An ancient, yellowed manuscript was found in an old steamer trunk in a downtown 19th century building in a west Texas city. The bundled papers had lain there for nigh a hundred years concealing its secrets. The historical facts and the narrative related in those dusty pages is published here for the first time. This is a Texas gothic.

The account was originally written by a man who witnessed some of the atrocious occurrences of the post-Civil War frontier, being a Texas Ranger during those fearful days. The manuscript has been researched and to all appearances relates the literal exploits of twin children taken captive by a brutal Comanche tribe. These survivors of Comanche savagery were born into and taught the values of familial devotion, and their unstinting love, bold character and courageous resolve was undeniably blessed and strengthened by Providence throughout their travails to escape and return through an endless, wild plain to the fringe of civilization that they had known.

This is an enriching historical tale which reveals the previously concealed United States government disbelief and disregard for the sufferings and terrible tribulations of those settlers whose great sacrifices drove the American frontier westward. This long delayed chronicle finally introduces two unassuming American heros, two humble but truly uncommon children whose faith and love proved their salvation and effected much needed change in official government policy and official hearts.
Acknowledgement

When I was a rusty-haired child my parents would give me money at Christmas time to buy them presents. They knew, of course, that without their help, I was incapable of giving. I was filled with indescribable emotions when I presented them with a clumsily wrapped gift on Christmas morning, even though they had bought it for themselves. I had at least invested loving thought in the 'picking it out'. In their gracious giving so that I could give they allowed me to learn the joys inherent in giving.

And now, in my old age, it is my sister and my brother who have taken the place of my parents in many ways. I have humbly accepted their endless and selfless gifts of time and effort, of patience, forgiveness and understanding through seasons in which I had no patience, forgiveness or understanding of myself. They have given so that I may give.

Without the love of my dear and true sister and brother this book dedicated to them would have been impossible. Their love has enabled me to give; to my sister and brother who know me best of all, and love me anyway.

With love, all things are possible.

For Fifty Years,
And Forever,
Love.
One Saturday evening a few years ago the mother of a deceased dear friend called me and interrupted my boredom. She was an old dear friend herself, a finer friend than I deserve, and I am always lifted in spirit to hear her still youthful exuberance. I had been unemployed for too long: depression and poverty were lately assuaged only by her part-time recruitment to clean, paint or move furniture in her real estate properties. This particular evening however, she offered a much more interesting, but non-profit undertaking.

My friend's husband who had been a doctor had purchased an old red-brick building in San Angelo, Texas in the '60's in which he had his practice. The good doctor had died quite a number of years past and the old building that had housed his office had been retained by my widowed friend but had remained vacant. Recently she had given thought to opening a business in the old building and had begun clearing out the fixtures, files and dusty odds and ends to make way for the new concern. Inside an ancient steamer trunk that was completely filled with paperwork and sundry debris from commerce conducted in the building prior to the doctor's office, she had found an antique manuscript, yellowed and crumbling.

My friend knew of my life-long interest in Texas history and from her perusal of the manuscript she sought my opinion as to whether the pages related actual history or was a work of fiction. She invited me to her home to examine and discuss the work. Though many pages were missing or so faded and indistinct as to be indecipherable, the fragile pages contained names, dates and events that suggested significant historical knowledge. That manuscript comprises the majority of the book before you.

My friend kindly allowed me to research the people and facts chronicled in this apparently historical document. I found no evidence that the story told in those brittle and long-hidden sheets was in any manner contrived. My friend further allowed me to fill in the gaps of the decayed and missing segments to hopefully closely
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replicate what the original author intended. Asa Hill's authorship within these pages was completed in the years prior to 1925 and he celebrated his 85th and final birthday later that same year. His manuscript was neatly bundled and tied with a rotted ribbon within a pasteboard box labeled for shipping to a long-since defunct publishing firm in Austin, Texas. A decaying formal missive sat atop the faded pages offering the account for publication. Why the manuscript was never sent remains a mystery. Perhaps Asa Hill died before it was sent. How it came to be in a crumbling steamer trunk in the old West Texas building is still being investigated.

All who have read this composition have been impressed with its unveiling of little known as well as completely unknown incidents in Texas history following the Civil War. The author participated in some of the forays into what was then known as Comancheria and as a volunteer ranger knew first hand of the particulars and the participants in the Indian battles related herein. The gaps in the narrative have been exhaustively researched and rewritten to continue the natural flow of the story. When segments of the original text were destroyed through the ravages of time and my own patchwork efforts to fill in the breaches inserted, it is noted throughout the account.

Asa Hill has presented his report of the events, attitudes and characters of that day and time as he knew them to be. Mister Hill undoubtably was caught up in the legend as it grew in the passing years and aging minds of all the players that his long investigation encompassed; clearly his style of tendering the tale suggests fictional technique. Yet the historical accuracy and the unembellished relating of the bias, the violence, the religiosity and the commonly-held honor of those times suggest truth, though plainly presented in a glorifying light.

Actual history or the stuff of legend? Could it be both?

-WWW

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In 1870, Texas Governor E. J. Davis called for volunteers to comprise ranging companies to protect the lawless West Texas frontier. Fifty-two men under the capable command of Captain David Baker were mustered into service at Seguin in Guadalupe County. The men were required to furnish their own mounts and saddles, but each man was issued a new Winchester's carbine. Most of these volunteers of Baker's Company carried one of Samuel Colt's fine revolvers, some even carried two. They were to be paid fifty dollars a month, when Texas could afford it.

The orderly sergeant of this valiant group was William Thorn. E. H. Cobb was the first duty sergeant; Joel Payne the second sergeant. The corporals were William Murphy, Charles Robinson, Dan Woodruff and another man whom the years have obscured from memory. John Fitzgerald was the bugler. Doctor Fred Gillespie was our physician-surgeon. The privates in that bold company were of the truest stock, the bravest, wildest and toughest boys that ever rode those wind-swept plains. I'm honored to have been a part of that courageous troop. My name is Asa Hill. I was the lieutenant of that fine fellowship.

Over fifty years have passed since that game outfit rode out to battle wild Indians and corral desperados in what was then the far west of Texas. We did all we could to fulfill our sworn task and I have ever been satisfied that we did our duty wisely and well. Still, there remains a tale that has never been told of that expedition, a secret that we of Baker's Company agreed to keep for the common good. The actions only now revealed in the following pages were withheld for over half a century to honor the wishes of the protagonists of this account, as will be explained in time.

To my knowledge, none of our company ever lied about the miraculous events that occurred in that short year we served, we just kept a few potentially harmful facts to ourselves. If we had to make those same decisions again, I know the same decisions would be made based on the facts as we knew them. These decisions were all command decisions, orders imposed from our superiors and not
an unwillingness to engage our foes: we knew no fear or trepidation
though some of our decisions would likely have been presented by
the newspapers of the day as timid or even cowardly. The editors
of the semi-civilized cities of East Texas believed we rangers to
be little more than government-sponsored bandits and viewed the
post-war U. S. Army as even worse.

Mister Andrew Jackson Sowell was a private in our company, a
brave young man of twenty-two, strong and of good stock. His father
served as a ranger with Captain Jack Hays in the 1850's. Mister
A. J. Sowell wrote a book¹ later in life containing a chronicle
of the adventures and exploits of our ranger company in 1870-71.
His remarkable book made every effort to veracity as well as honor;
as in keeping with the unanimous decision of our company to respect
the wishes of the heretofore unrecognized heroes of the following
account, Mister Sowell was silent regarding certain amazing historical
events and feats of the very young, heroic siblings of this previously
untold tale.

Also, the dictates of the polite social mores of the Victorian
Age in which Mister Sowell lived and wrote forbade discussion or
in some cases even mentioning the degree of violence and the beastly
ravages suffered by prisoners of the Comanche and Kiowa criminals,
for criminals they were, and of the very worst sort. In the reticence
of the Age, captives were not mutilated, dismembered, burned, tortured,
blinded or raped by the savages; it was typically reported that
"they suffered unspeakable atrocities" or "carried away into a
captivity worse than death."² The actual beastial, devilish tortures
that Comanche captives suffered were never detailed, lending, over
the years, an undeserved air of nobility to these murderous savages.
Many official reports glossed over or redacted the horrendous acts
of the cowardly Comanche and Kiowa, as Comanche-Kiowa Agent Walkley
reported that, in the month of June, 1868:

"...twenty-five persons were killed, nine scalped,
and four children captured."

No description of the tortures these dead suffered before their
deaths or of the mutilated and burned bodies, as well as no suggestion
of the monstrous savagery that many kidnapped children suffered.

¹Rangers and Pioneers of Texas, A. J. Sowell, 1884
²Texas Indian Troubles, Hilory G. Bedford, 1905
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Being personally astonished by the intrepid deeds and the magnaminous love of these unheralded and humble native Texas children, I have in the intervening decades interviewed dozens of participants and witnesses, including old rangers, settlers, outlaws, ranchers, cowboys, soldiers, Indians and army officers of the frontier forts of that day and time. On numerous occasions I have spoken with survivors who had been stolen by the Comanche and the Kiowa. I have also been honored to spend many enjoyable hours with the retiring heroes of this previously secret history and they graciously consented to the publishing of their trials and tribulations following their demise.

These noble and inspiring, unpretentious souls have now 'passed over the river' and I feel both a duty and a privilege [sic] to finally honor them, adding to the glorious history of this great and blessed country of Texas with this publishing of the real story, the miraculous feats that our God makes possible through His most precious gift that endows all who will accept it with the strength and the courage to succeed against every foe and obstacle. This book, surely all of life, is about that God-given gift. Love.

-Asa Hill, 1 May 1925
"Blood is thicker than water."

This ancient adage has been spoken by the wizened and wise to their young kin through olden times countless generations past. It is likely that your own dear mother or your revered grandfather taught you of this primordial proverb, but some unfortunate or selfish souls never realize this enriching truth or examine its depths and shades of wisdom. These ignorant beasts waste their paltry lives in the puerile pursuit of momentary insidious pleasures. Though their very lives depend on this precious sustenance passed to them from their mother's womb, they fail to cherish and value this paramount bond that links them to unconditional love, to their eternal loss.

Blood, like love, is born in the heart. From the heart the most nourishing riches flow into our lives. Many have learned the truth of this saying through hardship and sorrow, guilt and regret, and these count their sufferings a bargain to have eventually acquired this vital understanding. And, perhaps because of their sufferings, these prodigals cherish this truth more than all others.

Providence has granted that there are those fortunate ones who are born blest and in possession of this fundamental knowledge from birth and instinctually live and act with the guidance of this innate wisdom. In these seemingly chosen ones the light of love burns bright and hot; within these good children lives the beauty, the worth and the hope of mankind. For our hope, the hope of all mankind, lies in the cleansing salvation of the love inherent in the blood, in family lies the wealth, the wonder and the joy of life.
“And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which has opened her mouth to receive they brother’s blood from thy hand;...a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.” Genesis 4:10-12

“Momma, how much more okra are we gonna plant? We gonna plant all the seed in that jar?”

“No Winnie, we’ll save some seeds against an out-of-season freeze, or a hard rainstorm, or hail, or wind that kills all the sprouts. Always expect the best, but prepare for the worst. That’s what my momma always said.”

“Ain’t three whole rows of okra enough?”

“Isn’t enough Winnie, not ain’t. Ain’t isn’t a word. I know your daddy says it, but he isn’t one who speaks properly.”

Winnie blew loose strands of her inherited pale blonds hair out of her vision.

“Isn’t that enough, Momma?”

“Let’s finish out this row, honey. I expect that’ll be plenty. My momma always said, If it’s worth doing,...”

“It’s worth doing right,” Winnie completed the homily,

“Right.”

Susannah’s laughter was always delightful to hear, it sounded like music to Winnie. Through the long and wearying days on the West Texas plateau the tinkling melody of her mother’s mirth always revitalized Winnie and enkindled warm bubbles of love that overflowed her heart. These oft-occurring cherished moments sometimes brought to Winnie’s mind the words her father read from the thick old book that say on it’s own rough-hewn table in their home, ‘my cup runneth over’. Winnie’s smile and joy was heart-born.

“You tired already girl? We haven’t worked half a day.”

“I’m thirsty Momma.”
“Well, let’s get us a drink.”

The happy pair rose from their knees on the row of turned earth and dusted off their long cotton dresses. Sliding their bonnets off, each of them fingered loose blonde hair behind their ears in the selfsame manner. Stretching their long thin muscles, they moved gracefully from the truck garden to the well before the continually expanding shack that they called home.

Over four years now they had been fighting this wilderness, the heat, the cold, the wind, cactus, cockleburrs, varmints, the unconquerable mesquite and the long-horned devils they called cattle in Texas. After the War of Northern Aggression, Pleasant John Thompson Senior had purchased a certificate for a league of land for his family out here at the edge of civilization. The land was acquired at a more than affordable price. Nobody wanted it. It was hard, hot, dangerous and lonely.

Mister Thompson had felt a need for a change when he had returned from the war. He had survived the conflict with all his limbs intact, but he had contracted a certain malady of the mind that caused him unrelenting discomfort and maddening irritation caused by the close proximity of people not his own. He felt too crowded by the new farms less than a mile from his own inherited home outside Nacadoches. There had been too many carpet-bagging Yankees, government men, refugee thieves, starving black freemen and agitating Union soldiers to tolerate. The restlessness burned inside him until, after a long sleepless night of claustrophobia, he drove the wagon into town and sold their small, but highly productive farm. There had been just too much government, always a-regulating and a-taxing and a-nosing. He’d stood all he could stand.

Out here in the west they were many long miles from any government. No government out here except the soldiers at the fort by the Concho River. The Thompson family could make their own way, work hard and build a life, together. Pleasant Senior had bought some Hereford cattle hoping to breed them with the wild and hardy longhorns running and breeding like jackrabbits and populating this endless
thorny plains. He and his good wife Susannah were breeding horses, raising crops of corn and cotton, building a ranch, a farm and a home for Pleasant Junior and Winnie.

The children were the most important parts of Mister and Misses Thompson's life. They spent their days and nights raising them and teaching them right and proper. Both children were smart, enthusiastic, strong, healthy and very talented in all the skills they learned and practiced day in and day out. Because they had never been around others much, neither Winnie and Pleasant Junior, nor their parents fully realized just how exceptional they were. Both were expert working with horses and cows, had keen vision and were expert shots with both rifle and handgun. They had soaked up all the knowledge their parents had provided them as well as the wisdom and understanding contained in the few books they had access to. The parents were often amazed at the proficiency of their progeny, astounded that such quick and capable, fine and well-formed children could have possibly issued from their ordinary loins.

The children were twins, now approaching their twelfth summer. Winnie was the older by a few minutes. She was faster than Pleasant, could still outrun him, and the family good-naturedly joked that Junior would be chasing behind Winnie all his life. She was slim and unaffectedly graceful, unpretentious and naturally good. She was very pleasing to the eye, hair the palest blonde, almost white, and her hair made her cerulean eyes below pale lashes that much more charming. Pleasant John Junior's hair was carrot-orange when he was born, but it had mellowed to the hue of tanned cowhide over his first years. His eyes were green and his hands and feet seemed much too big for his lanky body at this stage of his growth. Winnie was a friendly out-going talker, always asking questions. Her brother was quiet, reserved, but observant. Though not as physically alike as usual for twins, still they were a perfect match, no question they were siblings. And they were closer in other ways than looks.

