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Warnings We Do Not Heed

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### **Indian Head Nickel**

One hot July morning, I heard the *yip yip yipping* of Paiute Indians piercing the air across the south fields and practically jumped out of my skin. Their yells sent me back to my Army days and specifically a time when my regiment was holed up in the Little River Gorge off Painted Flats trying to fend off an angry horde of Arapaho and Seminole charging down upon us. But then I got ahold of myself, laughing the memory off best I could, remembering I'd survived the Indian Wars and long since returned to my family in Weber County. I wasn't in Arizona no longer and didn't have to fear a couple of Paiutes coming for a visit. Still, old habits forge new methods and I sent Little Frankie running back to the house to warn Mama, Aunt Polly, and Owen while I walked over to the barn to grab my gun and holster hanging from the peg. Paiutes in this part of Utah were friendly, sure, but hearing them call out in excited yells from the south switchback trail was unusual enough to give me pause.

Hitching my loop holster around my waist and checking my Colt Dragoon to ensure a full chamber of rounds, I strolled over to the side yard to get a better look.

"What can you see?" Aunt Polly asked joining me in the side yard and handing me the spy glass.

"There look to be two young braves on pintos riding up the back spur trail," I said.

"They're kicking up a good head of dust too. Not full tilt, but they're coming fast and'll be here shortly."

"Lord a mercy," Aunt Polly exclaimed making the sign of the cross over the crucifix hanging from her neck. The crucifix being totem since it'd been a gift from her late husband before he died during the Battle of Appotommax back in '65. "What do you make of it? Will there be trouble?"

"Not sure. I don't think so. I can see they're carrying two large baskets strapped between their horses, and it's got them loaded down pretty solid, but I don't see them carrying any weapons. Nor are they painted up in any way. Maybe somebody's chasing them? Though I don't see anyone coming behind them."

Mama walked outside with Owen and Little Frankie, but I motioned Owen back inside to the porch where the Marlin carbine was hanging above the door frame just out of sight.

"Wait there," I called over, "till after them Paiute's arrive." Owen nodded in understanding and took down the Marlin to chamber a round.

When the Paiutes arrived five minutes later, dragging to a stop in front of the cabin, I stepped forward and, using hand speak, greeted them. The older Indian - though neither looked particularly aged past teenage years - climbed down from his pinto, returned the greeting for "*Hello, I am friend*" and offered the name Saaches – *Eagle Who Chases Fish Out of Water*.

"Hello, friend. I am Saaches."

"Hello Saaches. I am John."

The other Indian, the younger one, ignored us completely. Rather, he just swung down off his horse and began to untie and unload the two large woven baskets -- dragging them in tugs and pulls over to the nearby soft grass by our wagons. When he finished, without even a glance our way, he leapt back onto his horse and took off the way he'd come, *yipping* to punctuate his leaving.

"Oh my," Aunt Polly whispered to Mama as we all looked over at Saaches. Saaches waited till the dust settled, then in word and sign said, "The great chief Tawhawai sends greetings to his friend, *Jacob Fitzgerald*, and *Jacob Fitzgerald's* family from all the Paiute of the Pa-Roos-Its band. Please accept this gift," and here he gestured to the baskets, "as gratitude for the honor *Jacob Fitzgerald* bestowed upon Chief Tawhawai at the Lackawanna of the Itom Aye River three Sundown's ago."

Saaches visibly sighed in relief and happiness. He'd given the speech he'd been practicing since leaving home three days earlier and, now that it was done, he could relax and enjoy the trip home. Turning without further word, Saaches remounted, "*yipped!*" and rode off in traditional Indian fashion -- which meant, when the job was done, you left without delay -- no ceremony, no goodbye, nothing more required.

"Land sakes!" Aunt Polly said, again placing her hands over her heart. "They always come and go so theatrically. What in the world will happen next?"

Mama ignored her because, well, of the two sisters, Polly was always the more dramatic and Mama apparently having none of it this morning.

"Oh, what a fine and unexpected gift," Mama exclaimed lifting the basket lid and discovering peaches inside. "This should keep us in pies and preserves all winter."

Owen looked under the lid of the second basket. "Holy moly! There's a whole bunch more peaches in this one too! We'll end up fat for so many." He pulled out one and smelled it. "And they're dead ripe too!" he exclaimed. "We'll have to get at them soon

or they'll spoil. Well, waste not want not, I figure." Owen shrugged then took a big bite from his peach, letting the juice dribble down his chin. Moaning, Owen said, "Ohh, they're good! They's really good!"

"They *ARE* really good," Mama corrected, a shadow of her former schoolteacher training emerging.

I looked over the gift Saaches claimed was reward for something Pa did three days ago, but I had no way of knowing what it could've been. Pa and Uncle Miles had left to hunt in the back country two weeks earlier and hadn't yet returned. But they were due back any day.

