

Wyoming Territory

This is a novel of fiction and even though historical facts are found throughout, it in no way depicts the life of anyone, living or dead.

I have added a few words from the Lakota Sioux dialect to twist the tongue and cause the reader some angst. I hope you enjoy reading it.

Prologue

The Wyoming Territory is rich in history. Famous frontiersmen such as Jim Bridger, John Colter, Kit Carson, Jedediah Smith and General John Fremont spent time exploring the land and hunting for beaver pelts. While exploring the Rocky Mountains, John Colter discovered an area of steaming geysers and magnificent waterfalls that he called "Colter's Hell." In 1872, that area was set aside as the world's first National Park, known as Yellowstone. William Cody gained a name for himself hunting the large herds of buffalo that roamed the great plains of Wyoming. The city, Cody Wyoming, near Yellowstone National Park is named after its famous resident.

Forty miles east of Lovell, Wyoming, at the crest of Medicine Mountain, is located the Medicine Wheel, an ancient shrine with twenty eight spokes and a circumference of two hundred and forty five feet, built by some forgotten tribe. A Crow chief reportedly said, "It was built before the light came by people who had no iron. This prehistoric relic remains as one of Wyoming's unsolved mysteries.

There is evidence in Wyoming of prehistoric occupation dating back more than twelve thousand years. These historic tribes were nomadic and known as the Plains Indians. They were the Arapaho, Arikara, Bannock, Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Crow, Gros Ventre, Kiowa, Nez Perce, Sheep Eater, Sioux, Shosone, and Ute Tribes. The Cheyenne and the Sioux were the last of these to be controlled and placed on reservations.

Wyoming was the scene of the last of the great Indian battles. Fort Phil Kearny, in northern Wyoming, had the bloodiest history of any fort in the West as thousands of well organized Indians fought fierce battles with the United States Cavalry. These Indians were led by famous chiefs such as Crazy Horse and Red Cloud.

Fort Laramie in southeastern Wyoming became a haven for the emigrants and people seeking gold as well as a critical station for the Pony Express and the Overland stagecoaches, thus becoming a vital post for the military in its wars with the Plains Indians. It witnessed the growth of the open range cattle industry and the coming of homesteaders, or "sod busters" and the building of towns.

In 1869, Wyoming's territorial legislature became the first government in the world to grant female suffrage by enacting a bill giving Wyoming women the right to vote. Thus, Wyoming came to be known as the "Equality State". It wasn't long after the signing of this act that Ester Hobart Morris of South Pass City, became the first woman ever to be appointed as justice of the peace. Mrs. Louisa Swain, on September 6, 1870, in Laramie, became the first woman in the nation to cast a vote.

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While all of this was going on, the large ranchers in Wyoming were complaining of unbridled rustling by small “nesters” and that railroad contractors fed their crews with beef purchased from these rustlers. Without adequate law enforcement, the cattlemen took matters in their own hands hanging without trial those they thought were guilty. Regardless of such efforts to stop the rustling, the problem continued.

The infamous “Hole in the Wall” was located in Johnson County and seemed to attract various outlaws who preyed on cattle interests. Included among this group were Tom Horn, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid to name a few.

The cattlemen took it upon themselves to hire and send an “expeditionary” force of Texas gunmen, led by a former deputy United States marshal to go in and rid the area of these unsavory individuals who were rustling their cattle. Each man was promised a fifty dollar bonus for each “rustler” killed. The plan included the force, under the command of Major Frank Wolcott, to go to Buffalo Wyoming in Johnson County to replace the county government with individuals who would be more favorable toward the large cattle interests. It was this bunch of individuals, with nicknames that conjure up the best of the Wild West, and their shenanigans that caught my interest and brought my novel to the Wyoming Territory.

Much of the historical information I gathered was from G.B. Dobson’s web site, [About Wyoming Tales and Trails](#) and from the characters he described that many of the names used in this novel are derived.

During this time when the Wyoming Territory was going through its growing pains, Sweden was experiencing its worst recession since 1650. While the population in Sweden was increasing by an alarming rate, it was estimated that over forty per cent of its soil was unproductive.

People were leaving for America in great numbers aided by firms based in New York who sent representatives to Sweden to arrange passage on ships carrying iron to America. These ships would provide cheap passage and would only charge twelve dollars per person for a voyage that would last about seven weeks. It was an emotional time for these people, saying good bye to their brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers. Watching the countryside where they grew up pass by for the last time. They were never to see their family and home again.

These immigrants were often met by the Bethel Ship Mission in New York City, an organization which helped people arrange travel west. Many of these Swedish immigrants found work with the Northern Pacific Railroad helping build the Yellowstone Division. Once they saved up enough money, they purchased land close to the track so they could once again get back to farming. It is here where, Esben Hjerstedt and his mother, Corinne, went to live with his uncle, who was living in Wyoming while he worked for the railroad.

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**“Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves.” Confucius 551-479
BC**

Chapter 1

Near The Lakota Sioux Reservation Wyoming Territory 1871

The boy stopped on a smooth flat rock. He was barefooted and sweating, trying to catch his breath. He bent over gripping his waist, panting, looking into the darkness. A bullet slammed into the tree ahead of him. He heard the men coming. It didn't take them long to catch up to him.

He had run from the river bank, following a trail he had taken many times before looking for elk. He hoped he would be able to double back without being seen. Now that it was dark, he was stumbling and afraid he may have lost his way. His feet and ankles were sore and bleeding and he wanted to lie down and sleep. He had made his way into the mountains, climbing as he followed the winding path higher. In places sections of the hillside fell away beneath his feet.

“I can't stop yet,” he thought. “I have to get back to camp.”

Crashing into a rock, he lost his balance and hit the ground. He got up and kept running, straining to see obstacles ahead. He heard the men charging behind him. A second bullet whistled past his right shoulder.

Leaving the game trail, he began to zig zag and head away from the noise of the men following up the rocky incline. He gained the ridge top and looked down at the mist filled ravine with vapor rising in jagged wisps, like steam from a boiling pot. The night was cloudless and the moon was high in the sky. Between him and his pursuers the bushes were a shadow of black and gray. He saw the riders with their heads pressed to their horses' necks as they tried to avoid the dense trees, dripping with vines obstructing their way. They had to dismount and scramble up the steep trail, leading their horses as they skittered and slid, gouging out the red earth and loose rock which fell dangerously when they set their hooves upon it. If they got closer, they surely would be able to see his silhouette as he fled.

He kept moving. He scampered down the draw, snaking through the sage and pinion and coming out downstream along the bank of the river that ran past where he was camping with his mother and Grey Wolf.

When the scrub ended, he found himself forced into the open. He ran toward a buttress of rock that was a deeper shadow on the dark landscape. Upon reaching it, he sank to his knees behind a tree. His breath was rasping and he was aware of his thirst. He flattened out on the river bank and drank. It tasted sweet and cold. His eyes began to ache from drinking too fast.

Somewhere close by a twig snapped. His heart jumped. Scrambling up into a crouch, he fought to control his breathing. He heard a hushed exchange between two men. He stayed still.

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“He’s got to be in here somewhere Rory”, one voice said, very close now.

The boy shut his eyes, willing the men away.

“Shut up Jasper,” the other voice rasped. The boy heard them pushing through the scrub brush moving away from him. He was too afraid to open his eyes until the sound of their retreat grew fainter.

Heart pounding, he opened his eyes to see a pair of dark eyes staring back at him, glistening in the night. It was a small deer.

The deer turned, jumped down and nimbly scampered away, leaving him alone with the dark and still silence of the night.

He swore he could hear his heart pounding from fear and exhaustion.

I need to find someplace to hide until these men are gone, he thought.

He moved out. Reaching a rise, he stopped and turned to see if he could catch a glimpse of his pursuers. He heard horses snorting and their hooves striking the ground. The boy ducked into the brush along the path. The horses’ shadows passed over him. These were the other two men who had joined in the chase to capture him.

I can’t outrun them, he thought to himself, and darted away through the dark, effortlessly avoiding bushes and sharp, jutting rock with the ease of a rabbit. Occasionally he would stop to check on his pursuers, or to feel his way up a narrow gully. He was climbing, following a wild animal track up the side of a steep hill when he fell into some bushes, scratching the side of his face and turning his ankle. When he got up and put weight on his ankle the pain made his leg buckle and he collapsed. Lifting his head, he noticed a shallow cave directly in front of him, hardly four feet high but appearing to be quite deep. He crawled forward, forcing some bushes aside. Peering inside, he saw nothing but darkness. He put out his hand to find the perimeter of the cave and crawled forward. Involuntarily he shivered as he inhaled the dank musty air. The smell of wild animal was strong and he hoped the animal that stayed here was gone as he appeared to be blocking the only exit.

I don’t think those men will find me in here. I will stay until morning and then go back to camp using the river bank for cover. If my ankle will hold my weight, I think I can make it.

He peered out of the cave, parting the brush. The moon was high now and only a few stars could be seen in the bright light. He could see the creek far below with the sand shining like silver.

He saw no sign of his pursuers. He hoped they had given up and left.

He lay there, watching and listening for another few minutes. The breeze had died, and he started to shiver. Now that his sweat had cooled, coldness crept over him. He wrapped his arms around himself trying to keep his body warmth close; he curled up like a wild animal, resting his head on his arms

When he woke, dawn was close and the sky was flush with different hues of blue and the black shadows from the night before had melted into a deep green. Nothing moved outside the cave. The air was clear and the sun was rising on the horizon. His fingers traced the lacerations around his ankles and he winced when he touched a tender spot. He ached all over, still exhausted from running half the night and sleeping on the damp ground. Slowly he got to his feet. He was hungry and thirsty.

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Chapter 2

Just outside Starn, Sweden, 1863.

Cupping his mouth, Lars yelled, "That's the last one, Gunard."
"Ok, jump up Lars, we are going home."
Gunard marveled at the strength of his younger brother Lars. His forearms were huge and rippled with muscle developed from years of chopping, sawing and lifting of the heavy timbers they cut each day. Nothing seemed too heavy for him to lift with his powerful legs and back and it seemed he could work at the same pace for the whole day. His rugged face was covered with his winter beard that had a tinge of red. He always had a twinkle in his eye that made one think he was about to pull a prank. Lars was definitely born to be a lumberjack. Gunard usually tired by mid day and would like to take a break but he was shamed into working by Lars' stamina. If he took a break, Lars' booming voice and laughter would cause Gunard to stand up and get back to work so his brother wouldn't look at him in the way one does when they think their partner is shirking their share of their duties. One thing Lars didn't do well was drive a team of horses. This was always left to Gunard. When their father was still alive and teaching them how to be lumberjacks he had Lars drive the team back to the farm late on a cold blustery afternoon. The wind had kicked up and snow was falling at an alarming rate. The horses were a little nervous and required a steady hand, which Lars didn't have. The horses bolted and the sled ran off the road and into a ravine. The two horses were unable to pull the sled out by themselves so Gunard and their dad had to go to Gustav Anderson's farm to borrow his team to help. After that experience, Lars was hesitant to do the driving. He let Gunard do the driving whenever possible.

The sun was beginning to drop in the west and even though the temperature was below freezing, the ice was melting off the trees and dripping onto Gunard's hat and rolling down his neck. He leaned back in the seat of the sled to avoid getting soaked. Gunard and Lars had worked up a good sweat despite the cold temperature. The horses were prancing in place as they knew it was the time of day they would be heading home to a warm stall and some oats and hay. Gunard and Lars wrapped up in the bear skin they kept in the front of the sled as they headed to Starn to unload the trees they spent the past two days cutting down.

"Hiay, hiay, Gunard called out to the two big Belgian horses pulling the sled. They were going to Swenson's Sawmill for the last time. There just wasn't any demand for lumber any more in the whole country of Sweden and Peter Swenson said that he would be closing his sawmill at the end of the month. On the ride back both Gunard and Lars were lost in their thoughts. Gunard was concerned about Lars, his younger brother by five years who had a three year old daughter and another baby on the way. They were at a loss as to what they were going to do. Gunard and his wife had an eight year old boy, Esben. They lost a baby girl at birth five years ago and Corinne was unable to have any more children. It was probably just as well since Gunard was having a difficult time feeding the little family he had. All his brothers and sisters, beside Lars, have at least five children to help them on their farms. But now most land had become fallow and they were looking for something else to do to support their families.

The year was eighteen sixty three and Sweden was still in the middle of the worst recession the country experienced since the sixteen fifties. Poor harvests and

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unemployment continued to grow and the population continued to rise at an alarming rate. Wages were at the lowest Gunard had seen. People didn't complain about the low wages much as they were happy to have a job. Gunard and Lars found themselves on the outside looking in, much like their farming friends. Many of them had already left the country and emigrated to America. He and Lars were getting about one half of what they were getting ten years ago for the logs they would bring in to Swenson. They had looked for jobs in Starn and even went as far away as Stockholm hoping something was available but to no avail.

When they finished unloading the trees at the Swenson Mill, Peter Swenson said:

"Gunard, there just isn't any demand for wood. Nobody can afford to build anything. The farmers are losing their farms to the bank. I'll probably be closing the mill after we sell what we have here. I won't be buying anymore wood after tomorrow. I am sorry Gunard."

"I understand Peter. Something has to be done and it doesn't look like our government can figure out what. There are too many people living in Sweden and our land cannot support everyone. My sister Inger and her husband left for America five years ago and I am considering doing the same."

"I have thought of doing that myself, but I love my country. My father and mother are buried here. All my family and friends still live here. I just don't know."

"I love Sweden as well, but I have to feed my family and I can't do it here", Gunard replied.

Gunard and Lars thought that this recession would have been over by now but it seemed like it would go on for quite awhile. It was the rural folks who felt this more than the folks who had jobs in the towns and cities. They were able to hang on, at least for awhile. "Well, Lars, it looks like we will have to make a decision on what we are going to do to feed our families. Jons Jonsson is holding a meeting Friday night about going to America. It will be held at the little Baptist Church he started. It starts at six and I am going to go to hear what he has to say", Gunard said.

"Hell, Gunard, Jonsson is a religious fanatic. I don't want to hear anything he has to say. The Lutheran Church of Sweden as much as told him he had to leave the country."

All I know is that Jonsson has been writing to Gustav Unonius who started a Swedish settlement in America in a place called New Upsala, in a territory called Wisconsin in eighteen forty one. It is supposed to be beautiful and the soil is black as night. You can grow anything there and there are so many trees you could work every day for the rest of your life and not even come close to cutting them all down.

Inger said that the village they live in, New Glaurus, is in Wisconsin and she said it is not far from New Upsala. She also said the land is so fertile and black and that there are more trees there than in all of Sweden. She said we could stay with them until we could build a place of our own. She said Anders wanted us to come as well."

"I don't know, Gunard. I never got along with Anders. Ever since he married Inger he felt like all the Hjerstedts were now Carlsson's and he was the leader of the clan. I miss our big sister but not Anders. Also, this is our home. I don't want to leave. I may have to live on reindeer and bear meat, but I want to stay. What did she say, two months on a ship in the middle of the ocean? We're not Norwegians, Gunard."

"With that red beard Lars, I'm not so sure about you."

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“I am going to Starn tonight and listen to what Jonsson has to say and then make a decision, Gunard said, and I am going to talk with Corinne about this to see what she wants to do. She received a book on learning the English language from our sister in America and she has been teaching it to Esben for the past few months. He is learning quickly and already speaks it well. Corinne may want to stay here but I think she has pretty much made up her mind to go if that is what I want to do. I know it will be a hard journey on a six year old boy. I just don't know what kind of future there is here for Esben and I have to consider that.”

“Ah, yes, Esben, Divine Bear. Do you think they have any bears in America?”

“I am sure they do Lars. A country that big has to have lots of them plus they probably have animals we never heard of.”

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Chapter 3

Starn Sweden 1863

Jons Jonsson stood on a platform with torches blazing on all sides. It was six at night and the sun had faded into the darkness. Gunard and Lars had just arrived and were surprised at the number of people who were already waiting to hear Jonsson speak.

Jonsson's eyes were large and shiny, reflecting the light from the torches. The spittle was flying from the corner of his mouth as he spoke, interspersing religious rhetoric with the promise of the riches the new land, America, had waiting for them.

"God has made this land available for us Swedes and it lays in wait for us to plow the fields, lay the train track, to build our banks and start our businesses to make a new Sweden in this promised land. Where we can worship God in the way we want without a King telling us that his church is the only church. The crowd urged him on and he fed off them.

"How much does the land cost?" a squat man near the front yelled

"Gustav Unonius in his letter to me said America has so much land that they are practically giving it away. You can buy a forty acre tract of land in the Wisconsin Territory for twelve and one half cents per acre", Jonsson told them.

"What about wages?", cried a farmer named Paul Esbjorn.

"You can lay track for a railroad, called the Northern Pacific, and they will pay you \$1.00 a day in wages, replied Jonsson. They have so much work to be done in America and they don't have enough laborers to fill all the jobs."

"How much does it cost to travel over to America?" Paul Esbjorn's wife, a small woman with a pinched face and squat body asked.

"I have been in contact with the Bethel Ship Mission in New York and they have lined up passage for fifty people on a cargo ship carrying iron to New York. It will cost you twelve krona per person. They said the trip will take about seven weeks."

"How do we know where this Wisconsin Territory is, Esbjorn asked, and how will we get there?"

Jonsson pointed a boney finger at Esbjorn and yelled, "By God Paul, good question. I was told by the Bethel Ship Mission that they will have a representative meet us at New York harbor when the ship arrives. They will arrange passage West across America to the Wisconsin Territory. Everything will be done for you. All you need is the courage to pack up your things and leave and a strong back once you get there to do the work that needs to be done."

Jonsson raised both of his hands and looked to the heavens and cried, "Praise to the Lord for providing for His children. Amen brothers and sisters?"

The crowd shouted back "Amen", and a big smile spread across Jonsson's face

Looking over the crowd he said, "Now, are you coming with me?"

The crowd enjoined with a loud cheer, "We're with you Jons; we are ready to go."

"All right, then, if you are going, step up here and sign this manifest so I can get it to the shipyard tomorrow. The ship will be leaving the first of May."

Jonsson jumped off the platform and started shaking hands with people as they started to leave. People were excited and there were men clapping each other on their backs saying that they would see them on the ship in May.

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Lars turned to Gunard and said, "I don't think I will be going with you brother. I just can't see myself leaving my home. I talked it over with Candace at dinner tonight and she doesn't want to leave and never see her sisters and mother and father again. She said it would be too much for her."

"Well, Corinne and I decided that if the passage over there wasn't too much, that we would go. I have the thirty six krona it will cost so I am going to sign the manifest Lars." The brothers embraced before going their separate ways.

"Come by tomorrow Lars and I'll help you hook up the sled to the team so you can move it to your barn. Think you will be able to drive them without me?"

Lars just smiled, shaking his head as he waved before walking away into the dark of the night.

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Chapter 4

Hjerstedt Farm, Starn Sweden 1863

Esben was staring out his bedroom window watching the rain fall. It was very quiet outside. The family's livestock, what they had, was moved over to Lars' little farm. Their house was empty except for their beds and a dresser as they gave all their furniture to Lars as well. Lars would come back and get the beds and dresser later. The bark on the trees looked black in the early morning light and the leaves were just beginning their spring arrival. The day was dark and dreary as was his mood as he waited for his Uncle Lars to come with the wagon and team of horses to take him along with his father and mother to Stockholm. The forest surrounding their house was his whole world. Before he got older and had daily chores to do, he and his friend Richard would spend all day playing down by the lake where the trees were the tallest and full of wild animals. They had their own private place that they called their fort. They pretended they were in their majesty's special army and were responsible for protecting the King and his family. But tomorrow he would be boarding a ship with his mother and father heading to America and he would never play in this beautiful forest again. He was dreading the trip. He had never been away from home, let alone on a ship. He wasn't a very good swimmer and that bothered him. He was afraid he would drown if something happened and he fell into the ocean. How would they save him?

When his father told him that they would be leaving Sweden Esben was not happy. His father told him "Be brave Esben. When we reach America we will be traveling by train and wagon to the Wisconsin Territory. We will be staying with my sister, Inger and her family, until we have enough money to buy our own home."

"What is wrong with our home here?" Esben asked. Esben's best friend, Richard, didn't have to leave his home, why did he?

"Nothing is wrong with our home, Esben. But I cannot make any money here and we have to eat. We have to go to America now while we still have some money left.

Esben heard the bells on the horses' harnesses as they approached from the road. Sadness overcame him at that moment when he realized he would never see his home again. He walked out of his room for the last time and picked up the bag that carried all of his clothes. His father was carrying the trunk his mother had packed that contained the family's only possessions that they would be taking with them.

His uncle Lars walked in to help Esben's mother with the bags containing his mother and father's clothes. The usual twinkle that was always in Uncle Lars' eyes was missing this morning. Lars and his father were not only brothers, but they were the best of friends as well as business partners for over ten years. Esben realized that this move was going to be hard on his parents as well. Esben's mother's family was all dead. They were killed by the influenza that hit Sweden back in eighteen fifty before Esben was born. Esben's mother, Corinne, was close to Lars' wife, Candace, and Esben saw tears in both women's eyes last night when they parted for the last time. Richard and Esben didn't cry when they said good bye; at least not while they were together. Esben did cry when he went to bed last night and he wondered if Richard did as well. He bet he did. They knew each other all their lives. They went to school together, to the Lutheran Church together and

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played together every chance they got. Who will Richard play with now, Esben thought? Who will I play with? Will there be other boys my age on the ship? His Aunt Ingrid had two daughters who were much older than Esben so he couldn't play with them when he got to Wisconsin. All of this was going through his mind as his mother called to him to come out and get in the wagon. They were ready to go.

As Esben walked out of the house, he saw his father stroking the two Belgian's noses and speaking softly to them. There was a tear in his eye. Esben knew his father loved those horses almost as much as he loved Esben. His father felt love and compassion for all their animals and Esben loved that about him.

Esben's father was as tall as his brother Lars, but not as broad. They both had great strength in their arms and back and there were few men in their village that could compete with them when it came to the lumberjack games they would have every winter. They usually came in first or toward the top every year.

Esben climbed up on the back seat of the wagon next to his mother as his father climbed up next to Lars. Esben's mother put her arm around him and pulled him close as he silently cried.

Lars handed Gunard the reins and his father called out "Hiay, hiay" as he slapped the horses on their haunches. The horses strained against the load of the wagon and stepped forward with ease, taking Esben away from the only home he knew. Gunard looked back for one last time and Esben noticed the tears in his red rimmed eyes before his father turned around with an audible sigh. Lars put his arm around his brother as they headed for Stockholm for the last time.

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Chapter 5

Stockholm Sweden

Stockholm, the town between the bridges, is an archipelago, situated on the south central part of Sweden's east coast where Lake Malaren meets the Baltic Sea. The central part of the city consists of fourteen islands and the center of the city is situated on Riddarfjarden Bay. Over thirty percent of the city is made up of waterways. It is because of these waterways that the city was built as it was a strategic spot for trade within Sweden as well as between nearby countries in the Baltic Sea region. Stockholm's reason for being has always been to be the Swedish capital and is the largest city in the country.

By the time the Hjerstedts arrived, Stockholm was in the midst of a strong economic growth, as new industries emerged due to the introduction of steam engines which transformed the city into an important trade and service center; such a sharp contrast to the rural part of the country from which the Hjerstedts were fleeing.

They had traveled most of the night and it was still dark as they approached the outskirts of Stockholm when they turned on a street known as Bollhusgrand, near the square and passed a building with the number twenty three painted on the front. It was known as Ahlstroms jungfrubur, The Maiden Cage of Ahlstrom. It was bought by a captain Magnus Ahlstrom back in the seventeen hundreds who created a virtual temple of Venus with space for the priestesses on all three floors. Though the brothel made Ahlstrom rich, it resulted in squads of prostitutes with painted faces and gaudy attire, lining the street, nodding at travelers as they passed. The southern extension of Bollhusgrand was home to many more taverns and brothels making for a colorful journey for little Esben

Turning down Helvetesgrand, Alley of Hell, a place of disgrace suitable for criminals and thieves, they saw dark silhouettes of all the ships moored in the bay. One particular freighter stood out from the rest. It was gray and looked dreary and dirty. A group of people were milling on the dock in the vicinity of the ship, their shadows dancing eerily in the flickering glow of the gas lanterns lighting the pier. There must have been at least one hundred and fifty men, women and children all huddled together with their mattresses and blankets in bundles along with pots and pans and knives, forks and spoons sticking out in every direction. They were dressed in shabby gray overcoats and well worn caps and most with a small valise in hand. These people were to be the Hjerstedts fellow travelers to America.

The ship itself was a multi-masted sailing vessel, being square rigged with the fore and aft sails perpendicular to the body of the vessel; it was built for trans-oceanic voyages. It was nothing of beauty, built for transporting iron not passengers. It was constructed of wood and iron armatures which made it thirty to forty per cent lighter than cargo ships made of all wood. It was equipped with a screw driven steam engine that was fueled with coal which was stored astern below deck.

In front of the dock there were a number of peddlers selling steerage necessities such as mattresses, blankets, pots and pans along with plates, knives, forks and spoons and wash basins.

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When they arrived at the dock the putrid smells of the dead and rotting fish mixed with human waste and rotting food were nauseating. Corinne pulled a handkerchief from her purse and put it over her nose as she was helped out of the wagon by Gunard. Once they had unloaded their trunk, Lars hugged them all, holding back tears he turned back and stepped up into the wagon, snapping the reins, he clucked to the horses and went back up Helvetesgrand. His retreating back slumped over the front of the wagon was the last thing Esben saw of his uncle.

Corinne grabbed Esben's hand and Gunard picked up the trunk. As they walked along peddlers approached them trying to sell their wares. Esben buried his face in Corinne's dress and Gunard waved the peddlers away.

When they were down on the dock with their fellow travelers Gunard asked an older man standing next to them if he knew when they would be able to embark.

"No, that I don't. Nobody has said anything to us and we have been here for going on three hours already. The crew has been coming by in groups of threes and fours but they don't think of responding to our questions. We haven't seen anyone yet who might have some authority. Hopefully soon they will let us board. The little ones are getting anxious and some folks are getting pretty annoyed."

"Have you seen Jons Jonsson yet?" Gunard asked.

"Nary a hair of the man, the older man replied

The name's Andresen, Dagmar Andresen, what's yours?"

"Gunard Hjerstedt and this is my wife Corinne and my boy Esben."

Andresen nodded and tipped his hat in Corinne's direction and said: "That's my wife Jeanne over there with my boy Elmer and his wife Gladys."

By this time the sun was beginning to creep into the horizon changing the sky from black to a dark blue with streaks of white clouds passing by. A fog was drifting in over the bay and a lone fog horn sounded over the waters. A livery coach could be heard approaching over the cobblestone street coming to a stop in front of the dock.

The driver got down and opened the door and out stepped Jon Jonsson dressed in a top hat and a black coat and pants holding a walking cane and another gentleman dressed in a dark blue coat with a watchman cap on his head. The driver pulled down a trunk from the top of the carriage and started carrying it down the dock and up the plank way onto the freighter.

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Chapter 6

The only certainty is uncertainty; the only constant is change.

Jons Jonsson tapped the wharf with the end of his cane to draw the attention of the masses huddled together waiting to board the freighter.

“Please, everyone, listen up. We will be starting shortly. The purser will be stepping out and if you will, please line up in a single line and have your fare ready as you approach to board.

Your captain’s name is Knut Haukelid, a Norwegian, and the best seaman you could find. You are very lucky to have him at the helm.”

The purser stepped out by the gang plank leading from the dock to the ship along with two other sailors or persons of authority. When Gunard, Corinne and Esben approached they were interrogated roughly by the purser:

“Your name?”

“Gunard Hjerstedt. This is my wife Corinne and son Esben.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty eight.”

“Your wife and son?”

“Corinne is twenty four and Esben is six.”

“What’s your city?”

“Starn.”

“Where are you going?”

“America.”

“What do you work at?”

“I am a lumberjack and a farmer.”

After answering the questions, the Hjerstedts found themselves being pushed along by one of the stewards. When they stepped on board they were lined up with the other passengers in front of an open hatch with two ladders leading to some unknown place below. One man after another pushed forward and flung his boxes and trunks on board. The Hjerstedts were shoved and half thrown down one of the ladders. The steps were nearly perpendicular and very difficult to reach the bottom without stumbling and falling.

They were now in the steerage area of the ship, approximately sixteen feet below deck. The enormous cables that connected the rudder to the steering wheel ran overhead. Corinne glanced around and was filled with dismay and disgust. The ship showed no regard for the comfort of the passengers. This was no more than a wooden cell about sixty feet in length and twelve feet wide at the front end but narrowing to no more than five feet wide at the forecabin. There was no ceiling just the open area with the steerage cables. There was a hatchway where the two dirty ladders were placed almost perpendicularly that formed a staircase.

Along the sides, running the length of the steerage, a wooden partition had been constructed of bare boards, reaching to within a foot of the top. Spaced approximately four feet apart, were eight doors that were numbered; behind them were the sleeping quarters, each containing sleeping berths, each two feet wide. The boards that made up

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the doors at one time must have been painted, but now the paint was faded and chipped. On either side of the room two strips of canvas were stretched leaving a narrow alley, in which a single person could move but in which two people could not pass each other. On the floor the crew had strewn sawdust to absorb the dirt and spills during their voyage. In the center of the floor was an open wooden grating which was the entry to the steward's storeroom. It was packed with salt and cured fish among other items and vented directly into the steerage area. This dirty space was the dining and living area for the steerage passengers. It was certified to accommodate sixty passengers.

At the narrower end of the wooden cell stood seven beer barrels standing on end; three of these barrels contained broken bottles and a fourth decomposing and rotting food. The stench, combined with the heat, made staying below deck almost intolerable. Corinne and Mrs. Andresen departed to use the women's lavatory, which was in the forecastle, the part of the vessel forward of the foremast; the place where the crew eats and sleeps, making the women pass through the ranks of the sailors and stokers, who was employed to tend the steam boiler and supply it with fuel, which was coal. As they passed, a man stepped in their pathway causing them to stop. He was a large man, a stoker. His face was streaked and awash with coal dust. He leered at them and grinned, showing his blackened teeth. He didn't say anything but laughed and then stepped aside. Corinne didn't know if the terrible odor came from him or the lavatory, all she knew was that she was happy he moved out of their way and she hoped she wouldn't meet him again.

To use the lavatory was an inconvenience for the women for sure. The wash basins were supplied with water made from the sea water and condensed from the exhaust steam of the engine. It had a strong and disagreeable odor which remained on the skin after washing in it.

The closets in the lavatory had a smell that was so foul that Corinne thought she would be seasick before she could open the door.

Corinne turned to Mrs. Andresen and said. "I thought I would be violently ill before I could open the door to get out. I dread having to use it again."

"I know, let's get back to the steerage," Mrs. Andresen replied.

The sailors and stokers broke out in a chorus of catcalls and laughter as the two ladies, near tears, rushed through the forecastle back toward the steerage area of the ship.

"Breakfast will be served in approximately thirty minutes, the purser yelled. Make sure you secure your belongings in your berth before coming out to dine."

Breakfast consisted of bread and coffee with sugar and a hint of milk added. The main staple was an Irish stew, filled with potatoes and in which a piece of meat could occasionally be found. Esben looked glum as he looked into his bowl and stirred his stew listlessly.

"Come on now; eat your breakfast, boy. It will be a long voyage and you will have to keep up your strength," Gunard said.

"I know, it's just that this tastes horrible. Won't we get any eggs?"

"I told you that we will have to wait until we get to New York. The first thing I will do is buy you as many eggs as you want to eat Esben. Now come on, finish that stew; then we will go and unpack our things and make our sleeping quarters seem a little more like home."

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It was a long morning and they spent it completing their last preparations for the voyage. Afterward, they lounged on the forecastle head and looked off at the picturesque Baltic Sea, on which they would soon be sailing.

They left port later that day and trimmed their sails as they headed toward the Island of Gotland and The Sound, locally known as Sundet, the almost tideless strait that separates the Danish island , Zealand, from the southern Swedish Province of Scania. It connects the Baltic Sea, and the North Sea around the tip of Sweden and the city of Malmo and then into the Kattegat Bay on their way to the North Sea and finally the Atlantic Ocean on their way to America.

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Chapter 7

Traveling The High Seas

“Lunch is about to be served, a steward shouted. He had sandy blond hair, stout in stature, with a full sandy colored beard. You wanna eat? Then you better get below deck and find a spot at the table.”

By the time the Hjerstedts sat down, most of the seats were already occupied. The Andresen's were nowhere to be seen. Sitting across from them was the Lindberg family from Gardlosa Sweden. His name was August and her name was Louisa. Their son, Charles, was about seven years old and very shy. He kept looking up and staring at Esben but as soon as Esben made eye contact with him, Charles would drop his head again. Corinne had been told that August had left his wife and seven boys, quit his job at the bank and changed his name from Mansson to Lindberg. He was going to America to start a new life with his former mistress, who he now called his wife, and their son.