There weren't many neighbors, not yet, but they would be coming now that the army forts seemed to offer some protection from Indian depredations and outlaw gangs. The confederate general Tom Green's son had a place up the Colorado a ways. Granville Sherwood had a bunch of land scattered here and there and Richard Tankersly had a
ranch on the South Concho River. There were a few others trying to make homes, but it had a long way to go to be civilized and settled.

The dearth of European stock close by both soothed and worried Pleasant Senior. The Comanche and Kiowa raided mostly down in Mexico those days, avoiding the persistent, though ineffective bluecoat patrols. There had been rumors emanating from travelers and traders who had recently come from the eastern cities and had read newspapers that the governor had called for volunteers to form ranging companies to patrol the frontier and protect settlers from Indian and outlaw attacks. He was hopeful that these rumors were true.

The land itself on this plateau was dry but very fertile when, and if the rains came. Except for the dry heat through the long summers and the sparsity of rain any crop would flourish here. The native grasses were thick and high for most of the year allowing the buffalo to have grown to herds of millions, only lately being thinned by white hunters killing them by the thousands to satisfy the demand for their hides. As the buffalo herds were thinned the wild cattle proliferated and provided many men with the opportunity to build a ranch, and a life.

Susannah wiped the sweat from her brow with an old rag and watched her beautiful child drink the cool, clear water from the dipper. She noticed the tiny beads of sweat on her daughter's upper lip as she smiled and she affectionately wiped the perspiration away. She kissed her sweet baby's young, unwrinkled brow.

It was a good life, simple and peaceful, full of the important things. Susannah's clear eyes sparkled as she noted the position of the small white sun beaming the rainbow of light on the edge of the whitest, towering cloud. Sparrows flitted and chased through the scrub oaks which shaded and cooled their home and a handsome bachelor mockingbird expressed his loneliness in his heartfelt presentation of a imposing repository of love songs, stretching from his toes to his neck to hit the high notes. Susannah's laughter was as pure and natural as the bird's song. Life was simple, yet full and sweet.

Winnie vastly enjoyed the clear, cool water from the well her Poppa had dug as she fondly watched her Momma smiling at the antics
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of the birds. It was a moment, a vision burned into Winnie's memory forever. All her life she was able to relive that treasured instant in time, that simple and sacred sight was perfectly preserved in Winnie's mind for all her days. Her Momma was so beautiful, from the inside out. And she so loved all of God's creation. Winnie hoped she could grow up to be near as perfect as her mother.

Abruptly, the birds exploded straight out of the trees and shot over their heads.

"Run Winnie! Get to the house! Now! Run!"

Susannah grabbed her daughter's arm and sprinted to the house, their long skirts flying.

Angela wasn't much of a town, but it was growing. It catered to the needs of the soldiers at the fort mostly, the first businesses being brothels, saloons and gambling houses. Bart DeWitt had founded Angela, naming it after his sainted wife. But the soldiers usually just called it Over the River.

The army had come to the juncture of the Middle Concho and the North Concho and began building a fort in 1867. Mister DeWitt, recognizing financial opportunity, had purchased the land over the river from the proposed site from Granville Sherwood, the pioneering rancher, and began promoting and building the town. Buffalo hide hunters soon piled into Sarge Nasworthy's or Jim Morris' saloons or were bathed, pampered and relieved of their gold at Miss Hattie's Dance Parlor and Brothel. A New Yorker named James Trainer established the first store and by 1869 there were five stores close by the fort. No one remembers or admits to being the first to dig the tunnels from the merchandise stores to the saloons and brothels and later even to the banks. Certainly the good wives of the respectable merchants and settlers were unaware of the underground traffic. Gentlemen could visit the store of a well-respected proprietor to conduct business, walk surreptitiously under the streets to one of the brothels and

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1The original township of Angela evolved to San Angela and later to San Angelo, as it is now known.
‘take care of business’, then return to the store and conclude his only apparent transactions. Doubtless, there were visits from the brothel employees through the hidden passageways for important ‘business’ conducted in the various offices connected.

Pleasant John Thompson Senior and Junior had set out much before dawn for the fifteen mile journey winding through the mesquite and prickly pear patches to the little town. Senior, whom his wife called John, loved his biscuits and flour gravy. When the flour got low, John was on his way to the Concho to resupply. Susannah had written him a list of essentials as well as the list of luxuries, just in case there was money for such nice things as cotton cloth to make curtains, shirts and dresses and for all the other niceties that refine and comforted life.

Money came a bit easier now that John had made a handshake contract with the procurement officer at Fort Concho. He had also made a deal with the newly arrived butcher who had his shop on the Fort Chadbourne Road to supply his beef. John and Pleasant, for that was the name the family called Junior, had driven in twenty rangy longhorns the week before and they planned on picking up some cuts from the butcher that day. The new butcher did an even better job of cutting beef than John, and John had a good hand for it.

John and Pleasant worried about leaving the ‘girls’ alone at the ranch. They weren’t really alone, old Juanio was there, but at his advanced age his eyesight was failing along with his strength. He wouldn’t be much of a problem for a passel of wild, young Comanches. There was much handy work that Juanio did that was much help to the family, but his rheumy old eyes were about shot. John and Pleasant knew that the ‘girls’ were at least as good with the guns as they were, they’d all spent many hours practicing, but the damnable Comanches were treacherous and stealthy. So, they worried, and hurried.

The soldier’s presence made the thieving, murdering savages a bit wary, but, push come to shove, they really weren’t much. They troops at the fort were what they called the mounted infantry, not real cavalry, and cavalry were required to engage the Comanche and Kiowa with any success. Plains tribes produced what many deemed to be the finest horsemen there ever were. The painted warriors would strike
like an explosive fire and disappear like smoke. The fort on the Conchos was comprised primarily of buffalo soldiers, infantry buffalo soldiers. The Comanche, Kiowa, Southern Cheyenne and Arapahoe toyed with these uninspired freedmen. White settlers had little faith in the recently freed slaves who were not much motivated to lay their lives on the line for the hated and feared whites who they believed had fought tooth and nail to keep them in chains. The truth was that none of these hardscrabble settlers had ever owned a slave. Further undermining the settlers confidence in these troops was the awareness that the U. S. Government's policy disallowed the army martial contact with these Southern Plains Indians unless they were caught in the very act of murder and mayhem. And therefore, negro scouts ensured army patrols were not made aware of Indian activity or passage until the Indians were long gone. Whether they fought the Indians or just returned to the fort, they were paid the same.

Most of these buffalo soldiers had never ridden a horse or fired a gun until they had joined the army. And they had not joined the army with any inclination to fight anyone. They just wanted to eat regularly and be provided clothes and a roof over their heads. They had been provided for all their lives, sometimes adequately, but more often poorly. Army fare and treatment was generally much better than they had ever experienced. Army life was the government welfare of the time.

Even a large proportion of the female freed slaves followed the army. They married army men, sold them carnal pleasure, did their laundry, cleaned for them, worked as cooks. Wherever the army, or for that matter, any federal government was located, there would be found the majority of the negro population. It was definately not patriotism, it was a matter of survival. Washington city, in the Columbia District, and all the surrounding towns were provided with cheap, unskilled labor by the thousands of negroes who had been 'freed' to do the menial work and be subservient to the conquerors just as they had aforetime for the vanquished.

The buffalo soldiers, just as all the other freed slaves, followed the white man's orders not from any sense of fealty or affection; they fulfilled their tasks with a hostile set of mind, subtilely defiant, a subculture that identified and empathized more with the
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red Indians than with the white settlers they were sworn to protect. Despite kind words and ingenious twists of the facts by government officials, historians and others with their own agendas for dissembling, the run-of-the-mill buffalo soldier was not much of a soldier at all. And, in the enmity following the divisive conflict of the Civil War, it is distinctly probable that negro troops were assigned to the South purposely to further humble and chasten its proud people.

Added to the incompetence of this occupying army was the disdain of the exclusively Northern-born officers for the Southern citizenry. There were exceptions of course, but generally these officers were not assigned for duty on the frontier as reward for their successes or for their leadership skills. Many were either inexperienced shavetails or hangers-on from the war whose commissions were their saving grace, who had not the education, ambition, skill or courage to compete in the civilian world.

There were few true leaders in the army, even the Commander-in-Chief was a drunk whose administration was rife with corruption. The general of the entire U. S. Army believed the reports of Indian atrocities in Texas to be grossly exaggerated. The general overseeing Texas during Reconstruction was of the same opinion. Those who had directed the Indian Agency exacerbated the poor relations with the Indians by their repeated lies and larceny. Government malfeasance was pervasive. And the Quakers who replaced the unscrupulous Indian Agency had absolutely no conception of the character of the savages whatsoever. They even created a safe haven for the murderous red devils, where even the army could not pursue them.

1Doctor William Notson, post surgeon, a staunch yankee patriot and not a prejudiced Southerner, wrote in his Medical History: "The peculiarities of negro troops in contrast with the white garrison deserves probably some notice...As individual agents, as sentinels, they are not reliable: too liberal in their application of instructions; given to understandings usually incapable of appreciating them. Lying and stealing are the principal vices...The impracticability of making intelligent soldiers out of the mass of the negroes, is growing more evident to the Post Surgeon every day, and his opinion is concurred in by their own officers when speaking with confidence invited by the freedom and intimacy of garrison life." Medical History, vol. 401, pp. 124, 147, 177; also Medical History, Fort McKavett, 1870, p. 169.
Among all the western states, Texas was the most decimated by the uninformed, indifferent and ineffective U. S. Army because the Reconstruction policies disallowed the state to form any military organization to defend itself from the unceasing and increasing depredations of the murderous wild Indians until 1870. The volunteer ranger companies formed that year were more motivated to protect their own people than army troops, but tragic events witnessed by army soldiers would soon after motivate them against the savages also.

John and Pleasant did not lounge or tarry in Angela, they brooked no delay in getting their business completed and heading home. The old retired army mules that John had made a good trade for plodded homeward pulling the goods purchased with minted gold and greenbacks. John always dealt in cash, not trusting credit or banks, therefore he was cordially welcomed by shopkeepers in the fledgling town. He carried his money in a purse hung around his waist under his coat next to the hog-leg revolver strapped there. There were quite a few outlaws and banditos thereabouts, but John had trust in God, and Samuel Colt.

It was a clear March morning approaching noon. The distant white sun sparkled through a sprinkling of lazy clouds. Pleasant was enjoying a tasty struggle with a pull of licorice and watching his Poppa puff on his long-stemmed pipe and urge the floppy-eared and stiff-necked hybrids back to the ranch.

"What's needed son, is cattle as hardy and tough as the longhorned strain but with more meat on the bone."

"Ya mean more meat and less horn?"

His father chuckled.

"You get the idee boy. If these Herefords don't turn out some better stock we'll try some other breeds. Brahman maybe, or Angus. I've heard ol' man Goodnight's tryin' ta breed longhorns with buffalo. wuden' that be a horned devil?"

"When we gonna shoot us some more a' these cottontails ta eat Poppa?" Pleasant asked as half a dozen hares scattered in as many directions through the brush beside the rutted wagon trail. "They's
about a jillion of 'em. I shore like the taste a' rabbit."

"I know you do Pleasant. We'd best get us a few more later this week while the gettin's good. Can't
eat 'em when it's hot."

"I always wondered 'bout that. Why 'zat?"

"Don't rightly know son. I been told they get wormy in the summer an' it'll make you sick if you
eat em. I jes go by what my daddy and momma tol' me an' Al never got no rabbit-sick. Trust in the ol'
sayin's, they's a reason..."

"Poppa! I hear Injuns! Hear ern?"

John whoaed the mules to quiet the chains and the creaking wagon. They listened intently to the
whoops and yips of the Indians ring distinctly through the air.

"Hold on son. We'd better high-tail it to ta home. Momma and sis may need some he'p."

"Poppa, I smell woodsmoke too! Looky yonder!"

"That's the house a 'burnin' boy! O God he'p us! Get them rifles handy," John directed as he pop-
ped a long bullwhip onto the lead mules trump and hollered, "Get up there!" The big, long-legged
mules leaned into the traces and lumbered into a rough, jarring run.

"Take the reins Plez," Poppa yelled over the jangle and rumble of the laden wagon as it rolled and
bounced over the hardpan. The boy stood to take the reins and guide the wide-eyed mules through
the brush homeward, toward the tower of dark smoke boiling up into the soft blue sky.

Poppa pulled an army carbine from under the wagon seat and cocked it, peering ahead anxiously.
Another carbine lay under the seat and Pleasant toed it to a position beneath him so that he could reach
it quickly.

After what seemed an hour but perhaps was no more than ten or twelve minutes they came in sight
of the burning house about a quarter mile distant. Hoping to draw the Indian's attention away from
Susannah and Winnie, not expecting to actually hit what he threw bullets at, John began shooting from
the jostling, jumping wagon. Wild, half naked Comanches rode painted ponies around the blazing
house, whooping beastial cries of cruelty. When the red
men became aware of the charging wagon they initially shied away but when they saw only a man and a boy they turned to attack.

"Drive straight to the house boy. We gotta get yer momma and sister outta there!"

Pleasant whipped the terrified mules on toward the flames. Poppa was shooting and cocking as fast as he could and two painted Comanche fell from their mounts, but twenty guns and bows sent lead and flint into him, miraculously missing Pleasant. Before Poppa died and fell from the wagon he managed to speak.

"Up to you son. Save yer momma and sis. I..."

The long moment was indelibly printed in Pleasant’s memory. Time seemed to stretch and slow. Sounds distorted, and echoed. Vision became cruelly acute. The smell of sweat and blood and fear became a taste of anger and hate and insanity. Poppa fell forever.

Pleasant screamed, “Poppa!” as his revered father fell from the wagon and out of his life, his body riddled with arrows and gushing blood from too many wounds. A flint lance creased Pleasant’s thigh, the sharp pain focused his attention on his instant plight. His fathers words continued to ring and echo in his mind pleading with him to save his momma, his sister.

The mules turned away from the scorching flames and the boy quickly grabbed the remaining carbine and jumped from the tilting wagon. He fell when his bleeding leg folded under him. He rolled and gained one knee as a charging warrior tried to ride him down. He shot and the charging Comanche fell backwards over the rump of his horse. Then he turned and ran, as best he could, into the roaring inferno.

Winnie outran Susannah into the house, holding the door for her then slamming it behind her. Together they bolted and barred the door, then began closing the thick oaken shutters inside the windows. After the windows was closed each of them grabbed a gun, Winnie the rifle Poppa had given her and Susannah the ten-gauge, goose shotgun with the long barrel. Crosses had been cut
in each hardwood shutter to allow the shooters in the small house to cover a wide area of the surrounding clearing. The Comanches and Kiowas rode to a spot two hundred yards distant from the house and began screaming their strange barking sounds, periodically shooting a rifle at the house. When thy built up their nerve and charged, Winnie shot first and true, knocking a feathered fiend from his painted pony. Susannah waited until they closed to around thirty or forty yards before emptying one deadly barrel of lead at a fast approaching killer, resighted and fired the other barrel, sliding the long shotgun back through the shooting slot to break the barrel open and reload. Winnie continued to cock and fire, taking deadly aim. She was frightened, but not enough to throw her aim off. She'd been taught that these savages were people too. Even so, these people were trying to murder her and her mamma, so they deserved a good killing.

