rode through the center of the camp taunting Grey Bear. "Where is this mighty chief that hides behind his squaws when a real warrior approaches, is Grey Bear a woman gathering wood or tanning hides. I see no great chief, only women and skinny warriors!" Grey Bear threw the flap to his teepee open and stepped out his eyes flashing fire. He locked eyes with Buffalo Wolf. "And who are you with a dog pelt on your head to hide your fear under and throw your words of women before my warriors?" "I am Buffalo Wolf killer of many men. I am here to take from you all that you own and give you a death worthy of a chief so all the Comanche know you were killed by a great warrior and did not crawl off like a dog to die!" "Then you will die today Buffalo Wolf and all the Comanche will know your scalp hangs on my spear!" Buffalo Wolf threw his spear in the ground at Grey Bear's feet and slid off his pony. Both men drew their knives and Grey Bear walked toward Buffalo Wolf, the warriors gathering and making a circle around them. Limping Coyote and White Eagle watched intently from their mounts. Grey Bear rushed toward Buffalo Wolf and they met together each trying to throw the other and gain an advantage. The warriors yipped and yelped their excitement as the two combatants rolled in the dirt then sprang up on their feet again facing each other knife blades flashing in the early sun. Twice more they met and locked together before Grey Bear stiffened and grunted, a wash of blood running from under his left arm hanging limp by his side. His eyes never left Buffalo Wolf's as he stepped forward, stumbled and fell face forward in the dirt a puddle of blood under his massive chest slowly sinking into the dust and turning it to mud. Buffalo Wolf panted for a moment then knelt down grabbing the dead chief by the hair and cut around the hairline. He sliced under the skin to the skull and sawing the knife back and forth pulled his grisly prize from the chief's skull. Standing with bloody knife in one hand and the chief's scalp in the other he raised the scalp for all to see and threw his head back screaming out the victory chant! The warriors beat their spear shafts on the ground and screamed encouragement. They had a new Chief!

Over the next few days Buffalo Wolf enjoyed his new holdings, he culled through his squaws and gave each warrior a new pony from the old chief's herd. He strode the camp and got to know each of the warriors. From two warriors he now had a following of over sixty and he was pleased. His ambition was to become the most feared Comanche on the plains. He had more now than he had ever owned in his life but still he wanted more. He called a tribal meeting that night and laid plans with his warriors for a raid on the nearby ranches. He would become the chief the whole Comanche nation feared and sang about! Jessy couldn't believe their luck as they neared the Rio Grande river. No rain and no problems. They had slept under the stars taking turns standing guard. Each day they would check their back trail several times but if someone was following them, they were way behind. He rode with the new confidence of becoming a wealthy land owner and cutting out a good living for himself and his partner. His blue eyes scanned the horizon looking for trouble. "We ought to make the Rio before dark partner, then we'll cross in the morning and be in Old Mexico! Another three days ride and we'll be at Grey Bear's camp. You won't believe all the horseflesh he has!" Tom nodded and said, "I think I might be interested in having a woman before we go there, just in case!" he teased Jessy. Jessy replied, "I think that's a grand idea Tom, I was thinking along the same lines myself. There's a chicken ranch a days ride from Espolito's ranch where we sell the cattle, I think we'll just mosey over there and get a poke before we see Grey Bear. Couldn't hurt to have a little fun!" Tom reddened and grinned. "I ain't never been but with one girl and her daddy found out and shipped her back east!"

Jessy laughed. "Well in that case partner we're going to Erma's for sure, I wouldn't want you pissing Grey Bear off by trying to hump one of his daughters!" Tom was scarlet now. "Whatever you say, pard!" Tom muttered. Up ahead the winding roiling Rio Grande came into sight behind the cottonwood trees lining its banks. The water was not too deep but it was fast moving. The birds sang in the tree's and any worries Tom had were gone. The river was beautiful and they made camp in the sand under one of the tree's. Jessy showed Tom how to make a fishing pole out of a cottonwood branch and when both were done they scampered around like kids

catching grass hoppers for bait. Jessy had line and hooks in his saddlebag that he had bought from the general store and they spent the rest of the afternoon catching supper, a few browns and one nice rainbow that had almost gotten away from Jessy. A vermilion hued sunset painted the sky in cottony strokes, the sun dying in an ebbing of ever fainter hues. The two men were tired, happy, and hungry as they built a fire and cooked the trout. "I don't think I've ever had a finer meal!" Tom told Jessy as he bedded down letting Jessy take the first watch. He closed his eyes and drifted off.