When I smelled them ripe peaches though, I also got distracted. Thinking about peach cobbler and peach pie and maybe even making peach ice cream - if we had time to take a wagon into town for some rock salt and ice. Which would be nice cause then I could visit Sarah Ann at the Spring House and invite her out to the ranch for a spell.

"Can I have one?" Little Frankie asked, tugging Mama's apron.

"Just one," she said smiling down at him, "but that's all for now. You'll want more, I'm sure, but I don't want you getting a stomachache from too much fruit."

"I won't," Frankie promised picking up a peach from the nearest basket.

"Rinse that off over at the pump too, please. There's bound to be trail dirt on them."

"Yes, Mama."

Aunt Polly jumped in, "I'll check the storage shed to see how many fruit jars we have. And I'm fairly sure we still have two twenty-five-pound drums of sugar in there. We'll have to use most of it to get this job done."

"While you're looking," Mama added, "check to see how much paraffin we have left to seal the jars. If there's enough, we can make jam as well. Boys," Mama called out, "fetch some extra wood. We're gonna need maybe half a cord at least. Enough to keep the fire burning hot so we can boil and scald all these peaches."

I grabbed my double bit axe from the barn and headed out to the edge of the clearing where our Oak grove lay. Owen and Frankie joined me moments later pulling the two wheeled cart we used to haul the wood back and forth to the ranch.

"Why didn't those Indians have any paint on their faces?" Frankie asked, "Indians always wear paint in the picture books."

"Indians don't always wear face paint when they go to war," Owen explained to Frankie, "But if they did, we'da been in some big trouble trying to fight them off. They'd have gone right for your heart!" he laughed pantomiming stabbing Frankie in the chest.

"Really?" Frankie asked, his eyes going wide.

"Owen, don't scare him, please," I said, "He don't know you're joking. You'll give him nightmares." Owen also preferred the dramatic like Aunt Polly. Which he regularly channeled into reciting Shakespearean sonnets or Tennyson poems for the family after dinner. But sometimes, like Aunt Polly, he didn't always pick the best moments.

"Don't worry Frankie," Owen said, "Those Indians who visited today were friendly Indians, for sure. Because they were Paiute and Paiute aren't hostile. Paiute are all tame and mostly farmers like us, only they live on reservations nowadays. But if they'd been Comanche! Oh, brother, they would've attacked for sure and you and I could've been scalped! Our fine blond hair cut clean off!" he laughed tugging at Frankie's golden locks.

"Oh, okay," Frankie replied catching on, but still moving closer to me and looking around the woods. "When are Poppa and Uncle Miles gonna get home?"

"Owen, you and I are gonna have a serious chat later," I said glaring at him. Then to Little Frankie, "Pop and Uncle Miles will be back most likely tomorrow," reassuring Frankie with a pat on the shoulder. "They went down to the Virgin River where it meets the Muddy and it'll take them a bit of time to drive the mules and wagon back. Especially if their buffalo hunt was successful. Buffalos are big, Frankie. Bigger than even you!" I smiled.

"No one's gonna be bigger than me when I grow up!" Frankie insisted smiling back.

"Not Comanches or anyone! And I'm gonna hunt buffalo with Poppa and Uncle Miles when I'm big too!"

"Of course you will," I said. "And I'd like to join you when you do."

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Twelve miles, not more than fifteen south, just on the other side of High Water Pass along the Wasatch Mountains, Jacob Fitzgerald was growing impatient with his brother, Miles. The mules, Sarah and Beezus, were spooked about something and Miles didn't seem to be doing anything about it. Normally, the mules were steady as was his brother's handling of them. But this morning, Miles was sitting on a tree stump sipping chicory root coffee from his tin and staring at the mules while the mules just stood and stared right back. It was aggravating.

"You gonna sit there all day pondering your fate?" Jacob asked, "Or we gonna get the team moving?"

"I was thinking maybe we should re-pack that buffalo meat in the back of the wagon better," Miles replied glancing over at Jacob. "Wrap the haunches tighter in the tarpaulin and cover them with a few cut cypress branches. Mask the smell. There's wolves and coyotes around here and I'm sure they can smell all that fresh meat for miles. They might even be hungry enough to cause trouble since it's been a fairly lean year for them too. Plus, I only got maybe ten more shells for the Winchester. Not sure that'll be enough to fight off a pack of hungry wolves if they come callin."

"I thought about that, but it would take too long to re-pack a wagon full of dressed meat at this point. We should just get moving. If we stick to the main trail head and push the mules to travel fast, we should be fine. Home by supper, I reckon."

Miles grunted, "Maybe," but he didn't move. He was holding the lead rein to the mules and humming to them in between sips of his coffee and conversation.