Within half a minute the Indians realized the defenders were not going to be taken easily and they retreated to a safer range. They redskins held a brief conference and decided upon a better method of dispensing with the hated white faces in the little house. After a few minutes of respite Susannah saw the smoke, the Comanches had built a fire. They intended to burn the out, or they were going to try. She thought about running to the storm cellar and barring the door, but then the flaming arrows began hitting the roof. The screaming maniacs began prancing their horses and shaking their weapons, anxious for the flames to drive their quarry out to their cruel ministrations. Susannah could think of only two things to do. Pray, and shoot.

Pleasant ran through the flaming remnants of the door into the blinding, choking smoke. Just inside he fell again, quickly rolling over and off what he realized was the still smoldering remains of his momma. The flames still licked at her clothes. He pushed and pulled and rolled his beloved mother outside away from the hell that killed her. His hands smoked and burned but he felt no pain. Once he had her body clear of the fire an arrow stuck into her bare, blistered back.
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Yelling incoherently Pleasant snatched up the carbine and scattered the approaching devils with accurate hot lead.

Sobbing, choking, growling, crazed with shock and fear, pain and wrath, he stumbled to his feet hoarsely calling “Winnie!”

Stumbling back into the roaring flames he was felled from a blow from a rifle butt to his smoking head. His last sensation before consciousness fled was the smell of roasted meat. His last thought was the realization that the cooking meat was his momma. And his sister.

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Old Juanio had been plowing the field that would be planted with corn as soon as he finished turning the soil this final time, softening the earth for the young shoots that would soon sprout after the seeding and the good watering. He was absorbed in his work, in keeping the strong mule in the furrow and keeping the plow upright and in line. His thoughts were also tumbling over possibilities of what may have caused the family dog, Durnit, to growl and bark so ferociously a minute of so earlier and then so suddenly go silent. Perhaps he had killed a varmint, a coon, an armadillo maybe, and was bringing the dead varmint to Juanio as he had been trained. As he pondered and plowed he became aware of a presence approaching behind him. Was it old Durnit?

Juanio’s eyesight was so poor that he probably did not recognize that the rider who walked his horse up behind him atop the soft, moist soil was not a friend. As it was, he only became aware of the rider and recognized him to be a murderous Comanche when the flint arrowhead appeared, protruding from his paunch, having penetrated his back just above the waist.

The mule felt the drag on the reins and halted. The Comanche brute dismounted and walked to the mule, cutting the traces and reins. The mule then smelled the Comanche, or the blood, brayed a discordant note of fright and shied from the instinctive smell of danger, hot blood and hate, jumping
away over the freshly cut rows and into the brush. With the razor-sharp steel skinning knife that he had plundered from a slaughtered sheep-herding family south of the Rio Bravo, the Comanche strode to the helpless old Mexican man and lifted his head, and his scalp. The hair was so thin in places but there was enough of the almost white man to harvest. He quickly cut a circular patch of skin and hair, tearing it loose and exposing the skull in places. Juanio only groaned at this final indignity in a life that had been filled with drudgery, toil and sorrow. He had lost his family many years before to such savages as this, perhaps it was fitting that he also should suffer death at their hand. Juanio thought he had died then, but he was not so fortunate.

The full moon was the first thing Juanio became aware of when he regained consciousness. He was confused by the fuzzy, soft light. He could not quite identify it, but its gentle light seemed to comfort his mind, encompassing him in a promise, an assurance of salvation and rest. And then he moved and red pain lit up the inside of his eyelids. Darkness enveloped him and murmured menace. His gnarly, work-curled hands slowly moved to discover the shaft and the sharp stone point protruding from the side of his stomach. Memory of what had occurred in the light of day returned to him in unbidden waves and pulses and his rough old hand found bare-to-the-bone skull. Why wasn’t he dead? Or was he dead? No, he must be alive, only life could be so painful.

Steeling his resolve, his strong old hands held the wooden shaft of the arrow close to his stomach and broke the arrowhead off. He almost lost consciousness again, the hot dizziness overwhelmed him and he purged his guts bringing up bile and blood, almost choking. When his breath returned, he touched the arrowhead again and found it dangling from the shaft, still attached by some tough, thin strips, maybe gut or rawhide. He couldn’t manage to pull it free. The plow was just beside him and he crawled and scooted until he could grind the strip against the steel edge of the beveled blade. Carefully he sawed and patiently bore the discomfort until the stone point fell into the fragrant earth.
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He laid motionless, his face in the dirt until he again gathered his will to do what he knew must be done. Reaching behind to grip the shaft as close to the skin as he could, he began to slowly pull and withdraw the wooden stick. The dried blood bonding the wood to flesh, inside and out, caused him paralyzing pain and the hot, ringing darkness began to wash over him. Hurriedly, before he again blacked out, he jerked the shaft free with what strength and resolution left within him.

When consciousness returned he wished it had not. Disoriented, weak, in pain, he lay taking painful shallow breaths, allowing his old and broken mind to evaluate his circumstance and search for some course of action, a direction in his dilemma. The decision was to go to his family who had passed this way so very long ago. Where they waited there was no pain, only joy and peace and love. The priests had always taught that a man who took his own life would be forever condemned. If he just lay still and waited for death wouldn’t that be sinful? He felt he must struggle to live, though there was nothing for him here. So he focused his mind on living, with all its suffering and shame.

He began to crawl in the direction it seemed the smoke came from and where the ranch house must be, or where it had been. His head screamed in pain and torturous suffering further blurred his poor vision. His guts burned inside him and his tongue was glued to the roof of his mouth. His dry throat stung with every breath, he pushed on, fighting the pain, willing himself to stay above the surface of the warm, liquid darkness that beckoned and promised to be a balm. That deep, inviting slumber pulled at him, coaxing him to simply surrender, to accept the sweet gift of inevitable death.

"No!" he growled more than articulated. The sound that emitted from his desiccated mouth and throat was a strangled, beastial cry. Struggling against the seductful slumber that sucked at his very soul, he struggled to stand. Standing, he weaved and stumbled, but kept his feet. Bending at the waist, elbows on knees, he lowered his old head as the spinning black waves tried to pull him back down. His feet seemed to be on fire. Was he standing on coals? Jerking trembling, he spasmodically lurched forward utilizing his arms.
as front legs to keep from falling face-first to the ground. Pain racked him from ground to his crown. Still, he kept to his feet, stumbled, groaned, but walked.

Finally, trembling and shaking violently, he leaned into the rock wall of the water well in the yard. His hands found the bucket and wonderful cool water within it. He clumsily filled the dipper and raised it to his old cracked lips. There was pain in the water’s touch and pleasure. He drank deeply, then shrank and slipped down the well’s wall.

Lifting a foot to within reach of his hand, his trembling touch told him another cruel truth. The Comanche had not only scalped his head, he had skinned the soles of his feet. The demon knew that Juanio still lived and wanted him to suffer more before he died. His hand found the water bucket and lifted it down to the ground beside him. Using the dipper he poured water over his feet, washing away the dirt stuck to the hot, tender flesh. The cool water brought a feeling that could be described as unbearable relief, exquisite pain. Filling the dipper again he lifted it over his head and dumped it over the bare bone. He gasped and jerked at the shock and the following cool respite. He raised his shaking hand to touch his pounding temples and discovered his ear was gone. Both ears were gone, cleanly sliced from his head, only holes remained. In despair, he dropped his face into his hands and found his nose also had been cut off, the fleshy end removed. He screamed in anguish, fear, hate and horror. His humanity had been stripped from him.

When he somewhat recovered from the shock of these further mutilations, he trembled at an unthinkable thought that came into his mind, a memory of a past depredation he had witnessed after a Comanche attack. Slowly, hesitantly, he let his hand lover to explore his manhood. He expressed gratitude to God for sparing him the organs that made him a man. At least he could make water. Insanely, he laugh, then cried. Trembling in pain and shock, he moaned like a dying animal until he passed once more into unconscious, sweet oblivion.
"...Am I my brother's keeper?"

- Genesis 4:9

The war party of the Comanche and Kiowa thieves drove the stolen herd of horses and mules north toward the land the Mexicans had named Llano Estacado (Staked Plains). Although these tribes were wanderers, "vagabonds upon the earth", their primary haunts those days were in the area north of the Colorado River and south of the Canadian River in what came to be known as the Texas panhandle. This land and the wide swath of the southern extension of the Great Plains was appropriately known as Comancheria, for truly the Comanche 'nation' ruled those lands along with their allies, the Kiowa, the Southern Cheyenne and the Arapaho. Once a raiding party reached these lands they had little fear that any would pursue them and thus the hapless victims who had been stolen from their homes had little hope of being other than captives and the suffering slaves of these brutal savages.

Historians often omit the actual fact that the U.S. Government aided the Indian atrocities in Texas during Reconstruction by the policies based on bias, ignorance and apathy. Indian raids into the Texas settlements during the war between the states increased terribly. There was no effective white force available to combat the escalating attacks, most of the men and boys being employed fighting the hopeless cause of the Confederacy many hundreds of miles away from Texas. When the war ended the strikes were not hindered, but actually increased in number and ferocity. Never before in the history of America were there more murders, molestation, mutilations and destruction and theft of property allowed by government against a constrained and peaceable people.

The yankee soldiers that came to Texas following the war came to seize, subjugate and occupy, and protection of its recent enemies were certainly not a priority. The U.S. Government was primarily apprehensive of insurrection and unconcerned with the suffering of rebels. General Philip Henry Sheridan was given powers of a dictator over Reconstruction Texas and when the Texas Governor mercifully made
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an effort to protect the settlers along the long frontier of Texas by raising a thousand rangers, Sheridan refused to allow it.

By 1870, U.S. Army forts finally had reestablished the western line that had existed twenty years earlier. Government policy was being made by men who had never been in Texas and never seen a Comanche. In 1867 at Medicine Lodge, Kansas, the federal government had signed treaties with the four primary hostile Indian tribes of the Southern Great Plains. These Indians ostensibly agreed to reservations in Indian Territory (Oklahoma). But these tribes considered Texians a separate people from the Americans and bluecoats, in the view of the Indians they made any treaty with Texas.

The Indians had asked for the granting of land of the buffalo range in Southern Great Plains which included a large portion of Texas, but the U.S. Government owned no land in Texas. The Annexation Treaty of 1845 agreed upon when the independent nation of Texas became a state established that all the land within the boundaries of Texas was Texas land and no portion was federal land. There was no national land in Texas to bargain away to the Indians. Notwithstanding this lack of jurisdiction, the U.S. Government promised and pledged in the Medicine Lodge Treaty that there would be no hunting of buffalo by white hunters south of the Arkansas River and no intrusion of Americans into their granted hunting grounds.

There was little enforcement of this illegal treaty by the government and small bands of hunters had already begun to trickle down into the panhandle from Kansas by the winter of 1870-71. The hunters sought the buffalo in winter when the cold winds of the plains kept the Indians close to their fires and when the buffalo coats were thick. Later, when the political climate had changed, General Sheridan ex-postulated against measures to save the buffalo, stating that these who hunted illegally were beneficial to the aims of Manifest Destiny in:

"...destroying the Indian’s commissary;...Send them (buffalo hunters) powder and lead if you will, but for the sake of a lasting peace let them kill, skin and sell until the buffaloes are exterminated. Then you prairies can be covered with speckled cattle, and the festive cowboy who follows the hunter as a second forerunner of advanced civilization."
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The army had established the line of forts to protect the white settlements of the frontier. The peace and reservation policy of the U. S. Government at this time prevented the army from its purpose. The army could not wreck vengeance on the cruel Comanches and Kiowas. They were only allowed to bury the burned and mutilated corpses and try to ransom the tortured, maimed and often deranged captives. The many captives could expect no help from the army that was supposed to protect them.

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Miraculously, Juanio had made it close enough to a road leading to Angela that he was found crawling on hands and knees through the mesquite brush and prickly pear. He was carried to Fort Concho where the post surgeon did his best to comfort him before he died. He was able to tell the fort commander, Colonel Mackenzie, what had occurred and to confirm some of what had already been reported. Two patrols were sent out, one to try to locate the Indian's trail and peaceably escort them back across the Red River to their reservation; that was all that government Indian policy allowed them to do. The other patrol was to visit the ranches and farms that had been attacked and bury the dead.

Colonel Mackenzie had already sent out a squad to relay warning to camps, forts and settlements both north and south that might be in the path of the marauding savages. He was disgusted, frustrated, furious. These were not acts of war, if so they might be more readily understood, if not forgiven. These were cowardly and criminal acts of rape, theft, destruction of property, kidnapping and murder. He gave release to his emotions in a missive to his superior officers. What else could he do?

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Tied to a strap surrounding the girth of a stolen horse and led by the Comanche Red Horn, or Cuerno Rojo, was the limp, unconscious body of Pleasant John Thompson Junior. Red Horn had witnessed the courage of the boy and had counted coup on his head.
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with his rifle a bit to hard. The boy had slept for all the hours since. Some of his bloody brothers
wanted to slay all the whites at the last home they had attacked, arguing that they had spared enough
lives for prisoners, their number near four hands. But the ones who argued to kill the remaining pri-
soners were the ones who already had captives to take back to their squaws. The horses and mules they
had stolen were more valued by the Indians than the white children and women captives and every
warrior was needed to drive the big herd home. Others had taken their captives, Red Horn would have
his.

Bound to another horse led by Red Horn’s uncle, Shaking Hand, was Winnie Lee Thompson. Of
course Red Horn did not know the children’s names, neither did he care. It was plain however that the
girl and boy were siblings, though both bloody and beaten. Pleasant was fortunate to be unconscious
blissfully unaware of their plight and pain. Winnie had cried, bawled uncontrollably in her grief and
despair, crying not for her own suffering but for here lost parents and for her brother who hung limp
and lifeless across the back of the big horse beside her. She was beaten for her tears, then beaten for
defiantly cursing her captors. The brutal beating did not restrain her, she was simply spent, exhausted.
Soon the strength of her upbringing and her ancestry braced her. The love for her brother, now her only
living family, and her innate and pragmatic intelligence dried her tears, sharpened her mind. Her
growing hate steeled her resolve. The Christian faith she had learned at her mother’s knees assured
her heart. She prayed, knowing God heard and would provide a way. She would survive. God would
save her, and her beloved brother.

Her pale blonde hair had both endangered and preserved her. Several warriors coveted the long,
light-golden tresses for their collection of scalps. Her savior was the strong-willed chief Shaking Hand
who took her as his slave. Winnie saw the insane greed, or was it perverted lust in his black eyes? She
was only twelve, almost, still a child and too young to know such things. She was on the cusp of
womanhood with all its promise, mystery
and misery. Winnie was determined to overcome this present misery and hold fast to the promise.

The party of Comanche, Kiowa and captives began their passage even before the light of the second day and continued until light failed. Each night the prisoners were tied securely with strong rawhide cord. The cruel captors threw them scraps like dogs when they did feed them, allowed them little water and less privacy or opportunity to attend to bodily functions. The women, three of them, were repeatedly raped every night, raped in full view of all the others. Most of the white children had never seen this before and cried along with the violated women, in shock and confusion. The savages knew no concept of shame or conscience, they tortured and violated the women in raucous laughter and celebration.

There might be some measure of veracity in the fictional representation of the 'noble savage' elsewhere in another more civilized tribe, but there was no virtue, no mercy, no decency in the Comanche or the Kiowa. In their bestial hearts beat only hatred, vile, despicable and loathsome. They were nasty, abominable swine, brutes, devils. In all the records of white women taken by these tribes, not a single one avoided multiple rapes. Many times the children too were defiled, tortured, maimed, mutilated, burned alive.