Jessy shook him awake. "Riders coming, wake up, grab your iron just in case."

Tom rolled over and got to his feet. He strapped on his Colt and pulled the new Winchester from its scabbard. "Hello there, that's close enough friend. Who are what and what do you want coming up to a man's camp this time of night." Jessy called out.

"Why it's just ol' Willy from the Diamond X. Saw your fire and just wanted to get a hot cup of coffee if'n you got one." the rider called back. "Aint had no coffee in a week, sure could use a cup friend."

Jessy nodded to the side where the other rider had eased around to flank them. Tom eased the hammer back on the rifle and backed to the mule and horses glancing to check they were securely tied down. "Well come on in and get a cup and tell your partner he can have one too but he needs to come back around and ride in with you!" Jessy yelled loud enough to be heard.

The answer was gunfire as the two riders charged the camp from different directions. Jessy had no time to instruct Tom as two more volleys rang out and his rider came charging into camp. Fighting his adrenaline Jessy took aim on the riders chest in the tricky firelight and slowly squeezed the trigger on his Army Navy Dragoon. Flame erupted from his barrel and the big 45 caliber slug struck true flipping the heavy set rider over the rump of his mount as the chestnut colored stallion came thundering through.

He wheeled as Tom fired from the hip jacking the lever on the Winchester and hitting his man three out of five times. Somehow the rider managed to stay on his horse as it jumped the small campfire and disappeared into the night.

Tom let out the deep breath he didn't even know he was holding and his hands trembled slightly. "Are you hit partner?" Jessy asked worriedly. "I don't think so." Tom stammered. The man Jessy had shot gave a death rattle and his leg twitched for several seconds.

from town." Tom said, still in a daze. "Are you okay Jessy?"

"Yeah just a little jumpy, I heard one bullet go right past my head. You were right it was the bushwhackers from town." Jessy said rolling the dead man over face up. The night had gone silent after the gunfire and Jessy could hear nothing. "I think you hit your man, but lets be safe and move the camp." he whispered to Tom. Then he stripped the would be assassin of his gunbelt and possibles.

They got everything together and untied the animals. Tom stomped out the fire and they moved a few hundred yards up river leading the horses in the moonlight along the sandy river bank. Reaching a small clearing under the trees they settled in once again to a cold camp.

Buffalo Wolf gave Limping Coyote and White Eagle ten warriors each, Limping Coyote was sent to the west and White Eagle to the east with instructions to raid and steal horses along the way and to meet on the mountain in the distance. Buffalo Wolf would ride straight toward the mountain with twenty warriors of his own. He hated any one who wasn't Comanche and aimed on harassing the settlers and Mexican ranchers till they left his new land.

There was no room for anyone but Comanche in his plan and that meant wiping out the Apache and Sioux tribes that were scattered across his territory. The Comanche women cooked a great feast of horseflesh and prickly pear and the warriors painted themselves and their horses for war. Long into the night they caroused and at dawn they assembled loosely and rode out, a fearsome sight of terrible warriors.

A half mile past camp they split into their groups and the raid was on. Buffalo Wolf's party rode behind and in the middle and anyone fleeing the two parties on either side would run into the main body he led. A tribe of Apache was the first victims of the raid and Buffalo Wolf's warriors slipped up to their camp and charged in catching them by surprise and killing them all. Scalps were taken and several ponies and seven squaws were captured. Limping Coyote came across a settlement and wiped it out burning the encampment as they left leaving no one alive. A small party of Sioux were hunting buffalo but managed to out run White Eagles braves but before they reached

the large ranch his braves found a small ranch and burned it taking a white woman for hostage. So far Buffalo Wolf was having a very successful raid.

Tom and Jessy broke camp that morning and following the buzzards found the other bushwhacker. Jessy took what he could find of the dead man's belongings despite the awful stench. Flies were buzzing around the corpse in a steady hum. Tom's stomach churned and he almost lost his breakfast. Jessy, gritting his teeth found

a knife, eight dollars in gold coin, a pocket watch, and some tobacco.