“Soup here, who's for soup?”

The soup was carried in tin buckets by two burly stewards. It was rather nondescript and made up of rice and a good dose of pepper.

Each passenger then stepped forward with their plates which were heaped with boiled potatoes and slices of coarse and tasteless beef that was so tough, Esben had a difficult time chewing it.

When they finished eating all the passengers gathered their tin ware together and climbed on deck. The sailors directed them to scrape their potato skins and other debris over the ship's side. The galley cook filled a tub with hot water on the lee deck close by the rail. Here the passengers stood in circles six deep waiting for a chance to rinse their platters. By the time the Hjerstedts arrived, the water was cold and had pieces of potato and meat floating around in the midst of congealed grease. Corinne felt their tin ware ended up dirtier than it was before they put it in the water.

After putting up their tin plates and cups, the Hjerstedts ventured to the foredeck once again to watch the sunset for the last time over Sweden. Pretty soon they could feel the water moving beneath them. They were on their way.

At two bells, signifying the passing of an hour, a sailor approached them and said it is nine o'clock and that Corinne would have to go below deck. No ladies were allowed on deck after nine.

Corinne was tired anyway and she knew that Esben had to be as well.

“Come along and let's clean up and get ready for bed Esben. Then we will study our English for awhile. Do you want to study too, Gunard?”

“Yes, but you two go ahead, I'll be along shortly.”

After they left, Gunard sat down on the foredeck. He was feeling a little dizzy and wanted to let the feeling pass before he went below. Here he was, not yet at sea and only twelve hours on ship, and he was sick. This was going to be a very long voyage he thought.

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Chapter 8

Briareos – the Greek god of sea storms

The water was calm and the winds were soft. Passengers were able to go on deck and take in some sun and fresh air. In fact, for the first week they were at sea, one day seemed like the next. The seas were calm and the passengers for the most part appeared happy and excited about going to America.

One evening a group of people gathered on the forecastle and sang hymns. The bosun and a few other sailors joined in the choruses. There was dancing as well. A pretty girl with long dark hair and red freckles all over her cheeks danced with a couple of the younger sailors. Many of the passengers danced as well. The pretty girl grabbed Esben's hand and pulled him out to dance with her. Esben's face blushed to a deep red. When he finished dancing with the young girl, Esben danced with his mother as well as Mrs. Andresen and Mrs. Lindberg.

By the time they all went below to the steerage, they were ready for bed. The soft rocking of the ship as it slowly made its way to their new home put Esben to sleep immediately.

“What's your name laddies? You out getting your sea legs?” The old sailor asked as Esben Hjerstedt and Charles Lindbergh walked along the lee rail watching the water slowly pass below them. The water was calm and the wind was soft. The sailors gave up trimming the sails and were taking down those that were in need of repair.

Esben and Charles were allowed to come on deck to take in some sun and fresh air. The ship got rather musty smelling and they were glad they were able to get out. They were instructed not to talk or make any noise. A small breeze picked up for a moment but then stopped. For the second day in a row the ship was being powered by its steam engines as the sails were unable to capture any wind to propel them. Today they hoped that would change.

Esben looked at Charles and decided since the sailor asked them a question, it was alright to speak. “Esben and his name is Charles, Esben replied sticking his thumb in the direction of Charles' face. What's yours?”

“Ha, ha, you're a spunky one, ain't ya? Me name is Palmer, well, at least that's what me mates call me. My real name is Christianson but I haven't been called by that name for years; only Palmer.”

“Why do they call you Palmer when your real name is Christianson? That's just plain crazy.”

“Ha, that it is. You see this piece of wood, Palmer said as he picked up a round piece of wood about four inches in diameter and about two inches thick? Well, it's called a palmer because it fits in the palm of your hand, see? “The old sailor put the round piece of wood in his left hand and held it up for the boys to see.

“What is it for?” Charles Lindbergh asked.

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"I mend the sails when they tear. That canvas is so thick the only way I can get the needle through it is by pushing it with this palmer here. My mates will be bringing the mainsail to me soon and I'll be fixin' the tear we got as we left the North Sea. Them winds tore her a good one.

How you like sailin' so far, mates? You been sick yet? If not, you will be. We got a big storm headin' our way, I guarantee it. Whenever the wind is this calm it is followed by a blow sure as we are sittin' here."

"How do you know?" Esben asked.

"How do I know? I know because we are in the doldrums and I have been sailing all me life and a storm always follows the doldrums. That's how I know."

"Oh, when will the storm come?"

"Now that I don't know, but it will be soon. Maybe later today, tonight or tomorrow morning; but I tell ya' this, it will be here no later than tomorrow night. Mark my word mates, she's coming. When you see the waves a breakin' keep your eyes peeled for the sea gods. That's where they dwell, you know. They wrap their arms around the backs of giant whales causing the waves to crash over the ships. Any ship caught in open water would be pounded to splinters or swamped like a cockleshell. Whole fleets have disappeared altogether with no trace ever found. They make their home on the floor of the North Sea, the sea gods do."

The boys eyes got big as saucers and Palmer let out a loud cackle. "Don't worry lads, we will weather this storm."

"Look, Mr. Palmer, sea birds,' Esben cried.

"Them's not sea birds, lad, they're birds of passage. Something has disturbed them from their normal course. Guess we best get ready."

"Ready for what?" Charles asked.

"A big blow me lad, a big blow.

"Storm coming captain," Palmer yelled.

Those on deck spoke in hushed tones as the light of day turned to the darkness of night and the waves rose so high that they looked like green mountains of white water spread across the horizon.

"Are those the sea gods?" Esben asked.

"You can bet they are mates. Now you best get below and let me and these scallywags tend to business."

Then the rain began to fall; softly at first. Then the winds picked up and the clouds grew darker and the rain was heavy and constant with heavy head swells. When the ship reached the wind's eye she refused to go farther as the sudden change blew the sails against their masts. With all her sails aback she slowly forged astern. Back to that fearful maelstrom that waited to receive what appeared to be the doomed ship.

"Away aloft. Shorten topsail! Bring in sail fore and aft," the captain yelled.

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Sailors jumped and scurried up the rat lines and into the rigging, rolling up canvas and manning the ropes to haul in the yards so there was less sail for the winds to catch.

The winds climbed to a terrific gale force and started to take on heavy water, sweeping barrels and debris from the decks, carrying away everything that wasn't secured including a steward and one passenger. The captain was almost washed over as well, but fortunately he succeeded in grabbing a rope and secured it around his waist saving himself from sure death.

Every minute the storm was strengthening and moaning through the rigging. The wind was screaming as if all the demons of the sea were loosed upon them and the sky was black as night. A frothing mass of white breaking water was whipped across the forecastle. The deck rose and fell as they mounted one wave after another.

Overwhelmed by the elements and paralyzing terror, Esben and Charles clung to the cordage on their bunks, unable to do anything.

The men aloft clung to the yard-arm and pointed to a long black bank looming on the horizon, like a great mass of land where no land should be.

"Topmen, shorten sail. You men bring in the yards," the captain cried. The wind snatched his words and cast them out to sea making them meaningless to the men around him.

The ship rolled and pitched and the captain ordered the aft hatch opening on deck closed and covered with canvas. The crew struggled up to the forward companion on the leeward side where a safety rope had been stretched. Clinging to the rope, they staggered to shelter under the hurricane deck where they clung for dear life, while the ship lurched to the point of dipping her rail.

The ship rode the waves and wind like a horse. She bucked and plunged as she fought the heavy waters. She was struck from starboard by a tremendous wave which sent her yawing sideways, as if struck by a giant hand. Men were sprawled on the deck exhausted. The timbers creaked and strained and dishes and cargo were being thrown from one side of the ship to the other. Above the noise of the wind the clanging of the bells from the saloon and foredeck could be heard. The tin ware rattled and rolled and the coffee kettles hanging on the wall played a cacophony melody to the passengers trapped in the steerage. Some of the passengers trunks banged across the floor. They were strapping their children to their bunks before tying themselves as well. Children were crying and many people began to pray out loud. The storm struck with a force so strong that all those who weren't strapped to their bunks could do was hold on to the nearest post and pray.

Suddenly a line broke and the sail was violently flapping around and it looked like it might bring the mast down through the ship's deck. Sailors were shouting and started running across the deck. Finally one sailor, dressed in his foul weather gear, removed his rigger's knife placing it between his teeth he climbed aloft. While clinging to the mast, he quickly cut the rigging lines that held the flapping sail saving the mast with that one quick cut.

Later that evening the rudder head twisted off, leaving the ship helpless. The ship lurched in the waves and the rough seas swept everything forward of the foremast

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overboard including both forward boats. The cutwater was lost clear down to the keel, the forward part of the ship which breaks the current allowing the ship to go forward. The ship started to leak forward, causing the passengers to panic as there appeared to be no way of saving a single person on board.

The heavy seas rose above the topmast, but the excellent sailing qualities of the ship and the extraordinary efforts of the captain and his crew, quelled the anxiety of the passengers.

“Don’t panic people. We have ridden out worse storms than this,” Captain Haukelid cried over the howling winds.

“We need all the men to help us man the donkey pumps to keep the ship from taking on too much water. Donkey pumps were auxiliary pumps that were kept on board for use in case of such emergencies as they were currently experiencing. You ladies grab some buckets and go below and get the water out of the steerage. You can throw it out the porthole. We will come through this storm alright,” the first mate cried.

One by one seasickness picked its victims. There were sounds of groaning and retching from below. The ship was dipping her lee rail and an occasional wave sent water splashing over the passenger’s feet and ankles.

It was a night to remember as all the passengers were huddled in steerage, grasping on the edge of their berths and held on to avoid being pitched out. Many couldn’t help but retching over the side of their berths, creating a terrible stench that filled the steerage. A steward came down and sprinkled chloride of lime and told the passengers that it would help with the bad air.

In the morning the wind had subsided although the skies were still dark and ominous. By ten o’clock the engineer reported the steam pipe cracked badly and he had to work the engine by hand. The rest of the crew was busy making a temporary rig of chains and tack to repair the tiller and by noon they had a temporary rudder to steer the ship.

Sheets and pillows were stuffed in the holes where the cutwater received damage. They also took a sail and lowered it over the bow with grate bars to sink it and fettered to keep the water out. That and the use of the donkey pumps and regular pumps reduced the leaking considerably.

The captain made an announcement later that day. “Ladies and gentlemen, with all your help, we should make it to port safely within a week. Ten days at most.

Once the seas had calmed and the storms broke and the leaking controlled, the captain took out his medical kit. “Any of you ladies have your sewing kit?” He asked.

Mrs. Lindberg raised her hand. “I do.”

“So do I”, Corinne Hjerstedt said.

“Good. You don’t have queasy stomachs, do you?”

“I don’t think so,” they both replied.

“That is well then. Bring it forward. Mr. Johns had his thumb torn off plus his face and head received some bad wounds.

One of the stewards and the ladies worked all day with the captain tending to the wounded. The captain was no doctor so he had to refer to his medical book often.

The sailors had slashed arms and legs. Some had cuts on their faces and heads. Mrs. Lindberg, who assisted the captain and steward close the gaping wound left by the amputation of Mr. Johns thumb, used her sewing needle from her mending kit to sew up a

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sailor's leg that received a terrible gash as well while Corinne assisted in applying bandages to wounds of those not so severely injured. The steward gave a good portion of whiskey to all hands to help them forget the pain they were suffering.

Once the storm had passed, Esben and Charles walked the top deck to watch the crew as they worked. After the terrible storm, many of the ships sails were torn. The sailors climbed up the rigging and pulled down ripped sails. Mr. Palmer, the ship's sailmaker, sat on deck with his mending kit, which included his palm like thimble and needle and thread. Esben and Charles sat down beside Mr. Palmer and watched him as he pushed the needle through the many layers of canvas using the palm.

"What happened to the birds of passage Mr. Palmer?" Esben asked.

"Darned if I know. 'Spect I'll meet 'em on the voyage back."

Esben and Charles watched four ships filled with immigrants arrive since early morning, bringing the number of weary and disconsolate immigrants to over one thousand that sat despondently on wooden benches next to them on the dock waiting for the night trains to head west for the final leg of their long journey.

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Chapter 9

Those who wish to sing always find a song. A Swedish Proverb

Corinne and Esben settled in the new Wyoming Territory and had been staying with her cousin Jon and his wife Gladys and small baby Beryl. Jon traveled most of the time laying track for the Union Pacific Railroad so they didn't see much of him. He was spending a lot of time in Montana and wanted someone to stay with his wife and baby while he was away. Corinne was working for Colonel Peterson at Fort Sheridan processing the Sioux Indians who were being put on Reservations in the Wyoming Territory.

"Are you ready to go, Esben?" Corinne asked.

"Coming mother," Esben replied as he ran out of his room carrying his small satchel containing his change of clothes needed for their trip.

Corinne wanted to visit friends and shop for cloth, buttons and other sewing goods that weren't available where they lived unless they ordered it through the mail. She and Esben would board the stage coach that would take them to Fort Laramie. Esben was excited as it was his first trip outside Fort Sheridan since he arrived in Wyoming over a year ago.

The drought had deepened the fissures in the barren expanses of scrub and rock and the ruts along the Overland Trail had hardened and made the ride in the coach bumpy and uncomfortable.

The driver of the stage was a man named Billy McCloskey. He reminded Esben of his uncle Lars and made Esben sad and lonely for his home in Sweden. McCloskey had a bushy red beard like Lars had, and long stringy red hair hanging below his dusty beat up old hat. He had the brightest green eyes that Esben had ever seen and had a red kerchief tied around his neck. He chewed tobacco and would spit juice about every couple of minutes which Esben's mother said was one of the filthiest habits a man could have.

The trip was longer than Esben thought it would be and it was hot and would have been boring if it hadn't been for Mr. Hodge, an official with the Bureau of Indian Affairs that he called the BIA, sitting to the right of Esben. He was wearing fancy cotton pants with pin striping and a clean white shirt and a tan buckskin jacket with fancy bead work and fringes that blew in the warm dusty wind that was brought in from the trail through the windows of the stage. On his feet he wore moccasins that went up to his knees. Esben noticed the handle of a big knife protruding from the top of his left moccasin. Hodge was

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a big handsome man with jet black hair. His bright blue eyes were alive and danced around, looking everywhere as he spoke.

It was obvious to Esben that Mr. Hodge liked Esben's mother. His first name was Jim and he had a weathered face, darkened by the sun with deep creases running down each side of his nose to his mouth. Sitting on top of his head was a small pork pie hat with its brim flipped up and an Eagle feather sticking out the back. Mr. Hodge spent the past ten years living with the Indian tribes in the Wyoming Territory and he said that the shirt and moccasins he wore was a present from a squaw he knew.

Esben didn't know what a squaw was until Mr. Hodge told him that the squaw was like his wife.

Esben had been fascinated with the stories Mr. Hodge told of the different Indian Nations he was in charge of, the Sioux, Cheyenne, Crow, Flatheads, who put their heads between boards to flatten them, the Snakes, Utes and especially the Siksika, who were original residents of the northern plains and which is translated to Black Foot in English, the name coming from the dark moccasins they wear. Mr. Hodge said they sometimes are called Black Feet, which they do not like. Esben thought that was a funny name for a nation of people to be called.

There wasn't a cloud to be seen and the sun was dropping rapidly in the blue Wyoming sky when Esben heard a shot from a rifle.

"What was that?" He asked no one in particular.

"A rifle shot," Corporal Johnson replied as he leaned out the stage window looking behind them.

"Crow! They have been causing trouble lately all along the Overland Trail. We have been forcing them back on their reservation but there are always some renegades who want to cause trouble."

"Tom, can you reach my rifle behind you?" Mr. Hodge asked.

Tom was Tom Franklin, a slender young man who wore glasses and a brown suit with a white shirt and a string tie hanging from his neck. He had dark brown hair and pale white skin and was a banker out of the city of Saint Louis. He was going to run a bank his father had recently opened at Fort Laramie, Wyoming.

Esben heard Billy McCloskey yell at the team of big horses pulling the stage to get moving. Then he heard the crack of Billy's whip as he snapped it over the leaders' head. The stage began to pick up speed as they rounded a corner traveling through an escarpment of rocks on both sides of the trail.

The two Buffalo Soldiers in the coach had already drawn their Colt pistols and each moved to a window. There were two more Buffalo Soldiers on top of the stage. One was next to Billy McCloskey on the front seat and the other in the boot in the back of the stage. Each carried a Spencer repeating rifle made by Henry Spencer which was first introduced to the Union Army in 1862. Most Buffalo Soldiers were outfitted with old Spencer Carbines. But the army wanted the Overland Stage route to be safe from attacks from the Indians so they armed these soldiers with new rifles.

As they emerged from the escarpment, Esben could see a band of ten riders descending on them from the west.

"Miss Hjerstedt, you best get your boy down on the floor and you lie on top of him. Don't want you two to catch a stray bullet," Mr. Hodge yelled.

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It wasn't long before the stench of sulfur from the guns filled the air in the coach. That along with the fear of dying caused Esben to feel sick to his stomach.

"Just stay still, Esben. We will be alright," Corinne assured him.

Esben felt the additional weight of Corporal Johnson fall on him when he was shot in the forehead, killing him instantly and dropping him on the floor of the stage coach.

Esben heard Mr. Hodge cry out that he was hit too and then he heard him cry out as he was struck again. Now Esben was getting claustrophobic as the bodies started to pile up on him and Corinne.

Next it was Tom Franklin who cried out as he was struck by a bullet and he too dropped to the floor.

It wasn't long before another round brought down Private Davis. Now it was only Esben and Corinne alive, buried beneath the bodies of the men they were riding with.

Soon the shooting stopped and he heard the whooping of the Crow as they surrounded the stage bringing the horses to a halt. Billy McCloskey was slumped over dead in his seat while the Buffalo Soldier who was riding next to him had been shot and fell off the stage along with the soldier who was situated in the boot in the back of the coach who was shot and killed as well.

Esben was hoping they wouldn't see him and his mother buried beneath the bodies of the men lying on top of them but that wasn't to happen.

The Crow began to drag each man out and proceeded to scalp each one. The Buffalo Soldiers were already bald and the Crow thought that was funny and laughed when they removed the soldier's hat to take their scalp.

Two Crow grabbed Corinne while another grabbed Esben, clutching him by his hair getting ready to scalp him as well.

Esben saw a Crow jump from the coach grasping the bright red scalp that once was attached to Billy McCloskey's head.

They ripped off Corinne's clothing and tied her spread eagle and naked on the ground in front of Esben making him watch.

He closed his eyes and screamed. The Crow holding him spun him around and hit him in the face knocking him to the ground.

He heard a rifle shot and thought they shot his mother but the Crow warrior who had hit him fell to the ground beside him bleeding from a big hole in his back. He was dead.

Then another shot rang out and another Crow dropped over dead.

Esben got up and ran to his mother and threw himself over her to protect her from being shot.

"Run Esben, you can't do anything to help me. Please save yourself. I don't want anything to happen to you."

Esben looked over and saw Mr. Hodge's body next to them and he got up and pulled the big knife out of his moccasin. He ran back and started cutting the rawhide the Crow used to tie his mother's arms and legs.

Six of the remaining eight Crow warriors had just been killed by an unknown marksman and the other two mounted their horses and took off, riding away from the stand of rocks where the shots were coming from.

Corinne picked up what was left of her dress and put it on, covering herself the best she could.

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Soon a lone rider came out of the rocks riding slowly toward them. It was another Indian riding a black and white paint stallion.

He carried a Springfield buffalo rifle on his thigh, pointing in the air as he approached.

“Grey Wolf,” Corinne whispered. She had seen him many times when he came in Captain Peterson’s office to complain of the treatment and foul food his people were receiving from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and a Mr. Clements, the procurement officer who provided food to the different Indian nations in the Wyoming territory.

Grey Wolf stopped and swung his leg across his horse’s back and jumped down in front of Corinne and Esben. He reached in a small deer skin pouch secured around his waist and brought three white buffalo bones, honed to a sharp point. He grabbed the neckline of Corinne’s dress and thrust one of the bones through the fabric, securing it around her chest. He did the same down the front of her dress with the other two bones, covering her naked body. He stared at her for a moment before turning and walking to his horse. He grabbed the horsehair reins and his horse’s mane and swung up on its back. He kicked its sides and trotted to where Corinne was standing.

They stared at one another for a moment while Grey Wolf’s horse tossed its head and pranced around, anxious to get going.

Grey Wolf thrust out his arm in her direction.

“Come”, he said.

Corinne stood for a moment staring intently at Grey Wolf before turning and saying to Esben.

“We can’t stay here, Esben. Let’s go.”

She reached out her hand and grasped Grey Wolf’s forearm as he grasped hers and pulled her up behind him on his horse.

Grey Wolf turned and looked at Esben. At first Esben was afraid he was going to take his mother and leave him there all alone.

“Come”, he said again extending his arm in Esben’s direction.

Esben grabbed it and Grey Wolf picked him up and placed him in front of him and all three of them rode off together, to where, Esben had no idea.

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Chapter 10

Eyes that do not cry do not see

They rode west, the three of them on one horse, for over three hours, alternating walking the horse and riding it, before they rode through a pass in the rocks and into a valley thick with buffalo grass and before them stood hundreds of tee pees. It was Grey Wolf's village and he was taking them to his home.

As they entered the village, women and children came out and surrounded them, dancing and chanting, "Yi, yi, yi, yi, yi," until Grey Wolf stopped his horse and stared down at them, silencing them with his eyes before riding on.

They rode up to Grey Wolf's tee pee where he lifted Esben from the back of the horse, setting him on the ground before swinging his leg over and jumping down. He then lifted Corinne and brought her down next to him. Without saying a word, he pointed toward the tee pee, indicating they were to go in.

It was the first time Esben had been inside a home of a Sioux. In the center was a stone fire pit surrounded by buffalo robes. There were spears and a shield along with a bow and a quiver of arrows in the back of the tee pee. He was surprised at how spacious and warm it was inside.

Grey Wolf pointed toward the buffalo robes and indicated that they were to sit down.

Esben and Corinne walked over and sat down next to each other. Grey Wolf sat on the robe across the fire pit from them.

He pointed at Corinne and then at himself and nodded his head once.

"Nimitawa ktelo, you will be mine. Mitawin, wife", he said.

Corinne immediately understood that he was telling her that they would be together. That he now owned her. That she would be his wife.

She looked at him for a long moment with tears welling in her eyes and then she glanced at Esben, whose eyes were on Grey Wolf. She knew what she had to do.

He has been through a lot she thought. If Grey Wolf wants me, he can take me. All I can do is let him know that Esben must remain with me and remain safe.

She looked back at Grey Wolf who hadn't moved his eyes from her face and she nodded her head once, letting him know she was willing to be his wife. She pointed at Esben and then herself before pointing at Grey Wolf.

Grey Wolf looked over at Esben for a moment before turning back to Corinne.

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He grunted and nodded his head in agreement before rising and walking out.

“Doesn’t he speak?” Esben asked after Grey Wolf left.

“Oh, yes, he can speak, Corinne said. He speaks English very well. I think he was trying to make a point. That we should be careful; that our lives are in his hands now.”

Corinne thought that wasn’t such a bad thing. He was tall for a Sioux and a very handsome man with high cheekbones and a straight nose. He wore a red band around his head, keeping his long black hair from blowing in his face while riding his paint stallion.

Yes, she thought to herself, he is very handsome indeed.

It wasn’t long before Grey Wolf returned. This time he had a short heavyset Sioux woman with him. She was carrying a buckskin dress in her arms.

Grey Wolf pointed at Corinne and said, “Wasicun Hinzi.”

Then he pointed at Esben and said. “You come.”

Esben rose from the buffalo robe and followed Grey Wolf out into the late afternoon sun while the Sioux woman helped Corinne change into her new clothing.

Corinne looked quizzically at the Sioux woman and asked, “What does Wasicun Hinzi mean.”

The woman said, “Wasicun Hinzi, Pale Horse. That is your Sioux name.”

Corinne just looked at her and nodded slowly thinking I am entering a whole new life. A life I have no control over and she began to pray.

Again, Grey Wolf said to Esben, “Come,” and started to walk toward the center of the camp where close to thirty warriors sat around a fire that had just been started and was giving off much heat. More heat than Esben cared to be around and he hoped they weren’t planning on throwing him in the fire and sacrificing him to their gods.

“Sit,” Grey Wolf commanded, pointing to the ground.

Esben sat.

Grey Wolf introduced him as Tasunke pahaska, Yellow Hair, to all the warriors around the fire. A couple nodded their head and grunted but most of them just looked at Esben without saying anything and then turned back to watching the flames of the fire lap around the logs quickly consuming them.

“Ciye,” Grey Wolf said.

Once again, all the men looked up and stared at Esben. Then they all nodded and looked back at the fire without saying a word.

Esben didn’t know what Grey Wolf was saying. He thought the Sioux sure don’t say much. I can’t tell what they are thinking if they don’t talk. I wonder what Grey Wolf is saying to them? He looked at Grey Wolf.

Grey Wolf looked at Esben for a long time before pointing at him and then himself and said, “Ciye, my son,” he translated.

Esben couldn’t keep his jaw from dropping. His son, he thought? What does he mean? Is he planning on keeping us here forever?

Grey Wolf picked up Esben’s hair and again said, “Tasunke pahaska, Yellow Hair.” Making sure Esben understood.

He did understand. He understood that his new name was Yellow Hair and that he was the son of a very powerful Sioux warrior, either a chief, or a person of much influence.

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Chapter 11

... the spirits of the Sioux dead rest in the Paha Sapa - Black Hills.

Yellow Hair pushed the vines away from his face as he reached the bottom of the hill and looked north to where he had originally come. The river was high and the water cold from the melting mountain snow. He took a drink before heading back to where he had been camping with Gray Wolf and his mother. It wasn't long before he saw the hoof prints from the horses of his pursuers heading in the same direction he was going. He would have to stay within the trees that lined the river bank as he returned so he wouldn't be spotted if they were still in the area.

The river took a turn to the west and he knew the camp was just around the bend. Slowly he walked down the river bank into the water. He didn't want to leave any foot prints as he approached. What he saw next caused him to stop in his tracks. Up ahead, hanging from a tree branch that protruded over the river, were the bodies of his mother and Gray Wolf. They had been stripped of their clothes. A feeling of rage and hatred came over him and his eyes flashed as he looked around for the evil men who had done this.

The tears welled up in his eyes and spilled down his face. Sadness like none he experienced since his father's death at sea as they traveled to America consumed him. Why did they do this? Gray Wolf and his mother were harming no one. Gray Wolf was taking them to the Sicangu, or Brule Reservation, for the spring hunt of the buffalo. They were going to join up with other Lakota Sioux who were coming together to join Spotted Owl and the Sicangu near the Grand Tetons where the buffalo had been wintering. His good friend Little Elk and his father were going to be there as well. They were all Sioux brothers coming together as one people again. But the six Wasichus changed all of that. The boy felt weak and dropped to his knees. He tried to keep from crying, to be a man as Gray Wolf had taught him, but he was racked with sorrow and he broke down and sobbed uncontrollably.

"Why?" He asked himself again. His mind went back to that morning when this all happened, the day that changed his life forever.

It had started with the bright orange sun rising over the horizon, promising a warm spring day. The horses were grazing lazily along the river bank as a Bob White was nosily chirping and chasing her chicks through the meadow. That all changed when Gray Wolf spotted six white men, coming toward their camp. He turned, and said: "Yellow Hair, get your mother. She is down by the river getting water. I want both of you to run into the

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woods as fast as you can. Make sure she goes with you. I will see what the Wasichus' want." He said.

Gray Wolf had been calling him Yellow Hair from the first day they met. The Sioux were amazed at the bright color of his hair, which was common in his native Sweden. They constantly wanted to touch it. His mother's hair was more of a light brown and her skin was a pale white, which earned her the name of Pale Horse among the Sioux. Neither he nor his mother was offended by the names as they quickly learned that the names the Sioux used were tied closely to their guardian spirits or the visions they had.

Yellow Hair saw his mother filling the bear bladders with water as he ran down the river bank.

"Mother, some Wasichus are coming and Gray Wolf wants us to go into the woods and hide."

"No, you go Esben, his mother still called him by his Christian name, I will stay and help Gray Wolf. I can speak to the Wasichus and understand their words better than Gray Wolf can. We will call you when they leave. Now go, quickly."

Yellow Hair turned and ran along the river bank until he came across a game trail that headed deep into the woods and up the mountain. Before going, he looked back and saw the men circle Gray Wolf and his mother. One man, the biggest of the group, pointed in Yellow Hair's direction, and two other men dismounted and started to run after him.

Yellow Hair saw the big man take his lariat off his saddle and throw it around Gray Wolf, pinning his arms to his side. He dalled the rope around his saddle horn and turned his horse around before taking off, dragging Gray Wolf behind him. Gray Wolf tried to keep his balance and stay on his feet but the horse was going too fast. Soon he tripped and fell. Yellow hair could hear the big man on the horse laughing as he continued to drag Gray Wolf through the camp fire and into the river. Two others grabbed his mother and took her into the teepee. Yellow Hair felt the rage boil up within before the thought of self preservation took over as he saw that the two men coming for him were quickly approaching. He turned and headed up the mountain as fast as his legs would take him. That was the last time he saw his mother and Gray Wolf alive and now a great shame overcame him. He shouldn't have left them. He should have stayed there and helped Gray Wolf fight them. But what could he have done? He was just a small boy. Gray Wolf was a strong man and he was helpless against them. At least Gray Wolf stayed to fight. He didn't run.

Yellow Hair approached the bodies and saw their battered and bruised faces. Their tongues were protruding from their mouths. Their eyes were open, staring vacantly at the ground. His breath caught in his throat and a feral feeling of rage came over him. As his eyes flashed, he looked around hoping to find the pestiferous men who had done this. He knew he had to cut his mother and Grey Wolf down, but how?

Looking around, he saw his horse, Kodah, grazing on the buffalo grass on the other side of the river. It looked like the Wasichus were able to catch Gray Wolf's black stallion and his mother's paint mare but not Kodah. That did not surprise him as he was the only one Kodah would allow to approach her.

Sobbing, he ran toward his horse to bring her back to help him get the bodies down so he could preserve their spirits for their journey home. To their creator, or Wakan Tanka, as Gray Wolf and the other Sioux warriors called Him.

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As he neared, he softly spoke to Kodah who nickered at his arrival. She stood still as he grabbed onto her mane and swung up on her back. Kicking her sides, they took off toward the river and the tree where the bodies hung.

Yellow Hair found Grey Wolf's knife and sheath lying on the ground next to what remained of their teepee and clothing. He dismounted and removed the knife and stuck the sheath in his moccasin. Getting back on Kodah he rode to the bodies. First he reached up and cut the rope holding his mother. He gently eased her body over Kodah's withers and turned and rode up the river bank toward a stand of trees. He took the lodge poles from their teepee and secured them on each side of Kodah and stretched the skins Grey Wolf had hung to dry across them, making a travois to carry Gray Wolf and his mother to the Black Hills, the sacred burial grounds of the Sioux. After placing his mother's body on the travois, he went back and cut down Gray Wolf and brought him back and laid him beside his mother, wrapping both bodies in the skins Gray Wolf had hung from the teepee. He then gathered up Gray Wolf's bow and arrows and what belongings he could find of his mother's and placed them on the platform with their bodies. He chanted the death chant he heard so many times over the past years when a Lakota warrior was returned to earth. The Sioux believe at birth one receives from Takuskanskan a guardian spirit and the life-breath, or ghost, which comes from the stars; at death these return to the spirit world.

He kept Gray Wolf's Springfield 50 caliber buffalo rifle, bandolier and deer skin scabbard along with his old .44 caliber Colt sidearm. He would need more than his bow and arrows to keep his vow to seek revenge on the men who did this. He would spend the rest of his life, if necessary, hunting them down and killing them. This he promised on the wanagi - spirit of his mother and Gray Wolf.

Mounting Kodah, he turned and picked up the tracks of the Wasichus' heading toward the Paha Sapa - Black Hills, the sacred ground of the Sioux. By now his tears had dried and his heart hardened.

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Chapter 12

Paha Sapa - Black Hills 1875

The wind picked up, blowing the dust in circles, sending some into the buffalo skin lean-to. It was still quite warm in spite of the wind. His yellow hair whipped across his face as he stepped out and looked toward the sky, watching the black storm clouds gather to the north. They would bring relief from this heat that settled on the plains for the past few weeks. He walked over to check on his horse, Kodah, who was contentedly grazing on the tall buffalo grass that was being bent by the wind. She looked good, full and well muscled. They had been traveling across the Wyoming territory for the past six months and it felt good to be staying in one place for awhile. He shot a mule deer with his bow and hung the meat to dry in the hot sun. The sky was now purple and black as the clouds moved in. His horse softly nickered as the smell of fresh rain began to fill the air. He went to check on the meat he had cured by pounding it into a powder and mixing it with hot melted buffalo fat and berries making pemmican. He packed it for his upcoming journey. Next he brought out his Springfield buffalo rifle and started to oil and clean it before putting it back in its scabbard. He wouldn't leave until this storm had passed.