The Comanche were an especially noxious breed and no care or thought were given to hygiene or sanitation. They moved their camps only when they became so foul with their excretions and with the rotting carcasses of their hunting kills that the buzzards circling above cued their location to their foes for great distances. They were stone-age brutes and all the writers whose idealistic imaginings characterized them as embodying any 'nobility' whatever never met a Comanche.

Winnie did her best to care for her brother, wetting his lips, coaxing him to sip the paltry amount of water allotted them. After three days of hard travel across the dusty plains, abused and bloody, the captives were becoming as disgustingly filthy as their captors. The difference being that the captives were aware of and discomforted by their foul condition. Winnie worried over her brother, did not
rest when the Indians stopped, but attended to him. She prayed for him. Day after day he lolled unconscious across the back of the a house, breathing only shallowly, never opening his eyes or uttering a sound. She feared that the scowling Comanche who pulled her brother’s horse every day would tire of his condition and kill him. At night, when she managed to be tired close to hi, she whispered loving encouragement to him and hummed familiar songs. She feared that he would never wake up again and that she would truly be alone. And she worried that he may awake and be so severely damaged that he would never again be the brother she had shared her life with since birth. The swelling on his head was huge, infected, and wept viscid, putrid fluid.

On the day he awoke, he groaned in a despairing world of agony. Red Horn stopped the horse, turned to look at the slowly writhing boy. He motioned to Shaking Hand and uttered some Comanche communication Shaking Hand dismounted and untied Winnie. She ran to her brother and held his head up. Red Horn handed her a skin of water and she bade her brother drink. Surprisingly, he drank a few swallows, caught his breath and drank a little more. In waking, the boy joined his twin in suffering pain, grief and misery. In their tender youth, their torment and desolate plight made grave and irreversible impressions on their developing psyches, and in their wounded souls.

That evening the Indians butchered a mule. The three women among the captives were made to roast the meat on spits above the fire. After the savages had eaten their fill, the captives were allowed the remnants. Winnie had to chew the tough meat to soften it and then coax Pleasant to swallow it. He had neither the strength nor the appetite to eat on his own. After a few swallows her brother fell again into a deep sleep which both worried and pleased Winnie in turn. She prayed for him.

Resting only for a few hours in the night, the Comanche drove the stolen livestock, the plunder and prisoners relentlessly across the grassy plains without consideration for the beasts nor
the infirm and wounded. Sympathy was unknown to the race. The arid land marked their passage with a cloud of orange dust. The warriors gave no thought to any pursuit, not here in the land they ruled.

They were far from the pale one’s settlements and forts, they did not concern themselves with signals of their passage. No white man dared pass this way, so they thought. They hurried toward their camp in the big canyon and headed straight into the company of a dozen buffalo hunters with their big-bore, long-range and accurate rifles who had been alerted of their approach by the towering dust cloud. The hunters laid in wait quietly behind the mesquite and prairie grass.

Grumpy dropped down from the limbs of the lone scrub oak tree for a long distance and scampered sideways like a primate to where his friends Stepper and Abe hid behind a thick stand of sagebrush.

“It’s Injuns aw’ite. They’s a’comin’ on a line to pass right ‘cross yonder,” Grumpy motioned his arm to indicate the Comanche’s path. “They’s drivin’ a big herd a’ horses n’ mules an’ it looks like chillen an’ wimen with’ ‘em.”

“Hell you say. Comanche don’ usegy take no squaws ‘er children when they go ta stealin’ and killin’. I reckon they’s white women an’ children, stole away by them stinkin’ red devils,” Stepper opined.

“Think so?” Abe asked.
“More’n likely.”
“How many Injuns?”
“Meybe thirty, I s’pose.”
“Go tell the others Grump.”
“Oh yea, it’s aw-ways Grumpy, climb a tree, Grump do dis, Grump do dat...”
“Quit gripin’ Grumpy, this ain’t the time. Jes’ shut up an’ go on an’ tell ‘em.”

Mumbling curses, Grumpy scampered low and quick through the tall grass and brush alerting the other hunters of the approaching Comanches and what appeared to be white captives.
The hunters had first took it for granted that the dustcloud moving toward them was the vanguard of the southern buffalo herd and they had taken up shooting positions atop the highest swells of earth which were only slightly higher than the surrounding plain, but did afford better visability and perfect positions to make a stand to slay buffalo, or as the situation developed, to slay Comanches.

When they became aware that Indians approached instead of buffalo they gave serious thought to allowing them to pass unmolested, that is, if they could remain undetected. If they fired on the warparty, a few or all of their own might die. At the very least they would be forced to leave this hunting ground. So, when they saw the Indians driving the horse herd they sat quiet until a pair of hunters saw the bloodied and bruised condition of the captive women and children tied to stolen, branded horses. Most of the captives were Mexicans, but there were a few white captives, their own kind. When Stepper and Abe saw the beautiful blonde-haired girl that Grumpy pointed out, they began the brawl, knocking a pair of redskins from their ponies with their big, booming rifles.

Completely surprised and not knowing the numbers nor the identity of the attackers, the Comanche panicked, driving the stolen herd and the prisoners in a wild stampede before them. Shaking Hand pulled the leads of Winnie's horse, running in headlong flight. Winnie, mimicking Shaking Hand, leaned low over the horse's back, holding desperately to the plunging steed's mane. Fleetingly, she wondered who these shooters could be and turned her head to see. Pleasant's torn head throbbed with exquisite pain with each jump of the horse beneath him. Red Horn had tied his prisoner's mount to a rope around his own horse's neck and each horse ran and pulled against the other in an effort to break away from the fearful sound of the big-bore rifles. Red Horn could not shoot with his horse out of control so his attention and efforts were focused on staying mounted and seeking the safety of distance from the whistling chunks of lead.
Even through the blinding pain Pleasant recognized opportunity and his father's last words spoke louder than all the deadly commotion surrounding him. "Up to you son...save Momma and Sis." He had already lost Momma, he had to find a way to save Sis.

He was bent over the withers of the running horse, his hands tied but gripping the rope around the stretching neck of the horse. His face was atop his hands and without conscious deliberation he began to gnaw at the leather ties. The added pain of loosening teeth shocked him with each collision of the iron-clad hooves with the hard-packed earth. Strength, born of desperation, love, hate, or maybe from Winnie's answered prayer, this strength caused his masseter muscles to harden into powerful knots as his sharp, new canines cut the hide that bound him.

Unbound at last, Pleasant turned, trying in the turmoil and swirling dust to locate Winnie and it was just as he saw her, just as their eyes met that his horse left the ground to clear a prickly pear patch and spilled him to bounce and roll beneath the hooves of the trailing herd. He did not hear his sister's scream, "Plez!" A stone or a hoof struck his beleaguered head, again rendering him unconscious.

The Comanches ran the horses for another two or three miles until they realized that there was no pursuit, then they gathered and discussed what should be done. Three of their brother warriors were missing, presumed shot. Three others were dispatched to recover their bodies or to rescue them when circumstances allowed and either help them or dispose of them properly. Four of their number were grievously wounded. Two of these who were profusely bleeding were already singing their death songs as others began looking for a likely spot to bury them, cover them with stones and spiny cactus to keep the varmints from their soon-to-be corpses.

A consensus was reached to ride all night, the distance remaining would allow them to reach their camp sometime before dark the following day. Once there, they would secure the horse herd and the captives, rest for a night, then recruit more warriors to return and exact revenge. Red Horn wanted to immediately attack
and recover his new-found son, if he still lived, but he found no confederates. He had lost face when he had lost the red-haired boy, and since he could not fight the big rifles alone, he urged the others home at a trot.

The hunters had seen the boy fall from the jumping horse and as soon as the area was clear of Comanches, except for the dead, they ran to check whether he had survived the fall. There was an obviously earlier injury, a severe and swollen knot on the back of his head. His head had again been injured in this recent fall, a cut above his eye that was darkening and swelling fast.

Not knowing how long it might be before the Indians returned, and it was when, not if, they knew that there was no time to dally. Only two of their four big freight wagons were full of hides and meat, but it was unanimous that they load the unconscious lad atop the pile of hides and light out for Fort Griffin on the Clear Fork of the Brazos River, the closest refuge available to the little company. With the wagons, it may be near a three day journey southeast to the fort, four or five days if problems presented. They would post scouts to trail them so they could be forewarned of the approach of redskins. They put scouts out before and beside them as well. These men were not cowards, they were wary and wise. They could fight a reasonable number of Comanches, but they could be welcoming the entire Comanche and Kiowa nations if they dawdled.

There were six hundred soldiers at Fort Griffin under Colonel Wood. The Tonkawa tribe also had a village there and the Tonks were mortal enemies of the Comanche. The hunters could retire there for the summer, sell their hides and meat and unwind at The Flat, which was the rough little settlement of civilians close by the fort. The Flat had grown into a helltown of gunmen, muleskinners, dance hall girls, prostitutes, gamblers, hunters, drunk Indians and drunker soldiers along with other assorted riff-raff of the frontier. It seemed to Stepper and Abe that it may be safer and smarter to search for the southern herd of buffalo and profitable game down around the Conchos or the Pecos, maybe the Devil's
River.

All along the lengthy dash down to Fort Griffin the hunters kept loaded revolvers and rifles close to hand and a constant watch on all sides. It was wise to never underestimate the Comanche's and Kiowa's ability to track and attack. Warriors rode those tough Indian ponies far and fast, much faster than the mules could pull the wagons. The hunters had a head start, yet there was no certainty that the Comanches could not catch them. They traveled through the rest of the first day and through the night pushing the animals southeast in the opposite direction that the Indians took. Both the Comanche and the hunters were anxious to fight, and both were fearful.

Three exhausting days after the skirmish the hunters arrived at Fort Griffin. They delivered the boy to the medical officer there and gave an account of their run-in to a group of officers who made a report. They estimated that there were a dozen or more captives, mostly children. The commander sent out patrols to scout and they scoured the land in all directions. They found no sign of Indians in the area except for the friendly, ever-present Tonkawa. After six days they returned.

It seemed that the government closed the matter with the scout and the report, the entire government out there in the west consisting of only the army. Their hands were tied by the Quaker peace policy of the politicians in far-away Washington. Everyone thought it sad and tragic that honest, struggling settlers were continuing to be murdered, their children and wives stolen and sure to be severely abused if not tortured to death. Officers and soldiers in the ranks continually discussed the disbelieving attitudes of the policy makers. Even though much of the ex-rebel populace despised the yankee soldiers, some of the soldiers still had human sympathy and wanted to protect these proud people who were not allowed to protect themselves. But, they were soldiers and they obeyed orders, as unpalatable and disgusting as that might be.

The army rotated on patrol in squads for weeks at a time, returned and reported no contact with hostiles. The captives
seemed to have been abandoned, pushed back into insignificance. Only the boy whose head had been bandaged for so many days, conscious only for the past week and still disoriented, only he held his sister's captivity in the highest significance.

Army medical attendants intercepted Pleasant John twice as he tried to slip out of the fort's infirmary. He ranted that he was going to get his sister even though he knew he would have to go by himself. The second time that he tried to leave, they overpowered the weakened boy and tied him down to the cot. The fort's surgeon explained patiently that his head injuries required him to convalesce for quite awhile longer, possibly for months. Another blow to his fractured skull would kill him, almost certainly.

Pleasant felt dead already. Without his family, without love, life was lost. He screamed at the doctor that his sister was all he had left, that is 'if' she still lived. And, if she lived, she was suffering: without doubt she was suffering. He had to rescue her. She had no one else. He was her only hope. The surgeon had sedated him with medicine in his food; otherwise he refused and fought all medication. He wanted only to be released. The doctor considered telling him about his mother, but refrained. It would serve only to further upset him. It was difficult enough keeping him calm, halfway calm that is.

Stepper, Abe and Grumpy had visited the lad a few times since he had returned to consciousness, and though they admired his courage, they tried to dissuade him from the crazy idea of riding into the endless hell of Comancheria after his sister. If an attempt to rescue the girl by force was made, the hate-filled Comanche may kill her in spite. They brought the boy candy which he wrapped up in a cloth, saving it for Winnie. He knew she was hungry.

The corporal bringing Pleasant his breakfast two days after they had tied him down hurried the plate into the infirmary hoping to get it there while it was still hot and somewhat appetizing. He found the cot inhabited only by a wadded-up blanket and a note. A search of the fort did not produce the missing patient. What was found however was that two horses, a saddle and a packsaddle were missing from the livery. And further investigation revealed
a carbine, a rifle, two six-guns along with several boxes of ammunition were missing from the armory. The note found in the empty cot exhibited the boy's upbringing:

"I will return and pay for the use of the horses guns all the utter stuf from yer stors. I am not a thief.

signed P. J. Thompson Junior."

Two squads of soldiers were dispatched and were led by several Tonkawa scouts with orders to locate the runaway and return him to the fort for his well-being. After three days they found no further trace of his passage and returned empty-handed.

Commander Wood was apoplectic. He fumed and threatened every soldier involved with keeping or finding the boy. He also sought permission from his superiors to lead a large contingent of cavalry into the plains to find the boy and force the savages into releasing the innocents they had stolen. Permission was not granted. Policy must be adhered to with no exceptions.

When the squads searching for Pleasant returned to the fort to be dressed down by the Colonel, Pleasant John was a hundred miles north-northwest and following a trail of many shod horses surrounded by tracks of unshod hooves, fast on the trail of the monsters who had his sweet sister.

The giant Tonkawa war chief, Big Nose Johnson, had gashed his calf with a dull axe while cutting firewood and he instructed the fort surgeon about the proper way to suture the wound. It was his skin that was being stitched and he wanted it stitched like he wanted it stitched. Eventually, the surgeon abandoned his medical training and sewed the wound as the intimidating Tonkawa titan instructed.

This happened to be the same day they had stopped Pleasant the second time from leaving the fort to go find Winnie. Big Nose had heard the reports of the Comanche raids from Mexico back through the white settlements and ranches and the hunters had told him the story of the boy who had chewed through his bindings and escaped.
from the Comanches. He heard that day of the brave boy's eagerness to enter the dangerous country of the crazy Comanches and rescue his sister. Big Nose hated the Comanches. They had killed and mutilated, stolen and tortured some of his own family. He felt the same way the boy felt.

When the boy left the fort during the night two days later, Big Nose was waiting. He watched him wrap the horse's hooves in thick gauze from the infirmary and lead the horses easily past the pickets. The boy was good, the watchmen were poor. Big Nose had spoken to the scouts which the army employed, especially Tonkawa Bill, the head scout of the Tonkawas, before he had prepared for the journey. Big Nose allowed the boy an hour's headstart, then he was on Pleasant's trail.

His sister's screams reverberated behind his eyes and confused him. He could not recall hearing Winnie scream at the attack on the ranch nor remember even seeing her. Not until they were captured and he awoke tied to a stolen horse did he recall her being there. When did he hear her screaming for the unsettling sound to be ringing so clearly through his mind? Or, was she screaming now? Was she now suffering the cruel abuses of the brutal beasts who held her?

There was still severe swelling beneath his hair on the crown of his head and a swoll-knot above his eye almost the size of a hen egg. Every step of the cavalry horse beneath him made both injuries throb increasingly until he had to rein in. There were times when his vision blurred, the sweaty dizziness overcame him and caused burning-hot bile to rise in his throat, taking his breath. He had learned that the worst of the sickness and dizziness would pass if he lowered his head below his knees, so when the ringing dizziness began he would dismount and squat with his head held low until he could once again focus and withstand the constant ache. He had fallen from the horse once, the shock to his head paralyzing him for a period of time which he could not estimate. He fully realized that he was fortunate that the army horses had stood close while
he had been incapacitated. Without a horse, hundreds of miles into Comancheria, all alone and without water or provisions, he knew his chances of survival would be slim. And he must survive. He was Winnie's only hope.