They found the riders horse together in a gully and after stripping off the saddles and taking the rifles and scabbards, added the two to their string. Jessy seemed more tense now and asked Tom if he wanted to turn back. Tom laughed. "Partner, I didn't ride all the way to Mexico to turn back now! Besides we ain't even seen one of those pretty señoritas you was braggin' about.

"Jessy looked closely at Tom. "I know you won't let on, but I also know how I felt after killin' my first man. You had to do it or you wouldn't be here now. If it starts botherin' you just remember that. Takin' a man's life ain't no little thing. I'll listen and keep my mouth shut if you ever want to talk about it."

Tom stayed quiet for a few minutes, his brow furrowed, then said, "Naw, I'm okay with it. But thanks for offering. Before this is over there may be more killin' and I can't let my feelings get in the way of stayin' alive can I?" Jessy gave Tom a fatherly look, "No you can't. A man has to do things he don't like much in this life just to get through. Hell lets go see them señoritas, I can almost smell their perfume now!" The two saddled up and rode to the ford pulling the horses and mule.

At the Triple T Frank was cutting a herd for a gentleman from central Texas. The two men talked as the cowhands drove cattle through the corral for the buyer to inspect. Andrews had bought cattle several times from Frank and respected the man. "Did you hear about all the trouble going on over by the border?" Andrews asked.

What trouble?" Frank replied.

"The Comanche are on the warpath and they been hitting everything around there. They even killin' other Injuns! Daws was huntin' buffalo with a party and they came across a whole tribe of Apache killed and scalped, even the squaws and kids. Them Comanche is some rough customers I swear!" Andrews said mopping his brow with his neckerchief and pointing at some steers to add in.

"I got some hands went down that way to buy ponies from Grey Bear, hope they don't get mixed up in it!" Frank told Andrews.

"You hadn't heard? Grey Bear is dead, a new chief by the name of Buffalo Wolf is leading them now. They's the ones causing all the ruckus! Even Esposito's ranch is gone!" Andrews exclaimed.

With that Frank took off toward the ranch house hollering for his foreman, Andrews tailing behind. "Randy will see that you get your cattle, he can act in my behalf. I got to go get my hands if it ain't too late already. Have a good day Andrews and thanks for the information, pick two bulls, your choice for free." Frank hollered toward Andrews who had slowed to a walk. Frank hurried in the ranch house and started getting things together to go get Jessy and Tom.

Erma's place of business wasn't much, a small log shack with a grass and mud thatched roof, but the road was well worn from hooves and wagons. A couple of the girls were outside hanging laundry and Tom's eye caught a beautiful señorita with long black hair hanging to her hips and soulful brown eyes.

He liked the way the sun set off the shine of her hair against the tawnyess of her skin. She looked around at him as if she felt his gaze and smiled. Tom flushed a deep red and cut his eyes to his saddle horn. Jessy had seen the exchange and just grinned at the boy's discomfiture.

They reined up at the post in front of the shack and Jessy swung down. Tom sat stock still, his eyes wide and his face pale. Jessy chuckled to himself. "I'm going to go in here and see Erma for a minute Tom, if you don't mind water the horses and make sure the packs tied good on the mule.

Tom gave Jessy a grateful look and stammered, "Yeah, we wouldn't want to lose anythin'." He grabbed the reins to Jessy's horse and rode across to the big trough across the way. With a devilish grin Jessy went in and explained the situation to Erma.

When Tom was through and tying the horses to the rail a small brown hand slid over his and he looked up into the brown eyes of the girl he had seen hanging laundry. She had a red dress on now and her hair was brushed and pulled into a pony tail. Silently she led Tom into the shack and into a room to the

right. From the room Jessy was in propped up on his elbow with a blond from back east somewhere behind him he saw Tom and the señorita pass by. Rolling over on his back he smiled at the blond, "My partners about to become a man!"

Morning came and Jessy sat drinking coffee and chatting with Erma. He saw the señorita go by and she flashed him a smile and nodded. A full thirty minutes later Tom, looking tousled and sleepless staggered up, his hat in his hand and his face aglow. The smile on his face was priceless Jessy thought to himself as he filled a mug and slid it to Tom. "Erma here was telling me about some travelers talking about injun trouble close to here. Probably Apache, there's still a few of them around these parts. We better keep a good look out on the way up."