"You're gonna get sick if you keep drinking that sludge," Jacob warned. "Or you'll swallow too much chicory root and be sorry when you get stomach cramps."

"I'm good, Jacob. My stomach is cast iron. Quit fussing. When was the last time you ever saw me get sick."

"True, but there's always a first time. And this would be an inconvenient time to start. So why don't we get up and get that wagon moving?"

"Ain't up to me. Sarah and Beezus is spooked and I'm letting them see me so they keep calm. Otherwise they're likely to freeze up and then it'll be hell getting them to move for anything short of oblivion. Or they'll bolt and throw the wagon or themselves and end up hurt. Say, you don't think maybe there's wild Indians around these parts they're smelling, do you?"

“Wild Indians? Hell no. Ain’t been no wild Indians around here going on ten or fifteen years. And the Paiute were never really all that hostile in the first place. Most rogue bands we heard about roamed way down south by the Brazos or out west across the plains. Not these.”

“Well, Sarah and Beezus are pickin’ up something they ain’t encountered before. And they don’t like it,” Miles said. “But if I can get Sarah moving, so will Beezus.”

Miles stood, tossed the dregs of his chicory root coffee into the brush, then climbed up onto the buckboard. “Alright, then, girls,” he soothed, picking up the reins and gently snapping them, “Let’s go.”

Sarah moved, followed by Beezus, while Miles guided them back onto the High Water Pass trail. Jacob followed on his own horse, giving her free reign to choose the path ahead while he scanned back along the trail for signs of danger. *Something is out there, he worried, I can feel it. I just can’t tell who or what yet. But it don’t seem good.*

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Saaches turned the corner and stopped in the middle of the trail troubled because his riding companion, Tannu, had disappeared. They’d delivered the peaches like instructed and he’d raced to catch up with Tannu, riding west along Badger’s Gap. But just when he had Tannu in sight, Tannu suddenly spurred his pinto forward, raced around a bend and... just disappeared into thin air. His horse, River, was there, standing on the trail, her rope tie lead dangling, but no Tannu. Nor could Saaches see any footsteps leading away. *Had Taanu fallen*, he wondered. For the life of him, Saaches couldn’t determine where Tannu had gone.

“AIIYYEEEE!” Tannu whooped.

“What the...?” Saaches yelped.



"AIIYYYYEEEE!" Tannu hollered dropping down from the tree branches directly above onto Saaches' horse. But instead of landing the seat, Tannu bounced off Ember's flank and fell to the ground hitting hard. "Woof! Ouch! Oh, that hurt!" Tannu groaned, spread out in the dust where he landed. Sitting up, rubbing his back, he moaned, "I think I broke my tail bone."

"Serves you right," Saaches replied once he'd settled Ember from bucking and bolting. "What were you trying to do there, break Ember's back!?"

"Before we left, *Woveveh* told me the best way to attack Pawnee Scouts back in the day was to drop down unexpected like from a tree above and land on their horse's backside. Then reach around and cut the Pawnee's throat before they could let go of the lead. I wanted to see if I could do it."

"*Woveveh* is a drunken old fool who likes to tell tall tales. And you're an idiot for listening to him. You could've hurt Ember."

"Sorry 'bout that. Is she okay? I figured she'd be strong enough to handle the drop."

"She's fine. But you owe her an apology. She didn't like that."

"Sorry Ember. Sorry I jumped on you. And sorry you have a rider who's a big ol' *wacheechoo*. If I'd landed a little more to the right, I woulda had you cold and cut your throat for sure." Tannu smiled.

"You *ton-to*! No way! But I forgive you. Here let me get River for you."

Saaches spurred lightly over to Tannu's horse and reached for the loose rein. When he had it in his hand, he "yipped" loudly, spurred his own horse and galloped away with both pintos. All the while looking back over his shoulder and laughing as he kicked up a cloud of dust.

Watching Saaches ride away with both horses, Tannu laughed thinking, *Kutta baccha!*  
*Why didn't I think of that!?*

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Big Mike Henshaw whipped the draft horses harder after they faltered again pulling the wagon up the back side trail toward Tabletop. First the horse on the left, then the one on the right. "Come on, you sumbitches!" He cursed, "Get up that hill!" He was a stubborn man who'd been pushing the pair of horses hard for three days straight now. Ever since he and his partner, Red Wade, left Spanish Fork with four canvas sacks of The Denver Dry Good Company's gold coin originally intended to be returned to Colorado. Which Big Mike and Red Wade decided to divert west as part of their unofficial severance package.