Perhaps the echoing screams were his imagination. He knew she was suffering; he could feel her pain, her fear, her hope and her courage. It was more than empathy. It was their love that drew him, the blood that pulled him, called to him, gave him the strength to continue through the long, hard days and nights, despite all obstacles. Their love was both learned and inborn. It was innate, deep-rooted to the very marrow of the bone. This love was born and borne in the blood and those natural roots had blossomed and bloomed, grown and flourished to bud and flower in the joys of family. Now that the family tree had been so severely pruned the energy in the remaining love exponentially empowering each end of the severed branch. From the womb they had grown together, these could not be easily separated; their ties could not be broken.

There had ever been a spiritual sharing betwixt the fraternal twins, unspoken knowledge of the other's thoughts, an agreement of viewpoint and opinion, a certain kinship that was closer than kin. Each lived their own life and the life of the other. This extraordinary gift of melding set them apart from others and often caused others to envy or fear them. Some others held them in awe.

Mundane moments which others experienced as unremarkable were enjoyed by the twins as wonder-filled because they were silently and secretly shared. This gift was their treasure, held close and precious. The thoughts and emotions of the other were acutely held and felt by both. Pleasant knew Winnie suffered. And so he suffered. He must find her, help her.

He was alone. He was the only one in the world who cared enough to seek her. Maybe there were others who cared but fear restrained them. Pleasant's strongest fear was losing her sister too. But, Pleasant wasn't driven by fear or courage, it was love that bade him and made him go where trepedation barred others. Love allowed him to go willingly to the place that terror could not drive others. It wasn't that love overcame and conquered his fears, in his mind, fear
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was not a part of the equation, it was not considered. Blood called to blood. She was his blood, his only blood.

The officers at the soldier's fort had told him that "steps were being taken to change the policies and directives restraining the army and preparations were being made for a possible campaign to engage the Comanche and Kiowa and other hostile tribes and rescue the surviving captives." These "steps" were dangerously slow and yet to be determined. Pleasant's own steps were directed north and west into the problem. It seemed to his young, uncluttered mind that the problem must be confronted to be solved. Talking about it never got the wood chopped, that's what Poppa always said.

Pleasant had not initially believed that he had been unconscious for so long. Then after accepting the truth and knowing that the devils had his sister, the urgency of the situation overwhelmed him. The cruel Comanches had his sister for weeks without anyone doing anything but talking. He was furious. He raged at the passivity of the army, the acceptance of murder, torture, destruction, kidnapping and butchering of the blameless, law-abiding citizens.

"What kinda' men are ya'll? Cowards! Yer s'posed ta be so'jers. They killed Momma and Poppa! How many others? They stole my sister! Damn you! Yer so'jers! Fight 'em! Lemme go! Lemme go!"

The U. S. Army was still "making plans" and "taking steps"; his sister was suffering. How could he wait? How could he not be consumed, obsessed, how could he help but be furious? His thoughts escaped his mind and were whispered into the wind as he rode northwest, "I'm a'comin' Winnie. Hold on. I'll be there."

The third day out from the fort he found what he had been searching for, certain sign of the passage of Indians with stolen horses, many shod hoof prints mixed with a lesser number of unshod tracks. The first evidence of captives having also passed along this particular trail was a torn and faded bonnet stuck to the thorns of a cactus. It was Winnie's bonnet, he knew it. There were still a few white-gold hairs still inside the worn fabric. There was also a ripped portion of a petticoat caught in the brush and waving in the wind. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth; his ears and cheeks burned.

On the fourth day he came upon a camp where the remains of a carved mule carcass and the shorn grass of many horses grazing. This seemed to trigger a memory. He seemed to have some
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foggy recollection of the place. Red ants harvested the tiny remnants of meat and marrow that the coyotes and buzzards had left of the mule’s flesh. The hide was already stiff and dry. He guessed a month or more had passed since the mule had walked and balked.

Pleasant was motivated by the reminder of the passage of time that the carcass had provided him. He shook himself from an evil vision of his sister’s body also butchered and rotted on the ground.

He must pace himself, he must trust in God, and Winnie, to keep her alive until he got there. When he put the horses into a trot he suffered pounding headaches and dizziness that darkened his sight, so despite his anxiety and eagerness he slowly plodded forward at a pace that irked him to no end. He knew that he must be patient, save his strength. He knew his head would heal given time, just as his leg had healed. But time was not to be trusted. Who knew what tomorrow might bring? His fear was that he did not have much time, and neither did Winnie.

Exhausted, traveling by the light of the moon and later only blue starlight, Pleasant nearly fell from the saddle again. Grudgingly he stopped, unsaddled and hobbled the horse, wrapped himself in the borrowed army blanket and laid in the tender spring grass. He slept deep, and long.

He awoke in the cold, foggy morning to the screaming of the horse. Turning his swollen head, Pleasant saw the cause of their great fear, a big bear pawing at the packsaddle where the stores were tied. Under the blanket he pulled out the big-bore Colt revolver and the bear growled at the movement, its poor vision see only the large blanket stirring and perceived the threat as mightier than it was.

Pleasant yelled at the bear in the hope of scaring it away, but the yell had the opposite effect. The bear sniffed, roared and charged, closing the few feet seemingly instantaneously. The bear swiped its long, curved claws at Pleasant and ripped the blanket, the woolen coat and tore the flesh across his ribs and chest. As the bear spread its huge jaws to encompass Pleasant’s beleagured head, he pulled the trigger of the Colt.

The fat chunk of lead spun less than two feet and entered the bear’s mouth and throat to pass through and ricochet inside the bear’s enraged brain. The great bear died immediately, themselves
massive weight trapping all of Pleasant, mercifully exempting his mangled head and the gun hand stuck in the bear's big mouth. Pleasant could breath only shallowly.

The pressure of the weight on his chest was beneficial in one regard as it slowed the bleeding from the bone-deep slashes in the boy's flesh from the sharp two-inch claws. Wiggle and squirm, push and roll as he was able, Pleasant could not free himself from the half-ton of reeking fur above him. Only his head and the one arm and hand with the handgun was free and the arm was fast growing numb from lack of circulation. He tried to move the arm to restore feeling as thoughts of the varmints that were sure to come came to his mind. The buzzards, wolves, the ants. He struggled harder to free himself, in vain.

The first indication of a visitor came from the horses who turned to look in the direction which was blocked from Pleasant's view by the bulk of the dead bear. The horses were not frightened it seemed, only alert. They whinnied their greeting then lowered their heads to return to their graze. He could hear another horse, a big horse judging by the loud sound of the clomping hooves. The bear carcass seemed to tremble and Pleasant's reflex was to place the muzzle of the six gun against the bear's eye. The big bear's body began sliding down and off of him.

When he was able he half sat up and pointed his Colt at the biggest Indian, the biggest human, with the biggest nose that he had ever seen. The Indian had tied a rope around the bear's leg from his big horse's saddle, pulling the bear and freeing Pleasant. Pleasant was grateful, but wary.

"No shoot!" the Indian pleaded. Pointing to his wide chest he introduced himself, "Big Nose Johnson my name Friendly Injun. Tonkawa. Live by Fort Griffin. Big Nose help you."

Pleasant was still trying to catch his breath. It had been an exhilarating awakening that morning. He stared at the giant apparition in wide-eyed fascination, allowing his recently and regularly shocked brain a moment to weigh this latest incredible incident. Finally, he managed to speak.

"Thanks."
Pleasant lowered the big Colt and scooted to the saddle where the canteen was looped over the horn. He drank deeply, keeping his bright eyes on the monster. The movement had caused the wounds that the bear had contributed to his continuing collection of infirmities to ooze fresh blood. Pleasant poured water over the slashes, wiping some of the blood away.

"Lay down. Be still. Big Nose fix," the Tonkawa pointed at the deep claw cuts.

Pleasant knew that he did need help so he complied with Mister Johnson's instructions. The man did seem friendly. If the man-mountain meant to harm him there was little he could do to prevent him, and he could have taken full advantage of Pleasant's plight of being trapped under the bear. He had to trust the man, but it went against the grain in his brain. He had been taught that when an Indian was trusted, the mistake presented itself shortly. He kept a vigilant eye on the big man.

The Tonkawa went methodically about his work. First, he found and carried what seemed to be a half cord of dry, dead wood close by and built a small fire. He unsaddled and removed items from his packs and sat cross-legged before the fire that he had placed close by Pleasant to warm him. Taking a large skinning knife from a sheath tied to his waist and a long whetstone from a bag, he began sharpening the curved blade, glancing at Pleasant and smiling.

It was the smile that made Pleasant nervous. Poppa had told him about the Tonkawa, related the tales about the tribe eating their enemies, roasting a rump or some ribs. He checked to be sure that the Colt's hammer would be atop a live round.

Mister Johnson made no move toward him with the knife however, he strode to the bear and used a long pole that he had retrieved with the firewood to lever and roll the bear carcass onto its back. Slicing easily through the thick fur and hide from chin to tail he then ripped the hide wide apart and all its glowing innards he pulled onto the thirsty ground. He cut a long section of gut and washed it in water he had boiling, then sliced it into narrow strips. He walked to the nearest large mesquite and returned with a long thorn.
He slotted the thorn with the tip of the knife and carefully worked the strip of gut through the thorn, doubling it and cutting it to a length of about three feet. He tied a knot at the end of the guts and approached Pleasant.

He lifted and leaned the boy's torso up against the pack saddle and quickly took the revolver from his hand.

"You no need," he said, smiling.

Again, the smile made Pleasant wary.

Handing Pleasant the thick hobble rope he directed him, "you bite," then showing him the thorn and gut and pointing to the bear's slashes he added, "I fix," moving his arm in a sewing motion.

Pleasant calmed himself with the thought that the giant would not be doctoring him if he was planning on eating him. At least he must have no plans to eat him immediately, it seemed. But then he recalled how Momma used to stuff a turkey and sew the stuffing inside and his calm deserted him once more. If push came to shove, maybe he could outrun this monster. One of his mother's admonitions settled him a bit. He heard in his memory, "Have a little faith son."

He bit into the braided rope and breathed through his nose, trembling and sweating through the stinging pain. He knew the wound needed closing, he'd seen Poppa sew a tear in a cow where it had been torn during a birthing. They had trapped and tied the cow in a stall and, now he knew why the poor cow kicked and bawled throughout the ordeal. He was tied and trapped only by his own volition and truly wanted to kick and bawl himself, but he withstood it until Big Nose tied the last knot.

"You stay down three-four day. Cut shut, then you go for sister."

"How you know 'bout my sister?"

"I know. Ever body know."

"Why don't ever body he'p me get my sister back? They's hunnerds a so'jers at that fort."

"Maybe so they a'scared."

"Why you here?"

"I no a'scared."

Mister Johnson walked away then and began skinning and butch-
ering the bear. Pleasant was once again exhausted. His wounds stung and seemed to pull against the stitches. Soon, mercifully, he fell asleep. There was a prayer in his thoughts, in his heart, then in his dreams, for Winnie.
CHAPTER THREE

"...a brother is born for adversity." -Proverbs 17:17

Winnie winced when the blunt shaft of the child’s arrow jabbed her in the back. She turned and saw the imp and his cronies laughing at her pain. Not thinking of consequences, she strode into the small group of boys and clipped the one with the little bow with her tight fist, bloodying his nose. They were all surprised when the boy fell back to the ground on his butt. They were even more stupefied that Winnie had even fought back. She was supposed to be a terrified white girl. The expression on the bowboy’s face brought laughter to the surrounding audience of squaws and toothless old men.

The laughter shamed and infuriated the boy and triggered his immediate rush to grapple with the hated, pale-eyed girl. He ran at her with the intention of wrestling her to the ground, but she swung her hard little fist in a long arc, twisting her body on the balls of her feet like she’d learned to swing an axe. She connected with the side of his head, again sending him sprawling on the ground. The other boys began to rush at her and she stood her ground, bracing herself. Amazingly, the boys slid to a stop and ran from her. She wondered at their retreat and was about to strut and swagger when she was clouted to the ground herself by someone behind her.

Winnie rolled on the ground fighting the darkness that washed over her. From the ground she heard Shaking Hand yell at the retreating boys and the laughter was abruptly silenced. The audience of squaws and old men were immediately engrossed in suddenly consuming tasks. Shaking Hand glared at them and growled a chain of gutteral utterances. Taking Winnie by the scruff of her slim neck, he carried and pushed her back to her place in the ring of squaws and captives who were busy with their tasks. He scowled at Winnie, then spoke roughly to a handsome woman who usually slept beneath his robe.
When he had tromped away, the woman he had spoken to moved to sit beside Winnie and smiled at her in an approving, mischievous manner. She pointed at Winnie's captor's back and spoke his name in the Comanche tongue, "Mow-way." She spoke the name again, then raised her hand and shook it. Winnie surmised that the woman was telling her that the man's name, Mow-way, meant Shaking Hand, so she shook her own hand and repeated, "Mow-way." The woman smiled her approval. By this same method the woman pointed at her breast, then at a camp dog.

"Dog? Your name is Dog?"

She pointed at her pretty, exaggerated smile, then back to the dog.

"Mouth Dog? Dog Lips? Smiling Dog?"

Winnie repeated the pantomime and repeated the Comanche words. It puzzled her that they would name such a handsome woman after a dog. But, it wasn't too bad of a name she thought.

Smiling Dog endeavored to get Winnie to speak the Comanche for other names and some of the other squaws giggled at her efforts while some glowered and glared. With encouragement and repetition she came closer to the proper pronunciations.

Winnie knew of only eight white hostages in the camp of about eighty lodges. Five of the whites had been taken on the same raid that had taken her, at least they had already been in the group of captives when she joined them. It seemed every third or fourth person in the camp were young Mexican captives who seemed to easily assimilate into the Comanche culture. Only certain physical differences distinguished them from the native-born Comanches. Winnie knew the sounds of the Spanish language and heard many quietly whispering to one another when no Comanche was around. From this she understood that Spanish was not to be spoken, just as she had been cuffed for speaking English with the captive whites. She wondered at the relatively few white captives. It could be a good sign, indicating that the whites were more often rescued or ransomed. Or, she wondered, was it that fewer whites survived?

There were three young white boys, one tiny white toddler and
three young women. The young women were treated the worst. They were constantly pestered and cruelly kicked, punched, burned, or hit with any object close to hand. The squaws were as sadistically brutal as the bucks and they never seemed sated. Time after time throughout the days and nights the men pushed the women into a teepee or bent them to the ground and roughly raped them in full view of anyone who cared to watch. One of the white women always fought them hard and subsequently she was the least often raped of all the captives, white and Mexican, but she suffered worse beatings. The more she was beaten, the harder she fought. It was surprising that the Comanches had not killed her. She was constantly bruised, limping, bleeding and hurting.

Another of the three accepted the abuse stoically, as just another trial to suffer, another pain to withstand in an existence of pain. The last white woman cried constantly, cringed when a man even drew close to her, shivered violently and screamed insanely when she was raped. This was the one the young bucks selected most often to relieve their violent lust, often three or more in a row, or two bucks simultaneously, laughing at her hysterical terror. Winnie could only look away and cover her ears.