Tom sat there his hands around the steaming mug of coffee and never heard a word. As they started to ride the raven haired señorita ran out of nowhere and grabbed Tom's leg. They reined up and she looked up at Tom. "Bonita." she said softly the accent music to Tom's ears.

He hopped out of the saddle and they kissed long and hard as Jessy smiled and looked away. She broke the kiss and pulled a necklace of wolf claws with a turquoise stone as the centerpiece and put the leather string over Tom's head then ran quickly away.

"I think she likes you pard!" Jessy said. "To bad we won't come back this way." he teased. Tom shot him a hard look and started to say something but Jessy laughed out loud. "Come on boy we got to go get them ponies before the caballeros get all the best ones!" Kicking his horse in the flanks he galloped off leaving Tom standing there with his mouth open.

Something didn't feel right. Jessy could sense it but chose to ignore it pulling the shogun and laying it across his legs. It was too quiet as they rode the small trail up the mountain toward the Comanche camp. He thought of all the money they would get for the prime horseflesh the Comanche were noted for, besides Grey Bear had liked him.

Swatting at a deer fly that kept stinging his neck he topped the last rise before the camp and he started to turn and tell Tom they were almost there when two arrows struck him, one in the side and one pierced his neck and into his jaw at an upward angle. The shotgun fired both barrels as his hand tightened and Jessy was dead before he pitched backward out of the saddle hitting the ground with a thump.

Tom riding a few feet behind stared in disbelief as his best friend fell dead at his feet body rolling and sliding to a stop.

Arrows flying thick past Tom's face sank reality in as he looked up and saw a dozen or more warriors in war paint screaming and bearing down on him. He started to jump off his mount to check on Jessy but he knew there was nothing he could do. Instinct kicked in and Tom snatched the Winchester from its scabbard and dropped the line to the horses behind him hoping they would buy him some time.

Wheeling his pony around he raced back down the path giving his mount full head. He knew the river was his only chance and he kicked the pony in the ribs urging him on. Behind him the shrieking stopped for a few minutes as the warriors reached Jessy's body and the trade animals. Tom rode for all he was worth clutching the Winchester tightly and wondering if he would ever see Bonita, his beautiful señorita again.

Racing across the plain Tom thought, I'm going to make it, and the pony tripped throwing Tom in a dizzying arc. The ground rushed up and hit him with a terrible force as everything went black. The pony rolled and struggled to its feet. Shaking his head and mane he walked slowly to the prostrate man lying in the grass, hand still clutched around the Winchester. He nosed the still form as if to say "Get up, your life depends on it!"

Turning and looking the way they had come the pony snorted and trotted the other way into a small arroyo just big enough to hide him from view. Tom groaned and sat up feeling dizzy and sick. Spitting dirt and grass from his mouth and using the rifle as a crutch he got up. Looking around for the pony, he saw nothing but the chest high grass waving in the breeze. Overhead the sky was darkening.

He stood silently, his back to the approaching storm gazing in solitude over the grassy plain. Boiling and rolling the clouds in dark fury spent their stinging tears in the dusty earth. To die like this, alone here with no one to witness the coming battle but the crows and prairie dogs! He sighed and jacked a shell into the bore of the nearly new Winchester. He knew they were there, he could sense them if not see them. At twenty one years old he had made his peace with the world, he was resigned to his fate and he was okay with it. Would they come all at once or one at a time? He didn't know and guessed it didn't matter. He wished he could stay in this moment forever.

The first arrow fell from the sky, a little messenger of death that

struck the ground fifty feet in front of him. So it was like this he thought, they would find his range and skewer him from a distance. The wind whipped the tall prairie grass from side to side and betrayed a sneaking brave. Tom whipped the Winchester up, sighted and squeezed. The fight was on.

He crawled on his belly to the dead brave. Stripping off his shirt he pulled the leather and bead breast plate off the body and slid it on. He shucked his jeans looking around, tossed his beloved hat and pulled on the dead mans leggings, breech cloth, and moccasins. He strapped the colt around his waist and hoped from a distance he looked enough like a Commanche to pass.

Crawling on his belly through the tall grass Tom tried to get his bearings but he could only see a few feet in front of him. He saw the grass move in front of him and he tried to will himself into the ground as he flattened out. The warrior was creeping stealthily and stopping to look and listen.