Red Wade was now riding shotgun in the wagon because his own horse had faltered and died at the end of their first day running. An errant thorn from a wild bramble field he'd mistakenly ridden through lodged itself under the beast's saddle causing the animal to start bleeding. Which Red hadn't known about despite her becoming prickly most of the day, then sluggish during the night. Under normal circumstances, he would've checked his horse more thoroughly. But being on the run had distracted. Big Mike whipping and driving the team had distracted. The coin in the wagon had distracted. The man he'd killed in Spanish Fork distracted. And then his own horse dying. Red Wade felt....distracted.

"Come on, dammit, you filthy whoring beasts!" Big Mike swore lashing the draft horses forward again.

"You keep hitting them horses that way," Red Wade commented, "and they gonna die on us too. They's pretty tuckered out."

"So?" Big Mike growled.

"I don't rightly care so much myself," Red Wade countered, "Cept they're the last horses we got and we need 'em to haul this coin. At least over Tabletop. Then we can stash the sacks in one of the caves up there. It pays to think ahead a little, you know?"

"So you say," growled Big Mike, occurring to him not for the first time, that if he knew Red Wade's full name, he could curse him properly for being such a know it all.

Red Wade did know more than the average cowboy, having received some formal education back east before heading out west. But it irked Mike. He'd been with Red over a decade now and was glad Red shared everything equally. Few men did that or tended to be as good a partner. But every now and then, Red also liked to rub it in how he knew more than Big Mike. Which irked Big Mike. So, if he knew Red Wade's full name, he figured, why then he could curse him proper and take Red's pride down a peg or two. Only no one knew Red's full name.

Red saw no reason to share – with Big Mike or anyone. Not his name at least. That was private. And when Mike asked, Red just wouldn't answer. Everyone else got a curt, *"not your focking concern now is it?"* If they pushed -- which didn't happen often -- that person might discover their health and wellbeing were fast being placed into jeopardy.

"So, this may not be the best timing," Big Mike smirked, not being as subtle as he thought, "but it occurs to me I still don't know your full name. We've been pardes for a long time. Don't you think it's time you shared?"

Red Wade's real name was Cornelius Everett Wade Heathchild Vanderbilt IV.

Officially. But Red's father, Cornelius Everett Wade Heathchild Vanderbilt III, never recognized him as anything more than "that bastard" -- and his mother "that whore."

A one night stand with Wade's mother after a cotillion led a then young Cornelius was to impregnating Red Wade's mother. And since both were from somewhat consequential families of similar standing and power, a formal marriage was arranged.

But as Red grew, he was embarrassed. His father was a drunk and a louse. His mother lazy and entitled. And so, excepting for one decent maid who watched over him, Wade's first fourteen years were a misery. So he left home as soon as he was strong enough, heading west, and to begin his true education as a common man. Even going so far as to adopt "Red Wade" as his surname so one would know him.

Understandably though, his real name remained a source of injury and insult which he intended never to share with anyone. For any reason. What's in a name? Everything.

"My name is Red, same as every day," Red Wade spat at Big Mike.

"Yeah, well, that fella back in Spanish Fork seemed to think different. The priest. He knew your real name."

"This is neither the time nor place to have that conversation. You know my name is Red Wade. Is, was and will always be! So I suggest you drop whatever you've got on your mind or think you know and we'll be fine. Otherwise, it might be time to re-evaluate our partnership in a split direction. You understand!?"

It was a challenge to be sure. One Big Mike felt irritated by, but not foolish enough to contest. "Have it your way, then," he grumbled turning his attention back to the horses. "Aww, you sumbitches!" Big Mike yelled, whipping the horses one last time before throwing the whip away into the brush in disgust. "You fockin' no good horses!"

Red Wade's name or these quarter horses hadn't been on Big Mike's mind three days ago when they decided to liberate the four bags of gold coin from their employer. They'd just completed a 14-day journey delivering dry goods to Spanish Fork from Denver and were about to head to the saloon when the warehouse quarter master stopped them.

"Fellas, I have a proposition for you. Don't know how them Pinkerton morons forgot these," the quarter master grumbled pointing to the corner, "but they left four sacks of coin that was supposed to go along with them back main to Denver. Probably thought they was flour or something. Who knows? But I'm sure they'll eventually realize they's four short. And when they do, sure-and-begorah, they'll try to blame me for stealing them or some such nonsense. I can't have that. I got a good business and a good reputation. Now you two," the quarter master fixed his eyes on the two, "are seasoned trail hands who can get these coin back to their rightful owners right quick, yes? And if'n you do so *expeditiously*, I'm more'n sure they'll be giving you extra pay for your troubles. I'll even throw in a little myself to get you going. What do you say, boys? You up for a quick turn around and a run back to Denver? Time is of the *essence*."

They were game. A quick turnaround was never unwelcome when money was to be made. But it seems serendipity had something else in mind for Red Wade and Big Mike. Big Mike re-outfitted the wagon while the quartermaster loaded the coin and Red Wade saddled his horse and grabbed a few provisions from the store.