Then the clouds opened up; releasing the rain they had tried to hold for the past couple of hours. At first it was a light rain, then, with a flash of lightening and a clap of thunder, as if on cue, a torrent of rain began to fall.

He led Kodah around into the lean-to so she would be shielded from the storm. The rain blew sideways as the wind screamed and howled, stretching the buffalo hide against the restraint of the pegs, holding it down. He could hear branches breaking and falling in the nearby forest. The storm lasted for hours washing away anything that wasn't tied down. Finally, an azure sky broke through the endless cover of black clouds bringing with it rays of sunshine, knifing through, warming the earth. He turned to Kodah and began drying her back with his blanket before tacking her up and breaking camp, riding out to continue the search for the men who butchered his mother and Grey Wolf.

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Chapter 13

Near Chugwater Wyoming 1875

He was resting from the long ride when he heard what sounded like thunder. He kicked sand on the gray ash that remained of his fire and grabbed his bear pad and gun and ran to where Kodah was tied. He secured the pad and jumped on her back, sliding his knees under the rope he left coiled around her and rode at a gallop to the far bank of the river. The noise got louder. It wasn't thunder but a herd of buffalo, at least three thousand head coming his way. The sound of a buffalo rifle echoed in the distance and he knew who was firing. He had been tracking these men for two days and he finally caught up with them.

He turned his buckskin mare, around and urged her into a lope heading west toward a stand of rocks. She responded immediately and in less than a minute he had hobbled her and removed his rifle and crouched behind a stand of wind stunted oaks and rocks. He untied the deer hide bag holding his ammunition and laid his rifle on top of a boulder and sighted down the barrel. He was an experienced hunter and knew this rifle well. The wind was erratic and blowing out of the north kicking up dust balls around his feet. He would have to compensate a little more than usual when sighting in his target. His hair was blowing in his eyes, so he took a piece of rawhide and tied it back. Now he waited. The time passed and the rocks around him grew painfully hot by the rays of the sun and a terrible thirst beset him.

Soon a cloud of dust materialized in the horizon like smoke rising from a burning forest. Then he saw them. First an outrider, it was the man who grabbed his mother while Grey Wolf was being tortured. He was riding on the west side of the herd keeping them from breaking out across the plains. There were two more riders following behind the herd and another outrider to the east. There were four. He figured he could take out the closest outrider first and then be able to drop one of the riders in the rear before they knew what was happening. That would leave two, assuming his two shots would be on the mark, and he knew they would. One of the riders in the back was riding Grey Wolf's black stallion. He was a tall heavyset man with heavy jowls and pock marked skin, a drooping mustache and a scraggly beard. There was no doubt this was Turk Turner, his mother's killer. He carried a Remington lever action repeater rifle in his hands and guided the stallion with a touch of his legs. Yellow Hair would enjoy watching him die.

The outriders were having a difficult time keeping the herd together. A cow and calf broke away

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“Keep those cows and calves in close,” Turner screamed, as one of the riders in the back took aim with his rifle and dropped the calf.

“Yahoo, I got me one,” the rider yelled.

Then Turner fired a shot that took down the cow. Pretty soon all four riders were firing into the herd and yelling. The buffalo were dropping and tripping as the dead bodies began to pile up.

This senseless and reckless killing angered Yellow Hair and he brought his rifle up and sighted down to the chest of the outrider. Slowly, he thumbed back the hammer on his Springfield buffalo rifle and let out his breath, lightly squeezing the trigger, watching his target as the bullet went low and to the right, tearing into the flesh and hide of the horse. The horse dropped and rolled, dislodging its rider. Before the rider could gather his legs, the herd of buffalo was on him, mauling and dismembering the body.

“Where did that shot come from,” screamed the young rider pulling in next to Turner.

“Damned if I know,” hollered Turner. Let’s get to some cover quick.”

Yellow Hair removed another bullet from the bag and chambered the round. Again, he brought the Springfield up and slowly pulled back the hammer. Sighting down the barrel, he found the rider he was looking for, Willie Reston, one of the men who took his mother into the tee pee and who he believed tortured and killed her.

Reston pulled back on his horse, coming to a stop.

Yellow Hair adjusted his aim and slowly, with great patience, let out his breath and squeezed off another round. He saw the rawhide on the back of Reston’s shirt disintegrate and the blood and muscle splatter in the air. Methodically he brought down his rifle to chamber another round while watching the two remaining riders.

Turk Turner turned his horse and kicked him furiously to get out of the line of fire.

“I’m gettin’ the hell outta here.” Turner yelled.

The other outrider had dismounted and crouched behind the carcass of his friend’s dead horse. The blood and commotion was spooking his horse and he was having a difficult time holding him and staying behind cover. His horse reared in fear and he let him go. That was the wrong decision, Yellow Hair thought, as the man’s horse was his only way out.

Again, Yellow Hair raised the Springfield rifle to his cheek and sighted in on Turk Turner as he fled on the black stallion. He would have preferred to look into Turk’s eyes as he died, but this would have to do.

The crack of the rifle brought a grim smile to his face, as he knew this was the round that was fulfilling part of the mission he set out to accomplish years ago. The bullet found its mark and as it impacted Turk Turner’s body, muscle spasms caused Turk to pull back on the reins, and the stallion reared, throwing Turner to the ground. The shot had severed his spine, not killing him. The boy watched as Turner attempted to crab crawl to some brush for cover.

He turned to watch the last man cowering behind the dead horse. The man knew Yellow Hair was up in the rocks but couldn’t see him. It had been hot today and the sun was still keeping the heat at an unbearable level. The smell of the blood from the death and carnage below was wafting up to the boy and he heard Kodah whinny and he turned to see her prancing around. After all the hunts they had been on, the instinct of fear, coming from the smell of blood, still remained with his pony.

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Sliding off the rock, he picked up his spent cartridges and put them in the pouch tied to his waist and returned to his position. He watched as his last target furtively glanced up over the carcass of the dead horse. The boy decided to wait before putting him down for good. He wanted him to agonize over his upcoming death. Glancing to the north, he could make out the legs of Turk Turner, the man that he swore vengeance on, as he lay prostrate behind the small bush he chose as his final resting place. Yellow Hair could see no movement and figured death was near, if not already there.

These men deserved to die. Yellow Hair's family did not injure them, nor take their wives or horses. There was no reason for them to be attacked by these men.

Yellow Hair wiped away a trail of sweat trickling down from his right temple. It was time. He lifted his rifle and took aim just over the right flank of the dead horse, waiting for the rider to show his head. He knew that eventually curiosity and impatience would cause him to make a deadly mistake. It wasn't long before the man's head appeared. Slowly exhaling Yellow Hair squeezed off another round. It found its mark and he watched the head explode like a melon. He was done. Slowly he walked back to his pony, returning the Springfield rifle to its scabbard. He removed the hobble putting it in the pouch. Picking up the reins, he swung up on Kodah's back and rode down to where his victims lay.

The smell of death was heavy and thick as he approached the first outrider's body. He was mangled and dismembered and it was hard to determine that it had been a man. Kodah was nervous smelling the blood coming from the dead and dying carcasses. Yellow Hair spoke to her gently; reassuring her with a steady voice as they passed over the second man he shot. There was a hole one could put his fist through in the man's left chest where his black heart had once been.

When he approached the third body he saw that most of this man's head was gone. The impact from the .50 caliber bullet was enough to bring down a 2000-pound buffalo so it didn't surprise him that it would tear a man's head off as had happened here. What was left of him looked like he was a young man about the boy's age. Yellow Hair had never seen him before. What was he doing riding with these killers? Was he Isom's son? Whoever he was Yellow Hair felt no remorse for killing him.

Turning his mare, he gently squeezed her sides and she took off toward the man, Turk Turner, the boy had been waiting to kill for so long. As they got within ten yards of his victim, he could hear him moaning. He dismounted and dropped the reins. He removed his Bowie knife from its sheath above his moccasin as he slowly approached the dying Turk Turner. He knelt down and roughly turned him over. An agonizing moan escaped from Turk's throat as he opened his eyes, staring at the boy, wondering who he was and why he shot him. He raised his arm. It was more like a wave than any effort to fend off the boy's hand.

Yellow Hair slapped it away and looked in Turk's eyes and said: "My name is Yellow Hair. You killed my mother." He plunged his knife into Turk's throat and savagely turned it back and forth, watching and listening as the blood gurgled and choked the last vestige of life out of this vile creature that was lying beneath him. Then he cut out Turk's heart and stuffed it in his mouth.

Grabbing Turk's hair, he pulled his head back and brought his knife around to get his *topecokan sunpi* - scalp. When Yellow Hair was done he let out a blood curdling

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yell to let the spirits know he had anho - counted coup and avenged his mother's death.

When it was over, he wiped the blood from his knife on Turk Turner's shirt and slid it back in its sheath and slowly rose to his feet. Kodah was still waiting where he left her and as he walked to her he held out the scalp and said: "Well little one, this part of our journey is over."

Yellow Hair mounted and took off at an easy trot heading southwest along the bank of the Chugwater toward Fort Laramie, still searching for the man who killed his father, Grey Wolf. It was a good forty five miles and he planned to stop for the night and make camp at Horse Creek, about ten miles east of the fort.

Chapter 14

A Few Miles East of Fort Laramie 1875

Yellow Hair had ridden thirty miles before he caught up with Turk Turner and the others and was tired. He wanted to get to Horse Creek so Kodah could graze on grass and have her fill of water.

The hills were soft and wooded along the Chugwater as he rode toward Fort Laramie. He paused to watch wolves run along the bluffs. At the edge of the brush, a hawk's call rang out in the air and he caught a glimpse of it as it spread its' wings, with the tips fluttering as it glided and landed on a cottonwood. He waited before moving again, the only sound was that of his mare snorting the dust from her nose. The wind was warm coming over the mountains. It was a beautiful day. The Chugwater started up in the Black Hills, near the head of Horse Creek. From there, the two bodies of water go their separate way moving west. Over thirty miles of the Chugwater made its way through a dreary wilderness of rock, sand and clay, with very little vegetation before it reached this valley. Some call this no man's land but it is the Indian's land. The different colors of tan and rust of the clay and rock were what made this land so alluring. Some settlers had found gold among the sand of the creek-bed but only in small amounts so very few white men came here to find their fortune. The Lakota Sioux used to camp in the valley and let their horses graze on the abundant grass and drink of the cold water.

The word "Chug" means chimney to the people living in the area. Chug Valley is close to one hundred miles long and runs along the eastern edge of the Chugwater. A ledge of sandstone rises two hundred feet close to the east bank protecting the valley in the winter from the cold east wind.

Yellow Hair had traveled twenty miles and wouldn't arrive at Horse Creek until well after sunset. He would rest there for the night and wait until the sun was fully up before breaking camp. He crossed the Chugwater just east of Farthing, avoiding settlements along the way fearing word of the dead Wasichus may have reached the villages. He had another ten miles to go before he would get to Horse Creek. The sun was gone but the moon replaced it and was casting his shadow eerily in front of him as he rode along the rutted trail. The temperature had cooled down so he pulled out his blanket, which he had made into a poncho, and slipped it over his shoulders. Pretty soon the trail took a rise in a wild and desolate section of the valley where it flattened out. It is here Yellow Hair softly

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kissed to Kodah and she picked up a gentle lope. They kept this up for about 30 minutes before coming down to a walk.

It wasn't long before Yellow Hair saw the moon reflecting off Horse Creek. There was a stand of wagichun wagi, the talking tree or the cottonwood, sacred to the Sioux, mixed with some Mesquite trees on the other side of the water. This is where they would make camp. He stopped after entering the water to allow Kodah to take in her fill. "Well aren't you lucky Kodah, there is plenty wacanga, sweet grass." He said. Yellow Hair looked over the countryside. Not seeing anyone, he urged her into the water heading toward the copse of trees. As they climbed out of the creek bed, he dismounted and hobbled Kodah near the stand of trees.

He removed the bear pad, rifle and his buffalo robe and walked to one of the trees next to the bank that would shield him from the cold. The wind picked up and caused the leaves to rustle. His pony lifted her head and glanced at the trees, making sure she was safe and then went back to grazing. A lone coyote howled his troubled sentiment at having strangers camped in his space. Yellow Hair knew Coyotes would be close as the ground was littered with Velvet mesquite beans which they fed on. He rarely had campfires while he traveled unless mesquite wood was available. It didn't give off smoke which could alert strangers to his camp. He gathered some seedpods from the mesquite trees, grinding them into Pinole meal. He pulled his tashina pte - buffalo robe around his neck and grabbed his Springfield rifle; chambering a round and drew it near him, just in case. With the fire dying, the last thing he recalled hearing was the riffling of the grasses and the whisper of the water as it splashed along the riverbank, lulling him to sleep.

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Chapter 15

Outside Bosler Wyoming 1875

It happened again. Someone has been at the herd. We have two thousand head of cattle out there and only one hundred calves, Walcott said to himself. The rustlers have been taking their pick of Isom's cattle.

Walcott dreaded having to tell Isom and stand there while he threw a tantrum describing what he would do to the son of a bitch who stole from him.

Major Frank Walcott had been foreman of the Circle L, Olive's ranch since 1869. He arrived in the Wyoming territory after mustering out of the Confederate Calvary where he saw more death and carnage than he cared to remember, the worst being the Battle of Mesilla at Mesilla New Mexico. He was second in command to Colonel John Baylor. They defeated the Union Forces there and were heading up to the Colorado Territory to take Denver. This country could have been theirs and he felt they would have taken it if it had not been for those devils from Pike's Peak. There were close to three hundred of them and they joined the Union reinforcements arriving from California. He and Colonel Baylor were driven back into Texas where they remained until the end of the war. Pike's Peak, damn, defeated by a bunch of sod buster's from a place named after a loser, Zebulon Pike, who was unable to climb the fourteen thousand foot mountain; yet it gets named after him. It was like everything having to do with that damn war, nothing turned out the way it should have.

Major Walcott drove cattle north from Texas to Wyoming and Montana more than any man he knew. He was good at what he did, just as he was good at soldiering. If they had won the war, he would still be an officer, probably a full colonel by now. But they hadn't, and he needed to get over it.

He saw Tom Corlett's weathered face as he approached on his big Appaloosa gelding. When he came within yelling distance, Walcott said: "Tom, looks like we lost calves again to someone running irons."

Many herds were started with a fast horse, a long rope and a running iron. Some rustlers used a cinch ring, a horseshoe or a bit heated in a fire. They also used running irons which are long slender metal rods with curved tips or rings that can modify almost any brand.

"You're kidding me. When do you think that happened?"

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“Don’t know and don’t care. Get back down there and pick out a half dozen good men and meet me back here. I ‘spect Olive will want us to put an end to it; so we better get to it.”

As Tom turned and spurred his big gelding down the arroyo, Major Walcott looked over the herd of cattle and couldn’t help but think of Isom Prentice Olive and what it would be like telling him the news that most of his calves had been rustled. Olive was a little gnome of a man, barely 5’4” and appeared as round, as he was tall. He had no neck to speak of and his chin dropped to his chest in rolls. His thinning hair was forever greasy and hung in strands down the back of his neck. As repulsive as he was to look at, he was more disturbing to listen to. His voice was high-pitched with a nasal twang and that annoyed the hell out of Walcott.

Olive inherited his holdings from his father, who died when he stepped off the boardwalk in Bosler in front of the Bucking Horse Café and was run down by a wagon full of Brule Sioux. They were heading back to the reservation after a night of drinking as much “fire water” as their buffalo hides would buy them. All six Indians mysteriously disappeared the next morning and were found a week later, shot in the back of the head down by the Snake River up in Columbia County. Most folks figured it was the doings of Isom and some of his men but nothing was done about it. Walcott knew it was Isom and he knew which men he took with him. It was those two squirrely guys out of southwest Texas, Rory Lovell and Jasper McCabe. Walcott didn’t want anything to do with either of them. Two others, Turk Turner and Willie Reston were no longer with them. Olive knew better than to ask Walcott to do something like that. He was a wrangler, not a gunman. Now if they stole some cattle, Walcott would do what it took to get them back. To shoot a rustler was one thing, but to gun someone down with no proof of wrong doing was something Walcott wouldn’t do. Leave it to the law that’s what they are there for. Oh well, what the hell, they were only Indians, he thought.

Tom was riding back with Ben Jones and Bill Walker, two big boys who had a reputation for fighting whenever the opportunity made itself available. Also riding with him was D.E. the Texas Kid Brooke, who had a short fuse and was seen most nights practicing his quick draw with his two Colt .45’s. Walcott didn’t like him much. He overheard Gabby talkin’ to him one day after The Kid was bragging on how he could ride a horse.

“Anyone can do a job on a good horse, Gabby said, but it takes a hand to a job on a bad horse. You best keep your mouth shut and your eyes open and learn from some of the really good cowboys we got here like Tom and the Major.”

The Kid turned his horse and spurred him away while bumping into Gabby’s to show him his disrespect. Frank didn’t like him before and that act of defiance didn’t gain him any favor that’s for sure.

Also with them was Sam Clover, a quiet man who signed on with the outfit in Casper and who Walcott didn’t know much about, and then Nick and Ray Champion, two boys from Abilene, Texas, who ended up in the Wyoming Territory after being chased out of Texas by some woman’s husband who didn’t take a likin’ to havin’ a couple of cowhands servicing his lady. Walcott was pleased with Tom’s choice. These boys would be willin’ to go most places to take a fight.

“OK, let’s head out. We need to talk to Mr. Olive.” The group of riders pushed their mounts at a gallop across the plains toward the Circle L, Olive’s ranch, which was located a good three hour ride to the north. The Major would make sure they wouldn’t

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run their horses to death as some were wont to do when the horses didn't belong to them. Olive had supplied horses to most of the boys. Of course, the Major and Tom Corlett preferred to ride their own mounts. A good horse knows instinctively what to do when you have been working cattle for as long as they had. When you get a horse like that, they become priceless and you don't want to part with them. They make your job a lot easier than having to teach a green horse how to herd cattle.

Leaving the Loup Fork, they turned north on the old Overland Stage route. This route had been moved further north nearer Elk Mountain after Indian attacks made it too dangerous to cross. In the last few years, the Indians became a bit friendlier due to the Calvary stationed in nearby Fort Laramie so Walcott wasn't worried about any encounter with them today. However, after those Brule's were killed a year back, you never knew what the Indians might be thinking.

The plain was arid and gray. The trees appeared to be parched and dry and the prairie grass snapped beneath the hooves of the horses as they returned to the ranch.

As they approached the valley, everything appeared to be the richest of greens with elegant trees and patches of green buffalo grass blowing in the wind. They saw the smoke from the chimney as they crossed the mesa dropping into the valley. They had seen very little timber since they left the herd but now they were approaching some of the few stands of trees in this part of Wyoming. It sure made for a lovely setting.

When they reached the ranch, Walcott said: "You boys take the horses to the corral and make sure they get plenty of water and hay. Rub 'em down good too. There are burlap sacks in the barn you can use for that. Stay close by. We might be ridin' out shortly."

Walcott swung off his horse and walked to the door and rapped loudly. Soon a young Mexican girl about fourteen opened the door and escorted him in.

"Hi Rosita," Walcott murmured.

Rosita lowered her head and stepped aside allowing Walcott to enter. Rosita always averted her gaze when they met. Many times when passing the house on his way to his bunk, he could hear her crying. She usually had large bruises on her arms and occasionally on her face. He knew I.P. beat her and sexually used her. He didn't like it much, but he figured it was none of his business and there was nothing he could do about it anyway if he wanted to keep his job. What difference did it make anyway? She was a Mexican wetback who was probably better off now than the life she was living in Tijuana with her mother, father and ten brothers. They were probably abusing her as well before Apaches stole her and traded her to Olive for a couple of horses and a jug of tequila. At least here she had a nice roof over her head and enough to eat. Olive received pleasure by hurting women that was for sure. Walcott knew that from the times they would go to Chugwater and visit Ella Watson's place. Ella was also known as Cattle Kate, because she was the wife of a known rustler by the name of Jim Averell. Walcott could hear the screams coming from the room next to the one he was in. His whore told him all the girls hated Olive and she was glad he didn't pick her that night.

Olive was sitting at the table reading from what looked like a ledger book. He had a grim look on his face and Walcott could only imagine it would get worse once he broke the news of his missing cattle.

"What are you doing here?" Olive asked looking at him with a menacing scowl on his face.

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“We got problems boss. Someone has been stealin’ calves again. I think it’s some of them Hole in the Wall boys up in Johnson County.”

“Think it was that damn Red Angus? He’s been selling rebranded cattle up by the Chugwater for the past two years now. We ought to teach that son of a bitch a lesson he’ll never forget.”

Walcott knew that “We ought to” meant he and the boys would do the dangerous work before I.P. came along and did some sadistic thing to the poor bastard, something that filled a hollowness in his warped mind. “Either Red or that new guy up there, Horace Plunkett. He’s been known to take some that ain’t his. We can head up that way and inspect the brands. I know we will find some that have been worked over. We will have to be careful as we don’t want to rile up all those Hole in the Wall boys. All I got is six riders with me and Tom and that sure ain’t enough to go head to head with all them.”

“Well, see if you can get whoever done it down this way. I know how to deal with ‘em and I don’t want anyone interfering with me, especially that damn Sheriff Hayden. Walcott knew Michael Hayden, the sheriff of Bosler and a good man, had strong suspicions about Isom Prescott Olive being involved in the killing of the Brule Indians near the Rock River last year. The sheriff had been to the ranch a couple of times to question I.P. and told him that he knew he was behind the murders but just couldn’t prove it; not yet at least.

“We will let our horses rest a bit before we head out. I’ll get Tom to make sure we have enough ammo in case we run into some trouble.”

At that, Walcott turned, nodded toward Rosita and left. He could only imagine what sort of torture Isom had in store for those sorry rustlers. Whoever it was, he was glad it wasn’t him.

“Tom, make sure everyone has forty rounds of ammo. We will be headin’ out in about an hour.”

“Okay boss” and with that Tom walked to the bunkhouse where the guns and ammunition were stored.

Two hours later they were crossing the Lodgepole Creek just outside Pine Bluffs, heading north to Chugwater. It would take them a good day’s ride to get there and Walcott didn’t envy the man who rustled I.P.’s calves.

The morning sun was about full, shining on the grass where the dew was giving it the appearance of small pieces of glass, scattered about as far as the eye could see. There wasn’t a cloud in the sky and the air was still, as if waiting to blow.

There wasn’t much conversation along the way as none of them had a lot in common outside of punching cows. Every now and then the Texas Kid took it upon himself to start bragging on how he took down some cowpoke that had the temerity to draw down on him. Walcott wondered just how much was true and how much was just false bravado. Guess they would find out soon enough. He knew from fighting in the war that the quiet ones were the ones you could count on when things got hot. It was the ones who liked to brag on themselves that seemed to disappear when you needed them the most. He knew Ben Jones and Bill Walker would be in the mix when the shit hit the fan and old Tom would be right there with him. Sam Clover and Nick and Ray Champion were as steady as they come and would stand up to anyone.

Wyoming Territory

Chapter 16

A cowboys' work is never done.

After riding for two hours they came upon Horse Creek, just west of Meriden. It took them a few minutes to find a safe place for the horses to cross and then they took off at a gallop heading northwest to Chugwater.

As they approached Red Angus' place they saw four wranglers working in the corral branding some calves. It looked like Red and his brother, Ed, on the fence watching the men work.

Walcott had his men spread out in a line as they rode down into the valley and up to the corral.

Red and the others saw the riders coming when they were about one hundred yards away. "Get your guns boys, we got company," Red hollered. Angus wasn't one who got visitors so he knew this was trouble coming.

Ed Angus and two of the wranglers ran to the barn to get their horses while the rest sought cover behind a shed next to the corral.

Walcott lifted his arm and said, "Stop here men. Let's see what they are planning to do." It didn't take long for them to find out as a bullet went buzzing by Corlett's head.

"Damn, that was close," Corlett said.

"Let's get 'em boys," Walcott yelled as he charged down toward the corral with his gun blazing.

As Walcott found out while fighting battles in the army, many bullets flew but few hit their mark. He and his men were on Angus' group before they knew it. When up close, The Texas Kid dropped Red with one shot between the eyes. Ben Jones and Bill Walker shot Ed Angus and one of the cowboys off their horses while they tried to ride away. The other cowboy dropped his gun and threw up his hands. The Texas Kid cocked his forty five and sent a round through the cowboy's heart. Blood and flesh flew as the round went through his body. The cowboy dropped like a sack of flour with dark red blood seeping from his shirt onto the ground.

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Nick and Ray Champion came in from the north and circled the shed that the wranglers were hiding behind while Ben Jones and Bill Walker came at them from the south. Two of the wranglers were shot numerous times and died on the spot while the third took off running for the hills with Ray Champion in close pursuit swinging his rope. About twenty five yards out, Ray tossed his rope. It circled the wrangler's body, pinning his arms close to his side. Like a good cow pony, Ray's horse braked to a stop and started backing up tightening the rope around the man. Ray dallied the rope around his saddle horn. He turned his horse around, and at a gallop, started dragging the wrangler behind him. "Yahoo, way to go Ray," The Kid yelled as Ray continued to circle the property with the wrangler's body bouncing behind him.

All the men started yelling and encouraging Ray and his horse on.

All that Walcott could see was a cloud of dust chasing Champion's horse around the corral. When it was over, the wrangler was dead. He was torn to pieces from hitting all the rocks and tree stumps that were littering Angus' property.

"Ok, let's gather up those calves and get them back to Olive."

"Nick, you and Ray can start back while we go see what Horace Plunkett is hiding at his place."

"You got it, Major," Nick replied as his brother Ray was loosening the honda on his rope releasing the dead body of the wrangler.

"Ok, let's bury these men and get outta here," the Major yelled.

"Hey, Major, look here. I got me a little Mexican. What should I do with him?" it was the Texas Kid walking out of the barn with his gun to the back of a young Mexican boy he found cowering in a stall.

"Well, I don't want him, so we might as well leave 'im be," Walcott said.

"Should I shoot him?" the Kid asked.

"Why?"

"Why not?" The Texas Kid replied.

"No point in it, Walcott said. Put him back in the stall and let's get outta here."

The Texas Kid walked back to the barn with the Mexican boy in tow. When he got to the first stall, he opened the gate hitting the boy in the back of his head with the butt of his revolver. The boy dropped to his knees with blood flowing down the side of his head into his ear.

"Get up," the Texas Kid yelled. "I said get up, levántate," pulling the boy to his feet by his arm.

The Kid pushed the boy forward and he stumbled against the stall wall. The Texas Kid saw a two by four leaning against one wall. He picked it up and walked toward the cowering boy. Raising the board, he swung it at the boy striking him on his knee cap, shattering it. Then he swung the board and hit the boy in the face.

The Kid knew he broke the boy's cheek bone as he heard it crack. What he didn't realize was that the end of the board tore the eyeball out of its socket. It was hanging down the boy's face by what appeared to be grizzle and muscle. The sight of it made the Kid smile. "Aw shit," he said. He swung the board one more time hitting the boy behind the ear. The Kid stood there and watched the boy drop face first into the hay covering the stall's floor. The Kid drew his gun and cocked the hammer. He aimed it at the back of the boy's head but before he could pull the trigger he heard Walcott calling his name.

"Kid? Kid, get the hell out here. We gotta go."

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“I’m coming,” he yelled, shaking his head as he holstered his gun and turned to walk out into the afternoon sun. “Damn Mexican.”

Before he left he turned back to the young boy and said, “You’re one lucky Beaner.” He spat on the ground next to where the boy lay and walked out into the bright afternoon sun.

Chapter 17

Chugwater Wyoming, 1875

They didn’t want to announce their arrival so they slowed down to a walk as they approached Horace Plunkett’s cabin. After they buried Angus and his men behind Red’s barn, they rode out, leaving behind, who Walcott thought, was a scared young Mexican kid cowering in a stall. Major Walcott was unaware of what the Texas Kid did to the young boy. Nick and Ray Champion took about one hundred head of Olive’s calves that they found and started the drive toward the Circle L while the rest of them took off to Plunkett’s place. Plunkett had built a corral west of a small barn and in it were about forty cows all with calves. They could make out Plunkett moving about in his cabin. It seemed like old Horace had some mighty good luck calving this year. Not too many folks could brag that all their cows calved. Walcott wanted to check out the brands. He knew Plunkett was a no good cattle thief and had been for years. He wasn’t so sure about Angus, although he heard plenty of rumors over the years. If any brands were altered from the Circle L’s, they would hogtie the rustler and bring ‘im back along with the calves for Olive to deal with as he saw fit.

“I wonder where everyone is.” Walcott said.

“Tom, why don’t you take Bill and Ben and go down to the corral and check out the brands. I’ll take the rest of the boys and head to the cabin and have us a talk with Horace.”

“Ok, let’s go boys”, Tom said, as he turned his Appaloosa and headed toward the small herd of cows with Bill and Ben moving in alongside him.

Major Walcott and the rest rode up to the cabin where they all dismounted and walked to the door. Before they could knock, Horace Plunkett, a small thin man with long gray

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unkempt hair, stepped out onto his porch. He looked like he just woke up. He wore a filthy sweat stained shirt and his face was smeared with grease and soot. A foul odor emanated from him while he stood holding what Walcott immediately recognized as an old 1860 .44 caliber Colt Army revolver, used by the Union Calvary because of its lighter weight and improved balance and superior ballistics. In a flash the Texas Kid had drawn down on Horace and told him to drop his gun, which he did. Sam Clover stepped forward and picked up the Colt and stuck it in his belt.

“What do you boys want and what are those boys doin’ in my corral?” Horace asked.

“We’re just makin’ sure those calves aren’t where they don’t belong. If they ain’t been rebranded, we’ll be on our way. But for now, why don’t we set a spell and relax?”

“Where are your men, Horace?” Walcott asked.

“Only got a half breed named Johnny Bearfoot. He went to town to pick up provisions. Probably won’t be back ‘til late,” Horace replied.

Walcott didn’t believe him. He had to have more than one wrangler with him when he rustled cattle. They probably were in town as well.

It wasn’t long before Tom rode over. He leaned down in his saddle toward Walcott and said: “Them’s definitely rebranded Circle L stock.”

“Alright, let’s round ‘em up and head ‘em out to Olive. Kid, you and Sam help Mr. Plunkett here saddle his horse. Then we ride.” Walcott said. “I’ll gather up some provisions from the cabin.”

Chapter 18

“The best sermons are lived, not preached.”

Frank Walcott had been thinking of the Mexican boy ever since they left him in the barn at Red Angus’ place. Something about the way the Texas Kid looked when he walked out of the barn after taking the boy back in there that didn’t sit well with Frank.

I have got to go back, he thought.

Turning his big grulla gelding, Bandit, around, he spurred him into a lope and headed down the arroyo toward Tom Corlett. As he approached Tom, he reined in Bandit.

“Tom, I been thinking about that Mexican boy we left at Angus’ place. I gotta go back and make sure he’s alright. I just don’t trust the Texas Kid. I think he hurt that boy and I won’t be able to rest until I make sure he is okay.”

Tom had his right leg up across the pommel of his saddle with his hat pushed back and a piece of straw dangling from the corner of his mouth. He was watching the small herd of cattle they recovered from Plunkett as they slowly moved across the prairie, occasionally slowing down to graze on the buffalo grass until a rider came along and prodded them to move.

“Okay, we can get these cattle back with the rest of the herd with no problem.” He said.

“I’ll probably be back before you get to Olive’s place. Just keep an eye on the Texas Kid,” replied Walcott.

Tom nodded his head and watched the retreating figure of Major Frank Walcott. He always had a suspicion that old Frank wanted a kid and it wouldn’t surprise him if he didn’t bring that young Mexican boy back with him to the Circle L.

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Major Walcott was thinking, as a Confederate Officer, he was taught to respect women and children. To protect them at all costs. How could anyone of sound mind do anything to a child or a defenseless woman?

What happened after the raid on Red Angus' ranch to recover the stolen cattle for Isom had bothered him. He didn't feel right leaving that young Mexican boy alone to fend for himself. The Texas Kid wanted to kill him, he could feel it. He was glad he didn't let him do it. But still, he worried about that boy. The only way he could clear his mind was to go back to Angus' ranch and see if he could find the boy and make sure he was alright. Maybe he could find a family up near Chugwater who would take him in and take care of him.