He hadn't seen Tom yet but any second now and he would. The feathers on the hatchet handle fluttered in the breeze as the brave scanned with his eyes the openings in the grass. Tom eased the rifle into position and looked down the sight. Pulling the bead up under the warriors left armpit Tom squeezed the trigger and rolled to his left as the warrior dropped. Tom crouched and duck walked in a direction he hoped would take him closer to the river.

Tom squatted in the grass listening and watching. He heard a horse snort to his right so he crabwalked to his left and fell headlong into the shallow arroyo startling the mustang. Jumping up he called to his pony softly, "Easy boy, easy." He laid the rifle across the saddle and swung up kicking the pony's flanks and riding up out of the ditch just ahead of a band of warriors.

Tom fired without aiming and luck was with him as a warrior toppled and the rest milled around for a second or two before giving chase. Tom made the river as the skies opened up and poured down.

He dismounted and slapped the ponies rump sending him flying. Tom waded out and holding the rifle high let the current take him rushing down the Rio Grande banging and bumping rocks as he went. He felt a log hit his back and grabbed a limb with his free hand. Down river he flew till he judged he had gone a few miles and he turned the log and kicked for the bank. He had lost a moccasin but considered himself lucky to still be alive.

Tom hopped up the bank to the trunk of a cottonwood and pulled the moccasin off dropping it. Two warriors came screaming up the bank and Tom fired point blank into one's chest and rolled away from the other, a huge warrior with a horned wolf's scalp adorning his head. The warrior sprang at Tom and he swung the rifle falling backward feeling the hot pain as the blade buried in his front left shoulder as his right hand drew the Colt and squeezed the trigger, instinct guiding his hand surprised when it fired. Buffalo Wolf spun and fell into the sand, tried to rise and fell again. Trying to sing his death song he died blood and froth pouring from his mouth, the 45 slug had made a small round hole in his massive chest but the exit wound was a hole the size of a fist.

Tom stripped the moccasins off the dead warrior noting the fresh blond scalp hanging with other not so fresh hanging from Buffalo Wolf's waist. Tears in his eyes Tom took it gently off the breech cloth and pushed it down into the breast plate he was wearing. Moving up river he stayed just inside the tree line. He had been moving for about an hour when he heard gunfire up ahead of him, several rifles firing from the sound of it. He moved a little further into the trees and worked his way toward the ruckus.

Just up ahead he saw horses and then he saw the men firing toward the river. His eyes could not believe what they saw, Frank and two hands from the Triple T were behind the cottonwoods holding off a band of Commanche.

Tom yelled and waved to keep from being shot and ran to Frank. "Jessy?" Frank asked. Tom teared up and shook his head. "Lets get the hell out of here then!" Frank said. "Your hurt, can you ride?" Tom nodded to the affirmative. The men started falling back to the horses and Frank helped Tom onto his big bay then swung up behind him. Firing behind them the bunch rode.

Several minutes too late Limping Coyote and his braves rode in to flank the cowboys. White Eagle and his braves were still across the river and met with Buffalo Wolfs warriors. They found Buffalo Wolf an hour later and the howling and screeching could be heard for a mile! Limping Coyote picked up the wolfs head cape and pulled it over his head. The Commanche had a new chief again and they rode enmass back to their camp and women to sing of their victories and of the death of Buffalo Wolf.

They had a funeral for Jessy and buried his remains under a Tall oak tree at the ranch. All the hands were there and said something good about Jessy. They shuffled by, their hats in hand and shook Toms hand

and told him how sorry they were that Jessy was gone. Tom was silent and stony faced standing there his arm in a black sling that Doc had made for him.

After a while it was over and they covered the grave, the women singing hymns. Tom kept thinking how full of life Jessy was and how quick it ended. His mind turned to Bonita and he wondered what she was doing and if she was okay.

She had explained to him that Erma had took her in and raised her when her family had died from influenza. Erma had raised her as a daughter and Bonita had never entered the business that fed and clothed them. She helped out by washing clothes for the working girls and cleaning and cooking. Jessy had talked to Erma about Tom as a suitor for Bonita on his earlier trip and Erma had wanted to meet him. Bonita had fallen for Tom at first sight and they had spent the whole night talking and getting to know one another. Tom had promised to come back for her after he and Jessy had made their fortune. Lost in his thoughts Tom wandered around the ranch before finally returning to the bunkhouse later that night. His face a mask of pain and torture.