There was almost always one of Shaking Hand's wives or family close by her since she had been in camp. She intuited that Shaking Hand meant to protect her virginity, not particularly her person, for his own reasons. Those reasons were puzzling to her. It was certainly not because he was a gentle man, or kind or considerate. Maybe there was some unfathomable something coming to her that she could not imagine, some hellish horror reserved especially for her. She knew his motives were evil, for evil was his nature, primitive, beastial, cruel.

She was worked unmercifully by the Comanche women, especially those she suspected were Shaking Hand's wives. They seemed to have a jealous disdain for her, hate born of envy. However, they did not strike her, only Shaking Hand did that, and he did not lay hands on her often. Smiling Dog had braided her long, pale hair and by the soft tones of her words which Winnie was only beginning to
comprehend, seemed to be speaking to her as a daughter, or as a friend. Once or twice, when no one was around to witness, Smiling Dog held Winnie close as if to comfort her, rocked back and forth as she sang a rudimentary song, almost like a lullaby. It made Winnie feel uncomfortable, and protected, safe and confused. It made her cry. She wanted 'her' momma.

Thoughts of each of her lost family came to her in the noise and haste of the days and the still, quiet nights. Memories of happy moments made her sad, and lonely. It was likely they were all gone, dead and gone. No one would come for her. If they were coming they would have already come. That is what her rational mind concluded, but her spirit still whispered promises, promises of love and hope and she could not let go of the hope that her brother still lived. She hated to allow herself to accept that her parents were dead, but she saw them lifeless on the ground, unmoving. Her brother though, she felt in her spirit, in her heart, in her blood, that he lived. And he called to her through the ether.

Her intellect advised that it would benefit her to accept her circumstance and captivity, that the sooner and more fully she accepted her situation, the easier her life would be. But, her soul held her hopes close, her past held her faith and her love, her life was there, not here. She was incapable of deserting the only life she had ever known. She could not bring herself to reject the promises in the Holy Book that her mother and father held so dear. Though she was now in a place where there was no gospel, no restraint of evil, still, she held tight to the gospel in her heart. She believed. She knew. She knew she was not deserted. She knew her brother was searching for her. If he were on this side of death he would continue to seek her. God would help him, and he needed her help. He needed her just as she needed him. Without consciously resolving, she began evaluating opportunities to escape.

The Comanche had no strict social culture, no established law.
Their lives were total anarchy. A man received status in their world by deeds in war, by cruelty, by murder and by stealing. Riches were counted in the number of horses acquired by theft or trade. Through the Civil War with no effective force to oppose them, the Comanche had driven back the white settlements over a hundred miles. No tribe in the history of America had caused so much death, destruction and fear. None were even a close second. It was a Comanche buck's aspiration and glory to burn, torture, kill and steal. They had no conception of peace, honor or mercy.

The Texas frontier had become lonelier for white settlers through the years 1860 through 1870. Wise County, for example, had been reduced from a population of over 3100 in 1860 to less than 1500 in 1870. Only the very brave, the very ambitious and the very stupid remained in West Texas. This was not a recent development. Though the Spanish Empire had overcome hundreds of thousands of more highly developed Indians in Mexico, Central and South America, the Comanche had driven back and held these same Spanish Conquistadors and the mighty Catholic Church to a standstill for over 200 years.

The much ballyhooed Medicine Lodge Conference was a political farce. In October of 1867 the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and General William Tecumseh Sherman arrived with a 20 wagon entourage of aspiring dignitaries, 500 soldiers in full dress uniforms as a mounted guard and a grand kitchen on wheels to feed the 4,000 Indians which attended primarily to receive free gifts and free food. The Peace Commission had to send for additional supplies: 15,000 pounds of sugar, 6,000 pounds of coffee, 10,000 pounds of bread, 3,000 pounds of tobacco and much, much more. It was a blatant attempt at a bribe, ill-advised and unaware of the total inability of these Southern Plains tribes to conceive of an honorable and binding treaty. Added to this was the fact that the Commission of Indian Affairs was rife with larcenous malfeasance and it should have been evident that the treaty was doomed to failure.
The agreement upon which some 'chiefs' made their mark was to locate the Comanche and Kiowa on almost three million acres just north of the Red River. This would open the over two hundred million acres of Comancheria to white settlement and stop the murders and the atrocities. J. H. Leavenworth was appointed the Comanche-Kiowa agent. He was a supporter of the peace plan until he came to understand that neither the U. S. Government nor the stone-age savages had any intention of abiding by the terms of the treaty.

In the winter of 1867-68 the Comanche and Kiowa arrived at the reservation and found there was no food as had been promised them. Hungry and angry, they reverted to their habitual bestial behavior, preying on peaceful tribes in Indian Territory, stealing livestock and whatever they wanted, killing and scalping any who tried to defend themselves or their families and burning any property they did not steal. This calamity was exacerbated by the prohibition of army troops or other protective militia within Indian Territory by order of the Office of Indian Affairs. The Comanche and Kiowa were thus given license to maul and plunder inside Indian Territory and gave them a safe harbor after further hellish attacks on Texas settlers.

Agent Leavenworth simply walked away from his job in the spring of 1868, disgusted and disabused of his opinion that any peace could be made with the Comanche and Kiowa. Until October of that year there was no authority at the Comanche-Kiowa reservation, white people had fled for their lives.

After the resulting investigation, it was ascertained that agents had stolen the funds appropriated for the Indians. The only items the agents actually provided the Comanche and Kiowa were weapons, purportedly for hunting. There were specific laws against providing Indians with guns, yet none of the agents or agencies involved were ever held to account. They delivered several 'tons' of the finest Spencer and Henry repeating rifles, carbines and ammunition. Many innocent settlers died from lead fired from these U. S. Government gifts to these killers.
In 1869, Congress had enough of the corruption and deadly ignorance and abolished the Office of Indian Affairs. They then appointed much less corrupt, but equally ignorant, Quakers. Most Comanches were not on the reservation when Lawrie Tatum, the newly appointed Quaker agent arrived. Most Comanches were doing as they had always done, raiding the settlers in New Mexico and Texas.

The Indian were primitive but capable of observing and learning. Experience taught them that their violence always brought the white men with papers to make their marks on, treaties, which were promises neither side had ever kept. These meetings rewarding their violence were always occasions in which the Comanches could expect wondrous and generous gifts. They had learned that the way to get these riches were, as Tatum later explained, "to go on the warpath for awhile, kill a few white people, steal a good many horses and mules, and then make a treaty, and they would get a large amount of presents and a liberal supply of goods for that fall."¹

The treaties also usually let them keep all the livestock they had stolen. Adversely, when they behaved well, stayed on the reservation and did not plunder and sack the settlers, they got nothing at all. Those who kept their promises contained in the treaties were even punished for their decent behavior. Those Comanches who came to the reservation in 1868 and 1869 were deprived of their annuities because other Comanches were raiding. All annuities were forfeited to pay pillaging claims. It was a system designed not only for failure, but to nurture, expand and increase the depredations, the hate and the fear.

Colonel Ranald Mackenzie was a difficult man to please in those days. He had been placed in the impossible situation of being ordered to keep the peace and protect the citizens without being allowed to even apprehend the thieves, the rapists, the murderers.

¹ Tatum's Second Annual Report, 41st Congress, 3rd Session, Aug.12, 1870.
those who destroyed whole families and homes, stealing the women and children away to enslave, torture and sell back in poor condition when they tired of abusing them. The Quaker Peace Policy was not only malformed through ignorance but actually promoted extreme hate and insane violence. Mackenzie had railed against his orders not to pursue the murderous Indians beyond the Red River into the safe haven of Indian Territory. Only if the savages were caught in flagrante delicto could he attack them. If they were caught in possession of a huge herd of livestock and obvious plunder from murderous attacks on remote ranches, and even if they possessed evident fresh scalps, he was ordered to only escort them back to their reservation, ensuring their safety and allowing them to keep the spoils they had attained from those they had murdered. His superiors offered him insincere sympathy, secretly believing that the atrocities were greatly exaggerated. Mackenzie was naturally a moody individual, unforgiving and unrelenting. And this deranged 'peace policy' was compounding and exacerbating his difficult personality.

Finishing first in his class at West Point in 1862 at age twenty-one, Mackenzie finished the Civil War as brevet brigadier general. It was manifest that he was a driven, highly motivated man. He had been General U. S. Grant's favorite general. The whims of the fourth estate create heroes of such fools as George Armstrong Custer who finished dead last in his class at West Point a year ahead of Mackenzie, and honor him for leading his men into a disaster of epic proportions, while Mackenzie's incomparable victories are unheralded and generally unknown. Few are even aware he ever lived. Such are the vagaries of distinction, and of infamy.

Mackenzie was wounded several times during the War Between the States, one wound disfigured his hand. He was called Bad Hand by the Comanches, Three-Finger Jack by his troops. He was the most capable, if not the most liked, officer on the frontier. Relentless and demanding, his charges obeyed him, trusted him and followed him through thick and thin until finally, and secretly, President
Grant through General Sherman would unleash this, their dogs of war, Randal Slidell Mackenzie.

This unchaining of Colonel Mackenzie was growing near, unfolding events would soon spur the supreme powers to make an undeclared total was on the Comanches. The federal peace policy had also held the state government in check, not allowing Texas to act in defense of her citizens on the frontier.

In 1867, General P. H. Sheridan, Commander of the Fifth Military District headquartered in New Orleans and including Texas, removed James W. Throckmorton from the governorship he had held for a year. From his removal until February of 1870, Texas had been under military rule with provisional governors appointed by military commanders. The state was devoid of a legislative body. Under this government of military rule not even volunteer militias could be formed. Finally, the newly permitted and seated legislature passed the Militia Bill of 1870 which authorized the organization of volunteer ranging companies. Governor E. J. Davis called for volunteers to comprise such companies for the protection of the frontier.

One such company of volunteers was formed in Sequin, Guadalupe County, under Captain David Baker in November, 1870. This group of 52 young and vigorous men were to station themselves at Cross Timbers near the Red River, on the very edge of Comancheria. They were to be paid fifty dollars a month and given new Winchester carbines and ammunition. They were required to furnish their own mounts, handguns, saddles and necessaries.

Delayed by the non-arrival of their carbines, the volunteers were forced to wait for their arms until early February. They eventually left Sequin and headed for Fort Mason; eighteen miles from there they crossed the San Saba River to Santa Anna Peak. After crossing Jim Ned Creek they came to Camp Colorado and the volunteer company of rangers stationed there under Captain Swisher. They made their way by hard trails and short night camps to Fort Griffin on the Clear Fork of the Brazos where they camped with the ranger company under Captain Sansom. For there they made good time through the wilderness road to Fort Richardson on the
the banks of Lost Creek. Winding their way to Cross Timbers close by the Red River, the rangers established their home camp.

While in Fort Griffin they first heard of the Comanche raid down in Mexico which, in returning, raided the Tankersley Ranch on the Concho River, then at the Thompson place and at Stone’s Rancho north of Fort Concho. The Comanches did their worst at the Thompson place where the adults were reported to be all slain and the children stolen by a band of Comanches said to include Shaking Hand, a war chief, and perhaps twenty warriors.

On arrival at Fort Richardson the news had been received that the Thompson boy had been recovered by hunters and returned to Fort Griffin where he was recovering from severe head wounds. The newly arrived rangers heard rumors of renegade Indians stealing livestock in the area they were responsible for and in their patrols they found tracks of the unshod Indian ponies which plainly drove shod stolen horses and cattle, but they never caught sight of the thieves. The Comanche and Kiowa thieves seemed to be invisible. The volunteer rangers chased around the country and learned the lay of the land. They went out in patrols of twelve to fifteen, rotating men and horses. They were young and anxious to test their mettle against the wild Comanches.2

2 The reader should be made aware that these particular volunteers who came to the call of Texas and Governor Davis whose mission was to protect the western frontier from renegade Indians and outlaws were then called 'rangers' by the settlers and by the army. These men with whom I, the author, was honored to serve, performed many of the same courageous deeds that the 'official' Texas Ranger organization performed before the War of Northern Aggression as well as after 1874 when the Legislature again commissioned the rangers, yet history has not honored these brave volunteers of 1870 with the recognition and designation of Texas Rangers. Within this long delayed history, they are recognized and designated by the honorific 'ranger'. They, we, earned that title of good character by sweat, sacrifice and by blood, some by their very lives. And, to be fully honest, we earned some of the negative connotations of the term ranger also, as we also sporadically acted as judge, jury and executioner.

It is undeniable to any student of Texas history that although the Texas Rangers have been typified as highly principled and noble, heroic and dauntless, there have been many, very many, instances in their history when they were despicable murderers of women and children, thieves and worse. Some apologists will offer the justification that such severe actions were necessary to tame the
Through visits with Comanche and Kiowa Indian Agent, Lawrie Tatum, at Fort Sill across the Red River in Indian Territory, rangers were made aware of the depredations of the reservation Indians by this man the Comanches called 'Bald Head'. The Indians crossed the river at will and, upon their return, displayed bloody scalps with pride, scalps of peaceful white settlers, and openly boasted of their evil exploits against the Texians whom they hated. Rangers, like the U.S. Army, had no authorization or jurisdiction to pursue these murderous savages into their government created refuge, but they became more vigilant and anxious in scouting the river, hoping to catch the brutes away from their sanctuary. Even the good Quaker agent Mister Tatum fully realized that the only means of keeping the Comanches on the reservation and stop them from murdering the innocent settlers was by forceful military means.

Christian, civilized blood boiled with righteous wrath when the rangers began to witness the horrible aftermaths of the barbaric visitations of these uncivilized, heartless Indians. These horrific visions haunted them. The sight of the mutilations of helpless babes and peaceful families inspired hate, revenge and loathing in their young breasts and not fear and retreat as the primitive intellects of these unconscionable fiends intended and expected. The government 'peace policies' could only restrain the rangers and the army soldiers to a degree. They had their limits, they were stretching beyond the breaking point. Soon the restraints would be torn asunder.

(continued) lawless borders of civilization. 'The end justifies the means', 'fight fire with fire'; such old saws may be offered as mitigation for the unnumbered and forgotten innocents slain along with the guilty by the vicious gangs who were Texas Rangers throughout those olden days and into the present times. Another of the rationales for the slaughter of women and children were that they were only Indians, or Mexicans. Such were the skewed racist attitudes of the day.

We volunteers of 1870 were probably no better or worse than the 'official' Texas Rangers, we all did what we felt was expedient at the moment. Given the leisure of time and space, we may have made different decisions. Good or bad, we were all rangers, Texas Rangers, and I will call these young and brave volunteers rangers in these pages, for lack of a better term, just as we were called during those trying times.
The Flat was what most people called the hell town that had grown around the saloon and gambling house that had been first established outside Fort Griffin. From about 1869 to 1874 there was no restraint, no civil law and the U. S. Army did not concern itself with what happened there. Others called the place Hidetown because of the buffalo hide hunters and the skinners who spent their holiday time and their money there. The newspapers in far away civilization colored it 'Babylon on the Brazos'.

Later, around 1874, those who profited the most from the commerce conducted in The Flat had hired John M. Larn to 'marshall' the wild and wooly center of sin along with his chosen 'deputy', John Selman. These two were the primary controlling vigilantes who regulated when and who they felt like regulating and ignored or tolerated, often forgave the transgressions of those who refused to accept regulation. John Larn would later be killed by his own vigilantes inside his own jail. John Selman quickly disappeared following Larn's execution, but twenty years later made some claim to fame by shooting another notorious, sometimes resident of The Flat, John Wesley Hardin. Selman was no heroic gunfighter though, he shot Hardin in the back while he was having a drink in a bar in El Paso. A man doesn't have to be brave or hard to be a killer, it is often fear that motivates murder.