As he entered Red Angus' ranch, Walcott turned toward the barn. As he dismounted he noticed a lot of flies buzzing around the barn door. More than was usual.

It was dark inside and it took him awhile for his eyes to adjust from the bright sun.

"Oh hell, what did he do?" Frank cried, running to the boy's side.

"Quieto, muchacho, hold still." Frank slowly lifted the boy's head and saw what was left of his eye hanging down the side of his face. The flies were already covering the empty eye socket. He hurriedly brushed them away and took off his handkerchief and wrapped it around the boy's head. Gently placing the boy's head back on the ground he noticed his hand was coated with blood from the wound to the back of the boy's head.

Frank ran back to his horse and grabbed his canteen and first aid kit out of his saddle bag and hurried back to the boy. Slowly lifting his head again, he brought the canteen to his lips. The boy's one good eye fluttered open but then closed again. Frank bandaged the head wound and took a hay fork and broke the handle off. He then straightened the boy's shattered leg the best he could. The boy screamed in pain and then went limp, passing out in Frank's arms from the pain. Frank finished lashing the hay fork handle to the boy's leg and lifted him up and carried him out to his horse. As carefully as he could, he placed the boy in his saddle and then mounted behind him and headed to Chugwater to find a doctor.

The boy was unconscious for the entire thirty minute ride into town. Frank saw a cowboy standing by his horse in front of the livery stable. As he approached he asked him, "Is there a doctor in town?"

The cowboy looked at the Mexican boy and shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Frank drew his gun and cocked the hammer back. The cowboy heard it and stopped in his tracks.

"I asked you, is there a doctor in town? If you don't answer me quick, you will wish there was."

"Ain't no people doctor, but there's a horse doctor at the end of the street. Don't know if he'll work on a Beaner though. I sure as hell wouldn't."

"We'll see," Frank said, holstering his gun as he rode away.

A man was sitting on a bench in front of the hotel when Frank rode up. His face was smeared with dirt and lined with age. He was wearing a black hat, white shirt with a bolo tie and with heavy sweat stains under both arm pits. He wore suspenders that were holding up a pair of frayed black cotton pants.

"Is the horse doctor here?"

"Guess that's me," the man replied. "That don't look like no horse to me. What happened?"

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“He got beat up pretty bad. Lost his eye and his left leg is smashed,” Walcott replied. “Here, let me help ya get him down,” the doctor said as he slowly got to his feet and walked toward Walcott.

“We’ll bring ‘im inside and see if there is anything I can do. Haven’t seen anyone hurt that bad in a long time, and that fella’ didn’t make it.”

They put the boy down on a table and the doctor yelled, “Mildred, come out here quick and get some water boilin’, we got a messed up boy here.”

Mildred was wearing a blue calico dress with a white apron. She was a short stocky woman with white hair, wire rim glasses and a kindly face.

“Oh Mary, Mother of God, what happened to this poor boy? I’ll get some towels and bandages from your buggy while the water is boiling.”

Frank turned to the doctor and said, “I’m Major Frank Walcott. I’m the foreman at the Circle L Ranch outside Bosler. I found the boy out at Red Angus’ place. Red and his boys rustled some of our cattle and one of my boys got carried away when dealing with this kid. I will take care of him; you take care of this boy. Here, Frank reached in his vest pocket and gave the doctor two fifty dollar gold pieces. This should cover your expenses. I’ll be back to settle with you later. What’s your name doc?”

“Frank Wilson,” he replied. “We’ll look after him, you won’t have to worry. My wife, Mildred, loves children. Now, let’s take those bandages off him so I can do it right.”

Doctor Wilson slowly unwrapped the bandage from the boy’s eye, shaking his head.

“All I can do is keep that hole from getting infected. That leg of his will be useless if he lives. Your boy did a job on that knee cap. I will cut in there and remove some of the bone chips. That should cut down the pain he experiences if and when he gets up and around. He’ll need a crutch or else he can just drag the damn thing along behind him. He sure won’t be breakin’ no broncs.”

After they removed the bandages, the doctor cleaned the eye wound and applied a sterile bandage.

“Okay, cowboy,” Dr. Wilson said, “you are going to have to hold this boy down while Mildred here and I cut on his leg.”

Dr. Wilson poured a clear liquid into a white rag and handed it to Frank.

“Press this over his face for about a minute. I’ll tell you when to let up. Its chloroform so doesn’t breathe it in or you’ll find yourself knocked out on the floor.”

About an hour after Dr. Wilson had finished up his work, the young Mexican boy started to come around.

“Dónde estoy, Where am I?” he asked.

“You’re at a doctor’s office in Chugwater. “Como se llama, muchacho? What’s your name, boy?”

“Enrico Perez. Oh, estoy herido, I hurt.”

“The doctor here fixed you up. You’re gonna’ be okay. I’ll come back soon to get you. You can work for me when you are well. Bueno?”

“Si, señor, what is your name?”

“Major Frank Walcott.”

“Doc, Mrs. Wilson, thanks for all you have done. I’ll settle up with you when I get back in two months. Take good care of him,” Frank said as he swung up into his saddle and rode out of town.

It didn’t take him long before he caught up with Tom and the rest of the boys.

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“Made it just in time,” Tom said, “there’s the Circle L. How’s the boy doin’?”

“The Texas Kid did a number on him while he had him in the barn. I took him to Chugwater. An old horse doctor and his wife are lookin’ after him.”

“Do you think he is going to make it,” Tom asked?

“I reckon he will. The doc seemed to know what he was doin. I plan on bringing the boy back here when we are done with this drive, Tom.”

“Thought you would,” Tom said as he spurred his horse into a lope toward the herd of cattle.

Chapter 19

Circle L Ranch outside Bosler Wyoming 1875

As they rode into the valley approaching the ranch, they noticed I.P. standing on the porch with Rosita awaiting their arrival. They had been driving the cattle for three days now only stopping to rest the cattle for six hours a night. So they were all dead tired. As Tom and the boys drove the calves to the back of the ranch, Walcott and the Texas Kid led Horace Plunkett to I.P.

As they approached Isom, Walcott asked, “Did Nick and Ray get here yet?”

“Yep,” replied Isom. “They got in last night. I sent ‘em back out on the range to look after the rest of the herd.”

That figured. Walcott thought. The boys were probably dead tired and instead of letting them catch a good night’s sleep in the bunk house for one night, Isom sends them out on another six hour ride.

“Ain’t no question those are your stock, Mr. Olive,” Walcott said, “and Horace here was takin’ mighty good care of ‘em for you, weren’t you Horace?”

Horace didn’t respond. He just sat on his horse with his head down and his face hidden under the brim of his hat.

“Red Angus and his boys didn’t seem to think we should take what was rightly yours, so we had to bury him and his boys behind his spread. So I had Nick and Ray take your cattle and head back here while we went to have a talk with Mr. Plunkett here.. What do you want us to do with him?”

“Tie him up and take ‘im around back and get down one of them cow hides stored in the shed” Olive replied. “I have a special way to deal with this pig farmer.”

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Walcott was holding the cow hide he had pulled out of the shed and was standing around with everyone else with Horace waiting for Olive.

When I.P. finally made his appearance he took the cowhide and dropped it in the water trough, soaking it through and through. He then laid it out in the sun.

Turning to The Texas Kid, Olive said, "Grab him and turn him around in front of that hide and then toss him on top of it."

Olive wrapped the hide around Plunkett getting it as tight as he could.

After a few minutes he had the Texas Kid help him tighten the hide some more. He was going to leave him here, letting the sun shrink the hide and suffocate the man wrapped in it.

Walcott thought they would be hanging Plunkett, not torturing him. He had heard of this being done before, but he never saw it and didn't care to see it now either.

"You sure you want to do this, Mr. Olive?" the Major asked.

"Damn right I do. Anyone want to watch and see how it's done?"

"I do," replied the Texas Kid.

"Alright then, grab one end of this thing and let's drag him over here where the sun can get at him all afternoon."

It was a long slow agonizing death, which Walcott and the boys didn't hang around to watch, only the Texas Kid. The rest of them had work to do.

After Major Walcott and the boys left, Isom and the Texas Kid stayed and watched the cowhide shrink as the heat from the day's sun intensified.

Isom recalled when he was about seven years old and his father, Jacob, did the same thing to a Mexican worker, Jorge, accused of stealing a sack of meal flour. His father beat that Mexican mercilessly until he confessed before wrapping him in the hide. Isom didn't want to watch the man die, as Jorge had been his friend.

"Come little Isom, you can feed the chickens while I collect the eggs," called Jorge

"Next we clean the stalls. You can walk the mare with the sore leg. Do not run her, just walk. Pretty soon she will be back to normal and we can put her out with the rest of the herd. While you walk her, I will clean up the manure she leaves for me. Then we have lunch."

Jorge was the only friend Isom had on the big ranch. He didn't believe Jorge would steal from his father.

"Papa, Jorge didn't do that, I know."

His father slapped Isom hard in the face when he told him that. "Maybe it was you, Isom? Maybe I should wrap you in that hide along with Jorge", he said with a wicked sneer. Isom was scared and believed his father would do that, if for no other reason, then to watch another person die. His father had enjoyed beating his mother until she could take it no longer and left one night and was never heard from again. She was the only person who protected Isom from his father's explosive temper. Many nights she would step between his father and Isom and take the beatings for him. When Isom asked his father where his mother was, he was beaten and told never to speak her name again.

The Mexican woman he brought in to take care of the house and Isom was subjected to his father's fierce temper as well, enduring nightly beatings. At night, when his father would drink, his temper would rage. He would rant on about anything and everything. If you were in the room with him, you would be the focus of his rage. Isom quickly learned it was best to stay out of sight if he could. At night his father would stumble into Isom's

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bedroom and beat him with his belt for some imagined offense until his backside bled. One day he woke to find his dog, Duke, strung up and dressed out like a deer on the front porch. He ran crying into the house asking his father what happened. His father beat him for crying like a baby and said Duke had it coming.

As Isom got older, he started taking out his frustrations and anger on the workers and animals on the ranch. He would steal something and blame it on the housekeeper, or he would catch a feral cat and beat it mercilessly until it died. He was especially cruel to the mustangs they would bring in to break for ranch work. He would stub them out in the middle of the corral in the hot sun for an entire day without food or water. He would then beat them into submission before he would have one of the vaquero's saddle and ride the buck out of it. These horses' eyes showed fear whenever he was present. He liked that. He called it respect.

The first time he ever wrapped a man in cowhide to watch him die was when he turned seventeen. The boy, Brad Crandall, the son of a sod buster who just moved to the Bosler area, had taunted and humiliated him in front of his friends, attempting to get Isom to fight him. Isom new better as Brad was a big young man and Isom was short and overweight. By getting beat up Isom would only make his humiliation worse. So, Isom planned to ambush Crandall and make him pay. His chance finally came one day when he was riding back from Bosler and he saw Crandall riding his father's mule toward town. Isom pulled off the road and dismounted. Pulling out his carbine, he sighted in on the unsuspecting boy and fired off a round. His first shot was high and to the left. He fired again, this time hitting Crandall. The mule took off running. Isom approached Crandall as he lay bleeding and moaning alongside the road.

"What are you doing Isom?" Brad cried.

Isom threw his lariat around Brad and had his horse drag him about one hundred yards off the trail behind some Cottonwood trees.

"You better stop, Isom. Let me go or I'll kill ya'," Brad yelled.

"You'll kill me, Brad? I think you got this turned around. I'm going to kill you."

Isom tied him up and went home to get one of the cowhides his father kept in the shed behind the house. After soaking it in water, he spurred his horse to a gallop and returned to Crandall. The boy was close to death due to all the blood he had lost during the time Isom was gone.

As he wrapped Brad in the cow hide, Crandall begged, "Don't do this, please Isom."

Close to six hours later, the last thing Isom heard was Crandall crying, "I can't breathe, please help me," he gasped, and then he died. It was six of the most enjoyable hours of Isom's life. Isom dragged the body to a nearby arroyo where he dug a shallow grave and buried him. He threw some rocks over the grave to keep the scavenger's from digging it up and possibly having some passerby find the remains.

They never did find him and after a year the Crandall family sold their ranch and moved to the Big Horn Basin area outside Cody never knowing what happened to their son.

Now as he watched the cowhide slowly squeeze the life out of Horace Plunkett he felt that intoxicating feeling begin to stir within him. A sexual arousal he first felt when he was about thirteen and he was beating a mustang in the south corral behind the big house. Isom turned, "Rosita", he yelled, as he walked toward the young Mexican girl. He would show her again what he expected of her. What she owed him.

Wyoming Territory

After Plunkett took his last breath, Isom said to the Texas Kid, "Bury the son of a bitch and then get outta here."

Chapter 20

Fort Laramie Wyoming 1875

Yellow Hair woke to a light drizzle and fog. Moisture hung in the air like a wet shirt on a man's back. The spring rains had been heavy and the air was damp and fragrant. As he sat up, he noticed a herd of close to three hundred wild horses grazing on the other side of Horse Creek. Kodah and the wild horses would occasionally nicker back and forth while grazing. Yellow Hair took the hobbles off and led her under a stand of trees and dried her with his blanket before heading out toward Fort Laramie.

The skies were low and gray as he approached the Fort and it wasn't long before a cold drizzle started to fall. He felt the steady drip of the rain on his head and shoulders as he rode along the dark and muddy trail. The dampness caused a stiffness in his shoulders that felt like a weight pulling at his muscles, trying to drag him down.

It wasn't long after he rode through the gate, that the fog started to lift. Inside the fort was a self-contained community designed to survive long sieges. The barracks, livery stable, storehouses, kitchens and repair shops were built within a fort so they could be defended from hostile Indian attacks.

Esben heard hammers pounding and noticed a lot of activity going on in the north corner of the fort. They were building a gallows and a crowd of close to twenty people were milling around. The livery was on the west side of the fort and that is where he headed. He dismounted as the blacksmith walked out to greet him.

"I need a stall for tonight, if you have one," Yellow Hair said
. "Sure, it'll cost 'ya fifty cents. That includes hay, oats and fresh water."

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After paying the blacksmith, Yellow Hair headed toward the civilian barracks. Fort Laramie was one of the few army forts situated on the western frontier that provided quarters for civilians passing through. After checking in the room and depositing his gear, he went to find someone who might have seen Olive. He walked over to where the small crowd was watching the construction of the gallows. Approaching an old man standing toward the back of the crowd he asked, "What's this about?"

The man had long sandy red hair hanging down to his shoulders and had his hat pushed back on his head, showing a receding hairline. He had a beard and his shirt was stained and dirty with frayed cuffs.

"It's our first legal hangin' in these parts young fella", he replied. "Ol Jim Averell from Medicine Bow was convicted of rustlin' some cattle from the Carter Cattle Company. Sheriff Garcia is in charge as General Cook and his men won't be back for a couple of days. They headed north to bring back Spotted Tail, that Brule Chief. They think that will calm down them Sioux who have been raidin' settlers hearabouts. The Sioux were mighty riled up after them six Injuns were found dead along the Snake River a year ago. They been raidin' ranches all over this territory and the General wants to put a stop to it." Yellow Hair was aware of the killing. One of the men was the father of Little Elk, his friend from when his father and his people would hunt the Big Horn Basin with the Brule. He was a quiet boy, but a brave hunter. They enjoyed many days together hunting and fishing with their fathers. Little Elk was one of the few Brule who didn't seem to care that Yellow Hair was white. He actually came to his defense at times when other young braves challenged his right to be there. He never forgot that and felt sorry for Little Elk's loss. By avenging Gray Wolf's death he would be avenging the death of Little Elk's father as well.

"The hangin's at high noon tomorrow. It'll cost ya a quarter to watch if you're interested."

"Might be", he replied, "you know an Isom Prentice Olive?"

"Heard of 'im. He's the sumbitch they think killed them Brule's. Nobody can prove it though. I hear he is as mean as they come."

"You see him around here lately?"

He laughed. "They said he was down visiting Cattle Kate's ladies. She's ol' Jim Averell's woman. They think she's a rustler too but they don't want to hang her and have her women leave town. I didn't see Olive up here though. He mighta been, I just didn't see 'im. I arrived late Sunday night and slept purty late Monday morning."

"Where is Cattle Kate's place?"

The old sodbuster chuckled and said, "You can't miss it. The house is made out of pressed pink bricks. She calls it the 'Old Homestead'. You won't get nothin' outa Kate. She protects her guests almost as much as she protects her girls. She is one tough woman."

"By the way, the name's Merle Miller, he said sticking out a big callused hand. What's yours?"

"Esben, but most folks call me Yellow Hair."

"Ya, I can see why. Nice meetin' you, Yellow Hair. Might see ya' tomorrow at the hangin'."

"You might, Merle. Nice meetin' you as well."

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Yellow Hair had witnessed a couple of hangings and neither was very pretty. The last hanging he witnessed was Jack Ryan's, a small rancher from Natwick, accused of rustling cattle from the VR Ranch along Deer Creek. The rope was too short, breaking Ryan's neck and he strangled to death. The other one he was with Grey Wolf and they saw the hanging of a robber by the name of George "Big Nose" Curry, a member of a gang of road agents and horse thieves called the Wild Bunch out of the Hole in the Wall by Chugwater. At his hanging, Big Nose struggled so hard at the end of the rope his ears were torn off.

Curry rode with the likes of Frank McKinney, Joe Manse, Jack Campbell and Dutch Burrs, all of them known throughout Wyoming and Montana. They robbed pay wagons and stages from Rattlesnake Canyon clear up to Carbon County Montana. Dutch Burrs was the first to be caught. He was dragged off a train and hanged from a telegraph pole just outside of Carbon.

As Yellow Hair walked away he was thinking that Isom would have to visit the fort to pick up provisions before heading out. He might even be staying around for the hanging tomorrow. If he was here, he probably wasn't alone and Yellow Hair would have to plan where and when to kill him where no one would be around. He surely couldn't do it in the fort.

Chapter 21

A Sunny Day for A Hanging At Fort Laramie Wyoming 1875

The next day he awoke to the bright yellow rays of sun, knifing through the window piercing his eyes. He went down for breakfast and walked around the fort watching the soldiers clean the grounds and repair their gear. The civilians were beginning to arrive for the hanging that started at noon. He decided He would attend thinking that if Olive were still around he would be there.

Yellow Hair paid his quarter and watched as the hangman, an old half-breed named Crow Dog, who used to scout for the Calvary before being shot in his left eye by a Shoshone arrow, prepare the noose and spring the trap door a couple of times making sure everything was working. At exactly high noon, Sheriff Tom Garcia and his deputy led Jim Averell out of the jail and up the stairs of the scaffold. Garcia was in his mid thirties and had been sheriff for the past five years. His dark eyes looked over the crowd as he led the prisoner to the gallows. Averell's hands were secured behind his back. A sack was placed over his head and the noose draped around his neck. A preacher was up there with him and gave him his last rights. When the preacher finished, he walked down the steps and Crow Dog tightened the noose and stepped over to the trap door lever, looking at Sheriff Garcia. Sheriff Garcia nodded his head and Crow Dog pulled the lever. The trap door swung open and Averell's body shot through the air, his head being torn from his body by the tremendous jerk of the rope. His head remained in the sack and fell into the pit, while his body dropped to the ground, quivering spurting blood on those nearest the scaffold. Women screamed and started to push back into the crowd.

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A doctor stepped out of the crowd and bent over the twitching headless body and pronounced Jim Averell officially dead.

Well, I guess most folks could have figured that, Yellow Hair thought. He stood back and watched hoping to find Olive. As the crowd dispersed, he spotted a man fitting Olive's description, short and overweight, walking toward the livery stable with two other men. One being a pretty big fellow, tanned and broad in the shoulders appearing to be well muscled. He was a man who looked like he made his living doing hard labor. The other was of medium build, well tanned and also a man who was used to hard work. The blacksmith came out of the stable leading three horses, one a big Appaloosa gelding and the other two were big grulla geldings. After the three riders' rode out, Yellow Hair approached the blacksmith asking him the names of the three men who just left.

"The short one's I.P. Olive, the big 'un is Major Walcott, Olive's foreman, and the other is Tom Corlett."

"Do you know where they are heading?"

"Not sure, but I suspect they're headin' back to Olive's Circle L ranch. They've been in Fort Laramie for the past two days."

"Where's the Circle L?" Yellow Hair asked.

"Up river toward Bosler, then head east. You can't miss it. Olive has fenced in most the land so's nobody can get to any water. He's been tryin' to force all the sodbusters out of the area for a couple of years now. Ever since his daddy was kilt and he took over the operation. Not many folks like him much. I hear he is one mean little fella'."

"Thanks, would you mind getting my horse ready? I'm going to pick up my gear. I should be back in about twenty minutes."

"Sure will," replied the blacksmith as Yellow Hair walked toward the barracks.

He now had an idea where they might be heading so he didn't have to hurry to keep them in sight. He could pick up their trail easily once they left the area around Fort Laramie. He climbed on Kodah and headed out toward Bosler to finish what he promised he would do four years ago. He was determined that he would kill Olive by the end of the week and he knew exactly how he would do it.

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Chapter 22

On the way to Bosler Wyoming

Riding out of Fort Laramie with Tom Corlett and Isom Olive, Major Walcott was thinking he had about enough of Isom. He signed on to be his foreman and work his cattle not be his traveling companion. The more he got to know Olive the more he despised the man. As pathetic as I.P. was, he signed on with him because he was one of the few large cattle interests that were actually American owned. Walcott worked for the VR up on Deer Creek for a while. An ornery ol' cuss out of Scotland owned that outfit.

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He then signed on with the Bar C up north, outside of Natrona, which was owned by a British outfit. They got below market value leases on thousands of acres of government land to graze their cattle. They would then fence it off just like Mr. Olive did, blocking the small ranchers from access to the water. With the invention of barbed wire in 1874 many of the large outfits started fencing in their spreads and putting an end to the free range as Walcott had known and loved. The long cattle drives from Texas to Montana were pretty much coming to an end. Pretty soon foreigners would own the whole Wyoming Territory as they paid off elected officials along the way. He got tired of doing the dirty work for them. These folks not only bought local politicians, but judges and sheriff's to bend the rules or look the other way while they forced the small rancher's out of business. He didn't see he had much choice who to work for if he wanted to continue punching cows. He wished he could get himself some land and a few head of cattle and work his own place.

Tom is real smooth with his horses around cattle. When he's roping at brandings, he can side-pass his horse past the calves and skin one off the edge and not disturb the bunch as good as anyone he knew. He could probably count on Tom to work for him, as he didn't care much for Isom either.

The Major let out a grunt. He figured he would never get his own place. He'd probably be forced out of business just like all the rest of the small outfits.

It wasn't long before Walcott found himself dozing off as they were heading north along the Laramie River toward Bosler when Olive pulled up.

"Look up ahead there", Olive said pointing to his left.

Tom and the Major kicked their horses up next to him and saw a large group of riders approaching. Close to fifty, Walcott reckoned.

"Who do you think it is? Do you think they might be Brules?" Olive asked.

Walcott knew Olive was worried that the Indians were going to find him and get their revenge. Olive figured by now they knew he was responsible for the death of those six Indians on the Snake River.

"I doubt it," Walcott replied. "If it was Indians, we wouldn't be seein' 'em."

"It's probably General Cook and his men coming back from Elk Mountain. It looks like they have a prisoner with them. Probably Spotted Owl," Tom said.

Olive looked nervous, "Well, let's keep movin'. No point in just waiting to eat their dust."

Chapter 23

Grizzly Bear near the Laramie River

Yellow Hair had been riding close to an hour and noticed the tracks and horse droppings were getting fresher, indicating he was getting close.

After being stabled for over a day, Kodah wanted to run. "Alright let's move." he squeezed her flanks lightly and she immediately took off at a gallop.

He knew a spot along the Laramie River where he planned to set his ambush. He would take out Olive's two companion's horses and then drive Olive off and pursue him until they reached the outskirts of Bosler where he planned to kill him.

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He had just passed the settlement of Wyoming and figured Bosler to be about another ten miles north. He followed them through a narrow ravine to a shelf of rock overlooking a canyon. In the glow of the morning sun, he watched the river running swiftly below. Olive was keeping pretty close to the river so Yellow Hair figured he could cut them off by heading east toward the Chugwater staying out of sight as he passed them, and then northwest to where the Laramie meandered into some pretty rough terrain which would give him the cover he needed.

He saw the craggy bank of the Laramie ahead and urged his horse up the bank. Dismounting, he removed the .50 caliber Springfield Buffalo Rifle and hobbled Kodah behind some rocks. He walked to a shaded shelf of lava rock and settled in to wait. After about fifteen minutes, he noticed a group of about fifty riders coming from the north.

“This isn’t good,” he thought. Squinting, Esben saw the Calvary standard and knew it was General Cook. They were riding in a column of two with the Indian Scouts about a quarter mile in front. He knew he would have to come up with another plan to get his revenge on Olive.

Yellow Hair decided when the Calvary passed by, he would head back to Fort Laramie. His chance of getting Olive was pretty much gone, at least for now. He couldn’t attempt anything as they got closer to Bosler. People would be coming and going and the chances of someone stumbling across his ambush was heightened. He knew trying to hit him at his ranch would be foolish as he had been told Isom had close to fifteen wranglers working his spread.

As the Calvary approached he noticed Chief Spotted Tail in the middle of the column. Six horses with the bodies of their riders draped across their saddle were at the end of the column. One of them looked to be that of one of their scouts. Spotted Tail didn’t go without a fight.

General Cook brought the column to a halt as they rounded the bend along the Laramie River. Approaching them was Olive, Walcott and Corlett. They stopped for a few minutes talking before heading on toward Bosler. After they passed, the Calvary proceeded toward Fort Laramie.

Yellow Hair waited a couple of hours, giving the Calvary time to get some distance ahead of him before he mounted and rode back to Fort Laramie. He noticed that one of their dead was a scout, not a soldier, so it looked like General Cook would be looking for a new one.

He was interested in scouting for the army and nobody knew the Wyoming Territory better than he did. He figured it would be awhile before Olive would be leaving his ranch. He could wait.

He approached the base of a hill and Kodah came to a halt. Her head high and nostrils flaring with her ears pointing forward she started prancing around. She smelled something. Yellow Hair gently urged her forward, but she stopped after two steps. There was definitely something she was afraid of.

“What is it, Kodah?”

He dallied the reins around the bear pad and pulled the Springfield rifle from its scabbard; laying it across her withers, he turned her to the side putting her perpendicular to the trail so if he had to fire his gun, he wouldn’t have to fire it over her head. He waited. A couple of minutes passed and nothing. Kodah was still prancing around. He

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was expecting a lot from her to trust his judgment when her survival instinct told her to run.

“Easy girl, it’s alright nothing to worry about” he said.

Soon he saw what was scaring her. At first a brown hairy hump, then the enormous head of a male grizzly bear appeared. It looked to be about nine hundred pounds. Grizzlies are the only animals that his Sioux brothers actually feared and he was no different. One of the worst things that can happen out on the trail is to come between a mother grizzly and her cubs or a hungry male. Not only are they big and extremely strong, but also are fast and can run down an unsuspecting horse. When he was in a hunting party with Grey Wolf they encountered a mother grizzly. All the warriors emptied their quivers of arrows until the bear looked like a porcupine before it finally dropped. When a warrior, Little Thunder, walked up to claim his coup, the bear rose up and tore his face off. Yellow Hair wasn’t going to let that happen to him.

He took careful aim and squeezed the trigger. The blast from the rifle caused Kodah to jerk back a step and his shot was wide and struck the grizzly in the shoulder. Emitting a growl, the bear spun around and rolled down the hill toward them.

He reined Kodah around, “Let’s get out of here, girl.” There was no need to kick her as she was as eager to leave as he was.

They took off down the trail for about one hundred yards and then stopped and turned. The bear was getting to his feet.

“Damn, that didn’t stop him.”

He stood at least eight feet tall. Yellow Hair chambered another round and pulled back the hammer and took aim. “Just one more time, Kodah.”

This time his shot struck the bear dead center in his chest throwing him over backwards. Keeping his ground Yellow Hair reloaded his rifle and waited. A couple of minutes passed and the bear still hadn’t moved.

“You stay calm, Kodah,” he said, as he slowly stroked her neck and squeezed her withers.

He dismounted and secured her to a small Ash tree just off the trail and walked slowly toward the grizzly. He kept his rifle leveled on its huge head. When he was about ten feet away, he threw a rock. It bounced off the bear. Nothing.

It looks like he’s dead, he thought.

Slowly he approached, cocking the Springfield, as he got nearer. He bent over and nudged the body with the barrel of the gun. The bear didn’t move. He walked around the body making sure he was dead. It was then the bear lifted his head and with a deafening roar swapped a huge paw at his gun, knocking him off his feet and causing the gun to discharge. Yellow Hair scrambled to his feet and the grizzly met him with a tremendous rush, and they went down together. The stench of rotting flesh coming from the bear’s mouth was overpowering. Yellow Hair opened his mouth and bit the grizzly’s sensitive nose. The bear began to utter a cry of pain while Yellow Hair quickly reached for his knife bringing it up swiftly and stabbed the bear in the heart. The bear rolled over dead.

When he was certain he was dead, he checked his body for any bite marks. He found there was none of significance. He was lucky he was able to kill the bear before he could get his jaws around his head, which is usually the first place grizzlies attack.

Yellow Hair went back to Kodah and grabbed his riata and looped the rear feet of the

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grizzly. He then mounted and wrapped the rope around a limb of an oak tree just north of the trail and moved out leveraging the heavy weight over the limb. He trussed the carcass about three feet off the ground and dismounted, dropping the reins, ground tying Kodah. He secured his riata to the oak tree and went back to the grizzly. He knew he would get some good money from this hide if he skinned it properly.

Pulling out his Rezin Bowie knife again, he started cutting. The knife had an S guard at the back of the blade protecting his hand from being cut while in use. He used its Spanish Notch to strip the bear's sinew that he would save for his bow.

Starting just below the anus, he cut down to the head, continuing his cut through the chest to the neck, stopping at the corners of the mouth. He then removed the paw pads.

From the paws, he cut down to the elbow then across to the chest incision, making sure each cut met at the same place by the main incision. Then he moved to the hind legs, starting at the heel and cutting down the center of the leg to about two inches above the anus.

At the rear paws, he began to remove the skin from the body. He had started a fire and threw some stones in and went to the river to get water. He poured the water into the buffalo pouch that was suspended on four sticks over the fire. Grabbing the bears tongue and liver, he placed them in the pouch. He lifted the hot stones and released them into the water cooking the meat.

After eating, he cleaned the hide and put the rest of the bear meat in it before rolling it and securing it on the back of Kodah with rawhide straps. He mounted up and headed back to Fort Laramie to see about working as a scout for General Cook.

Chapter 24

The Scout

“General Cook, my name is Esben Hjerstedt, they call me Yellow Hair. I was told you were looking for a scout and I would like to be considered for the job. I have lived in the Wyoming Territory for over ten years and I know it as well as any white man.”

“Aren't you the boy raised by the Lakota? We met outside of Bosler a few years ago. You were with your mother and Grey Wolf. I am sorry about what happened to them.

“Thank you, General Cook.”

“Are you doing alright?”

“I'm fine general, thank you. “

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"I'm glad to hear that, the General replied. We have asked the U.S. Marshalls Office to find out who was behind that. The Earp brothers have been around asking questions. Hopefully they will be able to find out who was responsible and bring them to justice. Yellow Hair merely nodded his head knowing he had his own justice planned for those responsible and that he had already meted out that justice to two of them. He didn't hold much hope for justice to be shown when it was Sioux who were killed by Wasichus. If it were the other way around, they would have already arrested the Sioux they thought were responsible.

"Are you still in need of a scout?" He asked.

"I am," the General responded. "The job usually lasts eight weeks but we have two wagon trains scheduled to come through here so we have extended it another four weeks to twelve. We are sending a patrol out to lead the first wagon train across the Wyoming Territory in a few days. The patrol will be meeting up with the wagons in the Black Hills when they cross over from the South Dakota Territory. Think you would be interested?"

"Yes sir," he replied.

"Just so you know in 1866, Congress authorized us to use some Indians as well as civilians as scouts. We hire civilians as contractors and call them scouts. The Indians we enlist in the military so we can keep better control over them and they are called scouts as well." the General said.

Yellow Hair knew a Shoshone named Sgt. Crow Heart who carried the rank of sergeant after serving four tours. Crow Heart was proud of that rank. Yellow Hair had no interest in serving more than the twelve weeks and since he wasn't a blooded Indian, he wasn't eligible for rank or a pension.

"We pay five dollars a day in United States Greenbacks plus expenses. Do you know what greenbacks are Esben?"

"Yes sir," he replied

Corporal Reilly will take you to the paymaster who will sign you up."

Yellow Hair turned and followed the corporal out the door to fill out the paperwork. Five dollars a day was more money than he had ever made, so he signed on for the twelve weeks.