"Here's a sawbuck to get y'all started like I promised," the quarter master called out. "I sure appreciate you fellas doing this. I know you're good for it. Now be quick and get this back to Denver. I'll wire ahead to let them know you're coming. They should be waiting with the rest of your payment upon delivery."

On the way out of town, Big Mike held up the sawbuck. "We got time to stop for a little refreshment, don't we?"

"I believe we do," Red Wade smiled.

Hart's Saloon wasn't busy, it still being early afternoon, but there were a few cowboys hanging about who knew Big Mike and Red Wade. So when serendipity introduced a

well-known, worn out joke – that being “*a catholic priest walks into a bar*” -- Big Mike and was the first to laugh.

“Will you getta look at this *fockin’* guy,” Big Mike grunted staring at the priest. “He’s wearing a dress and a lady collar.”

“It’s called a cassock and collarino,” Red Wade replied looking over. “He’s a catholic priest.”

“A priest? No shit? Like them guys that say, ‘*bless me father cause I sinned*’ and all that bull?”

“That’d be the one.”

“What’s a priest doing way down here? Spanish Fork already got religion. Hell, the reverend over at Mt. Zion will even dunk you in some holy water if you ask him to. And he don’t wear no dress neither.”

“That’s called baptism.”

“Yeah, I know,” Big Mike snarled, “Sure I know. *Fock! You don’t always gotta correct me.*”

“I wasn’t trying to correct anyone. Just passing on a little information.”

“Well, didja know my Ma had me dunked by one of them travelling preachers over in the Brazos when I was young. Which means I get to go to heaven. That’s the rules. Bet you didn’t know that!”

“No, Mike, I didn’t know that.”

“Damn right you didn’t,” Big Mike replied, somewhat appeased. “Think this *fockin’* guy here will be baptizing people in the Brazos too?”

“Couldn’t say, but I doubt it.”

Red Wade didn't like seeing the priest. Because he recognized him. And the priest, Father Thomas Flannery, not only knew Red Wade, but by his true name. They'd grown up together not more than a block apart and even attended the same parochial school. Red, unbeknownst to him, was even the person Father Flannery credited with starting him down the path to priesthood when they were boys. In fifth form, during a schoolyard brawl over a girl, Red punched Thomas in the mouth so hard, a tooth punctured his lower lip. After which, Red got expelled and Thomas lessoned a valuable lesson about "the dangers of women." Neither got the girl.

It'd be fair to say Father Flannery mis-remembered that incident, believing Red had been his friend even though they never saw each other again. Until the Hart Saloon in Spanish Fork, Arizona nearly fifteen years later.

"Cornelius?!" Father Flannery called out across the bar, a whiskey shot in his hand. "Well, I'll be an Irish monkey's uncle! Cornelius is that you! Jesus, Joseph, and Mary if this isn't a fine thing! To run across a childhood friend way out here!"

Father Flannery started walking across the saloon with his whiskey in one hand and his hat in the other. Otherwise, he would've subconsciously rubbed the scar on his chin while the group of cowboys and vaqueros milling watched with interest. They'd clocked the name Cornelius, which was unusual, and wondering who the priest was talking to. He seemed to be heading right for Red Wade and Big Mike.

"Cornelius? Don't you remember me? Don't say you don't remember!" Father Flannery called out finishing the shot and walking toward Red Wade. "It's me, Thomas! Thomas Micheal O'Shea Flannery. Aye and begorrah, but if it isn't Cornelius Everett Wade Van....."

He spoke no further. He couldn't because a bullet exploded, blowing his brains out the back of his head. The cowboys and mill hands and vaqueros, first silenced by the blast,

remained quiet and motionless in shocked surprise. Not by the violence, they were used to that. But because they'd heard Red Wade's real name. At least part of it. Which they'd have a great deal to say about, but that could wait till later. At that moment, everyone watched Red re-holster his Remington .45, grab his hat off the bar and head for the door.

"Well, shit Red," Big Mike commented too late. "I think that might be seven years bad luck for shooting a priest. Him being a friend of yours and all."

"Bad luck for him maybe." Red replied. "Now can you get on the wagon and get her moving?"

Big Mike liked Red Wade despite Red sometimes being a know it all. He was a good partner. Plus, his anger with life matched Big Mike's own. But Cornelius Everett Wade? Big Mike intended to keep that nugget for a later time.

Right now they had a dead priest to deal with and a wagon of gold coin to tend to.

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"I honestly don't care if these whorin' beasts do die," Big Mike grumbled. He'd gotten down from the wagon and was trying to pull the horses forward by their bit lead, "But they's gonna get us where we's going first. Or I swear I'll kill them."

"If they die, we'll be on foot."

"Then we'll be on foot."