After 1874, some of the others who frequented The Flat and even called it home for awhile illustrate the character of the little town. Doc Holliday first met Wyatt Earp at Shaunissy's Saloon in The Flat. Pat Garrett stayed for awhile. John Wesley Hardin loved it there. Billy the Kid, Billy Dixon, Kit Carson, Bat Masterson who would later become the legendary sheriff of Dodge City, and the most feared horse thief of all, 'Dutch Henry' Born; all these men and lesser known but even more deadly customers drank and gambled, whored and celebrated their short lives in this savage little city of sin. If you stuck your chin or chest out or wore your six-gun strapped down low through The Flat, someone there would soon check your credentials.
After 1876 or thereabouts, Miss Lottie Beno was who might be crowned 'Queen of The Flat', but in these early years, before her marriage, the lovely Miss Mabel Goldstein was the most influential personage residing within The Flat. Mabel had been born in a small town in the hills of Texas founded by German immigrants whose artists of masonry had constructed fine walls, houses and barns of the natural stone in establishing a thriving settlement in early Texas. Mabel's father was a farmer and a judge, serious in both pursuits, presenting a visage of sternness and a bearing of strength and stability. He was strict in his raising of his five daughters and they all grew into ladies that made him proud; except Mabel. Not that she was immoral or not a 'lady', at least by her own definition, but she was headstrong and had her own mind and opinions about most everything, which attitude was unacceptable to the male-rulled society of the day when suffrage was not even imagined.

Mabel attended college with her sisters but exhibited interest in science and particularly physiology. Her father was unaware of her interest and study for a period of over two years, there being a sort of conspiracy of secrecy between the sisters, professors and administrators instigated by the wily Mabel. Still, ultimately he discovered the subterfuge and threatened to withdraw his daughters and his support of the school, thereby terminating Mabel's "unladylike education" at the college and infuriating his middle daughter.

Not to be undone, Mabel packed her bags and left the institution and finagled her way into a working relationship with the physicians and hospital in Galveston where she nursed the sick and learned quickly.

Exactly how Mabel came to be magnetic manager of a gambling house and dance hall saloon in far West Texas has never been fully understood. It is known that she had a May-December relationship with a doctor there in Galveston, that he suffered long and eventually perished of consumption despite Mabel's loving care. For over a year no one was certain of Mabel's whereabouts. The good doctor had provided generously for Mabel after his death and it is supposed that she traveled east, perhaps to Europe, searching for solace. Mysteriously, she somewhere learned the intricate manipulations and calculations of the card sharp. Perhaps it was in the casinos in
France or the courts of Italy, Mabel never spoke of these missing years. It was only known that Mabel stepped down from the stage one evening in the front of the Bee Hive Saloon, walked inside and began her reign as the ruling lady of The Flat.

Those that witnessed the scene on that rainy spring afternoon in April of 1871 agree that Miss Mabel was in high dudgeon, her fair face near as red as her fiery hair as she strode and stomped across the thick floorboards before the bar in the Bee Hive. The usually rowdy patrons were obediently silent and attentive.

"Let me see if I have this insane situation right. Some undetermined number of Mexican and American women and children have been stolen away after their menfolk have been slaughtered and unspeakably butchered by heathen savages,...Comanche maniacs!...and the only 'man' with the fortitude, the only 'man' with the backbone to go and try to get his sister back from these primitive animals,...these primitive, raping brutes is a twelve year-old 'boy' with head injuries that may kill him? A twelve year-old 'boy'?! You mean for me to understand that a twelve year-old boy has more guts than all of you drunken varmints who strut around here on your hind legs barking at one another like vicious dogs? You call yourselves 'men'? Am I to understand that among 600 soldiers at the fort here, dozens of you dangerous gunmen, outlaws and rough, smelly buffalo hunters strutting around here carrying tons of firearms and swords and knives,...do you ask me to understand why there is not one single 'man' amongst you with the heart, with the courage, with the integrity to help that boy?...To help those children and poor suffering women? Is there not a 'man' among you?"

"Miss Mabel, it's 'gainst the law fer white men ta go out thar inta that Indian huntin' ground, ya know tha Quaker Peace treaty won't allow..."

"To hell with the Quakers and their Peace Policy! It is not their sons or brothers or daddies that have been killed, cut into pieces and burned, their wives and daughters stolen, tortured and raped! All the Quakers are somewhere safe, they sure are not in Texas! The 'law' doesn't restrict you from rustling cattle and killing thousands of buffalo where you aren't supposed to go. Don't pretend that you care a whit for the 'law', what 'law'?!"
"It's them so'jers job ta pertec' tha settlers, it ain't my job. "

"It's ain't my job," Mabel mimicked. "Fool! I'm not talking about whose 'job' it is, I'm talking about the very lives of innocent brothers and daddies and sons...I'm talking about babies have their brains bashed out of their tiny heads by a maniac simply because they cry. "It ain't my job.' Damned coward! It's not your job to sit on your fat butt and drink a river of rye whiskey and fondle these girls without paying either. I've heard enough from you. Get your cowardly, stinking, fat carcass out of my saloon. Now!"

One of Mabel's gunmen leveled the barrels of a fat-mouth shotgun at the object of her scorn. The nasty buffalo skinner chugged the dregs of the rot-gut, stood and growled. "I don't have ta take this raw-jawin'."

"Shore don't," the shotgunner answered as he thumbed back the heavy hammers on both barrels, "but yer gonna take this double-load a' lead thur yer fat belly if'n ya don't head on out of here. Git!"

The skinner got.

"Miss Mabel, if I could persuade two dozen of these fine and brave fellows who are expert with fire-arms to accompany me, I would not hesitate to ride through the gates of hell and cause the devil to re-locate," Bat Masterson postulated.

"If we rode into Comanche land with as few as two dozen of us we might avoid the devil but we'd sure meet our makes with so few of us," spoke the owner of another saloon, John Shaunissy.

"Much as I'd enjoy killin' some a' them pesky red monkeys, fighten' Comanche woulden be tha main pri-orty if'n we went, doncha' see?" the yound John Wesley Hardin chipped in, "Main thang'd be gettin' them women and' kids back safe'nsound."

"That is perfectly correct, John Wesley," Mabel agreed, which concurment [sic] caused the young gunsel to preen, "The captives are the primary objective."

"How you figger on slippin' inta Comanche territory without doin' any fightin'?" Dutch Henry asked.

"With the help a' some Tonk scouts an' some a' these ol' mountain men, like Abe an' Stepper an' Grumpy. How 'bout it? You boys game?"

"Oh yea. It's a'ways Grumpy will ya' do this, Grumpy would'ja
do dat, I swear..." Grumpy was interrupted.

"Shut up Grump. What Grampa Grump really means, if ya sift through the whinin', ta make a long story short...is yep, all three of us are crazy 'nuff ta go," Abe committed.

Stepper simply nodded his alcohol-sotted head.

"Miss Mabel, they's thousands a' them feather n' leather wearin' varmints out chonder. Thousands!" one of the old-hand cow thieves protested.

"One good white man is worth half-a-dozen redskins, that's indisputable fact. I know how you men can ride and shoot and fight. Heck, you fight tooth and nail in this saloon just for fun. But, I expect that a few soldiers would be a benefit to such an endeavor. I should speak with Colonel Hall at the fort, convince him to ignore those quacking Quakers and do what is necessary to preserve the lives of these blameless babes and hard-working homesteaders. If a few Comanche have to die, so be it. If the Colonel will send a few troops along, will you boys go?"

A loud affirmative answer was given.

"Yea!"

"Yes Ma'am!"

"Hell Yea!"

"You betcha Miss Mabel!"

"And who will go with me to the fort?"

The whole crowd volunteered.

"Less go!"

"I will."

"Lead on Miss Mabel!"

"I just need two or three. Good talkers. Sober. Well respected. Bat?"

"Ma'am, I'd be honored to accompany you."

"I'll go too, Miss Mabel," John Wesley volunteered.

"No John Wesley. We don't want the Colonel to think this is an insane idea, and everybody knows you're insane." Mabel continued to speak over the general laughter. "Your gun speaks much clearer than your tongue anyway John, that's what we'll need from you."

"Well, you shore got that ma'am."

"Billy Nixon, will you speak for the hunters?"
If'n they allow me ma'am.

"Yea Billy, you go. Yer a good'un."

"One more," Mabel thought aloud. John Larn, you'll do. You look intelligent even if you aren't, really." Over the whooping laughter she yelled, "Be here at seven in the morning. All of you. Clean up some, all of you. Be sober and I'll feed all of you, everyone who's sober and presentable I'll buy breakfast. Then we'll all walk to the fort together. We'll request an audience with the Colonel, the four of us, and the rest of you wait for us, looking grim and serious. Now everyone belly up and get a drink on Mabel."

The whooping and hollering commenced once again.
Pleasant was granted gentler awakenings the next few mornings. It was cold enough for bundling in a blanket in the first light of dawn. The fire had been banked by a skeletal structure on limbs that Big Nose had assembled. He had driven posts in the hard ground and had stretched the big bearskin across the windward side and across the top. The inside of the hide was turned to the fire, drying the well scraped and tightly stretched dermis which exuded a peculiar but not unwelcome warm ambiance to Pleasant’s present abode.

The giant Tonkawa had enlisted an army of ants to clear tissue from hide and skull where his big hand could not reach. He had allowed the ants to mine the pink meat for four days and when they had finally abandoned their gathering, he scraped the hide again. His long and strong fingers had rubbed the bear’s brain tissue into the hide to soften and further cure the leather, utilizing also the heat and smoke of the fire.

For five days Pleasant had lain still per the Indian’s urging, not disturbing the reeking poultice applied to his head, chest and ribs. He was anxious to be about his duty, his mission. He had dreamed that Winnie was speaking to him, her voice so clear, calming him, wisely admonishing his impatience. She entreated him to rest and recover, assuring him the Indian’s medicine was beneficial. She promised him that he would accomplish the unspoken promise to Poppa soon enough. He wondered that Winnie knew of Poppa’s dying words. Was she close by? These sort of things had happened before, seemingly impossible transfers of knowledge or thought between them, typically in circumstances of high stress or excitement. Sometimes they seemed to share one mind. This being to first time that they had been apart for so long however, he was surprised that such thought and emotion could reach him. He hoped his own assurance reached her, and because he had heard her clear, ringing voice, he was no longer greatly distressed. He knew she was alive and that her prayers had granted him patience, strength and trust.
Mister Johnson had fed him bear meat for two days and every time Pleasant had awoken Big Nose was eating. The third day there was venison. He asked Mister Johnson why they weren’t eating more of the bear meat.

"Big Nose ate bear."

“You ate it? You ate it all? There musta been hunnerds a' pounds a'meat on ‘at bear," Pleasant was incredulous.

"Big Nose like bear meat." He licked his lips and tore into the still smoking deer meat. "Big Nose like deer meat too."

"Will there be 'nuff fer me?"

Johnson’s big face exhibited his abashment, but it did not hinder or slow his mastication. Pleasant was ever amazed at Mister Johnson’s ability to consume mammoth amounts of victuals. He would later learn of a complementing ability to do without food for long stretches. But, watching Big Nose gorge was hard to swallow. Amazing.

When Pleasant was relieved of the stench of the wrappings, he was again amazed. The serious wounds were nearly healed.

"Hurts need wind now. And sun. Tomorrow we go."

"I'm ready Mister Johnson."

"Yes."

"Uh,...well,...thanks."

Big Nose just nodded, added a limb to the fire and tore off a hunk of meat from the deer's haunches.

It was an incongruous alliance, a confusing sight to those who watched from hiding. Traveling at a trot on horses with fresh legs across the plain was a huge, long-haired Indian dressed in cast-away clothes too small for him and a boy beside him in borrowed army attire much too large for him. The Indian seemed to know where he was going as he rarely glanced at the ground for the signs of passage there.  

1The following passages of 2½ paragraphs are damaged in the original manuscript by what seems to have been moisture and/or mold, and have been rewritten as accurately as could be gauged by the portions which are decipherable. WWW
The morning of the second day of their travel from Pleasant’s encounter with the bear, the pair approached what must have been a fork of the Red River. Cottonwoods, hugging oak and pecan trees were crowding close to the water.

When they crossed over the stream and were urging their dripping mounts up the steep bank, their way was blocked by four Mexican banditos with rifles leisurely pointed in their direction. The wide, welcoming smiles beneath the flowing moustaches were cilling. Pleasant was instantly aware that below the wide sombreros were desperados, casual killers. He’d seen such before in Angela.

“Est es goot we cross paths wit’chu dos pendejos. We are in need of fresh cabios an’chu have them for us. Gracias amigos. An’ we can use jour gins an’ boolets too. Muchas gracias. What else jew have, I wander. A beeg one an’a leetle one together. Un guero e un Indio, makes me wander, por que? Geet off el cabios. Undale! Now! Before I shoot jew off!”

The bandits were unprepared for what happened next, to their eternal detriment. Quicker than Big Nose could think it, two Colt sixguns were exploding in Pleasant’s hands. The first pair of bullets ruined the speaker’s smile and his life, and knocked the badit at his side from his horse. Both were dead before the second volley smashed trail dust and hot blood from the filthy serapes of the short-term survivors of the little gang.

Slow and easy, Pleasant hopped down from his horse, scanning the surroundings carefully, making soothing sounds to settle his trembling mount. Big Nose stared, mouth agape, dumbfounded at the speed, dexterity and the deadly decisiveness of the quiet boy. Pleasant began going through the pockets of the dead men and stacking their guns.

“Mister Johnson, would you catch them wore-out hosses? Meybe we kin find use of ‘em when they’ve rested some. We need ta put some distance ‘tween us an’ the noise I made purty quick I imagine, somebody unfriendly might’a heard the shootin’.”

Big Nose shook himself from his shocked immobility and rode to get the horses that had already lowered their heads to graze a short distance away. They fixed a rope line to lead the four poor
horses, burdening them only with their Spanish saddles and bridles. The rifles, pistols, ammunition and some valuables they loaded on their pack horses' saddles.

Big Nose kept an eye and his mind on Pleasant. He had never seen, nor even imagined that a mere boy could be so fast, so decisive in deadly intent, so proficient, though the Tonkawa's thoughts were certainly not in those words; he had no words for what he had witnessed. He believed that he was in the presence of a special person. A strange sort of fear tinged with respect and awe was growing within Big Nose for the freckled-faced boy.

After a night of sleeping in shifts, they continued the journey northwest. They soon came upon a small herd of buffalo. When about three hundred yards away, Pleasant pulled rein and slid his rifle out of the saddle scabbard and hopped to the ground.

"No Dead Bear. We get closer. Make shot good. Buffalo run if you miss."

Pleasant smiled at the moniker that Big Nose had hung on him and softly replied, "I won't miss."

He pulled the rifle into his shoulder and cheek, sighted and shot. None of the buffalo moved, except one who fell sideways and layed still on the ground.

"Where you shoot buffalo so it dies so fast?" Big Nose asked.

Pleasant returned the rifle into the scabbard and mounted his horse. He gazed at the still grazing small herd as he answered, "In the eye."