He was kept busy scouting for the army out of Fort Laramie. He led one wagon train across the Wyoming Territory and was heading to the Black Hills to meet up with the last one before his contract expired. It had been close to ten weeks since he had seen Isom Prentice Olive. He was on his mind every day. He was getting anxious to find him and kill him. The vow he made on his mother's grave to avenge Grey Wolf's and her death was one he would keep. This drive was keeping him going.

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Chapter 25

You Can't Count On The Wasichus To Help

On his way to meet the army patrol and the next wagon train entering the Wyoming Territory, Yellow Hair decided to head toward the Brule Reservation to see his friend Little Elk. He stopped on the outskirts of Bosler at a roadside inn and hobbled Kodah in a stand of trees. He pulled down his water bag and poured water into a deerskin pouch and secured it around her muzzle. She drank greedily and he felt bad for not thinking of her needs sooner. He opened the feed sack and laid out some grain on the ground. Taking a sip of water, he removed the deerskin pouch from Kodah's muzzle and walked toward the roadside inn. The street in front was muddy from the recent rain and the wood on the

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front porch was rotting so he had to watch where he stepped as he went in to get something to eat and drink before riding the final ten miles.

It was dark inside and it took awhile for his eyes to adjust. He saw a small table that was unoccupied near the bar. There were four men standing around and another eight spread out at different tables. As he sat down a large woman with a huge bosom walked over and asked him, "Whatcha having young man? You hear to eat or just drink?"

She had so much cake applied to her face it was difficult to tell how old she was. It was hard to cover up all the wrinkles she had, but she gave it a good try.

"I need something to eat. What is your special?"

"We got beef tips and that's it. No specials."

"Alright, I'll take that and a cold beer."

"Okay, sweetie, coming up."

As she walked away, he overheard some yelling. A man who appeared to be a local rancher, close to fifty years old, slight of build was telling a big cowboy who was sitting at a table next to the bar that he had every right to be standing there and drinking.

"Now you listen Gavin, I have the right to eat and drink as much as I want wherever I want. I don't really care what you say or think. You ain't even from these parts. Go back and stay on ol' Olive's ranch where you belong."

The cowboy at the table gave him a menacing look. He was a large man, well over six feet tall with thick shoulders and well muscled arms. His hands were huge and the calluses belied a life of physical labor. There wasn't a hair on his head but he did have a scraggly mustache that connected to a beard that covered his chin. A scar ran along his jaw bone and down his neck and disappeared under his shirt by his collarbone. His arms were very long and the sleeves on his shirt were unbuttoned and only reached to the top of his large raw wrist bones. His eyes were pale blue and hollow and were covered by thick bushy eyebrows that connected across the bridge of his nose. The lobes on his ears were big and flattened out as if someone took a rolling pin to them. As he rose, his chair scraped on the beer and sweat stained floor. He had a difficult time straightening his legs and he staggered with his first step before he gained his balance. He limped as he crossed the floor to the bar where he reached out with his hands and grabbed the smaller man's shirt and pulled him close.

The cowboy said: "I thought I told you to stay out of here, you old coot? Don't you listen? I guess I am going to have to make it clear to you that you ain't allowed in this here bar."

Yellow Hair was sitting down the bar not far from where this argument was taking place. He went and stood next to the old gentleman and said, "What's the problem?" The cowboy's foul breath made Yellow Hair turn his head and caused bile to rise from his belly and catch in his throat. This man hadn't seen clean water in weeks.

The cowboy named Gavin looked at him with contempt in his eyes and picked up a strand of his hair. Turning to his friends he said, "Lookie here, we got us a pretty little blond. Where did you get such pretty hair, boy?"

Sometimes you have to do what you feel is right even if you know you aren't going to win and Yellow Hair knew he wouldn't win a fight with this big cowboy who was itching to get in it with that old sod buster.

He pushed the Gavin's hand away. The cowboy turned on him, grabbing his arm in a vise like grip that he was unable to break. Yellow Hair brought his hands up, catching the

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Gavin by surprise and swung his elbow into his throat. Gavin stepped back choking from the assault and Yellow Hair advanced toward him striking his face with his right fist. The cowboy ducked and dropped his head as Yellow Hair's fist connected with the top of his skull.

He heard his knuckle crack and felt the pain shoot up his arm. He was in trouble. Unless someone came to his aid, which it didn't appear to be happening, he would be fighting this big guy with just one hand.

He knew he had to stay away from Gavin as the big cowboy's strength and weight would overpower him, Yellow Hair kept moving to his right while jabbing with his left.

Gavin slapped his hand away and charged. He easily avoided the big man by stepping out of his way. He knew he had to come up with some way to hurt this giant and soon as he couldn't keep doing this dance and jab routine much longer. The cowboy landed a blow to his right shoulder, causing his arm to go numb. Then Gavin sent a right fist to Yellow Hair's cheek, breaking the skin.

Blood poured down his face. As Gavin charged again, Yellow Hair stepped back and to the left causing the cowboy to trip and lose his balance. He swung his leg around, catching the cowboy on the back of his right knee. As his leg buckled, Yellow Hair spun on his left foot and kicked out his right foot again, landing a blow to the small of the Gavin's back. Gasping in pain, the cowboy grabbed his side. His eyes narrowed as he turned toward Yellow Hair, his face getting dark and then he charged. This time Yellow Hair moved too slow and was unable to get out of his way. His Gavin's shoulder hit Yellow Hair's stomach, knocking the wind out of him, driving him into the wall. A picture fell to the floor, shattering the glass.

Gavin grabbed his hair and proceeded to smash his head against the floor. He landed on top of Yellow Hair, causing him to lose consciousness and focus as the cowboy landed blow after blow to Yellow Hair's side and head.

He could feel his eye swell up and close. In desperation, he grabbed Gavin's right arm and put it between his body and his numb arm, turning and pinning it between him and the floor. Gavin kept striking him in the face with his left hand and Yellow Hair could feel his cheek bone break from the force of the blows.

Again, he realized he had to do something quick or he would pass out. He turned again, grabbing the cowboy's pinned arm above the elbow and rolled him over and ending up on top. Scrambling to his feet, Yellow Hair backed up and turned sideways with his right foot forward, minimizing the size of the target he offered.

The cowboy was on his feet quickly and charged forward. Yellow Hair lashed out with his right foot striking the cowboy's jaw. He stumbled against a table.

Yellow Hair turned and found a metal beer stein on the bar and picked it up. Gavin charged again and he met his charge and as their bodies collided his head struck Yellow Hair in the chest sending a blinding white pain through him. As he was falling back, he repeatedly struck the back of the Gavin's skull with the beer stein.

Gavin finally dropped to his knees before falling face first to the floor. He was out cold. Yellow Hair fell back against the wall dropping the stein and slid down to a sitting position. He didn't have the strength to stand any longer. He felt hands reaching under his armpits lifting him to his feet.

His head was pounding and his right hand was swollen to twice its normal size. He still couldn't move his right arm and he was worried he might have suffered serious damage.

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He had to turn his head to see the cowboy's body next to him as his left eye was swollen shut. He got up and staggered before his hand found the table in front of him and used it for support. He hoped Kodah hadn't wandered too far as he really needed her now.

The old sodbuster stepped next to him and said: "I'm sorry, but I ain't much at fightin'. I knowed I shoulda hepped ya', but I guess I ain't got the backbone fer it."

Yellow Hair stared at him before turning and walking away.

He dragged himself to the door and leaned against the wall, getting his bearings as he pulled the door open. The bright sun was like a knife cutting into his good eye, causing his head to throb. He saw his horse grazing about twenty yards away in a stand of Birch Trees. The grass was a dark green and filled with sweet clover which she was thoroughly enjoying. She snorted her displeasure as he took the loose reins and grabbed her mane and swung up on her back. His ribs hurt with every breath he took. He was worried he might have broken a couple of them as he was unable to take a deep breath without an unbearable pain shooting up his side. He squeezed her into a slow walk, heading west toward the Brule Reservation and away from Bosler.

I hope I can meet up with Little Elk before long, he thought to himself. That cowboy hurt me bad.

The sun was hot and unrelenting, beating down on him, baking the blood dry on his face. He could only imagine how badly he looked. He had been riding in the heat for over two hours, fading in and out of consciousness and growing weaker by the minute. He wrapped his lariat around his waist and around his horse's belly and secured it to the bear pad hoping this would keep him from falling.

Another hour passed and he felt helpless as he kept passing into unconsciousness for longer periods of time. The sun was high in the sky following him every step of the way staying directly overhead. The pain was getting too much for him to bear any longer so he untied the lariat from his waist and slid off the horse onto the ground. The last thing he remembered was dreaming of the days he hunted with Grey Wolf and Little Elk and his father near the Grand Tetons. The buffalo grass called gently to him as the wind blew it back and forth in the warm afternoon sun as he drifted into unconsciousness once again.

Chapter 26

Every Dawn As It Comes Is A Holy Event And Everyday Is Holy, For The Light Comes From "WAKAN-TANKA"

When he woke the sun had dropped behind the hills and a slight breeze had picked up. He started to shiver even though it was still quite warm. He tried to sit up but the pain made him cry out and lay back down. Kodah was grazing close by and his cry caused her to lift her head and look in his direction. He was glad she hadn't gone off too far or that someone hadn't come along and taken her. He knew they were about five miles out of

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Bosler so they had about another five to go before they reached the Brule Reservation. He wasn't sure if he was in any condition to make it. There was a stream a couple of miles north that crossed the trail.

If I can get back on Kodah, I can ride to the stream and the waters will help heal my wounds and ease the pain. Then when I reach the reservation I will spend a few days in an onikare, a sweat lodge, until I am well. He thought to himself. He closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Chapter 27

The best place to find a helping hand is at the end of your own arm

He heard the horses approaching and knew they were Indian ponies by the soft sound of their hooves striking the rock. He had been unconscious for about six hours and it was now close to dark.

It was a Brule hunting party of six braves. They made a travois from limbs of trees lining the creek and placed Yellow Hair in it and tied it to Kodah and led him back to the reservation.

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Opening his eyes, Yellow Hair saw someone staring at him. “Mee soon, he said, little brother in Sioux. It was Little Elk, his boyhood friend. What happened to you? You don’t look well.”

“I don’t feel well either. Some big cowboy and I got into it at that roadside inn just outside of Bosler. I didn’t think I was going to make it.”

Little Elk just grunted as his wife, Small Dove, lifted Yellow Hair’s head and put a bowl to his lips.

“Here, drink this.” It was warm and tasted bitter.

“This will make you sleep,” she said.

He didn’t wake until the next day.

He sat up and immediately felt a dull pain beating on the left side of his head. Gingerly he touched his cheekbone under his left eye and felt a poultice. It was cool and moist.

Small Dove must have just applied it.

He pushed back the animal skins that covered him and stood up, staggering to the teepee’s opening he looked out. Little children were playing and dogs barking as women were preparing food and washing clothes. A couple of old men were walking around and that was it. The young warriors must be out hunting he thought

Small Dove saw him as she walked up from the stream carrying water and wondered what he was doing up.

He waved and stepped out into the day’s sun. It was mid morning and not too hot yet, but he could tell it was going to be very warm again.

As she got near, Small Dove said, “Manishnee, you should not walk. Little Elk told me to make sure you rested.

Please go, stay down.”

“How long have I been here, Small Dove,” he asked.

“Two days.”

“I have to leave. Do you know where Kodah is?”

“In the corral with the other ponies, she said, pointing north of the village. The young boys are watching them.”

“Wado, thank you.” He turned and walked back in the tipi and gathered his belongings.

“Little Elk will not be happy,” Small Dove said as she turned to her work.

“Tell him I will see him when I get back. I have to go to the Black Hills. I am scouting for the Long Knives.

Small Dove scowled and nodded her head. Even though the Brule signed a treaty with the white man, they were not happy with so many coming onto what was once their land.

He walked to the corral to get Kodah and with every step he took he felt a sharp pain in his left side where that cowboy had hit him.

He led Kodah back to where Small Dove was squatting preparing food for the night’s meal.

“Donagohvi, let us see each other soon,” he said.

“Donagohvi,” she said without looking up.

He mounted Kodah and turned and headed back north. As he looked back, he saw Small Dove still preparing her meal. She still hadn’t looked up.

Wyoming Territory

Chapter 28

The Wagon Train Summer 1875

He joined up with the wagon train just outside of Oshoto along the Little Missouri River. They had twelve Conestoga's, which had long deep beds so that the contents could not spill out on hills. They were covered with hooped canvas coverings to keep the sun and rain off the women and children and their belongings.

They were fortunate as the weather was beautiful. It was early summer and they traveled down to the settlement of Gillette and then across to Buffalo before crossing the Eastern Grand Teton. After they passed through Ten Sheep and crossed the Big Horn River and

Wyoming Territory

entered the Big Horn Basin approaching Cody, the skies opened up. They were caught in one of the heaviest downpours the area had in years. The Sheridan River was swelling and spilling over its banks.

The pain from the beating Yellow Hair took had pretty much left him. He sat on Kodah in the rain, watching the debris racing down the river, huge torn up trees and dead branches among the jagged rocks when Lt. Steckel pulled up next to him.

“I worry about crossing this river as it is very high and the current strong. Not only do we risk losing a wagon, but also some people whose safety we are responsible for,” he said.

Lt. William Steckel was in command. He was a few years older than Yellow Hair and a recent graduate of West Point. They got along well on the last trip and he trusted the decisions Yellow Hair made and he appreciated the confidence the Lieutenant showed in him.

“We could wait a couple of days and let the water recede some before crossing.” he replied.

“We could, but I have to get back to Fort Laramie by the first week in July to pick up a fresh remuda of horses and take them to Fort Kearney. I can’t wait here much longer or I won’t make it back in time,” Steckel said.

“I think we will unhitch the oxen and swim them across first and then float the wagons by themselves, he said, turning to the soldiers behind him.

Corporal Moon found a passable ford near the mouth of the Sheridan.”

Lt. Steckel turned his horse and rode back to the column of soldiers, waiting for the command that would tell them what to do next.

“We are gonna cross. Be prepared for close to fifty yards of swimming water in crossing men. So get ready to put up your boots. Don’t let the oxen drink anything all day. I want them to be thirsty when they reach the water. It will make it easier to drive them into the river.”

That night they bedded the oxen down in some grass about three miles from the river. The next morning it was still raining when they hitched the oxen to the wagons and headed to the mouth of the river. They unhitched the oxen when they got there and Sergeant Milliken yelled. “Those of you who are leading the herd of oxen into the water remove your boots and clothing and give ‘em to the riders in the rear.”

The approach to the river was gradual. The other side had a narrow pass with a steep incline. Since Kodah was a strong swimmer, Yellow Hair was the lead man on the downside of the river. With the Calvary’s saddle horses in the lead, they started to cross the Sheridan River. Kodah swam with the freedom and ease that he knew she would and several times the saddle horses swam so near he could reach out and touch their backs. Yellow Hair noticed Corporal Kujawski crossing the Sheridan about ten yards back when his mount, a big bay gelding, got cramps and sank.

“Help me, I can’t swim. I’m sinking,” Kujawski cried. He went down with his horse.

A moment later, he surfaced and Lt. Steckel caught him by the shirt, “Grab a hold of my horse’s tail Corporal and I’ll pull you across.”

They never did see the horse again.

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“Most of these horses are good swimmers but it’s hard for them oxen. They have a tendency to get congested as they emerge from the water and if we let that happen, some of them will drown,” Sergeant Milliken yelled.

“Come on keep ‘em movin’ they’re beginning to back up. Watch that one on the downstream side she looks like she’s about to go under.” Lt. Steckel yelled.

A soldier went down and righted that one and they had no problem with the rest.

Once they got the oxen strung out on the far side of the Sheridan, they turned their attention to floating the twelve wagons across.

“Let’s get them wagons tied together. Run ropes from the back to the front on both sides. Bring the ropes through the wheels and secure the tongues of the wagons.” Milliken screamed over the roar of the raging river.

They forded the river on their horses and once on the other side, they changed to the biggest and strongest horses out of the remuda and dallied their ropes around the pommel of their saddles. The remaining men on the other side of the river pushed the wagons while the horses that crossed the river were pulling them.

Once the wagons were in the river, Lt. Steckel yelled out to the riders “Keep the ropes taut, don’t let the wagons drift too far down stream or they will miss the passage on the other side.”

They got all of the wagons pulled across with no problems but on the last wagon one of the ropes broke loose, causing it to spin. It struck a large rock, breaking off its tongue and tipping it onto its side in the middle of the river.

It was the Dubois’ wagon. Pierre Dubois had died on the way out here and Laura Dubois and her young son, Marcel, were trying to make it on their own. All its contents and both the Dubois were thrown into the current and were being swept downstream. Yellow Hair mounted Kodah and entered the river. He turned Kodah so they would be swimming with the current and it wasn’t long before he overtook Marcel and Laura Dubois. The current was strong and the noise level was high as he reached down and yelled to the young boy “Grab my hand Marcel and swing up onto my horse. Next he came upon Laura who was clutching to a tree trunk. “Hang onto the mane” he told the boy as he jumped into the water. He put his arms around Laura Dubois’ waist and grabbed onto Kodah’s tail.

Unfortunately, Kodah was heading for the wrong side of the river and there was no way he could change her direction. They exited the river about a mile downstream from where the rest of the wagon train had crossed.

They sat down on the bank of the river.

“I need to rest and catch my breath before we ride back and join up with the wagon train.” he said.

“Thank you,” Laura gasped between breaths. “I was so afraid I would lose my boy. I can’t thank you enough.”

“We have lost everything we own. I don’t know what we will do.”

“You are going to make it, Mrs. Dubois. It will be alright. The main thing is that you and Marcel are alive and safe. There are some nice folks you are traveling with and they will make sure you are taken care of.”

He put the Dubois’ on Kodah’s back and led her upstream to where they had forded the river.

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Once there, Lt. Steckel sent over Sergeant Milliken and Private Bennett on strong horses to get the Laura and Marcel and take them across the river to join the rest of the wagon train.

“Put them on our mounts,” Sergeant Milliken said. “We’ll grab the tails and let them free swim across.”

When it was all over Yellow Hair sat on Kodah with Lt. Steckel and Sergeant Milliken on each side of him, looking back at the river as it angrily fought its way south.

“Well, Lt. Steckel said, we lost one wagon, an ox and a saddle horse. But all of the people are safe. I think we are lucky that is all we lost. That’s one hell of a river. Let’s go and get them to the Grand Tetons before another front moves in.” He turned his horse around and rode up the embankment to lead the wagon train on the last leg of its journey through the Wyoming Territory.

At least you will make it back in time to pick up your remuda of horses, Yellow Hair thought to himself as he kicked Kodah into a trot and followed Sergeant Milliken behind the lieutenant toward the wagons which were being hooked up to the oxen and being readied to move out.

Chapter 29

The Cattle Drive September 1875

Frank Walcott slipped on his boots and grabbed his flannel shirt off the cot buttoning it as he walked to the door. He grabbed his oiled canvas duster, quirt and hat before warily stepping into the cold Wyoming morning. The wind slapped his duster against his legs

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and whipped him in his face, freezing the first breath he sucked into his lungs. It seemed, as he got older, the harder it was to get going in the morning. It was 4:00 a.m. and the sun wouldn't be showing its face for another three hours. He had to wake Gabby Harkins, the cook and then Tom Corlett who would get the rest of the boys ready. Today would be the first day of what was going to be a two month long cattle drive to Bozeman, Montana. Frank had been foreman of the Circle L going on five years now and he never tired of the cattle drives. He loved being a drover. When things were going well it was a relaxing job, riding your horse at an easy pace alongside a couple of thousand braying cattle. And the nights didn't get any better than when you were on the trail, with the soft nickering of the remuda and a full moon with thousands of stars lighting up the clear night sky and the smell of smoke and the crackle of wood burning in a campfire. But when things went wrong, and they did, the danger of thousands of stampeding cattle was real. Anything could set them off, the crack of thunder, some stray old buffalo bulls, anything. Frank and the boys would be taking two thousand head of beef to the Black Foot Indian Reservation in Montana to fulfill a government contract that I. P. Olive had signed with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Walcott, Ben Jones, Bill Walker, Sam Clover and the Champion brothers, Nick and Ray, went out and captured one hundred mustangs just south of Medicine Bow last month. They brought them all back to the Circle L and saddle broke 'em. They would be part of the remuda they would take with them today. He would let the boys draw to see who would get first pick on the horses and divide 'em up accordingly. There were some mighty good ones in there. He liked a stout bay stallion that he pulled out for himself after they branded 'em with a Circle L. He named him Takoda, a Sioux name meaning strong of heart. With Takoda and his grulla gelding, named Bandit, he had himself two strong horses for the drive. He would pick out more today along with the rest of the boys.

Yesterday, Gabby and Tom took the wagon into Bosler and laid in supplies for two months. They had six big oxen they would be taking along to pull the wagon. He couldn't think of anything he had forgotten. He had been doing this for so long it had become second nature to him.

Tom was already up and dressed. He had his bedroll in one hand and his saddle and tack in the other and was heading to the corral to get Diego, his big Appaloosa gelding. Frank figured Diego and Bandit were two of the best cattle horses this side of the Missouri River.

It wasn't long before all the boys were saddled and ready. They would round up the herd and drive them to Bozeman covering between fifteen to twenty miles a day. Walcott, starting the drive on Takoda, rode to the main house to let Olive know they were ready to leave.

"We're ready boss."

"Here's your letter of credit," Olive replied.

The letter of credit was to purchase goods in the towns they would be passing on their way to the Black Foot Reservation.

Walcott had Tom, Ben Jones and Bill Walker riding point with Nick and Ray Champion as outriders on one side. Sam Clover and D.E. "The Texas Kid" Brooke would be the outriders on the other. Ken Blades, Rory Lovell, and Jasper McCabe were the drivers. He had Bill Franklin stay with Gabby and the chuck wagon while the remuda, numbering one hundred and forty, ten for each man, were under John Kelly and a new

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man, a big Norwegian named Leslie “Little Pea” Frinak who actually appeared to be afraid of the horses. Walcott had to chuckle to himself wondering how Frinak would fare on the trail and just where he got that nickname Little Pea.

When they got to Bozeman, he planned to cut The Texas Kid loose. What he did to that little Mexican boy was inexcusable, beating him until he was near death and then just leaving him in the barn to die. Maybe he should just shoot him, he thought. He just might.

After they gathered the herd, Tom Corlett yelled out “OK boys, let’s get ‘em strung out and then bring them in a big circle.”

A government agent, Ed Cauley and his assistant, Lou Crowson, rode out for a count. Tom told Ken Blades, Jasper McCabe, Rory Lovell and Sam Clover to tie a tally string to their saddles and get a count. Two went to one side and went in one direction and the other two went to the opposite side and direction of the herd. They each took a government agent along with them as they took a count.

After they circled the herd Tom called out, “Whatcha count Kenny?”

“I come up with two thousand one hundred and twenty,” Kenny bellowed.

“How ‘bout you Rory?”

“I got two thousand one hundred and fifty,” Rory replied.

“That’s what I come with too,” called Sam Clover

“Jasper?” Tom asked.

“I counted two thousand one hundred and sixty two,” Jasper said.

Since two of the counters agreed on a number, two thousand one hundred and fifty head, that is the count they agreed on. Ed Cauley brought out the papers and Frank and Olive signed it and they were on their way.

Chapter 30

The Sheriff October 1876

“Hey, Sheriff, ain’t them two Virgil and Morgan Earp?” Clive Andrews yelled over his shoulder. He was standing on the steps in front of the Sheriff’s office.

Wyoming Territory

Sheriff Bill Hayden was a small wiry man, pushing fifty years old. He wore a full beard because he thought it made him look a little more menacing than he did without it. He had been sheriff of Laramie County for over ten years now and was getting the itch to quit and settle down on his small ranch situated East of Bosler. During this time, he had very little trouble in town; the usual drunks and wise guys, but nothing serious to where he had to draw his gun. Not that he was averse to doing so, just that the opportunity never showed itself. He took pride in the fact he could reason with most people before it came down to that. He hired Clive as his deputy close to six months ago and the boy was still excited at the prospect of being a lawman. He was a big raw boned young man with long black hair, wide set brown eyes and a full mustache and rounded cheeks. He had come to Bosler about seven months ago and appeared to be bright enough to handle the job as deputy. He didn't hire him right away, but Clive kept returning daily to ask about the job. Finally, Sheriff Hayden gave in and hired him to clean the jail and deliver meals to drunks who were sleeping off their hangovers before being released and sent back to punching cattle. Clive had been after Hayden to let him start patrolling the town at night to make sure the cowboys who came to drink and carry on with the ladies at the Saloon behaved themselves. Hayden didn't think Andrews was ready yet. Clive wanted to confront drunks instead of trying to calm them down first before arresting them. That was one sure way to get somebody shot and Andrews could very well be the one to catch some lead.

Sheriff Hayden joined Clive on the steps and watched the two lone riders slowly ride down the middle of the street of Bosler. They were wearing wide brimmed black hats and long white dusters that flowed down the side of their horses and covered their boots. Their tin stars, pinned to their chest, reflected in the afternoon sun.

"Howdy Sheriff, name's Virgil Earp and this here is my brother Morgan, we are Deputy Marshall's out of Dodge City," the older of the two said as he dismounted in front of the sheriff's office.

"I know who you are," Hayden replied, "What can I do for you?"

"Mind if we go inside and talk?" Virgil asked.

"Not at all, I got some coffee left over from this morning, if you're interested? It'll wash down some of that dust."

"Sounds pretty good to me," Virgil replied.

Morgan spoke up and asked, "You got any whiskey to put in that coffee?"

"Think I might be able to find some." Hayden replied.

Both Virgil and Morgan slapped their hats against their thighs to get the days dust off. They removed their dusters and laid them over their saddles before walking in the sheriff's office. Both Earp brothers were rather small men and were dwarfed by Clive Andrews as they stepped past him on their way into the office. Both men had two Colt .44 caliber Army Officer Pistols cross holstered high under each arm. The handles were made of what looked like white pearl.

"Those are mighty fine looking pistols you boys got there." Clive said.

They ignored him and walked back to Hayden's desk.

Hayden had pulled up two chairs in front of his desk and had already poured the coffee before the Earp's sat down.

Reaching in the desk drawer for his bottle of whiskey and pouring a stiff shot in each cup, Hayden said, "Now what's on your mind, fellas?"

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Both of the Earp's picked up their coffee cup and took a drink while their black eyes looked intently at Sheriff Hayden.

These two ain't nothin' better than hired guns, Hayden thought to himself as he stared back at them. They are mighty spooky lookin'.

It was Virgil who spoke first, "How long you been sheriff here?"

"A little over ten years, why?"

There was complete silence in the room and the two Earp brothers just stared at Hayden. Clive Andrews was leaning against the wall behind Hayden's desk and shifted his weight from one foot to the next. The jingle of his spurs caused Morgan Earp to lift his eyes and stare at him.

Virgil put down his cup and reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper.

"You know this man." he said as he reached across the desk to hand it to Hayden.

Hayden kept his eyes on Virgil as he slowly unfolded the paper.

The sheriff looked down at the paper he held in his hand and surprise registered on his face. It was a Wanted Poster with the picture Isom Prentice Olive on it. He was wanted for the murder of six Brule Indians.

"Yeah, I know him. Who issued this?" He asked.

"Justice of the peace Ester Hobart Morris," Earp replied.

"A woman judge?" Hayden asked incredulously.

"Yep, the first and only woman judge in the territory. Hell, probably the only one in the whole damn country," Virgil replied. "That goddamn suffrage bill passed in 1869 and got them women voting."

"Anyways, you know where he can be found?"

"Yep."

"Well, why don't you and this young feller standing back here, go out and bring him in? The judge will be in Bosler in four weeks along with the U.S. Attorney for the Wyoming Territory. They aim to try him for them murders before the Sioux get more upset then they already are. Things are fixin' to boil over pretty quick if we don't take some action and soon. One of them Brule was a chief. The Agent of Indian Affairs been talking to President Grant about clearing up this problem and it seems like Washington decided this is the fella they want."

"I can do that." Hayden replied.

"You need any help?" It was Morgan Earp who asked.

"Don't reckon I do," Hayden responded.

Both Earp's lifted their cups and drained the remaining liquid and put them back down on the desk and rose to their feet at the same time.

"Good," Virgil said. "See you in four weeks."

They nodded at Clive and turned and walked out of the office.

They didn't thank Sheriff Hayden for the coffee.

When they rode off, Clive looked at Hayden and said, "Them two give me the creeps."

"Yeah me too. Meanness doesn't just happen overnight. Them two have been workin' at it for awhile, I guess."

"I reckon I better head out to the Circle L and give ol' Olive the bad news. He ain't goin' to like this much."

"Want me to ride along?" Clive asked.

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“No, I think it’s better you stay in town and keep an eye on things. We still got some boys hanging out at the Spinning Spur Saloon and I don’t want them shootin’ up the streets. Think you can handle that without drawin’ your gun?”

“Yeah, I’ll keep ‘em in line, don’t worry.”

“I won’t,” Hayden said as he got up and grabbed his hat off the rack standing behind his desk.

“If I leave now I should be back before night fall. Clean out that last cell in the back and keep it empty for Isom.”

“You got it boss.” Clive said as Hayden walked out into the afternoon sun.

This wasn’t going to be pleasant, he thought. Isom felt like Hayden owed him for his job. He had to admit, he got folks to back him whenever he needed help, but that didn’t mean Isom could break the law, even if all he did was shoot some Indians.

Hayden wanted to get this over with so the Earp boys would come and go without spending too much time in Bosler. Just something about them two that made Hayden’s skin crawl. He thought it interesting that Clive felt that way as well. Maybe he would make a decent deputy after all.

Chapter 31

Brule Sioux Toll Charged To Travel Over Their Land

Little Elk and Walking Bird had led the hunting party for three days before they came across a small herd of buffalo.

Wyoming Territory

“Quiet”, Little Elk said in a hoarse whisper. He then commanded silence by raising his hand after which he pointed here and there to places where he wanted the braves to go before they charged the herd.

They were able to kill four bulls and a cow. They had skinned the hides and sliced the meat into one inch wide and one half-inch thick strips. They cut away all the fat and added pemmican and peppers and hung the strips of meat from poles to dry in the sun. They had enough to feed their tribe for the next few months.

They broke camp and loaded the hides and jerky on the horse travois’ and headed back to the reservation. There was a time when all they would have to do was step outside their teepees and they would find thousands of buffalo grazing in the prairie. Since the arrival of the white man the buffalo had disappeared. Most of what remained had been run off the prairie and higher in the mountains.

Little Elk had learned that the white man had killed over thirty-one million buffalo over the past thirteen years. They received eight dollars for a ton of buffalo bones. He was told it took one hundred carcasses to make a ton. He could recall as a young boy riding with his father the prairie being black from horizon to horizon with buffalo. Once they rode for three consecutive days through one continuous herd. He and Walking Bird had witnessed the white man shooting hundreds of buffalo from their big Iron Horse that ran on iron paths that cut across the Sioux land. They left the buffalo to rot in the hot day sun. He and Walking Bird rode down and cut the hides and stripped the meat from as many as they could for a whole day before fatigue over took them. They had to leave the rest to the buzzards

As they rode up the arroyo, they saw a wagon train approaching about one quarter mile to the east. Little Elk and the rest of the hunting party came to a stop to watch them approach. There was a Calvary attachment of eighty riding in columns of four leading about twelve wagons. They counted fifteen outriders as well. The white man hired many Crow Indians as scouts, but this attachment had a white man with long yellow hair. Little Elk knew that could only be his friend, Yellow Hair, who told him that he hired on to scout for the Calvary.

He turned to Walking Bird and said, “That’s Yellow Hair. I will go speak with him.”

Walking Bird nodded.

“Stay here”, Little Elk commanded. He urged his pony down the hill toward the approaching wagon train.

Little Elk thought of the many times he hunted with Yellow Hair and knew he was one of a few white men able to hunt the buffalo riding without a saddle and bridle. His horse, the buckskin mare, was one of the best hunting ponies in the Lakota nation. She was quick and fast and would bring Yellow Hair so close to the buffalo that he could reach out and touch them with his rifle. Little Elk and Yellow Hair had many contests to see who would be the first to bring down a buffalo bull in a hunt. Yellow Hair usually won due to his pony’s knowledge and fearlessness around the buffalo.

Wyoming Territory

Chapter 32

Friendship doubles our joy and divides our grief

He saw a lone Indian approaching which was very unusual.

Wyoming Territory

It wasn't long before he recognized him as his friend, Little Elk. Yellow Hair turned to Lt. Steckel and said, "I know this man. He is a friend. Let me ride out to meet him and see what he wants."

"Alright, but we will be watching him closely, Esben." Lt. Steckel had started calling him Esben. He said he felt funny calling him Yellow Hair, as that is General George Custer, his commander's nick name, given to him by the Sioux.