And almost to prove his point, the lead horse dropped in the wagon halters trapping the other and dragging him down at an awkward angle. The horse leg snapping was loud and unmistakable.



"Dammit to all hell!" Big Mike screamed, unsheathing his Bowie knife and plunging it square into the horse's forehead. It was a tremendous blow, with all his weight behind it, piercing the skull and killing the horse nearly instantly. "I told you, you sumbitch!" Then Big Mike spit tobacco juice on the ground while Red Wade shook his head, smiling.

"Well come on then," Red Wade sighed, "Let's unbox that coin and find a place to hide it. Then we'll walk to the nearest farm or cabin till we find more horses. And a wagon if they have it. Shouldn't take too long. There's gotta be a farm or homestead around here. Didn't I tell ya' what would happen if you didn't stop whipping them horses? Didn't I?! You should've let up."

"Yeah, well I didn't."

"Yeah, well, if you had, we could've made Pine Gap. Now you got us out here on the trail with our peter's hanging out."

"Wouldn't've changed nothing if I had listened to you....Cornelius."

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"Hey, I been meanin' to ask," Miles asked Jacob as they rode the low trail up toward Tabletop. "Exactly what did you say to that Indian chief a couple days ago that made him so happy? I thought he was gonna drop his pipe and kiss you there for a hot minute. It sure weren't over our how successful our buffalo hunt was, I tell you that. There's hardly more than a few thousand buffalo left."

"I told him I didn't care if the federal government had ordered the Dawes Allotment Act to go into effect. As far as I was concerned, their land was their land and I wasn't gonna be no party to taking it from them."

"Yeah? So why'd that make him happy?"

"You remember that surveyor we had come out last year and map all the land we bought."

"Yeah, I do. He cost near twenty dollar. Course I remember."

"Well, he was surveying that finger land abutting off the east main plot. That piece that winds though the little hills like a snake? You know it?"

"Course I do. So?"

"Well, he found signs of old cultivation there, along with some buried Paiute tools, and buffalo skin lodge remnants in the valley. And when he did some checking, he learned the Paiute ancestors used to camp on that land during their spring and summer hunts. Till they were moved off of course, like the rest of the tribes, after Jefferson's Relocation Act took effect back in the 30's. And they ain't been allowed back since."

"That weren't in the report."

"No, I asked him to keep it out to avoid any legal issues. Seems the government re-districted the land and sold it off to the Associates of Palmer who were gonna use it as part of their Sevier Valley railway system. Some kind of junction pass. But the land was too narrow and out of the way apparently to be a proper junction between spur lines so they sold it off again. The Indian Affairs Council made a bid for the land in Washington but were denied even placing a bid. It was then summarily added by unknown parties to the land we just happened to buy as part of our big land grant purchase last year."

"Okay, I'm with you so far. But that don't explain why the chief was so happy."

"After the buffalo hunt, when the chief invited us back to his lodge, I did some thinking."

"Never a good sign."

"Still and all, I told Chief Tawhawai I wanted to gift him and his tribe those acres back as a gesture of good will."

"You're kidding."

"No. I'm not. It's the right thing to do."

"Says who?"

"Think about it. We ain't gonna develop that land, right? It's too narrow and out of the way."

"Yeah."

"Well, if we ain't gonna use it. Why not put it to some good use and give them back their land."

"Because ain't no way the government's gonna let you deed them that land. You said so yourself."

"That's right, but I don't have to report it to them either. Nor do I need the government's permission to share my land with whomever I choose."

"Okay, but wouldn't we still be paying taxes on the land? Giving them back their land may be the right thing to do, but it don't really save us much if and when the government comes calling for their tribute."

"A few tax dollars is nothing compared to making allies out of them Paiutes. And happy allies mean good neighbor relations. We learned that the hard way during the Cayuse war, right?"

"Okay, you have a point there, I suppose. But you coulda said sumpin' about it to me first."

"I know. Sorry. It was a spur of the moment thing. Came to me during the buffalo hunt when I was watching them watch us."

"How so?"

"Well, have you considered they ain't even allowed to hunt any more. Nor can they sing their songs or dance their dances cause of the Dawson Act. Hell, they's even expressly forbidden from using bow and arrow that generations of Paiute used before them. I don't know about you, but it seems like they got the short end of that stick. They been stripped of just about everything that makes 'em Indian. If that were us, we'd have fought like hell. And we would've wanted our neighbors to fight with us. With this land gift, now them Paiutes know they have neighbors who care."

Miles was about to say something more but a wolf howled not too far off making the mules jump. *Okay, that sounded like a wolf, Miles thought, but I'm pretty sure it weren't.*

"That cain't be no wolf," Jacob said, "Who ever heard of a wolf howling in the middle of the day like that?! You don't suppose someone's having a go at us, do ya?"

"Well, whatever it is, we need to get clear of it. It's spooking the mules."