The next few weeks Tom was quiet even for Tom. Jessy's death weighed heavily upon him and Frank was worried. The knife wound was healing rapidly but Frank knew the wound inflicted on Tom's mind was the more dangerous. He could only give it time and try to break Tom out of his funk. Frank was leaned on the corral rail watching a hand break horses. He had been thrown several times and Frank knew he was sore and weary so he stayed at the rail to shout encouragement and lend support.

He looked up and there was Tom, unshaven and eyes red from lack of sleep. He couldn't get the words out, just broke like a dry cottonwood limb, tears gushing from those sad red rimmed eyes and Frank wrapped his arms around Tom.

Jessy?" he sobbed into Frank's shoulder.

Frank leaned Tom back and looked him in the eyes, "It was just his time Tom, it could have just as easily been you lying there. The good lord has other plans for him."

Tom nodded and rubbed his eyes. "I left him Frank, I just left him!" Frank put his hands on each side of Tom's face. "You did what a man had to do to survive! Nothing you could've done would have saved Jessy, his number was up. You dying there wouldn't have made Jessy happy but going on and living your life the best way you can would!" Frank said looking Tom earnestly in the eyes. "Make him proud Tom!"

Tom got better after that, he still had a bad day now and then but he was back to being Tom and even started reaching out to some of the other hands cutting up and laughing as they worked. Frank watched with a close eye. He pulled Tom to the side and asked him if he'd be interested in ramrodding a herd down to Mexico or if it was too soon.

Tom looked at Frank warmly, "Boss, if you need cattle in Mexico, then I'm headed to Mexico!" and grinned. "Besides, I got a pretty little señorita I aim on seeing again!"

Tom picked his men, ordering them like he had done it all his life. They rounded up the herd Frank wanted to send and headed out. One of the hands asked Frank as the herd and Tom's crew pulled out of the Triple T, "D'ya think he'll be okay Frank?"

Frank watched Tom's back as they pulled out. "The whole Comanche nation couldn't whip that boy's spirit!" Two weeks later Tom and the boys rode in, a beautiful Mexican girl by Tom's side.

Frank stepped out of the ranch house as they rode up. "Need to see you inside Tom when you get settled." he said and walked back inside.

Tom showed Bonita to his quarters and told her he'd be back. Walking to the ranch house he wondered if he had done wrong by bringing Bonita. Frank had sure seemed serious. Tom gulped and walked in, whatever it was he could face it. Frank was sitting behind the oak desk with a bottle and two glasses. He poured himself a drink and filled the other glass.

"Have a drink Tom." Frank said looking directly at him. Tom sipped the strong whiskey. "How long have you been here Tom?" Tom's stomach tied in knots. "Five goin' on six years, sir." he answered. "Then it's time you started pulling your weight around here isn't it young man?" Tom's eyes got wide and he started to stutter an answer but Frank waved him off. "Yessir you need to start pulling your half of this ranch boy do you understand what I'm telling you!" Frank said loudly trying not to burst out laughing at the quizzical expression on Tom's face as he processed what Frank had said. "You mean...." "That's exactly what I mean Partner!" Frank said.

This book was distributed courtesy of:



For your own Unlimited Reading and FREE eBooks today, visit:
<http://www.foboko.com>

Share this eBook with anyone and everyone automatically by selecting any of the options below:



To show your appreciation to the author and help others have wonderful reading experiences and find helpful information too, we'd be very grateful if you'd kindly [post your comments for this book here](#)



COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Foboko.com respects the intellectual property of others. When a book's copyright owner submits their work to Foboko.com, they are granting us permission to distribute such material. Unless otherwise stated in this book, this permission is not passed onto others. As such, redistributing this book without the copyright owner's permission can constitute copyright infringement. If you believe that your work has been used in a manner that constitutes copyright infringement, please follow our Notice and Procedure for Making Claims of Copyright Infringement as seen in our Terms of Service here:

<http://www.foboko.com/legal/tos>



**STOP DREAMING
AND BECOME AN
AUTHOR YOURSELF
TODAY!**



It's Free, Easy and Fun!

At Foboko.com we provide you with a free 'Social Publishing Wizard' which guides you every step of the eBook creation/writing process and let's your friends or the entire community help along the way!

LOGON ONTO FOBOKO.COM

↙ and get your story told!

FOBOKO.COM