Esben didn't mind being called by his Christian name.

He rode out to meet Little Elk and they grasped forearms in the Brule and Lakota's way of greeting close friends. "How have you been, Little Elk?"

"I have been well. I see you have healed well."

"Small Dove has strong medicine."

"Ai. How do you like working for the mila hanska Yellow Hair?"

He didn't answer Little Elk's question. "I know the land they are traveling through as well as most white men. The Crow Scouts don't care much for me."

"The Crow are ishta, girls. They have no backbone. They attack our women and children in our village whenever they know our warriors are away. They are weak."

"What are you doing out here? I see your warriors up on that hill. Is that Walking Bird and Spirit Talker with you?"

"Yes. We have been hunting buffalo. The buffalo are hard to find since the Wasichus has come to our land. They kill all they can and leave the meat rotting in the sun. Soon my people will starve to death. The Wasichus will come and drive the remainder of the buffalo up into the mountains and then they will drive us there as well.

"I know, Little Elk, we will never see the prairie like it was. I remember the land being black with buffalo and wild ponies. Now there are few. Ranchers are putting up fences keeping them from getting to the water and free grass. Our ponies, the proud drinkers of freedom are soon to be gone. The only way they can survive is to leave and find a new home."

"The same for my people," Little Elk said. "The Washichus has taken our best land and pushed us further away as well. The land they give us cannot sustain the life of the deer, elk or buffalo. We have to travel far to find our food and it is getting harder and harder every year."

Yellow Hair just nodded his head in agreement.

They sat quietly on their mounts for a moment, watching the activity down by the wagons as people prepared to camp for the night.

"When the anpetu wi, sun, drops behind the horizon, I will break away from the wagon train and we can camp here for the night. We have much to discuss."

"Alright, meet me by that mesa. I will tell Walking Bird and the others that I will join them after one sleep."

With that, Little Elk turned and kicked his pony into a lope heading back to where he came.

Yellow Hair looked forward to talking to Little Elk again. They used to spend hours playing as kids and telling tales to each other over the campfires at night. Their fathers were close friends and their families spent much time together.

He pulled Kodah up next to Lt. Steckel. "That is Little Elk, a Brule. He and a hunting party are heading back to the reservation and I asked him to join me for the night and he agreed. I will camp with him over by that mesa and catch up with you in the morning. I

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will ask him to make sure the Sioux let us pass. They usually ask for horses or some cows from the people passing through. I'll negotiate a fair price so we won't encounter any trouble later. I have known Little Elk a long time and he is a good man."

"Okay, but what about the others with him? Will they be in agreement, the Lieutenant asked?"

"They will be. Little Elk is their leader and he is telling them to go back and that he will join them tomorrow."

"Good, we'll see you tomorrow then."

The Lieutenant turned his horse and waved the column of Calvary toward the circled wagons.

Yellow Hair waited until they were a good quarter of a mile away before he headed to the mesa to meet with Little Elk.

Chapter 33

The Meeting of Kodahs (Friends)

Wyoming Territory

The flames from the campfire snapped and crackled as the mesquite logs burned. Little Elk and Esben sat close, wrapped in buffalo robes, to keep the cold night away. They finished chewing on lengths of buffalo intestines that Little Elk had just stripped. They finished a meal of raw brains and liver smeared with juices of gall bladder and raw marrow raked from the broken bones of the buffalo and were smoking kinnik-kinnik, which is made from the inner bark of the red willow. The Sioux use it as a substitute for tobacco. It has an aromatic and very pungent flavor. It is prepared for smoking by being scraped in thin curly flakes from the slender saplings, and crisped before the fire, after which it is rubbed between the hands into a form resembling leaf-tobacco, and stored in skin bags for use. It has a highly narcotic effect on those not habituated to its use, and produces a heaviness sometimes approaching stupefaction. It is for this reason Esben rarely smoked it. This night he did.

Looking toward the sky, Yellow Hair said, "It appears Thunderbird, God of Rain, will soon bring us more rain. We have had a difficult time getting the wagons across some of the rivers. They are gorged with the waters and in many cases, overflowing their banks."

Little Elk grunted, inhaling deeply the smoke from the kinnik-kinnik, "Our ponies have no trouble with the rivers" he replied.

They were quiet for awhile before Little Elk turned and inquired about Grey Wolf and his mother's murder and what had been done to avenge their death.

"I have killed Turk Turner, my mother's killer and three others. I will find Isom Prentice Olive, who killed Grey Wolf, and I will kill him as well," Yellow Hair replied .

"This Olive is a monster and must die. I owe this to Grey Wolf. It is what I have to do."

"Word reaches our people that he is the one who shot my father. I want to be with you when you find this person. The Wasichus won't do anything because he killed Sioux, not white people", Little Elk said.

"I don't think that is a good idea. They will come after all of the Sioux if they know a Sioux killed a white man. If I am alone and they catch me, there is no one else they can hurt.

"Would I deny you?" Little Elk asked. "You must let me ride with you. It is what's right. When you return, come for me. I will be ready."

He knew it was pointless to argue with Little Elk as his mind was made up.

"Ok, my friend, I will welcome your company and help. It has been a long time since we rode together."

"Is that stallion, Thunder, getting any better at hunting the buffalo, or do you wait in the teepees with the squaws for the warriors to bring you your food?" Yellow Hair asked laughing at the frown on Little Elk's face.

"He has learned quickly, my friend, and can now beat that little pony of yours," Little Elk replied."

"Little Elk, it is more than just the pony, it's the rider and the pony together. My little mare and I can beat you and Thunder anytime and you know it."

"We'll see," he said. "When you come back through we will find the buffalo and you can show me how you and your mare work together. I will watch you try to catch a calf as Thunder and I skin our bull."

"You have been sleeping under the dream catcher for too long and smoking too much kinnik-kinnik, Little Elk. It will not happen. But I look forward to the hunt. Maybe I will

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ride my pony backward like the heyoka who warriors call "foolish ones". I will do this so you and Thunder can see me better as I drop the biggest bull in the herd," Yellow Hair said as he reached for Little Elk's pipe.

Little Elk pushed away his hand and said, "You are a heyoka, you will have to prove your worth to smoke any more from this pipe." He threw off his robe and stood over Yellow Hair in a playful stance. Many times they played this game of wrestling and, with Little Elk's quickness and strength, Yellow Hair had all he could do to keep from eating dirt as Little Elk wrestled him to the ground.

"Ok, Little Elk, you proved your point. I am too tired to fight tonight. You and Thunder are almost as good at hunting the buffalo as my pony and I."

Little Elk laughed and sat down, handing Yellow Hair the pipe as he wrapped himself in his buffalo robe.

He said, "We Sioux seldom used guns in hunting buffalo until we were given breechloaders. By the time Wasichus could load his old muzzleloader, we could ride three hundred yards and shoot twenty arrows. Many of us could kill a buffalo with two arrows. We could do that because of our buffalo horses. They are trained to run beside the buffalo during a hunt. I keep my buffalo horse inside my lodge at night. You should do the same with yours or a Crow may come and steal her."

"Now that I know you are around, I will keep her in my lodge. Thanks for telling me," Yellow Hair said.

With a serious look on his face, Little Elk asked, "What is the wagon train willing to give my people for letting them pass through our land."

"What do you want?"

"Two ponies and four cows. One of the ponies is to be yours", he said with a grin.

"That won't happen", Yellow Hair replied, and Little laughed.

It felt good being with him again and Yellow Hair vowed he would make a point of seeing him more often.

They agreed on the two ponies and four cows and Yellow Hair said, "I will cut them out tomorrow when I get back to the wagon train."

Little Elk grunted his approval.

It wasn't long before both the pipe and the fire were dying out as was the light in their eyes and they settled in for a deep sleep.

The next morning, as the sun struggled to break through the haze rising from the mesa, they set off toward the wagon train. The chill was still hanging in the air and Yellow Hair put his poncho on and Little Elk wore his buffalo robe. It didn't take them long to come up on them. Little Elk rode to a ridge north of the wagons as Esben rode in to talk to Lt. Steckel about the agreement he had made the night before with Little Elk. Lt. Steckel agreed and had one of his men help Yellow Hair cut out the four cows and two horses.

As he led the horses and drove the cows toward the ridge, Little Elk rode to meet him and gave a war whoop and got the cows running.

After they slowed down, Yellow Hair gave the horses to Little Elk; "I will see you by the first frost."

"Egogahan le mita cola - until we meet again my friend" Little Elk replied.

He raised his Sharp's Buffalo Rifle in his right hand and gave another cry and the cows picked up their pace as Yellow Hair watched them head off into the Grand Teton toward the Brule nation.

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He turned and set out at a slow walk back to the wagon train.

Chapter 34

The End of The Trail

Wyoming Territory

“Here’s your pay, Esben. These are United States greenbacks. The government has used these since 1864. Everyone in the Wyoming Territory knows these are backed by our government and are just as good as gold or silver coins. Just let me know if anyone refuses to accept it and we will lock them up.”

“It was a pleasure working with you and hope you decide to return. More wagon trains will be coming out of the Black Hills next spring so don’t go too far if you want to scout for us again,” Lt Steckel said.

Yellow Hair looked at the greenbacks with a quizzical look. They were new to him. He had never seen them before.

“Thanks, lieutenant. I’ll remember that,” he said as he put the greenbacks in the pouch he wore around his waist.

“Good luck to you, sir.”

“Good luck to you as well, Esben.” Lt. Steckel turned and left the room.

Yellow Hair walked over to the general store and picked out provisions and gun powder and was placing them on the counter when he heard the door open behind him. He turned and a very pretty young woman was walking in his direction. As she passed, Esben glanced down at her long auburn hair, hanging down her shoulders and disappearing behind her back. Her dark almond shaped eyes were looking past him as if he didn’t exist. As she came closer, he noticed how flawless and smooth her milky white skin was. He watched her lithe body move beneath the long thin cotton skirt she wore that reached to her ankles, exposing only the tips of her black riding boots.

“Hi Seth,” she said as she reached the counter.

“Would you please fill this order for me? I will be back to pick it up shortly. I have to run an errand.”

“Sure will Miss Turner,” Seth replied.

She turned and looking up at Esben, smiled and sweetly said, “Hello.”

He nodded as she walked to the door to leave. The back of her was as pleasing to the eye as was the front.

After Yellow Hair was able to gather his composure he asked Seth, “Where did she come from?”

“Someplace in Wisconsin,” Seth replied.

“Her father bought the Plunkett place from the bank and moved in last March. They bought a few head of cattle and are trying to make a go of it out there. Might just do it too, if ol’ Olive leaves ‘em be.”

“Well, I hope he does. She sure is pretty. Isom is bad news,” he replied.

“Well, I better be going Seth, if I am going to beat the rain. See you next month.”

Seth nodded as he proceeded to fill Miss Turner’s order and replied. “Take care of yourself, Esben.”

Yellow Hair turned and lifted the sack that was filled with the merchandise he had just purchased with some of his greenbacks and walked out the door. So far the greenbacks are pretty good, he thought.

The bright sun caused him to squint as he stepped off the porch and looked to where his horse was tied. He noticed an altercation taking place close to a buckboard and it was causing Kodah to move around in fear. The voices grew louder and Kodah started to pull back from the hitching post. She kept pulling and turning side to side trying to get as far away as possible from the commotion that was going on around her.

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There were two tough looking wranglers arguing with an older man. Esben grabbed Kodah's reins as he approached, calming her down and overheard one of the men saying "Why don't ya' just pack up and go back where ya' came from ol' man?" He then shoved the man in the chest, causing him to fall on his back onto the ground. The old man reached into the back of the buckboard and brought out a Winchester rifle. One of the wranglers grabbed the barrel and threw the rifle on the ground.

"Is there a problem here?" he asked. The larger of the two wranglers turned toward him and without saying a word swung his right fist. Yellow Hair saw it coming but it was too late. The force from the blow snapped his head to the right. He immediately went down and everything went black.

"Back off, Gavin" the old man had retrieved his rifle and was standing pointing it at the chest of the big man.

"Just turn around and get yourself out of here before you make me do something I don't want to do."

"You'll regret this old man. We'll cross paths again and the next time you won't be so lucky."

"I reckon we will. Just remember, don't pick a fight with an old man. If he is too old to fight, he'll just kill ya."

Coming to, Yellow Hair felt a cool water soaked rag being gently pressed against his jaw. Slowly he opened his eyes and saw the silhouette of a woman bending over him with long hair being blown around her face, captured against the backdrop of the bright orange sun. He tried to focus on her and realized he was gazing into the eyes of the beautiful Miss Turner who he just saw at Seth's mercantile store. He had no idea where he was, only that he was staring up at the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Thank you for helping my father. I am so sorry you got hurt."

At this point he didn't know what she was talking about. He was still trying to figure out where he was and what had happened. When he opened his mouth to reply, a sharp pain shot through his face causing an involuntary groan to escape. He started to sit up but she put her hand on his chest, gently pushing him down, "You took a pretty nasty hit. It's best you just lie here for a moment before you try to move. I really appreciate you helping my father," she said again smiling at his swelling face.

"Who were those men?" he asked.

"They are two of Isom Olive's men. They aren't too happy that we purchased the Plunkett place next to Olive's Circle L Ranch. I heard Mr. Olive wanted to buy it as well but didn't figure on someone buying it out from under him. My father's cousin told us there was a beautiful ranch just outside of Bosler that the bank took over and was looking for a buyer if we were interested.

Now Mr. Olive is trying to run us off. I guess he doesn't know my father. He doesn't back down from anybody.

The right side of your face has swollen up like a watermelon. I hope nothing is broken."

"Me too. I better get up. I have a long ride ahead of me."

His legs buckled as soon as he stood up and he grabbed her arm for support. When he bent to pick up his sack of provisions, he started to fall and she reached out and steadied him by holding his arm. Feeling her close to him like this, made it difficult for him to breathe.

"Thank you, guess I had better sit a spell before riding out."

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“Where are you going?”

“I am supposed to meet a friend at the Brule Reservation tomorrow.”

“I don’t think you are in any shape to ride anywhere, let alone all the way up there. Climb into the back of our buckboard and we can take you part of the way. Our place is north of town. We can make you a nice meal before you head out. That’s the least we can do for you after you helped my father. What is your name?” she asked.

“My Christian name is Esben, but most people call me Yellow Hair.”

“I can see why, she smiled. My name is Christine, Christine Turner.”

Her father approached and bent down to grab one of Esben’s arms.

“Christine, help me get this gentleman into the back of the wagon. My name is Adam Turner and I appreciate what you did. Hard telling what those two were planning on doing. They have been harassing us ever since we moved here. They work for our neighbor, Mr. Olive, who is as unpleasant as a tooth ache.

Is that buckskin mare yours?” he asked.

Without waiting for an answer, he said, “we will tie her to the back. The least we can do is provide you with a good meal and a dry place to stay tonight. We got them black clouds gathering in the east and they are getting closer by the minute. I know your horse will appreciate a dry stall and some fresh alfalfa hay. We just put up a bunch. Our barn is full and we have plenty. I’ll go in and get our supplies and then we can leave.”

Esben was too groggy to protest “Thank you,” he replied.

Kodah looked at him quizzically as he lay stretched out on the feed sacks in the back of the wagon as they headed to the Turner ranch. A laconic smile began to fill his face,

“Christine”, I like that name. He thought it was nice that he would be spending time with her, something he never thought would happen.

“The nagi tanka - Great Spirit is looking down on me, my little pony.”

She tossed her head and gave a snort clearing the dust being kicked up by the wagon from her nostrils. That was the last thing he remembered before blacking out again.

Wyoming Territory

Chapter 35

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched—they must be felt with the heart." - Helen Keller

At the roaring sound of the buffalo bulls angry in their rutting, Christine's horse bolted and took off running. His flaxen mane and tail were soaring in the wind as Christine bounced around in the saddle. It looked like she was going to fall. Yellow Hair had been staying at the Turner's place for the past two days helping Adam repair fencing and put up hay when Christine asked if he would join her for an afternoon ride. He did. It was a beautiful day.

He squeezed Kodah's side urging her into a gallop in the direction Christine and her horse were heading. Bending over with each of his hands along side of Kodah's neck, he kept encouraging her to go faster. Esben knew Kodah could go further than Christine's quarter horse, but he wasn't sure she could catch him in time before Christine lost her balance and fell. He saw a game trail that led through a ravine that ran parallel to the trail they were traveling. It curved around and came out on the trail again about two hundred yards up the mountain. Taking it would cut the distance between them enough where he would end up in front of Christine. At least that is what he hoped. The only problem he wasn't sure how badly rutted out the game trail was. He had no choice. He turned Kodah and started down the ravine coming up the other side. So far everything was working as Esben had planned. He hadn't encountered any serious washouts and was able to keep Kodah at a steady lope. As they broke out around the bend, heading back toward the trail, he noticed a tree about two feet in diameter across the trail ahead of them. He urged Kodah on, hoping she had enough strength left to clear it and keep going. He leaned forward with Kodah's surge and she gracefully lifted off the ground and cleared the log with room to spare. Kodah had spirit and the will to please and she didn't quit. When they landed Esben's weight shifted and he started to fall. Kodah slowed until he could right himself and then she picked up speed again.

Esben reached the trail just as Christine was rounding the bend. He turned Kodah and they loped ahead, keeping Christine and Bucket behind them. He gradually slowed the pace. When Esben felt it was safe, he dropped back and reached out for the big gelding's reins and pulled him along side turning his head to the right. This combined with fatigue caused him to slow to a walk. After they came to a stop, Bucket was still nervous and kept prancing around and tried to pull away. Esben moved Kodah with him instead of fighting him. Soon he tired of turning and came to a stop, snorting to clear his nose. The sweat on both horses glistened in the afternoon sun. Christine's hat had blown off and was on her back held there by its stampede string. Esben turned to face her and he could see the fear in her eyes. She trembled. Her hair was being blown in her face and eyes by the wind.

"Are you okay?" Esben asked.

"I'm fine. Just a little shook up," Christine replied.

"Let's rest for awhile and let your horse calm down. "

"Okay, she replied. Where did you learn to ride like that, Esben?"

"I spent ten years riding and hunting with the Lakota Sioux," he said.

She was quiet for awhile.

They were both sitting on the ground watching their horses lazily graze on the tall buffalo grass when she asked, "How did you end up living with the Sioux?"

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“My mother married a Sioux warrior named Grey Wolf and we lived on the reservation. Grey Wolf taught me many things.”

“What happened to your real father?”

“He died on the ship on our way from Sweden to America. He caught diphtheria along with ten other people. They all died. I was only six years old.”

“I am sorry, Esben. Do you miss him?”

“Yes, even though it happened a long time ago. It’s been twelve years and a lot has happened since then.”

“My mother died from the influenza epidemic in Wisconsin. That was three years ago and I still miss her, Christine replied.

Do you still miss Sweden and your friends?”she inquired.

“I miss my uncle Lars and his wife Candace. Lars was a big strong man. My father and Lars were very close. They both wept when we left. I had one close friend as we lived on a farm outside a village named Starns. There weren’t too many people close by.”

“Where are you from Christine? I mean before Wisconsin.”

“England, and I don’t miss it at all. The King of England is a very pompous person and not very nice. I am glad we left.”

Changing the subject she said, “Kodah is a beautiful horse. I love her light brown color.”

“She is called buckskin because she looks like a deer. The dark line that goes down across her withers, the Lakota call the magic line. You wrap your legs around in front of the line and the horse will go back and when you want the pony to go forward touch your heels behind the line.”

Christine asked, “Where did you get her?”

“I caught her on the prairie near Grass Creek.”

“You caught her?”

Christine was asking a lot of questions and Esben was feeling uneasy talking so much about himself. For some reason it felt natural to talk with her.

“I had trailed her for seven days, staying within her sight so she would see me every time she stopped. I had cut her out from a herd of close to two hundred mestengos. Finally she allowed me to get near her. I didn’t do anything but sit on my horse and let him graze alongside her. She stayed close to him for the next two days while they grazed in the tall buffalo grasses. When the horses entered a river and went up to their knees in the water to drink, I jumped from my horse onto her back. The power of the current in the river kept her from moving quick enough to get out from under me. I then slipped a rope around her neck.”

“Did it take you very long to train her?” Christine asked.

“Not very long,” he replied.

“How did you do it?”

“After I caught her, I dismounted and reached out to touch her with one finger extended and then slowly opened my other fingers to rub her on her forehead. Grey Wolf taught me when approaching a horse to extend only one finger as an open hand is like a cat’s paw striking.”

“I began with only one hand and slowly moved it over every part of her body. It wasn’t long before she let me touch her everywhere. I went slowly as she tried to kick me when I touched her flank. I stayed out of the way until she tired of kicking. Gray Wolf said when touching them do not hurt or frighten them and soon they would trust and serve you.

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When she was convinced I wasn't going to hurt her, I breathed from her nostrils. Her breath was warm and sweet and carried her spirit and I let her breathe in mine." It was then I knew her heart. I pressed my ear against her flanks and heard the sound of her spirit.

"The Lakota call the horse sunka wankan, sacred dog," Esben said.

"Sunka wankan." Christine repeated and closed her eyes and smiled, as if she saw a vision.

"After doing this, I mounted her and let her run. When she tired I dismounted and began to rub the sweat off her with sweet grass. I then fed her some grain I carried and led her back to the water to let her drink. It wasn't long before I had gained her trust and she became my favorite hunting and war pony. From that day on, I not only lived on her but I lived by her and with her. I named her Kodah, which means friend."

"That's beautiful, Esben."

"You said war pony? You fought against the army?" she asked.

"No, against the Crow Indian," he replied.

"They are a long time enemy of the Sioux. They kill the Sioux's women and children whenever they come across them when the Sioux warriors are gone from the village to hunt. The Crow are a bad people."

They sat for awhile, watching the horses graze quietly in front of them.

Christine looked away and said, "Look at those trees, aren't they pretty?"

"They are Cottonwoods, wagichun wagi - talking tree. They are sacred to the Lakota."

"Really, have they talked to you?" Christine replied.

Esben smiled and just nodded his head and Christine gazed off toward the west watching the sun slowly set. She let out a soft sigh and said, "It really is nice out here. I love the sight of the mountains. Have you ever been there? To the mountains I mean?"

"I have, many times. I just returned from scouting for the mila hanskas. We led a wagon train through the Wyoming Territory on its way to California. We took them to the pass in the Grand Tetons and from there they go on their own.

Once they cross over the mountains they are in California. I have never gone that far."

"Maybe someday I can go there, she replied. Right now I am enjoying the beautiful land we bought here in Bosler. I hear the winters are pretty rough. In Wisconsin we had some pretty cold weather but I hear in Wyoming you have cold weather and very high winds, causing the snow to drift, making it very hard for the cattle to live."

"It does get very cold and windy here. I don't know anything about cattle, only that they were not meant to live in this climate. My mother said the English brought them over here because of all the free land the government was giving them to use and raise them on. We came across many frozen carcasses of cattle a few winters past."

"Do you still live with the Sioux?" she asked.

"No, since my mother and Gray Wolf were killed, I had no place to go. I go back once in awhile to see Gray Wolf's sister. I spend some time on the Brule Reservation with my friend Little Elk."

"What was your mother's name?" she asked.

"Corinne."

"What was your mother's Sioux name?" she asked. Her horse was quiet now still grazing along side of Kodah while they sat and watched them.

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Leaning back on his elbows, Esben replied, "They called her Pale Horse, because of her pale skin. She was like most Swedish people while my father was a little darker. I have my father's skin and hair."

After a thoughtful moment, Christine said, "I like that name, Pale Horse. The Sioux give their people beautiful names. How do they come about picking the names for their children?"

There was something about Christine that made him willing to talk to her. He had never been able to do that before with anyone else, not even Little Elk, who was his best friend. "They feel that the Spirits speak to them and give them a sign, which could be an animal running by or a great wind or storm building up while they are communicating with them. It is different than what we do. We name our children in honor of our ancestors while they honor the earth and its creatures."

"What would you name me, Esben?" she softly asked.

"Cikala Anpo Wilapi."

"What does that mean," she asked?

"Little Morning Star."

She stared at Esben for a moment before asking, "Why Little Morning Star?"

"Because you bring promise of a sunny day", he replied.

Her eyes widened and she smiled, "I like that. You are very kind Esben."

She was quiet for awhile before asking him, "Don't the Sioux hate white people? Where did your mother meet Grey Wolf and how did you and your mother end up in Wyoming from Sweden?"

Esben smiled at all the questions she had. "I don't know if they hate white people. I think they are angry with what the white people are doing to the land that has provided for them all their lives. The white man is destroying the Sioux's way of life. My mother worked for a Captain Kramer at Fort Kearney when we first moved here. We came from the Wisconsin Territory just as you. We lived with my father's sister and her family in a place called New Glaurus when my mother received a letter from her cousin, Jon Bjorg, who was working for the Northern Pacific Railroad. He invited us to come live with his family in Wyoming. He traveled with the railroad laying track from the Black Hills through the Wyoming Territory and was gone for a long time and wanted someone to be with his wife Jenna and my little cousin Brita, who was only two years old. We stayed with them until they moved to Montana. They asked us to move with them but by then my mother had met Gray Wolf and decided to stay with him."

"Was that difficult for you? Staying with him I mean instead of moving with your mother's cousin and his family?"

"Not really, Cousin Jon was gone all the time so I didn't know him and Jenna is real quiet and only spoke Swedish. She rarely spoke to me. I think she was sad that we didn't go with them. My mother was the only person who spoke Swedish except for Jon so Jenna had no one to talk to. It was strange moving from a cabin into a teepee. "You lived in a teepee?"

"Yes, where do you think we lived?"

"I don't know, I just thought... well what was that like? Was it cold in the winter?"

"Not really, we kept a fire going all the time and we wrapped up in buffalo robes. It was as warm, if not warmer, than the cabin we stayed in with Jenna and Brita."

Wyoming Territory

“Why do the Sioux live in teepees? Why don’t they build cabins and live in them?” she asked.

“The Sioux are great hunters like the wolf and they follow the buffalo herds so they move all the time. It makes it harder for their enemies to find them.

“Hunters like the wolf? That is a strange thing to say, Esben.”

To the Sioux, the wolf is a wise and powerful animal that has many qualities that are needed for their survival. The Sioux have these qualities as well. The wolves are responsible animals that hunt to provide for their families, just as the Sioux do. Both wolves and Sioux are great hunters because they work with other members, and they know how to use the land to their advantage. A pack of wolves splits up when they are not hunting, but when hunting they come together to form a hunting group. The Sioux do the same thing. That is what we were doing when Gray Wolf and my mother were killed. We were on our way to join a hunting party with other Sioux to hunt the buffalo.”

“How were they killed?” Christine asked as she reached out and touched my forearm.

Esben could see the sadness in her eyes as she looked at him. It was his sadness that she felt. It made him feel protective of her and made him want to open up and tell her what happened and to share the pain and loss that he was carrying.

“We were camping along the Little River. We were on our way to meet with other warriors to join in the spring hunt for buffalo when six Wasichus rode down on our camp. One man, who was very big, threw a rope around Gray Wolf and dragged him behind his horse while three others grabbed my mother and took her into our teepee. I ran while two of them chased me. I was afraid. Gray Wolf was torn to pieces by the dirt and rocks along the river bank as they dragged him through the fire and into the river, They stabbed Gray Wolf in the heart and then scalped him.

The Wasichus’ hung them both from a tree. They came after me but they could not find me. I hid in the hills until the next morning when I went back to our camp. I cut them down and sent them on their journey back to the spirit world. I made a vow then to get revenge on the men who did this to them. “

Christine looked into his eyes and said, “I am so sorry, Esben. I just can’t imagine going through that.”

The concern and sadness in her eyes made him want to reach out to her. To bring her into his arms keep her there forever.

Christine leaned forward and put her hand on Esben’s cheek and brought her lips up to his. It was a soft and tender kiss. Her eyes were smiling at him as he took her in his arms and returned her kiss with an ardor he didn’t know he had. Esben’s head was swimming and it wasn’t from the blows he took from that big cowboy a couple of days before.

Slowly Christine pulled back and said, “We should probably be going. My father might be worried. Can you stay with us for awhile longer?”

“I have to leave tomorrow. I have to finish what I started but I can come back, if you want me to, Cikala Anpo Wilapi.”

“Yes, Esben, I want you to.”

Esben couldn’t help but smile. “We had better go now,” he said as he went to get Kodah and Christine’s horse, who were contentedly grazing on fresh clover.

Wyoming Territory

When he brought back the horses he held onto the bridle as Christine got into her saddle. Smiling, Christine said, "Thank you, Esben."

They mounted up and rode back to the ranch at a leisurely pace. When they got to the cabin, Christine said, "I will tell papa I am going to start supper. You should come in one hour."

"Okay, he replied as he took the horses to the barn and rubbed them down with some old burlap bags that were stacked in the back of a stall.

The next morning Esben got Kodah ready and swung up on her back and looked over at the Adam's house. It was still dark and quiet.

"Good bye Cikala Anpo Wilapi, he said turning and riding out before the sun was up.

Wyoming Territory

Chapter 36

“I Ain’t A Friend Of Custer’s.” Johnny Cash

After Yellow Hair left the Turner ranch, he headed north toward Bosler. Along the way, people he met were talking about the Sioux massacre of General George Custer and two hundred and sixty four of his men at the Little Bighorn River in the Black Hills. The white people were afraid the Sioux and Cheyenne would be coming after the ranchers and slaughter their women and children and steal their livestock. They felt there weren’t enough horse soldiers in the entire Wyoming Territory to protect them.

A week before Custer’s death, General George Crook took about one thousand troops and three hundred Crow and Shoshone, who were some of the greatest horsemen, to fight against fifteen hundred members of the Lakota Sioux, the Throat Cutters and Cheyenne, known as the Finger Choppers, and the Kiowa, known as the Mouse People, at Rosebud Creek. The battle lasted for over six hours. It was the first time that all the tribes united together in such large numbers to fight the white man and it wouldn’t be the last.

A week later, General Custer and six hundred and fifty five men were sent out to locate the villages of the Sioux and Cheyenne involved in the battle at Rosebud Creek. He discovered their encampment on June 25, 1876 and estimated that it contained about ten thousand men, women and children. Unfortunately for Custer, he assumed the numbers were much less.

“Men, it looks like there are about two thousand braves, squaws and children in the encampment. We will attack them today. We don’t need to wait for General Terry to arrive with more troops.

Captain Benteen, you take your men and scout the range of hills about five miles from the village. Major Reno, you attack the village from the upper end of the Little Bighorn and I’ll strike further downstream.”

“In unison Captain Benteen and Major Reno replied.”Yes sir.

Get the men ready to head out sergeant”, they barked.

Sergeant Major Jim Mills issued the command to mount and Major Reno’s company of men was quickly in the saddle lined up in a column boot to boot Captain Benteen’s men weren’t far behind.

Major Reno and his men rode out toward the Little Bighorn River at a fast pace. It didn’t take them long before they discovered there were many more Sioux than the General thought. When they rode along the river, a party of close to seventeen hundred warriors appeared at the top of the hill led by Joseph Brown Thunder, known by the Calvary as Chief American Horse.

He raised his right hand, which was holding a feather laden spear, halting the warriors riding behind him.

Peering down at the soldiers below, Chief American Horse said: “Netdahe”, death to all intruders. With a blood curdling yell, He started down the steep slope, pointing his spear at Major Reno, with all seventeen hundred warriors closely behind him as they attacked the column of soldiers from the north.

The fighting was fierce.

“Damn, there are a helluva lot more injuns out there then the General thought”, Sergeant Major Jim Mills yelled.

Wyoming Territory

Major Reno lost fifteen men before he was able to recover and head back to safety.

“Retreat, he cried! We’ll meet up with Captain Benteen and his men to form a battle line.” They turned and headed back to the river at a full gallop.

Soon Captain Benteen and his men rode up and joined them.

It wasn’t long before Chief American Horse and the warriors tired of trading insults and shots with the mila hanskas and decided to return to their village.

While Reno and Benteen were waiting for General Custer’s return, Custer was continuing his advance along the Little Bighorn when he stopped to rest.

“Men, dismount,” he called out.

While the men were resting from hours of hard travel in the saddle some warriors appeared above the river.

General Custer was leaning back on his elbow talking to his bugler, Joe Madison, when he saw the Sioux and Cheyenne along the ridge.

“Joe, sound “Boots and Saddles” Custer yelled as he quickly stood up, buckling his belt that held his saber and Colt .44 pistol.

At the sound of the bugle, the men ran to their horses slapping on their saddles and, standing at their horse’s head, waiting for the command to mount up.

“Prepare to mount. Mount”, General Custer yelled.