"I agree. I'm gonna scout ahead a bit. See if I can pick up on whatever is out there. Hand me the Winchester and whatever extra rounds you got left."

"Alright, but don't go too far. That only leaves me with the buffalo gun. That'll be darn near useless if trouble comes a-callin'."

"I hear ya' brother. I won't be long."

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Saaches waited for Tannu to catch up on foot. "No more games okay? Truce."

"Alright, truce. Owwww-whuuuuuuuu!!!" Tannu howled letting his wolf call echo off the nearby hills. "Have you heard *Woveveh* imitate the wolf? He's really good. He's teaching me how. You can't tell the difference from the real thing, right? Even better than *Besah* and that's saying something. Owwww-whuuuuuuuu!!!"

"Hey, we better get a move on. We still have a way to go before we get home. And I don't want to miss the feast tonight. If we cut through the dog pass over by Tabletop, we can pick up the main trail head and make a run for home."

"No, let's not go that way. It's too open and chances are we'll run into someone. I've had enough of these *wacheechoo* settlers for one day. Let's take the trail down by the *Itom Aye*.

"Tabletop is faster. I'm going that way."

"Fine."

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Jacob had a troubled look when he returned from scouting.

"Did ya' see anything?" Miles asked.

"Yeah. I think we got more'n that wolf call to worry about. I found a couple of dead horses attached to a wagon a couple miles down over to the east by the water. The birds are at it now, but it looks to be a recent kill. Not even a day. Hours I'd even say."

"You think that's what's spookin' the horses?"

"Could be, but I don't think so. I didn't want to get too close and spook the crows or send 'em flying in case someone's about. But it looks like one of the horses had its head split. And some of its flank cut off clean with a big knife. And there were a dozen drag marks off into the brush. I think there's someone about. Maybe they saw us coming up

the trail and maybe not. Can't say for sure. But I don't like not knowing. Especially after seeing them poor dead horses."

"So we ride hard up and across Tabletop. If they's on foot, we can out pace 'em."

"Maybe. Or they's fast enough to cut the angle and cross us. Maybe catch up the next time we stop to rest the mules. Which we'll surely have to do before we make the last push up and over Tabletop."

"Then we'll fight off whoever might be around if they come at us."

"No, you said it yourself. All we have is the Winchester with not enough .308 rounds and the single shot buffalo gun. I got a plan though. There's a butte up there near the escarpment after Tabletop at about three o'clock? You know the one I'm talking about?"

"Yeah."

"When we get around this next bend, I'm gonna slide off and head up to that escarpment on foot while you rest the mules. If I'm fast enough, I can hide there and be in place to cover you from the top with no one the wiser. You cross tabletop and head down. If it's wolves trailing us, I'll scatter them back the way they came. But if someone's following us, they'll have to come around that bend and I'll get a good look at 'em for sure. If it's trouble, I'll send out a warning shot. If they're dangerous, well, I'll make sure they ain't for much longer."

"Sounds like a plan," Miles agreed.

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Big Mike set the sack he was carrying down on the trail, wiped sweat from his forehead, and spat tobacco juice onto the ground splattering a good dose across Red Wade's boot.

"Hey ya' dern fool! Watch where ya' spittin!" Red Wade growled.

"*Whaddidjajuscallme?!"*

"I said you're an *idjit!*"

"Shut yer mouth before I shut it fer ya'."

"Like hell ya' will. Spit in my direction again and I'll kick the living shit outta ya. Then I'll make ya' lick the tobacco off'n my boots!"

"You couldn't kick shit." Big Mike started to argue. They were both hot, tired, and more than a bit irritated with each other over the whole horses dying affair. But then they heard a wolf howling. "Hey quiet! Did you just hear that wolf howling?"

"Yeah. And I hear herses comin' our way too. We could use a couple of herses right now, fer sure."

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Saaches and Tannu rode over the back ridge of Tabletop down the dog trail to find a very large and dirty *wacheechoo* man standing in the middle of the trail blocking their path. Before they could react, a second *wacheechoo* man - who was dirtier than the first if you could believe that - popped out from a side bush, grabbed the lead rein to Saaches horse and pushed him clean off.

"Now boy," Big Mike called out to Tannu, "you gonna get down off'n that pinto and hand 'er over or is I gonna shoot ya' off?!" The pistol he leveled backed up his demand.

"I'm not your boy," Tannu growled, "And my horse is not yours for the taking."

"Weren't asking," Big Mike replied cocking back the hammer and sending another spat of tobacco juice down the trail at him.

Red Wade pulled Saaches' pinto back several steps, unholstered his own pistol and pointed it at Saaches lying on the ground. "You *injuns* must be some kinda *stoopid*. We's outlaws if ya' haven't figured it out. And we's takin' your *herse's*."