As each trooper got in their saddle they lined up boot to boot and then General Custer yelled, “Advance!” and all two hundred and sixty four of his men set out toward what they thought was a small war party of Sioux but what turned out to be more than four thousand Sioux and Cheyenne warriors.

Custer got his troopers into a gallop before he realized the number of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors was much greater than he imagined.

He knew his only chance was to shoot their horses and make their final stand behind their carcasses and hope General Terry and his men would arrive sooner than they were expected.

“Dismount, shoot your horses and dig in men”, Custer yelled as he brought his pistol up to the forehead of his black gelding and fired two quick rounds.

Private John Tuttle took a bullet through the head and fell by Custer’s side, stone dead. A long range rifle bullet smashed Lieutenant Charles Braden’s thigh bone but he kept on fighting. Another long-range Lakota rifle shot unhorsed Lieutenant Hiram Ketchum. It wasn’t long before the Lakota found him and removed his hair.

Unfortunately for Custer and all two hundred and sixty four of his men, General Terry and his men didn’t arrive in time and all were killed. Their scalps were taken as coup by the warriors to hang from their lodge poles.

A young warrior dismounted and ran over to the body of General George A. Custer. He pulled back his lifeless head and brought his knife down and cut into the skin along his forehead slicing backward removing the general’s scalp. He raised his bloody right hand holding the hair and whooped in delight for all of his friends to see and hear. They would be envious of him for getting this prized coup. This would be something he could brag about and all the warriors would soon know that he had killed the hated Yellow Hair.

The pain in his side caused him to lower his right arm and he looked down at the wound in his right chest. It was bleeding more now than it was before and he was feeling faint.

When he returned to the village he would put kinnik-kinnik and tobacco juice on it to stop the bleeding.

Wyoming Territory

He picked up the horse hair reins attached to his pony's mouth and swung up on his back and trotted over to join the rest of the warriors for their victory ride home.

Wyoming Territory

Chapter 37

Empty Barrels Make The Most Noise

As Esben approached the outskirts of Bosler, he withdrew his Springfield rifle from its scabbard and laid it across Kodah's withers. With all that happened, he wasn't sure how he would be accepted in this town, seeing as he was dressed in Sioux buckskin clothing. He noticed a gathering of close to fifty men on the steps in front of the Spinning Spur Saloon. Most were on foot but there were about a half dozen sitting on horseback listening to someone talk. Esben moved in with the others on horseback. Nobody paid much attention to him as they were listening intently to the little man on the steps give his speech. The speaker was none other than I.P. Olive. His eyes were small, black and shiny, like a snake's, and they were furtively darting around from one person to the next. Sweat was standing out on his forehead and staining the collar of his white shirt as the heat of the morning was beginning to rise. He was wearing a black coat with a black vest and gold watch chain hanging from his pocket. He had two guns strapped high around his waist with the butts facing forward ready for a crossover draw. His ample belly hung below his gun belt impeding any fast draw he might attempt. He would occasionally raise his right arm and point in the direction north of town and people would dutifully turn their heads and follow the direction of his fingers. Olive had two of his men standing around him keeping an eye on the crowd that was gathering.

One of the men was the big cowboy named Gavin that Esben got in a fight with at the roadhouse north of town and the other was much smaller and younger and he looked in Esben's direction and stared at him with his rifle laying across Kodah's withers. Their eyes locked as his hand went down to the butt of his gun and stayed there. Esben immediately recognized him as the Texas Kid. He had a reputation for shooting first and asking questions later. Esben was told he was one of the three cowboys who rode with Olive when he went to kill Little Elk's father and the other Brule Indians. After a time, he looked away.

"It's time we quit this Sunday school policy and let Sheridan recruit regiments of Western Pioneer hunters and scouts and kill every Indian in the Wyoming Territory, cried Olive, pointing and yelling to the crowd.

The best use to make of an Indian is to kill him. It is time that the dawdling, maudlin peace policy was abandoned. The Indian can never be subdued by Quakers, and it is certain that he will never be subdued by such madcap charges as that made by Custer." A few men in the crowd were beginning to join in and I could feel the tension growing. "You're right there, Olive, a young man close to Esben's age yelled. We gotta git 'em first 'fore they git us."

"Listen men, Olive said, I am putting together a vigilante regiment to run those damn Indians off that Brule Reservation near all of our ranches. They are just too damn close to me for comfort. They could ride down and kill me and my men and steal my livestock before General Crook or General Terry could have their men outta bed and their horses tacked. Then you'd be next and they wouldn't stop until all of our scalps were hangin' from their lodge poles.

I got a dozen of my boys ridin' with me. Who in this town wants to join me?"

Wyoming Territory

As a chorus of "Count me in", rose from the crowd, Esben turned Kodah around and slowly started to ride away. He heard a voice behind him and put his hand on Kodah's haunches and turned around.

"Where are you goin' Injun?"

It was the Texas Kid. He had stepped off the steps and was standing in the street behind the crowd. His legs were spread in a gun fighter's stance and his hands were resting on the butt of his guns, which were hanging low on each hip. He was equipped to draw fast. That Esben knew.

Slowly Esben pulled back the hammer on the Springfield Buffalo Rifle. If needed, all he would have to do is lightly squeeze the trigger and he could blow the Kid through the doors of the Spinning Spur Saloon.

He approached the Texas Kid slowly and turned Kodah sideways so the barrel of his rifle was pointing directly at the Kid's belly.

"I'm not an Indian", Esben said.

"Then why ain't you stayin' an' signin' up with the rest of us to kill 'em?"

"You go ahead and kill who you want to and I'll kill who I want to", he replied, staring into the eyes of I.P. Olive who had stepped off the veranda and stood to the left of The Texas Kid.

Olive's mouth dropped open as if he was about to say something, but nothing came out. Sweat was now running down the side of his face as Esben's eyes bore into his and he was dabbing it with a white handkerchief. Esben noticed movement below him in the direction of the Texas Kid. Without taking his eyes off Olive, he said to the Kid.

"Don't even think about it. I know you are fast, but nobody is that fast. All I have to do is twitch this finger and you'll have a hole in your belly I could ride this horse through."

Finally Olive was able to speak.

"Come on boys, let's get out of this heat and go inside the Spur. I'll buy drinks for all who sign up".

There was a lot of murmuring among the men as they stepped into the Silver Spur Saloon.

"We're not through with this yet, Injun'," the Texas Kid said as he dropped his hands to his side and walked away.

"I expect we're not", Esben replied,

Esben noticed the big cowboy, Gavin McVey standing on the bottom step, looking at him and saw the recognition fall across his face.

"Hey, I know you boy. Don't come back here or I will finish what I started before and I can guarantee that you won't be able to walk away.

"I'll try to remember that," Esben said, before he turned and continued on his way.

Now Esben was getting close to Olive and it wouldn't be long before he would kill him.

But first, he had to head to the Brule Reservation and let Little Elk and the rest of the Sioux know what was brewing down river in the town of Bosler.

Wyoming Territory

Chapter 38

“Sometimes Dreams Are Wiser Than Waking.” Black Elk – Oglala Sioux

Esben pulled up and looked down at the activity in the village below. There was a time when nobody could have gotten this close without being seen and the village being alerted. The Sioux were getting complacent. It was all a part of the white man's plan to change the culture to be more like theirs. They have been teaching the Sioux how to farm; how to grow corn and raise cattle. It wasn't working. The Sioux were known as Teton, or plainsmen and buffalo-hunters. Many of the young braves were rebelling and leaving the reservation and joining up with other young braves. They were coming from the Oglala, the Sicangu and the Hunkpapa tribes. Little Elk spoke many times about leaving the reservation with his wife, Chee Wakiyela, Small Dove, and their young son Blue Eagle only to be convinced to stay by his mother and uncle, Chief Dull Knife. Esben wondered if Little Elk took part in the battle with Custer. It wasn't long before he got his answer.

As he rode in, he noticed a crowd gathered in front of Little Elk's lodge; Two Rivers, Spirit Talker, Walking Bird, Little Bird, Shadow Talker and Tree In The Wind, all young warriors Esben had grown up with all watched as he dismounted.

Blue Eagle stepped out of their tent and the crowd parted as he walked over to greet him. From the grave look on his face, Esben knew something bad had happened.

“Ya a teh - greetings Yellow Hair. We were hoping you would arrive soon. My father has been asking for you. Come. Inside. Owa sicha - bad wound.”

He turned and pointed to a large tree behind the village where an owl was quietly perched. The Sioux believed the presence of owls indicated that death was near.

Stepping through the entrance of the lodge, Esben saw Little Elk lying on buffalo robes next to a fire with Chee Wakiyela, Small Dove and Chief Dull Knife sitting by him.

Esben walked over and knelt down. Little Elk reached up and grasped his forearm and looked in his eyes, “Nacacijin - loyal Yellow Hair, I was hoping you would come soon, he murmured. You will have to go alone now to kill the Washichus who killed our fathers.

Mieyebo lela oosni, I am very cold,” he said.

“Ai, I will get him, Little Elk,” Esben replied

His face was pale and his eyes were sunken and dark.

“What happened?” Esben asked, turning to look at Dull Knife.

“He was at the Little Big Horn. He was shot by a mila hanskas, a long knife. He killed Custer” Chief Dull Knife replied.

Little Elk reached under the buffalo blankets and pulled out a bloody scalp of yellow hair. A grin spread across his face as he lifted it for Esben to see.

“It looks like yours,” he said laughing. The pain from his wound caused him to wince when he laughed.

Esben couldn't help but smile at the childlike pride he showed.

“Now I must take the spirit path to the place of souls. Custer will no longer bother my people.”

He closed his eyes and was quiet for a few moments. Then his mouth and eyes opened and his breathing became heavy and raspy. Soon the death rattle came and he was gone.

Wyoming Territory

“Amba, le mita cola, good bye my friend,” Esben whispered.

Small Dove began the death chant and others joined in. Esben turned and looked at Dull Knife again. His face was lined by age and etched with grief for his young nephew. He rose and nodded his head to beckon Esben to leave the lodge.

They walked out into the afternoon sun and stretched their backs as they looked out over the Wyoming plains where the buffalo used to number in the thousands but were no more.

“We will be leaving soon. The mila hanska are near and will be coming.

“Where will you be going? Esben asked. The white men in the East are like birds. They are hatching out of their eggs every year, and there is not room enough in the East, and they must go elsewhere. They come out West, as you have seen them coming for the last few years. And they are still coming and will come until they overrun all of this country and you can’t prevent it. Nor can the President prevent it. Everything is decided in Washington by the majority and these people come out West and see that the Indians have a big body of land that they are not using and they say, ‘we want the land.’ And they take the land.”

Dull Knife looked at Esben with his weary eyes and said, “Sitting Bull saw a vision of a large number of white soldiers falling from the sky upside down. As a result of this vision he predicted his people were about to enjoy a great victory. We did, but this isn’t over yet, Yellow Hair. The mila hanskas captured Joseph Brown Thunder, who they call American Horse. He was one of our leaders at Little Bighorn. They will come here soon and kill as many of us as they can. We will keep moving north if we have to. Soon we will be in Crow country and we will have to fight them again as well. I see no peace for our people.

The Lakota have pride in defeat, the Wasichus shame in their victory,” he said as he turned and walked back into the lodge and join in the death chant and mourn the loss of his nephew and Esben’s friend, Little Elk.

Wyoming Territory

Chapter 39

The End Of The Trail

Major Frank Walcott walked out of the Western Union office and squinted into the afternoon sun. A cool wind was blowing in from the north and was picking up anything that wasn't tied down and blowing it down the main street. He could see the Powder River to the South, twisting its way through the Montana Territory. He welcomed the cool weather after the blistering heat he endured while eating the dust of two thousand head of cattle for the past two months. But he was glad he would be gone by the time the snow fell. He heard stories of how bad it got in Bozeman when winter came and he wanted to be far from it.

Tom Corlett and the Champion brothers were waiting for him. They were all mounted on their horses with their rifles lying across the pommel of their saddles, ready in case someone decided they wanted to take the money I.P. Olive just wired to Frank to pay the boys. He thought he should have brought the Texas Kid along, as he was the fastest man he knew, but Frank was going to give him his pay and then tell him to clear out his stuff when he got back to the Circle L Ranch. Frank didn't like what he had done to that Mexican boy, Enrico, back at Red Angus' ranch. Frank planned on stopping off at Doc Andrews' place to pick up the boy and bring him back with him to the Circle L. He would put him to work there and show him how to rope and brand the cattle. Maybe by next year he would be ready to go on a cattle drive when they were ready to take them to market.

They had just finished delivering the cattle to the Black Foot Reservation just north of Bozeman and now were ready to return to Bosler and a few days of relaxation before getting back to mending fences and putting up hay from their final cut. Some would be taking off until next spring when they would return for the next drive.

Walcott grabbed his reins from Tom Corlett, swinging his long leg over the saddle and settling onto the back of Bandit, his big grulla gelding. "See anyone suspicious looking, Tom?" Walcott asked.

"Been quite as snow falling, Frank. Nothing is moving in this town that I could see."

"Good. Let's get outta here and pay the boys and then head on back to the Circle L."

When they returned to camp Tom Corlett cleared the table from the chuck wagon and pulled over two chairs; one for himself and the other for Major Walcott, who would be handing out the pay envelopes. Tom would record the payment in the payroll book where each man signed after receiving his pay. The Champion brothers were standing behind them with their Remington rifles lying in the crook of their arms. Major Walcott deliberately held the Texas Kids' pay envelope until last.

As the Kid stepped up to the table, Walcott looked up at him and pulled the envelope back.

"You're through here, D.E. I want you to clear out your stuff when we get back to the Circle L and I don't want to see you around these parts again."

"What for, Major? I din't do nuthin'." the Texas Kid whined.

"There was no call for what you did to that Mexican boy at Angus' ranch. You maimed that boy. Now take your pay and get out of my sight. If your stuff ain't gone within an hour after we get back, I'm gonna' burn it. You hear me? You're through!"

Wyoming Territory

“The hell I am. We’ll see what I.P. has to say about this.”

Walcott was out of his chair in a split second, grabbing the front of the Kid’s shirt and pulling him across the table so they were inches apart, looking eye to eye.

The Kid’s right hand dropped down to the butt of his gun, holstered low on his hip, while his left hand tried to push Major Walcott away.

Walcott was too strong for him so he was forced to look at the fury burning in his eyes while Tom Corlett pointed his pistol at the Kid’s belly and said: “Don’t even think about drawing your gun Kid. I’ll drop you like a sack of cow shit before you clear leather.”

Tom reached out and removed both of the Kid’s guns, opening the chambers and dropping the bullets on the ground. Walcott pushed him back. The Kid stumbled and fell to the ground. Getting up, he brushed off the seat of his pants.

“You ain’t seen the last of me yet, you son of a bitch. Nobody treats the Texas Kid like this and lives to talk about it.”

“Get out of my sight, Kid, before I do something I regret,” Walcott said.

Major Walcott was a big strong man, but the Texas Kid was never to be trusted to fight fair, especially if he had his guns within reach.

As the Kid turned and walked away mumbling, Tom Corlett addressed the rest of the men who had been standing around, hoping to see some action. “Okay, let’s get them horses to the train yard and load ‘em on the box cars for the ride back to Bosler. We got some whiskey for y’all once we get ‘em loaded and y’all are on the train ready to go.”

A collective cheer went up from the men as they passed the payroll table on their way to gather the horses for the trip home.

Tom turned to Walcott and said: “I’ll try to watch your back, Frank, but you gotta know the Kid won’t let this lie. He’ll go to Olive for sure. He an’ Olive seem to have some kinda bond of some sort.”

“Don’t worry about Isom, Tom; I’ll take care of him. I appreciate you keepin’ my back covered. If I see that son of a bitch coming anywhere near me, I’ll break both of his arms and send him packing.”

Turning to Gabby, Walcott said, “Okay, Gabby, you can pack ‘er up and take this wagon to the train. We’re done here.”

“Yes sir, Major. We’re on our way.” Gabby replied as he grabbed the chairs to put them in the back of the chuck wagon along with the table and the rest of his cooking equipment as the Circle L boys reached the end of the trail.

Chapter 40

Wyoming Territory

Eyes That Do Not Cry Do Not See

The train ride back to Bosler was uneventful. Major Walcott and Tom Corlett sat in back of the car and watched the men cut up and carry on while drinking the whiskey that he and Tom provided. The men deserved it. The cattle drive had been one of the most successful drives they had in the past few years. They lost very few cattle and old I.P. Olive was very happy when he was told how many cattle were delivered to the Black Foot Reservation. The government check was the largest they had received in years.

"The Texas Kid seems to be stewing a bit up there, don't he?" Tom said, turning to Frank who was sitting next to him, sipping the last of his whiskey.

"Yep." Walcott replied

Nobody seems to want to sit by 'im. Probably afraid he may shoot 'em." Tom said.

"He's just a bad one, Tom. Walcott replied. We'll just have to be a bit more careful next spring when we take on wranglers. I 'spect he'll end up with the Hole In The Wall gang up in Chugwater. He seems to be a perfect fit for 'em. Probably have to face him again too."

Tom came back; "Just be careful Frank."

Major Walcott just nodded his head. Putting his glass down, he pulled his hat over his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

They pulled into Bosler at first light and Tom and Frank were the first ones off the train. Gavin McVey, Isom's big cowhand, was there to meet them.

"Howdy, Major, how was the ride?"

"Pretty good, Gavin, how have things been back at the Circle L?"

"Everything's been good, Major. Been hanging out with Isom in town the past week gathering volunteers to go after them Sioux that got Custer awhile back. Think you'll be joinin' us?"

"Damn, Gavin, we just got back from living in the saddle for the past few months. I don't plan on goin' anywhere. I have to take a quick trip up to Chugwater first though. Get my horse for me and that bay mustang stallion, Takodah. They are in the last car."

"Get mine too, will ya' Gavin" Tom Corlett chimed in.

"Yes sir,. Be right back."

"What're you doin' Tom?" Walcott asked.

"Ridin' with ya' Frank, that's what I'm doin. More 'n likely the Kid will be headin' up to Chugwater as well. Told ya' I got your back, 'member?"

"Yeah, I remember. Thanks Tom."

It wasn't long before all the horses were unloaded and Gavin was coming with Tom and Frank's horses. He had tacked them up and they were ready to ride.

"Appreciate it Gavin. Tell Isom we'll be back tomorrow evening sometime and I'll bring him up to date on the drive then, if he hasn't left to get them injuns." the Major said.

I'll do it, Major, but he's been pretty busy in town signing up folks to run them Sioux outta the Wyoming Territory. We'll be headin' back to the Circle L in the morning and then we'll be headin' out to the Brule Reservation to take care of business."

"You make sure the Texas Kid clears out his stuff and is gone before we get back tonight Gavin." Walcott said.

Wyoming Territory

“What happened?” Gavin asked.

“He ‘bout killed a boy a while back. I’ll fill Olive in on the details when I get back.”

He turned Bandit around and both he and Tom Corlett tipped their hat to Gavin and headed toward Chugwater with the mustang stallion trotting along Bandit’s side.

“So, what do you plan on doin’ with the boy Frank?” Tom inquired.

“Not quite sure, Tom. Reckon I’ll figure that out as I go along.”

“Reckon you will,” Tom replied.

They rode the rest of the way into Chugwater in silence, each lost in their own thoughts.

Riding up to Doc Wilson’s office they saw Enrico, sweeping the front steps. His face was badly scarred and he was wearing a black patch over the hole where his left eye used to be. He looked up as the two riders approached.

When he recognized Major Walcott, a big grin spread across his mocha colored face.

“Senor Major, bienvenido de regreso a, welcome back.”

“Thank you Enrico. Is the Doc and Miss Mildred in?”

“They are in the back. Come in, Senor Major. Should I get them?”

“Why don’t you do that Enrico. Tom, you coming?”

“I think I will go to the saloon down the street and have a whiskey before we head out.

I’ll be back by the time you settle up with the Doc and are ready to ride.”

“Okay Tom. We won’t be long.”

Tom turned his horse and headed down the street as Frank took off his hat and followed Enrico into Doc Wilson’s parlor. Frank noticed that Enrico dragged his left leg behind him as he walked.

Doc Wilson strolled into the parlor followed by his wife Mildred. She was wearing what appeared to be the same blue calico dress and white apron she had on the last time he saw her. The Doc’s clothes’ looked to be the same as well, only now they were freshly pressed and cleaned.

“Howdy, Major. I see you made it back from your cattle drive. I hope it was pleasant for you.”

“It was, thanks Doc. I come to get the boy and settle up with you. He looks much better than he did when I left him here. I take it he can ride?”

“Oh, he can ride alright. That boy is amazing. He can do just about anything he puts his mind to. Mildred has been teaching him English and he speaks it better than I do.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear that Doc. I want to settle up with you, so how much do I owe.

“Oh no, Major, Mildred said, we couldn’t take any more money from you. Enrico has been a joy to have around. He has always been more than willing to please. He helps in the kitchen, in the stables and he helps my husband with the sick and lame animals. So, no Major, you keep your money. Just promise us that you will take care of Enrico, okay?”

“I will, Mrs. Wilson, you can bet on it.”

She smiled and asked, “Will you stay for a cup of coffee and a piece of pie before you head back to Bosler?”

“Thank you ma’m, but I think we should be going if we want to make it back before night fall.”

Enrico had been standing in the back listening to their conversation. Frank turned and said; “You ready to ride, Enrico?”

“Si, Senor Major”

Wyoming Territory

“Good, you’ll be riding that little bay stallion outside. Let’s go.”

Mildred’s eyes were brimming with tears as she gave Enrico a hug and napkin with a piece of apple pie wrapped in it.

Doc Wilson walked over to Enrico, grabbing his hand and patting him on the back, said,

“We’ll miss you, young man. Come back to see, us won’t you?”

“Si, Medico Wilson, gracias.”

Chapter 41

The Circle L Ranch

Wyoming Territory

“Enrico, that’s your horse next to mine. His name is Takoda which means Brave Heart. Like you. He’s a mustang and they are easy keepers. Their hooves are hard as rock so you never have to shoe them and I have never seen one of them get sick. Take good care of him and he is yours.”

“Gracias, Senor Major”, Enrico replied happily, with a huge grin on his face. I will take good care of him.”

He walked over to Takoda and began to softly stroke his face with his hands. He laid his head on Takodah’s neck and spoke to him softly in Spanish.

Tom Corlett rode up and smiled, shaking his head. “I think they are going to get along mighty fine, what do you think Major?”

Frank nodded his head in agreement and said; “Appears so. Okay, let’s go. We have a long ride ahead of us.”

Dusk had fallen by the time they approached the Circle L ranch. Tom noticed it was unusually quiet and figured everyone was in town celebrating the end of the cattle drive to Bozeman. He would go to town tomorrow but tonight he was worn out and all he wanted to do was grab a quick bite to eat and then hit the sack. They had spent the better part of the day in the saddle and he could tell Enrico was not only weary, but also sporting some pretty bad saddle sores.

“Tom, why don’t you go to the house and see if Rosita can rustle us up some grub right quick while I take Enrico and show him where he will be putting up Takodah and where he will be bunking?”

“Will do Frank.” Tom replied and he turned his horse and headed toward the big house. As Frank and Enrico approached the barn, a shadow appeared from the side of the tool shed. By the time Frank turned to see who it was a shot rang out causing Takodah to rear on his hind legs, throwing Enrico to the ground.

Frank felt a searing pain from the bullet that ripped through his left side. Grabbing where he was shot, he pulled his hand away and saw the blood. He quickly turned to see the Texas Kid running around the back of the barn.

Frank pulled out his gun and kicked Bandit into a lope in the direction the Kid ran. The Kid was in the North corral hiding behind the water trough. Frank aimed and fired. Wood chips from the trough flew as his aim was too low. He pulled back the hammer of his pistol as he drew back on his reins and let fire another round. That too was off its mark. The Texas Kid stood with a pistol in each hand and rapidly fired six more shots at the Major, three from each gun. Two bullets found their mark. One hit the Major in the left cheek and the other struck him in the hand, blowing off two fingers. Bandit turned and ran off as Major Frank Walcott slid from his back hitting the ground like a sack of grain. He lay motionless as the Texas Kid approached him and kicked his body with his foot. Sneering, he said, “Nobody treats the Texas Kid the way you treated me and lives to talk about it, you bastard.”

He turned and looked at Enrico’s motionless body by the front of the barn.

“Well, what have we here? If it ain’t that little Beaner I knocked the shit outta at Red Angus’ place. I guess I’ll just have to finish what I should have finished there.”

Tom Corlett came running out of the ranch house after hearing all the gunshots. Seeing the Texas Kid and the bodies of Major Frank Walcott and Enrico lying on the ground, he pulled his gun and shot at the Texas Kid.

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His shot was high and hit the barn wall with a soft thud. The Texas Kid turned and fanned off six quick shots, one which struck Tom in the chest, dropping him to his knees. Tom looked down at the hole in his chest and then looked up at the Texas Kid, before falling forward on his face.

The Texas Kid walked over and grabbed Bandit's reins and swung up on his back and rode to where Tom Corlett's body lay prone on the ground. He pulled back the hammer of his pistol and shot Tom in the back of the head.

"Now I know you are dead, you son of a bitch," he spat.

The Texas Kid looked up and saw Rosita in the doorway. A smile spread across his face. "Well, well, Rosita, you and me is gonna have us some fun before I go back to Texas," as he dismounted and stepped over Tom Corlett's dead body and walked into the ranch house.

Chapter 42

"When You Are Awake The Dream Is Gone"

Wyoming Territory

After the Texas Kid had left, Rosita got up off the bed, clutching her torn dress to her chest and walked out of the house. The moon was high in the sky, casting shadows from the nearby trees, eerily across the three bodies lying on the ground. A cooling soft breeze was blowing in from the north. It would have been a beautiful evening if it wasn't for the murder and carnage that the Texas Kid had left at the Circle L. She walked over and gently turned Tom Corlett over on his back. His blood had turned the ground below his body a dark brown. His eyes were open and she softly closed them with her hand. Next she approached Major Corlett's body His legs were bent in an unnatural position and flies had already set into the gaping wound in his face. Rosita brushed them away but they were persistent and continued to come back. Tears welled up in her eyes as she realized the only friend she had at the ranch had just been killed. She stood and walked over to the young boy who was lying on his back with the mustang stallion standing next to him.

He is alive, she said to herself. He is hurt but I do not see any wounds. He must have been knocked out when he fell off his horse.

Rosita knelt down and lifted him by his shoulders and said, "Muchacho, muchacho, Cómo se llama usted, what is your name?"

Enrico groggily sat up, opening his eyes, "Que paso, what happened?" he asked.

"You fell off your horse and were knocked out?" The Major and Mr. Corlett were shot and killed by the Texas Kid."

"Oh no, why?"

"I do not know. Cómo se llama usted?" She asked again.

"Enrico, he replied. Where is that man you call The Kid?"

"He took the Major's horse and rode away. He said he was going back to Texas. Here, let me help you up and get you inside and bandage your head."

"You are bleeding, senorita. Did he hurt you too?" Enrico asked.

"I will be fine. Let's get you inside, she replied as she helped him get to his feet.

"What is your name, senorita?"

"Rosita." She replied, lowering her eyes.

He looked closely at her then and was surprised at how young she was.

He stumbled as they started to walk, so he leaned on her shoulder for support. He couldn't help but think how beautiful this young angel of mercy was. She could be no older than he was.

He tripped and stumbled again as they climbed up the first step. "Watch your step, I will help you," she said as she secured her grip on his arm. They entered the ranch house and closed the door behind them.

Chapter 43

Those who wish to sing always find a song.

Wyoming Territory

He's alive,' Rosita yelled breathlessly as she ran into the hacienda to the kitchen table where Enrico was sitting.

"Who's alive, *senorita*," Enrico asked?

"*Senor Major!* When I went outside I heard him groan. I went over to him and he opened his eyes. Please, Enrico, help me bring him inside."

"*Si senorita*," Enrico said as he gingerly placed his feet on the floor. His head still hurt but he had to help the Major if he could. He reached up and touched the bandage on his head covering the cut he received when his horse, Takodah, reared and threw him during the exchange of gunfire near the barn.

Both Enrico and Rosita rushed outside to where Major Walcott lay. At first Enrico thought Rosita was mistaken as the Major was ashen colored and quiet. When Enrico bent down and touched the side of Major Walcott where one of the bullets struck him, the Major let out a soft moan and his eyes fluttered open and then rolled back up into his head.

"I cannot carry him, Rosita. He is too big. We must drag him into the hacienda as carefully as we can. You take his feet and I'll pick up his shoulders."

Together they were able to get Major Walcott into I. P. Isom's bedroom and onto the bed. He had lost a lot of blood. Enrico removed Walcott's shirt while Rosita went into the kitchen to boil water to clean his wounds.

"Rosita, I am going to ride to Bosler and get Medico Wilson and bring him back."

"Are you sure you are okay to ride, Enrico?" she asked as she applied pressure to Walcott's left side to stem the flow of blood. They had already bandaged the wound on his face.

"*Si senorita*, I can do this for *Senor Major*. I will ride all night and bring the doctor back tomorrow morning."

They worked feverishly together hoping that they could eventually stop the wounds from pumping out blood. The bowl of water Rosita had boiled was red from all the blood they squeezed out of the rags. She took it outside and dumped it and filled it up with fresh water which she quickly brought to a boil on the stove. It wasn't long before that bowl was red from the blood as well. Finally they had stopped the blood from flowing out of his wounds.

Enrico stood up and said, "I will go now and bring back the medico."

He grabbed his hat and ran out to the corral where Takodah was lazily munching on the hay he had left.

"*Vaya con Dios*, Enrico," Rosita murmured as Enrico stepped into the stirrup and swung his leg over Takodah's back. He tipped his hat in her direction as he turned Takodah and headed north to Chugwater at a gallop clutching his horse's sides as they left the peaceful valley and entered the parched prairie surrounding the Circle L Ranch hoping it wasn't too late for Major Walcott.

As Enrico rode to Chugwater, the Major's words on how not to ride a horse to death came back to him. He was aware that Takodah was beginning to breathe hard and he knew he would have to slow down soon. He was close to Horse Creek where he planned to stop and let his stallion get his strength back by grazing on the buffalo grass and drinking his fill of the cool water. As he crested the ridge he spotted the river in the

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distance and brought his horse down to a walk. He hoped Major Walcott would live long enough for him to bring back Dr. Wilson who could bandage his wounds properly.

Riding along he noticed some mestengos, wild horses, along the ridgeline, standing there like it belonged to them. That this ridgeline and valley was intended for them to live free and graze on, never to be captured, ridden or worked. Takodah had noticed the wild horses as well. His ears were pointed in their direction as he heard a stallion's call as it echoed through the canyon walls. He gazed at them intently as the mares rested and their leader watched. Enrico decided they should stop or they wouldn't make it to Bosler and Doctor Wilson.

"Let's pull over here in this stand of trees and rest. You can drink from the creek before we go on," he said.

He arrived in Chugwater after a couple hours of hard riding. Pulling up in front of the doctor's house, Enrico yelled, "Senor Medico Wilson, please come quickly. Senor Major Walcott has been shot and he is hurt bad."

Dr. Wilson ran out to his porch as Enrico was dismounting. "What happened Enrico?"

"He is shot in the face and his left side. He also had two of his fingers shot off. He is bleeding a lot, Senor Medico Wilson. Please hurry.

"Where is he?"

"He is at the Circle L Ranch. It's about ten miles south of here. We must go right away."

Dr. Wilson turned and ran back into the house yelling, "Mildred, please get my bag and I'll go saddle Casper and bring him around to the front of the house. We can't waste any time. Let's go Enrico, you can help me."

"Si, Medico Wilson."

They rode out at a fast trot and then picked up the pace as they reached the outskirts of Bosler, heading south toward the Circle L Ranch. Enrico did not push the pace faster as he knew that his horse was tired and that Dr. Wilson was not that good of a rider.

The bright sun had begun its descent in the western horizon as they arrived at the Circle L Ranch. "I will put the horses in the corral," Enrico said when Rosita ran out to meet them as they dismounted in front of the house.

"He is very hot, Rosita said. I have been putting a cold cloth on his head but it doesn't seem to be helping any."

"Has the bleeding stopped?" Dr. Wilson asked.

"Si, but he lost a lot of blood and looks very pale."

"Well, let's take a look," Dr. Wilson said as they walked into the house.

He noticed rags stained red from blood that must have been used to stop the bleeding, stretched out drying on the counters and table in the kitchen as he walked into the back bedroom.

The major was lying on his back with a blanket pulled up to his chin and a towel over his forehead. He indeed was very pale from losing so much blood. As he pulled down the blanket to look at the bandages covering the major's wounds, he couldn't help but be amazed at how professional the bandages looked. This Mexican girl had done a commendable job and more than likely saved this man's life and he told her so.

"You saved the Major's life by the doctoring you did, seniorita. You did as good a job as I could have done. I am going to open the bandages and suture his wounds. Can you boil some water for me?" he asked.

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“Si, Medico Wilson, I will be right back.” She turned and ran into the kitchen and put the water on the kitchen stove that she had kept going throughout the day.

Enrico entered the house and walked into the bedroom and asked Dr. Wilson “Will he live, Medico Wilson?”

“I think he will make it, thanks to you two young folks. That young lady in there deserves a lot of credit. She did a tip-top job of bandaging this man.”

Rosita returned with the water as the doctor removed the bandages and opened his medical bag to begin his work.

Two hours later he had finished and went into the kitchen where Rosita was preparing dinner consisting of potatoes, corn and beef steak. Enrico was finishing putting plates on the table and the doctor couldn't help but think how they looked like a nice domestic couple.

“I gave him something to make him sleep. He probably won't wake until the morning. It's best as he will be in pain for the next few days. Keep him on his back and check on the bandages every six hours or so the first day. He should recover nicely.”

“Si, medico, we will do that, Rosita replied. Please, come sit and eat. I have prepared dinner.”

“Well, thank you Rosita, I am famished. I will rest awhile before heading back to Chugwater. I have a young lady about to deliver her first baby any day now.”

“I will ride with you, Medico Wilson,” Enrico replied.

“But now we eat”, Rosita said as she brought bowls filled with potatoes and corn to the table.

Enrico returned the next day to find Major Walcott sitting up in bed eating tortilla soup that Rosita had made for him. His bandages had recently been changed. He was still pale, but looked much stronger.

“Buenos Dias, Senor Major. You look much better.”

“Thanks to Rosita and you Enrico. Thank you.”

“Who is the man, The Texas Kid who shot you, Senor Major?”

“He is the cowboy who hurt you in Red Angus' barn, Enrico. He is from El Paso Texas. Rosita said he told her he was headin' back there now. He was upset because I told him to pack up his stuff and clear out before morning. Tom Corlett figured he might try something like this.

Poor Tom, Rosita told me he died. He was a good man and a good friend. I sure will miss him. We had been ridin' together for a long time.”

The major put the bowl on the night stand and then closed his eyes and fell asleep.

“I will get your horse back Senor Major,” Enrico said, more to himself than to the major as he turned and walked out of the bedroom.

Rosita was coming in and asked, “What did you say, Enrico?”

“I am going to get the man who did this to the major and bring the Major's horse back”, Enrico replied.

“No, you mustn't. He will kill you,” Rosita cried.

“I will not let him. I am leaving in the morning.”

“I will go with you, my hometown is just across the border from El Paso in Mexico and I can show you how to get there”, Rosita replied.

“You must stay here and take care of the major, Rosita. He will need help until he gains his strength back.”

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“I will have Miss Turner come and take care of him. She lives at the ranch just north of here. I cannot let you go alone, Enrico.”

“I won’t let you come Rosita. I may be gone for a long time. The Texas Kid was heading back to Texas and it is dangerous country down there. The Comanche are everywhere and much of the land is desert.

“Enrico, I lived there most of my life before the Apaches took me away and sold me to Mr. Olive. I know of the desert and the town of El Paso.”

“Okay, Rosita, you can go get Miss Turner and see if she will take care of Senor Major. Then tomorrow morning we go after the Texas Kid and bring the Major’s horse back to him!”

Chapter 44

Wyoming Territory

Thou hast a head and so hath a pin.

It had been two days since they left the rest of the wranglers in Bozeman and Jasper already was driving Rory crazy with his constant chatter.

I want to clear the Wyoming Territory before the snows come then I'll get rid of this saddle tramp, Rory thought as he glanced over at Jasper who had pulled up along the ridge line of the canyon below. Their time in the saddle had been pretty uneventful until now.

"How did he git down there?" Jasper asked, looking at the body stretched out on the rocks at the bottom of the canyon, while he picked at rabbit meat stuck in his teeth using a stick he had been whittling on for the past few minutes.

"Damned if I know," Rory replied, even though he knew Jasper wasn't looking for an answer.

They had spotted the vultures circling when they were about a mile away from the Laramie River. So they knew something was dead. They just didn't know what. From where they sat on their horses, it was clear that it was a white man, maybe about forty years of age. They had been sitting there looking at the body for a couple of minutes and hadn't noticed any movement.

"The vultures are on the ground and headin' over to peck at the body" Jasper said.

"I can damn well see that, Jasper. What, you think I'm blind?"

Jasper ignored him and continued, "The eyes are their favorite part, you know and they will be the first to go. It will take them awhile to tear off the clothing to get at the rest of the body. They like the ass too. God damned vultures. I hate 'em. If we go down there, we might find some gold on that sorry cowboy. One never knows."

"Yeah, one never knows," Rory said to himself. Spending a couple of months movin' cattle for I.P. Olive and Major Frank Walcott and being paired up with Jasper just about drove him crazy. He never shut up. They had just finished driving about two thousand head of beef up to the Black Foot Reservation near Bozeman Montana and he agreed to ride with Jasper to El Paso and then into Mexico for a couple of months, which he was now regretting. The Texas Kid wanted to ride with them but he was just plum loco and Rory didn't want anything to do with him. He was trouble a walkin', as his pa used to say. Luckily Jasper agreed with Rory and they cut out before the Texas Kid crawled out of the bunkhouse.

The snows were about to hit the plains and it would be nice to spend some time where it was warm. They would head back and catch on with another drive in the spring when the snow was gone.

He made a mistake. Maybe it wasn't too late to leave Jasper and take off for California.

"There's twelve of 'em Jasper continued. Vultures I mean."

"I know what you mean, Jasper. I can see 'em too." Rory replied, coming out of his reverie.

"Can't ride these horses down there, can we Rory? Too dangerous, what with all them loose rocks and shit. They'd cut their legs and might even bust up one, what you think, Rory?"

"I ain't takin' ol' Sage Brush down there, that's for sure. That ol' saddle tramp probably never had enough gold in his life worth riskin' ol' Sage Brush for," Rory mumbled.

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“It might be too dangerous to climb down there on foot too. We might slip and end up like that stranger,” Rory said.

“Whaddya think, wanna go down and check ‘im out Rory?”

“What, didn’t you hear me Jasper? It looks plumb dangerous to try and go down there. And for what? A few nuggets of gold? We don’t even know if he has any gold on him. I can see his gun. It looks mighty big. Probably a .45.”

Rory knew that Jasper was thinking about stripping the body of anything of value and was speculating on whether it was worth taking a chance of slipping and falling among those rocks.

“I sure could use that gun,” Rory said.

“Then let’s get on down there, Jasper said. He might have been a prospector and he might have his poke on him.”

“More than likely, someone pushed him down there and if they did, they probably took everything this guy had,” Rory replied. He still wasn’t keen on climbing down that cliff, but he sure did like the looks of that .45 and he could use some cash. He hated to think about digging into his pay envelope before he got out of Wyoming.

All they had to eat the past two weeks was some wild jack rabbit and some berries. Rory thought he would shit little round pellets if he took one more bite of rabbit.

“Sure would be nice to get some good ol’ home cooked food when we get to Meriden,” Rory said as he dismounted from Sage Brush and hobbled him in a stand of Ash trees.

“Let’s go git it,” Jasper cried as he scrambled down the cliff.

“Aw hell,” Rory said and he started to follow Jasper down the steep incline. They watched as the stones they dislodged rolled and crashed down into the basin below. A few of them bounced off the body, causing the vultures to take flight. They didn’t go far. They landed on the branches of an old scraggly dead oak tree about twenty five yards up the canyon.

When Rory and Jasper reached the bottom, the stench from the rotting flesh caused them both to gag. Jasper turned and retched last night’s rabbit before he could go forward again. He bent down picking up a dead tree limb and turned the body over.

“Oh shit, Rory cried. It’s Sheriff Hayden, from Bosler.” He reached down and yanked the tin star off his vest.

The body was well along the way to decomposing and the smell was overpowering. There was a large hole in his shirt just below the pocket. It looked like it was made by something big, a .45 or larger.

There was a black circle of blood on the ground where he bled out.

“I don’t like this,” Rory said. “I say we git the hell outta here and act like we never found ‘im.”

Jasper ignored him and started rifling through his pockets. He reached for the lawman’s gun and pulled it out of its holster sticking it in his belt. Normally Rory would have been pissed and let Jasper know that he said he was gettin’ that gun, but he didn’t want anything to do with this anymore.

“Come on Jasper, let’s get outta here,” Rory cried as he started scrambling up the canyon wall.

Jasper ignored him and started to turn out the dead man’s pants pockets.

“Look, a twenty dollar gold piece. Drinks is on me tonight Rory.”

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Jasper reached in and pulled out a folded piece of paper from the sheriff's vest and started to unfold it when a shot rang out. He looked up to see Rory sliding down the hill and landing next to the lawman. There was a hole in Rory's forehead the size of a silver dollar. Ol' Rory's eyes were wide open but he sure as hell wasn't seein' nothin'. He was dead as soon as that bullet tore into his skull. Same as this lawman here died as soon as that bullet tore that hole in his chest. It was one mighty big gun that done Rory in, bigger than the one that got the sheriff, that's for sure.

Jasper looked down at the piece of paper in his hand and said, "Mr. Olive?" He quickly dropped to the ground as a bullet kicked up dirt near Rory.

"Holy shit," he yelled, trying to crawl under Rory's still warm body. Jasper knew he needed better cover than just Rory, so he grabbed him by the arms and dragged him on top of the lawman and dove behind them. He heard a dull thud as another bullet struck Rory.

If ol' Rory wasn't dead before, he sure as hell is now, he thought.

Another round struck the ground close to his face, sending a stone flying, cutting into his cheek. The pain caused tears to well up in his eyes. Blood ran down his face. He wiped his eyes trying to see where this guy was. He knew he had to find better cover soon or he would end up like his buddy Rory and this lawman. There was that ol' oak tree that the vultures had vacated, but that was a good twenty five yards away and he knew he could never make it before the shooter dropped him dead in his tracks. He hoped his horse was still up there.

Hell, what difference does that make? I'll never git to the horses, let alone up this canyon wall, he thought.

He had an idea. Jasper cupped his mouth with his hands and yelled. "Hey, you up there. Hold your fire. I ain't tellin' no one 'bout this, I promise. Jist let me git outta here and you won't hear from me agin. I'm headin' for Ol' Mexico and I ain't comin' back. I promise."

It wasn't long before he got his response. He heard a crack and a soft "thwat" as a bullet struck Rory in the face, disintegrating his left eye.

Well, that's one those damn vultures won't git, Jasper thought.

He pulled the lawman's gun out of his belt and raised his head over the stacked bodies looking along the canyon ridge. He saw a figure dressed in buckskin leggings and shirt with long yellow hair and a big ol' buffalo gun aimed right at him.

"Aw shit, a damn injun with yella hair." Those were Jasper's last words before the .50 caliber round blew off the top of his head. The folded paper he held in his left hand floated to the ground landing in the blood and gray matter that was oozing out of Jasper's skull, covering the picture of I.P. Olive on the Wanted poster Sheriff Hayden was carrying in his vest pocket.

Yellow Hair slid down the steep embankment and walked over to the three prone bodies. It looked like the body these two were rifling through, was that of Sheriff Bill Hayden of Bosler. The other two were two of the Washichus who killed his mother and Gray Wolf. He took the barrel of his Springfield and pushed it into the side of one of the cowboys rolling him over. His eyes were open probably wondering where the top of his head went. There was a blood soaked piece of paper lying beneath him. Yellow Hair reached down and picked it up and wiped the excess blood off on the cowboy's shirt.

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“Well, I’ll be,” it was a Wanted Poster for the arrest of Isom Prentice Olive for the murder of the Brule Sioux.

“Hmm, took them long enough. If it were white folks he killed, you would have had him arrested a year ago.” he said to the body of the dead sheriff.

He pulled out his knife and reached down and grabbed the hair of the first cowboy and sliced it off. He did the same to the other, leaving the sheriff be.

This time he didn’t yell to the Spirits. He would save that for the next one.

He stuffed the paper in his shirt pocket and scrambled up the hill.

He removed the saddles and bridles from the dead cowboys’ horses before turning them free.

Chapter 45

Wyoming Territory

When seeking revenge, you should dig two graves.

As Esben entered Bosler and looked down the street toward the other side of town, he noticed a large group of men, close to fifty or sixty, milling around the front of the saloon next to their horses, talking. Pretty soon I.P. Olive walked out to meet them.

“Okay boys, Gavin and I are going back to my place to get my men. So, meet me back here the day after tomorrow at daybreak and we’ll head out and take care of business. Once we get rid of those Brule Indians we all can sleep better at night,” he yelled.

Olive climbed up on his horse next to Gavin McVey and they both turned and headed North toward the Circle L ranch.

Esben figured that this would be his best chance to get Olive before he hooked up with all the men who would be riding with him to hunt down and kill the Sioux.

He turned Kodah around and galloped out of town. He would cut Olive and McVey off before they reached the ranch.

Olive was a poor rider so they were taking their time as they rode along the trail that wound around the Laramie River.

Esben cut through a narrow ravine to a shelf of rock overlooking a canyon. In the glow of the afternoon sun, he watched the river running swiftly below, closed from the upper world by the scarp of rock reaching to the sky. Huge torn up trees, dead branches and jagged rocks lay below. He rode to a coppice of small trees where he stopped and tethered Kodah. He took out his rifle and hurried over to a crusty escarpment of gravel and awaited their arrival. They wouldn’t be riding by for a few hours yet

The hours passed and the rocks around him grew painfully heated by the rays of the sun and a terrible thirst attacked him.

Finally, in the distance he saw the dust from the horses as they approached. The big cowboy riding with I.P. Olive, Gavin McVey was soon to die.

He drew a bead on Gavin and squeezed off a round from the rifle. Gavin’s head exploded like a ripe melon. The cowboy was dead before he hit the ground. His head was nowhere to be seen.

Olive’s horse started to bolt and Olive was having a difficult time trying to stay on his back and calm him down. This gave Esben time to reload. He took aim again and this time he shot Olive’s horse out from under him. He dropped his rifle and ran toward Olive. He was stunned and unable to move which gave Esben time to reach him.

As he approached, Olive scrambled to his feet and turned and ran toward the ravine below. Esben quickly caught up to him and dove, wrapping his arms around Olive’s legs and driving his shoulder into him. They rolled down the escarpment toward the river’s edge where Olive dropped into the dirt face first. They both clambered to their feet and when he turned, Esben saw he had drawn his pistol and was bringing it up to fire. Esben dropped under his arms and slammed his fist into his side. He expelled his breath with a grunt. Esben grabbed Olive’s right wrist causing the gun to discharge, stepping up toward Olive’s right side he brought his right foot behind Olive’s, pushing him backward. He fell on his back with Esben falling on top. Blood was now pouring down of the side of Olive’s face. Esben raised his left hand and smashed Olive straight in the mouth, breaking off his front teeth. Olive groaned and turned his head and brought up his hands in front of his face as self preservation now took over. Esben brought down his right

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elbow with all his weight behind it onto Olive's larynx. The blow stunned him for a moment, causing him to gag. Esben brought his left leg over Olive's neck and his right leg over his thighs and grabbed his right arm into an arm bar and broke Olive's elbow. At the sound of the bone snapping, Olive let out a blood curdling scream and dropped the gun.

Esben drove his left elbow into Olive's soft belly, causing him to expulse a breath of foul air. This took whatever fight he had left out of him and he lay still beneath Esben as he reached down and brought out his Bowie knife, grabbing the front of Olive's scalp, he said. "This is because of who you are and what you have done."

Olive's agonizing scream echoed through the canyon walls as Esben claimed his coup, the pecokan sunpi - scalp lock, that he had waited to get for what seemed like an eternity. Esben looked down at the whiteness of Olive's head as the blood drained into his eyes and down his cheeks. He then plunged the knife into Olive's belly, driving it upward under his ribcage to his heart.

While Olive laid dying Esben thought of the deaths he was responsible for, his mother and father, Grey Wolf, and six Brule Indians and more than likely, countless others. He felt no remorse for what he had done.

Esben still felt that death came too easily for Olive.

He didn't want Olive's body to be found. Not because he was afraid that his death could be linked to him, but because he didn't want anyone to mourn Olive's death. He wasn't worth mourning over so Esben dragged his body to a nearby ravine and threw rocks over him. Scavengers would eventually get to him but by then he would be forgotten

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Chapter 46

When You Are Awake The Dream Is Gone

Dawn was about to break over the horizon as Esben crossed over Horse Creek and reined Kodah to a stop. He looked down at the ranch below and quietly watched until a lamp was lit in the front room.

He could see Adam Turner walking toward the front of the house, opening the door and stepping onto the porch stretching out the kink in his back from the night's sleep. He slid his right arm into the sleeve of his shirt and then his left. He then reached down and grabbed his suspender straps and pulled them up and in place before turning and walking back into the house.

It wasn't long before Christine was up and moving around in the kitchen. She wore her long hair up and put on a white apron over her dress. He could see her filling the coffee pot from the water pump next to the sink and adding the coffee grounds. Next she went to the wood box and took out some wood and started a fire in the black pot belly stove and began to prepare the morning breakfast.

"Cikala Anpo Wilapi, Little Morning Star, I'm not the man you think I am."

The sun was now ascending over the Black Hills in the East as he patted Kodah on the neck.

"Too much has happened. "

It was at this point that Esben knew they would never meet again.

"Do you want to see what's on the other side of the Grand Tetons Kodah? Let's see why everyone wants to go to California."

He headed west at an easy pace with the plain stretching before him, treeless and waterless with the grass turning brown. The winter season was approaching. This was the Wyoming Territory he knew so well, the Wyoming Territory he spent so much of his life riding through.

Maybe California is the answer; or maybe he should have dug two graves.

Chapter 47

Wyoming Territory

El Paso Texas

The young cowboy rode slowly down the deserted streets of El Paso. The sun was high in the sky and the heat was unbearable. The sweat ran like a river down his back soaking through his filthy shirt as he looked to his left and then his right. It had been a long day. He just finished riding through the west Texas desert for the past three hours and he was eager to water his horse and give him some grain. He was anxious go to the saloon and wash the Texas dust out of his mouth and see if ol' Juanita brought in any new whores from Mexico.

He found a hitching post that was in the shade in front of the Cantina del Rio. Two other horses were tied there. He pushed them to the side as he wrapped his reins around the post while his horse dropped his head to greedily drink some water. He loosened the girth on the saddle so his horse could expand his belly. He bent over and cupped some water and threw it on his face, noticing his image in the water trough. His leather vest and shirt were soaked with sweat and caked with dirt from his week long ride through Texas. He could smell himself and he didn't like what he smelled. His dull gray eyes were sunken in his face with dark circles showing his fatigue. His week old growth of whiskers was sparse, belying his youth, which bothered him because some didn't take him seriously. That was their mistake. Dust from the trail covered his face giving him a pallid look and his lips were cracked and dry from the desert sun. He noticed that the dust on the crown of his hat had turned to mud from his sweat when he heard a strange noise behind him, like someone was dragging something along the ground.

"Wonder what that could be," he thought, when he heard a voice ask him:

"You just come in from the Wyoming Territory?"

"Depends, who wants to know?" the young cowboy answered without turning around.

The voice was Mexican, which was not unusual in El Paso.

"I'm looking for a wrangler coming from Wyoming", the stranger said in a steady voice. The young cowboy straightened up, placing his hands in the small of his back to massage the stiffness out, he slowly turned around.

The young cowboy could make out a dark silhouette standing in front of him. The stranger was standing with the sun at his back, making it difficult to see his features; he had his hat pulled down low covering the top part of his face and part of a deep scar that ran down his left cheek. It looked like a young face from what the young cowboy could make out, probably younger than he was. The stranger had dark skin, definitely Mexican. The young cowboy saw a trail in the dust behind the stranger that lead from the far side of the street. He now knew what the odd noise was that he heard before. It was the stranger dragging his useless leg.

A cripple, he chuckled.

The stranger was smaller than the cowboy and wore a white duster that reached down to his scuffed and well worn boots. He noticed that his left hand was inside the duster, probably holding a gun. He knew he could draw down on this Mexican and drop him in his tracks before he could get off a shot. He also wondered what in the hell this stranger wanted and what it had to do with him.

The stranger held his eyes steady on the young cowboy's as he asked again.

"You just come in from the Wyoming Territory?"

Wyoming Territory

“I heard you the first time and I said, who wants to know?” the young cowboy replied. “I’m looking for a wrangler who drove cattle out of the Circle L Ranch outside Bosler, the stranger said. It’s been a long time since I saw him.”

“I might have, but I sure as hell don’t know you”. The young cowboy spit out the tobacco he was chewing and it landed between the stranger’s legs.

The stranger didn’t move, keeping a steady gaze on the young cowboy he said, “You know a Major Frank Walcott?”

The stranger saw the surprised look come over the young cowboy’s face as he slowly nodded his head.

“Are you known as the Texas Kid?”

“You bet your sweet ass I’m the Texas Kid,” he replied.

The stranger pushed back the brim of his hat with his right hand revealing the rest of the scar and the hole where his left eye used to be.

“I made a promise to the Major I would find you.”

“Well, ya found me Beaner and you’re going to regret ya did.”

The young cowboy was lightening fast as he slapped leather bringing out both of his .45 Colt pistols at the same time. But he wasn’t fast enough. The stranger was holding a cocked and loaded shotgun under his white duster and the blast from both barrels knocked the young cowboy off his feet and he landed spread eagle on the steps of the Cantina del Rio, leaving a hole the size of a prairie dog in his chest where his black heart used to be.

The blast from the shotgun scattered the horses and brought people out on the street to see what happened. When they saw the body lying on the steps, they quickly retreated back indoors out of the afternoon heat.

The stranger limped over to the young cowboy’s motionless body. The morning light showed the terrible witness of death in his lifeless and glassy eyes as a pool of blood poured from the gaping wound. The stranger broke down the barrel of his shotgun, ejecting the shells on the blood soaked ground.

Looking down, he spit in the Texas Kid’s dusty and dirt caked face and turned around and grabbed the reins of the horse that the Texas Kid rode into town. Leading him, he limped across the street, dragging his useless leg behind him.

“Come on, the Major will be glad to have you back Bandit,” he said as he tied the horse up in front of the hotel.

The beautiful young Mexican girl came over and put her arms around his waist and laid her head on his shoulder.

“Come Rosita,” Enrico said, and they walked into the El Paso Hotel closing the door behind them.

Epilogue

Wyoming Territory

“Frank, I got a letter here for you.” Adam Turner yelled as he pulled up in front of the cabin.

His daughter, Christine, opened the door and helped Major Frank Walcott down the steps to the buckboard.

“You didn’t have to come out to get it. I was gonna bring it in to you.” Adam said.

“That’s alright, Adam, I need to get up and around. Chores are buildin’ up and I have to get at ‘em pretty soon. If I don’t start moving, I never will.” Walcott said as he took the letter from Adam’s out stretched hand.

“Who is it from Frank?” Christine asked as she saw tears welling up in Frank’s eyes as he read the words.

“From Enrico and Rosita. They are in El Paso and will be coming back next week. They got Bandit.”

“Oh, that’s good news, Christine said as she put her arms around Frank’s waist and laid her head on his chest. I can’t wait to see them again, and of course, Bandit too.” She added as a smile spread across her face.

Frank just nodded his head and turned, limping back to the house.

Christine knew he was both happy and proud. Happy to hear from Enrico, knowing he got Bandit back and proud of him for accomplishing something Frank should have taken care a long time ago, killing The Texas Kid.

Wyoming Territory

Texas Is Cattle Country

This is a preview of the second novel in the trilogy on the life of Esben Hjerstedt, known as Yellow Hair.

Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing. Helen Keller

Chapter 1

San Francisco 1870's

Sitting on his horse with the rain running down his face and soaking through his poncho, the rider looked down on the lights from the torches and lanterns dotting the city below. He could hear the raucous laughter from the miners and cow hands who have come down from the mountains and the ranches to spend their money and waste their time and health by participating in the life of the city, the Barbary Coast. It is the bowels of hell, a turbulent flow of vice and iniquity, littered from end to end with the dregs of humanity. It is alive with card sharks, pickpockets and prostitutes. It is the rainy season, when no work is being done upon the ranches and the work in the placer mines, has been suspended due to the rain. Placer mining is surface mining or open pit mining that is popular with the forty- niners, the men who rushed to California in 1849 when gold was first discovered. This was San Francisco, the city he heard the immigrants he helped lead across the Wyoming Territory speak about, where they planned to make their fortunes.

He eased Kodah down the slope toward the bay. They would camp outside the city and wait to enter after daybreak.

The night was cooled by a strong wind blowing across the bay pushing the rain to the east. It brought with it the smells of the city, spicy Chinese foods, smoke and garbage. It was to the noise and these smells that he finally fell asleep with Kodah gently grazing on the grass beside him.

Wyoming Territory

Chapter 2

The Residents

At daylight a fog rose off the bay as the sun was peeking over the mountains in the east. He rode through a region of the city that was bound by Montgomery, Stockton, Washington and Broadway streets. Garish looking Spanish-American women glanced his way from their seats just inside the doorways of their little dens, with their faces painted a gaudy red over a white flour paste, their bars are well stocked with drugged liquors waiting for their first customers of the day. They are clad in black and their faces are covered to their eyes in their rebozos. They are fallen and degraded but still attempt to preserve some of the grace in speech and manner that distinguishes them above all others. They fixed their black eyes on him as he rode past, but made no verbal communication. Chinese coolies walked by, swinging their heavy burdens on the ends of bamboo poles, balanced on their shoulders, changing them from side to side as they trotted quickly along. He passed various narrow alleys which intersect the main streets. These alleys are known as Stout's Alley, Murderer's Alley and China Alley. A number of Chinese females dressed in loose drawers with their blue-black hair braided in two strands hanging down their back beneath striped gingham handkerchiefs, thrown over their head and tied beneath the chin as a badge denoting slavery and a life of hopeless infamy. The smells were that of raw fish rotting and of "gou rou", dog meat, cooking on an open fire mixed with the smell of urine and human excrement. He was beginning to wonder why the Wasichus, white man, was so anxious to come here. With a population around two hundred thousand people who seemed to be living on top of each other, this place didn't hold any interest to him.

Every other building was a saloon, in which nobody seemed to be stirring. Over the doors were signs on which the name of the establishment was painted, "The Cock of the Walk", "Star of the Union", "The Roaring Gimlet", "The Bull's Run" and "Every Man is Welcome" and on and on it went. For the most part, these buildings have a hopeless and half-deserted appearance. He felt he had stumbled upon a part of the town that was going into a gradual but certain decline and decay. It was hard to imagine that all of this grew from a small settlement called Yerba Buena, the good herb.

As he reached Montgomery and Kearny streets, he felt like he entered a different town. The streets were filled with the beauty, fashion and wealth of San Francisco that the emigrants must have dreamt about. The sun was beginning to fill the sky and the day suddenly became pleasant. A military contingent in dress uniform passed by and attracted a group of people. Following the military came a group of horsemen and horsewomen, gaily mounted, out for a morning ride, galloping down the street oblivious to those around them. They are glanced at, criticized and forgotten.

He could feel the eyes of the people follow him as he rode past. He was as much an oddity to them as they were to him. He doubted many men wore buckskin clothing here even though he was passing through an amalgamation of cultures where people were wearing just about anything imaginable.

He rode up in front of the Wells Fargo Company and looked at the sign in the window that read:

Wyoming Territory

Wanted, experienced riflemen to ride shotgun on coach line from the Express Co. of Wells Fargo & Co. of San Francisco and the surrounding mining communities. Apply within.

“What do you think, Kodah? This might be something I could handle and you may have a bit of a rest if all works out for the best,” he said, as he dismounted and walked through the doors of the Express Company of Wells Fargo & Company of San Francisco.

Inside standing in back of the room in front of about a half a dozen men was a balding man, quite portly with small black eyes that twinkled like those of a snake. He had half glasses that were pushed down to the end of his nose and he was wearing a black vest and white shirt with a bow tie. A gold chain was hanging from his vest pocket at the end of which hung a gold watch which he was intently staring at.

The man looked up when he entered and said: “Come in young man, we were about ready to start. I was about to tell everyone about our fine company and what we do and why we need brave young men like yourselves. My name is Stillwell, John Stillwell, and I am the manager of this Wells Fargo office.

There is not an institution of greater public importance than that of Wells Fargo. It is endeared to our people by many associations, dating from the present back to early pioneer times. It has long supplied, and still supplies the necessities to the nomadic characteristics of a mining people. So long as gold continues to be found, there will be men rushing in search of it. Mining camps spring up in a day. Gold is discovered throughout the Sierra Nevada’s, and, whenever it is found, there a large population will locate itself for a brief period. In such cases, mail and express facilities are needed, and are always supplied by Wells Fargo with an energy and efficiency that has won the admiration of all visitors to this coast, and has secured the undying gratitude of our own people. It is an institution of which Californians are justly proud. A gold field is discovered in the remote mountains. Thousands of hardy miners hustle themselves to the spot, through deep canyons and over high mountain ranges. As soon as they build log cabins Wells Fargo comes along, bringing passengers, mail and newspapers, and connecting the new El Dorado with the outside world, and bringing back the gold, so essential to our commerce.

What will be of concern to you, are the outliers, the ones who want to profit off another man’s labors. They lay in wait for our stages to come and they rob them of the gold, money and any other valuables that we may carry. It will be your duty to stop these robbers by any means at your disposal. Due to the frequency and severity of the recent attacks, management has decided to arm each coach with a shotgun and rifleman along with the driver. The shotgun will ride up front and the rifleman will be stationed at the back of the coach. If highway men approach, don’t hesitate to fire first and fire to kill. Those are your only instructions.

Now I have on the table before me, forms for you to fill out and turn in before you leave. We will have a brief training tomorrow morning before we divide you into teams and give you your schedules. You will be paid five dollars a day plus meals at each station. You will get two days off each week. Not everyone will be able to have Saturday and Sunday off, so we will rotate schedules to best accommodate everyone. Are there any questions?”

Wyoming Territory

“Can you recommend a clean place for a man to cleanup and get caught up on some rest for me and my horse?” Esben asked.

“Well young man, you are now in the tenth largest city in these United States and we have hotels on just about every corner. Now, if you are looking for a place that will take care of your horse and for an extra dollar a day, will give you a bed and one square, then on the north end of town is the Hanson House. Ma Hanson and her son Hiram can accommodate you. You are allowed one bath a week at that price as well. They charge you extra if you find yourself so dirty you can’t wait your turn. When you walk out here, turn left and you’ll be headin’ north. You can’t miss the place. It will be on your left.”

“I’m obliged,” Esben said.

“Now if that’s all, you can leave when you are done filling out the papers and I’ll see you at nine tomorrow morning.”

After filling out the form, Esben walked out to where he left Kodah and untied the reins and swung up on her back.

He rode north to the Hanson House and was amazed at all the people walking along the street. He wondered where they all came from.

The Hanson House was much larger than he imagined it to be. It was two stories high with white laced curtains hanging in the windows and it had a substantial stable directly behind it that opened up to at least ten acres of pasture land.

Esben knocked on the door and a gruff voice called out, “Come in.”

He pushed open the door and walked into a huge room filled with four stuffed chairs and a large red divan. Sitting at a desk along the back wall was a white haired woman who had to weigh at a minimum, two hundred pounds. He had never seen a lady that large before and if he wasn’t staring in wonder at the red divan, he would have been staring at her.

“Haven’t you seen a fainting couch before, young man? They are made for women because so many women wear corsets that are so tight it makes them faint. They need someplace soft to land; won’t catch me dead in one of them things. Why hide what you got, I say, and I got a lot. Now what can I do for you?”

“Well, ma’m, I am going to work for the Wells Fargo Company tomorrow and Mr. Stillwell said you provided rooms for men and stalls and pasture for their horses and that’s what I’m looking for. Can you accommodate me and my horse?”

Mrs. Hanson just stared at him and finally said, “You dress funny young man. Are them the only clothes you got?”

“No ma’m,” he replied.

Wyoming Territory

“Well, that’s good. You sure and hell will find yourself gittin’ in fights around here if you keep dressin’ like that. Yeah, I can accommodate you. Hiram, Hiram, you git your ass down here. We got a young gentleman wants to stay with us. He’s got a horse we need to care for too.”

Soon a large man appeared. He was nearly as big as Mrs. Hanson and looked just like her, except he had a few less whiskers.

He shuffled past without looking at Esben and said, “Follow me, name’s Hiram”, and walked out the door.

Esben figured as much, so he thanked Mrs. Hanson and followed Hiram out the door.

“Grab your horse and follow me. I’ll show you where you both will be stayin’.”

“Okay”, he said, as he untied Kodah and fell in behind Hiram.

A familiar voice across the street, a lady’s voice called, “Esben? Esben Hjerstedt?”