"Climb down, Tannu," Saaches said. "Let them have the horses."

Red Wade cackled. "Why thank ya' very much, boy! You heard 'em, *Injun*. Give it up."

Tannu dismounted and moved over to Saaches.

"Good," Big Mike grunted. "That's a good boy. Now that that's settled. Let's see what else ya' boys got. And jus' so youse understan's, I got no problem shootin' both of ya' dead right where ya' stand. Two more dead injuns don't matter much ta' me."

A round exploded in the dirt at Big Mike's feet along with the sound of a gun blast from the escarpment above them and to the right.

"Now that will be enough of that, gentlemen," Jacob yelled down chambering another round into the Winchester. "Give 'em back their horses and let them go. Or the next round will do some damage."

"Now don't go doin' that, mister," Red Wade yelled up, looking over Jacob. "We's just gettin' our property back is all from these *thievin' injuns*. They stole these *horses* from us a-ways back and left us on foot. We jus' caught up with them is all and is well within our rights to take our *horses* back."

"They didn't steal anything. Those are unshod pintos without halter. No way those were your horses. And you have three seconds to give them back to their rightful owners."

Red Wade glanced at Big Mike, then quickly nodded his head in Jacob's direction. Big Mike spun to his right firing his pistol in the direction Red motioned. Only the hole



that opened up in Big Mike's chest from the .308 round Fitz fired testified he wasn't fast enough. Big Mike was knocked back flat. Red Wade started firing simultaneously and had just enough time to aim and get off two rounds. But Fitz shifted sights and put Red Wade down with his next shot.

When the air cleared, and Fitz's ears stopped ringing, he stood up. "You boys okay?"

Tah-hanu stood up from the bush he had dove into. Saaches did the same looking up at Fitz.

"You gonna rob us too?"

"No, boys, I'm not. I been watchin' those men for a bit when you came riding around the bend. Bad timing. They was bad men for sure. Up to no good. I'll have to load them up in the wagon and report this back to the Marshal."

"Well," Saaches said, "We're thankful. You sure saved us."

"If you don't mind repaying the favor so soon, I could use your help. Looks like that one had good enough aim to hit me high up in the leg with his second shot. I don't think I'll be able to walk too far right now. My brother is up the trail some with the wagon. If you catch your pinto and ride after him, tell him I need him back here, I'd appreciate it. It'd save me some pain trying to catch up with him and do me a courtesy."

Saaches turned to Tah-hanu. "You grab the horses and bring them here. Then ride for this man's brother. I'll stay and help him with these ugly *wacheechoo'* s."

Tah-hanu grunted and took off for the pintos while Fitz limped down from the escarpment.

"Thanks son. My name is Fitzgerald."

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"Does buffalo meat taste good?" Frankie asked. "I never had none."

"You never had *any*. And it tastes like peaches," Owen replied.

"It do?"

"No, Frankie," I interrupted. "Owen's joshing you. We ain't never had buffalo either, but Uncle Miles says it taste like beef. Just a little sweeter is all."

"When do you think Poppa and Uncle Miles will get back? We been out here all day."

"Soon. Asking a hundred times ain't gonna make it happen faster though."

"I just miss 'em. Poppa said when I get a little bigger, he's gonna take me on the next buffalo hunt."

"That's nice. Here, Frankie, carry my axe. I believe we have enough wood to finish off the cord. Owen, grab that end of the cart and we'll head back."

Frankie, Owen, and I walked out of the woods after a long day and headed back toward home. When we came in sight of the cabin, I noticed Poppa's wagon out front along with two more pintos tied to the back.

Frankie yelled, "Look! It's Poppa's wagon! They're home! And they brought the Indians back!"

"Hand me that axe before you take off running, Frankie. You're liable to fall and cut yourself."

Frankie wasted no time. He handed over the axe and took off at a dead sprint for the cabin yelling, "Poppa! Poppa!"

I figured he couldn't wait to hug Poppa and Uncle Miles and hear all about the buffalo hunt and how Poppa was going to take him along next time. When he grew bigger.

Which, in a few more years, he certainly would be.

As I walked toward the cabin, I thought about the years ahead and looked forward to seeing Frankie grow up and Owen grow less shy. For Aunt Beatrice and Uncle Miles, Momma and Poppa, to retire and enjoy all the years of their sacrifice and labor establishing a homestead. I looked forward to finding my own wife one day and bringing her back to start a family of our own while adding to the brood. Have Owen and Frankie do the same so we had lots of children running around and lots of family to settle the land. It sounded like a nice future. And I looked over at the pintos hoping them Indians would have the same and we'd be friends and neighbors for a long time.

I looked to our cabin, watching Little Frankie run for home, and I felt blessed. Coming out to Utah had been a boon to our family.

The End.