The big Tonk's smile relayed his disbelief, but when they reached the fallen buffalo and dismounted, he saw that blood oozed only from the small orifice that moments before lodged an eyeball.

"Boy kills bear. Kills Mexicans fast, easy. Kills buffalo one long shot to eye. How you shoot so straight? So fast?"

Poppa taught me, made me practice. My sister too. He tol' us that our eyes saw better'n other folks. Reckon it's so if'n he said it."

The amazed Tonk began opening the buffalo for meat, still keeping one eye and most of his mind on the waiting boy.
The incongruous pair moved a few miles away and roasted some of the meat on a buffalo dung fire which produced little smoke, then continued on their way, eating as they rode. Awhile later Big Nose held up his hand to signal a halt, then covered his mouth to convey silence. They listened in the still air of the afternoon and peered into the distance. Pleasant's young eyes identified the riders first, white men, probably ranchers chasing stolen stock, or a posse chasing them thinking they were bandits. Big Nose made an evaluation, handed Pleasant the lead rope to a pack animal and the bandits' horses and put his heels to the great horse's ribs, hollering back in half-English, "Luego, Dead Bear!"

Pleasant spluttered, "What? Wait!" He turned toward the thunder of the charging group and realization washed over him when most of the Texians rode on by, shooting wildly at the fleeing Tonkawa.

"No! Stop! He's a friendly Tonkaw!"

Two of the white men pulled their horses up beside him and Pleasant entreated them, "Pull 'em off 'im! He's my scout, my friend. Tonkawa."

Well son, I'd wager it's too late now to call them dawgs off'n that coon. Reckon he's a dead Tonkawa by now. Those boys don't miss much they aim for."

"You shoulda' found out who he was 'fore ya started tryin' ta' kill 'im, don'tcha think?"

"We saw a Indian trailin' stolen horses with a boy we know has run off from Fort Griffin,...hell boy! You got on army clothes, easy ta see that. 'Sides, a man who waits to see what branda' Indian he's dealin' with in this country may not live long enough to regret tha delay."

The man identified himself as ranger lieutenant Asa Hill\(^2\) of the Seguin volunteers. Seeing the great bearskin complete with the head mounted behind Pleasant's saddle, Hill asked about it.

\(^2\)The author
William W. Worley

“Bear attacked me. Had to kill it.”
“What’d you kill that monster with?”
“This,” Pleasant tapped one of the Colts strapped to his waist as his eyes searched the returning rangers.
“A handgun? Ha! My momma raised a fool but that was my brother. Why, that bear’d eat that revolver. Did you have to reload?”
“Nope, one shot.”
“Ummmmhuh,” Lieutenant Hill responded in obvious disbelief.
“An’ where’d you put that one shot?”
“Mouth.”

Hill just shook his head.

The squad of rangers rode up and reported: “Got clean away Lou. Like a dad-blamed ghost. There one minute, gone the next. Like the ground swallered ‘im up. Coulden even find no tracks.”

“He couldn’a jes’ disappeared.”
“Well, he did.”
“Shore did Mister Hill.”

“I tol’ you, I ain’t no mister, jes’ call me Hill or Lou. But, it don’t matter that the Injun got away from ya, seeing as how this boy tells me he’s a friend’ly Tonk.”

“Is this boy Pleasant John Thompson Junior,...er...Lou?”

“He ain’t been formally introduced, but I suspect he be tha Junior. I figgered that out my own self.”

Turning to Pleasant, Hill questioned him about the line of Spanish-saddled horses. “You know them horses was stolen, look at the brands. Where’d you come by ‘em?”

“I diden steal ‘em. Some Meskins left ‘em on the prairie.”

“Left ‘em, did they? Why would they leave ‘em on the prairie?”

“Coulden ride ‘em no more, seein’ as how they’s dead.”

“You found four dead Meskins?”

“No, diden find ‘em dead, jes’ left ‘em dead.”

“An’ I s’pose you killed ‘em.”

“Yep.”

“You killed four banditos?”
"Tried to rob us for our horses and guns, so they looked to be banditos. An' I s'pose they's dead, they didn' do no movin'."  
"An' you killed 'em, all four. An' kilt that big bear, one shot from a handgun. Now yer headed to take on the whole Comanche nation? Where'd jew bury them banditos?"

"Diden bury 'em. Left 'em like they'd a'left us. Buzzard bait."

"An' where'd jew leave them bandit carcasses boy?"

"Where they fell. Jes' foller our trail back a few hours, you'll find 'em."

"Reckon you'll show us, son."

"I ain't chur son, 'mister',...my Poppa's dead."

"Well,...'boy',...yer goin' back with us. Doncha' know you have got the U. S. Army an' half the country a'lookin' fer ya? An' they's a re-ward fer them dead Meskins, dead or alive. You can claim that money if ya really kilt 'em, which I doubt,...'boy',... jes' come along back with us to civil-i-zation 'fore these Comanches scalp you like they did yer,...well, 'fore they kill ya."

"I'm goin' ta get my sister, ain't goin' back. Reward'll hafta wait. Money'll be there when I get back, won't it? I reckon Sis an' me'll need money to build tha homeplace back up."

"Pleasant John Thompson Junior. That musta been quite a lick you took on yer head. You ain't thinkin' right. Now son,...boy, in good conscience I can't let ya go after yer sister, I hafta take you back, safe with us, doncha see? Maybe in a few weeks we kin find yer sister, if she's even still alive, an' buy her back from them murderin' Comanches, but..."

"No sir! It ain't cher decision ta make! I'm tha head of my fam'ly now an' I'm goin' ta get my sister, 'less you intend ta shoot me right here an' now. Anyways, ain't chal duty-bound ta he'p me? Ain't that cher sworn duty, ta fight renegades an' ta perfect the citizens? Ya ain't yeller,...are ye?"

"No boy, we ain't yella', but we got good sense. Ya know, them savages might jes' kill yer sister 'fore they decide ta fight er run."

"Yep. I know that. Jes' gonna hafta slip up on 'em."
"Ha! You can't slip up on no Comanche, boy."

"I've snuck up on dove, quail an' deer. I reckon a Comanche ain't much."

"Um-huh. Well, I'm tired a' jawin', 'boy', ...hand over them guns. Yer goin' back with us."

Pleasant noticed one of the rangers shaking out a loop.

"Thought I'd 'splained clear enough I's goin' after my sister. Only way ya'll 'll take me back is ta kill me. Don' b'lieve yer gonna do that. Take these broken down, stolen horses an' high-tail it outa here since yer 'fraid of a few feather-sproutin' redskins. Jes' save 'at reward fer me an' Sis. Now, get outa tha way."

"No, don't reckon I can. Boy, you ain't gonna shoot nobody. Jes' hand over them guns an'..."

Things happened real fast after that. The bullets from each of Pleasant's sixguns found their perfect mark. One bullet knocked the hat off the Lieutenant's head and the other burned and skinned a furrow in his horse's butt, causing the surprised lieutenant to snatch at the saddle horn to stay aboard the wildly pitching mount. The boy ducked a lasso a ranger threw and put his heels to his horse, pulling the leads of the pack horse along beside.

The squad of rangers started in pursuit of Pleasant, but pulled reins when the lieutenant hollered, "Hold up! Let 'im go. We'll catch up with him later. Crazy kid may make us kill 'im. That'd be hard to explain. 'Sides, that boy's dangerous. He may kill one of us. Let's go see if we kin find them dead banditos, jes' see if that boy really kilt 'em."

The volunteer rangers backtracked the pair's trail to where the buzzards squabbled over the exposed tender parts of the Mexican outlaws and tore at them with their sharp beaks and talons. The rangers spent an hour finding a suitable oak beside a trickling spring from which they hung the remains of dead meat and bones as a warning to all that might pass this way. A hastily printed sign was pinned to one's serape: 'Ruslers get Ranger justis'.

The Rangers had been told at Fort Richardson that four Mexican bandits had robbed a trading post in Mesquiteville, or Jacksboro.
as they called it by then, and stolen four fresh horses from the stable there. Since they found no money
or much of anything else on the horses or on the bodies, they surmised that the boy had found the
booty.

After resting until the dawning, they found some of their horses were laying down and not grazing.
These were grain-fed and bred American horses, not the Iberian-derived Spanish horses that had been
raised on the grama and buffalo grasses of the plains as Indian ponies had been for generations. They
needed fuel and they fed the poorer horses a fair amount of the remaining oats.

Lieutenant Hill realized they were deep in Comanche land. If attacked they would be hopelessly
outnumbered and possibly outgunned if the rumors of Spencer and Henry repeating rifles being
 supplied to the Comanche and Kiowa by the Office of Indian Affairs were true. Hill believed the
rumors to be well-founded. The lives of the men he led must be weighed against the life of a single
crazed boy riding into Commancheria with the confidence of Samson, jawbone in hand. Freeing the
sister and the other hostages even if successful in locating them in this ocean of grassy space would be
a miraculous feat, logically impossible, especially with so few men. The boy was obviously rendered
insane from the damage to his head. Crazy he was, undoubtedly, but my oh my, how could he be so
handy with those Colts? Maybe the boy did kill the bear with a sixgun as well as the four Mexican
bandits. Maybe he did. Hill again inspected the holes in and out of the crown of his hat, and shook his
head.

From a long distance, laying in the waving grass, Parra-ocoom, or Bull Bear and Kobay-oburra, or
wild Horse watched the Texians saddle their big horses and begin their retreat to the southeast. They
discussed why the small group of pale eyes had come here and quickly concluded that the motives of
the whites could not be understood by the Nermemuh, or The People, as the Comanche called
themselves. These men appeared to be rangers and such had not appeared to them for many years.
Dangerous men, but the New Mexicans would pay good prices for such horseflesh.

Shaking Hand and Red Horn had gathered warriors to ride against the hunters. They wanted to
continue to find the hide
Gathering the firewood under the watchful eyes of the squaws that detested and resented her, Winnie surreptitiously surveyed the great herd of horses grazing a quarter-mile away from the camp. All the men except the too young and the very old had left the camp hurriedly hours ago. She supposed they were going to raid the easy prey of the isolated homesteaders once again, since many of them had painted and adorned themselves and their ponies with ribbons, feathers and bones. Having learned that the squaws were even more evil and brutal in their sadistic treatment of the captives than the men, Winnie intended to present a seemingly obedient and humble nature to these wicked women. Without the restraint of the men they feared with just cause, the squaws were free to increase their cruelties to the captives.

Edging towards the horse herd, picking up sticks and buffalo dung for the fire, Winnie’s eyes sought a horse that she might be able to mount before it shied. None of the horses were shying from at all, they ignored her, lazily pulling at the new grass. Would the women allow her to go among the horses? She could certainly sprint to a horse but the horse would naturally bolt away. Just a bit closer and she could begin making soothing sounds that Momma had taught her. The pain of a stick hitting her in the back startled her from her musing. The squaw pushed her roughly, squawking and pointed back toward the camp.

Winnie skirted around the fire, careful not to let her shadow fall upon the food cooking there in the big stolen iron pot. She had been cuffed only twice in learning not to violate the superstitious taboo. It brought to her mind the silly retrain or childhood, ‘step on a crack and break your mother’s back!’ It was further evidence of the undeveloped minds of these primitive people.
She had noticed also that some of the Comanche seemed to worship pet crows and special deerskins, exhibiting physical signs of fear and veneration. She was ever mindful that she was extremely vulnerable to the primordial, ignorant beliefs and customs of her captors at every moment. She made certain that she faced the sun when she stirred the pot over the fire.

Through the smoke from the fire she could see the idling horses and her unbounded longing for home, for her family, pulsed in her heart and through her soul.

O

Big Nose hoped that this boy who had taken on the spirit of the dead bear had not also absorbed the bears stench. The slightest whiff of a bear would cause a horse to react wildly, running and screaming. Big Nose and the boy he now called Dead Bear held their hands over their horses muzzles to prevent a whinny to the Indian's ponies as the painted warriors galloped by, a hundred yards distant. The boy had long understood that the eyes caught motion first and so stood perfectly still and held his horse still and quiet as the dangerous Comanche rode swiftly by. The boy was more than a boy, Big Nose knew that. The Great Spirit had endowed him with exceptional gifts and watched over this special one. Big Nose had heard and obeyed the urging within his own spirit placed there by the Great Spirit; he was to go with Dead Bear and be his brother.

After the danger had passed, Pleasant wondered where the near 200 warriors were going to cause death, suffering and destruction. It seemed too soon to again raid the settlers. The it dawned on him: the rangers. The Indians had discovered the rangers on their land. Pleasant thought to warn them, but he had no idea where the rangers were by now. Besides, now he could track the Comanches back to their camp. Winnie may be there. This might be the best opportunity to liberate his sister with so many men gone. He looked at Mister Johnson. There was no way he could send him to warn the rangers. In their inexperience and eagerness they might very well shoot him. But, if he could make an appearance at a distance, just let them see him watching them from out of rifle range, they could be forewarned that an
attack was forthcoming and make some measure of preparation, instead of being totally surprised.

He spoke with Big Nose, spelling out his thinking. Big Nose was confident he could find and warn the rangers in such a manner as Pleasant described before the Comanches found them. But, he expressed his belief that his mission was to protect Dead Bear. Pleasant patiently explained how he would be protecting his charge, for if the Comanche surprised the rangers and quickly slaughtered them, the warriors would return sooner to the camp and might forestall the rescue of Winnie. If the rangers were made aware of a coming attack, perhaps they could delay the Comanches return to camp and allow Pleasant time to steal Winnie away.

Big Nose understood the need for expeditious action and agreed to comply with Dear Bear’s wishes. He instructed Dear Bear to ride with Winnie due south for a full day after retrieving her before turning a bit east. He conveyed these routes by gesturing and pointing. He had heard the white man’s words for the directions but could not call them to mind. He promised Dear Bear he would find him within three suns. Big Nose rode away east.

Pleasant felt a tug in his chest as he watched the big Tonk ride away. The man had helped him, likely saved his life. He thought the simple prayer, “God go with him.” Pleasant turned his horse and rode north and west.
CHAPTER FIVE

"He giveth power to the faint and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and grow weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles: they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."

- Isaiah 40: 29-31

Big Nose Johnson rode his horse at a gallop across the grassy plain that had no trail, no landmarks, no distinguishing indication of direction or distance. His primal instincts, not his intellect, guided him. Like a migrating goose or a foraging bee he was born with a capability of finding his way without reference to prominent features or milestones.

Within his oversized heart he felt it was his charged commission, his appointed path, his destiny to assist and protect the one born of the dead bear. Truly the boy had been given his life by Big Nose. He would have certainly died trapped beneath the beast had Big Nose not delivered him. Akin to a mid-wife of his people, he had delivered the boy’s life. And now, fate had assigned him the duty of caring for the life he had extended.

The boy was his kindred now, his son. He named the new-born son Ged Bear, for as one dies and leaves this world, one is born to fill that place. They shared a common passion, hate for the Comanches who had hurt and broken their families, and a hate held in common is a strong bond. The boy’s hate had been recently kindled when the monsters killed his parents and stole his sister and him away. The boy lived the pain of imagining the torturous life his sister now suffered. In many ways the mental imagining was worse than the physical suffering, but Big Nose had witnessed Comanche captives’ sadistic, burning hell.

A year earlier while he hunted with his Tonkawa brothers, they were attacked by a band of Comanches. The Comanches retreated
and left one of their minor chiefs dead on the battlefield. The Tonkawa made camp, thinking Comanches would not return. But the Comanche joined with a greater number of warriors nearby and returned, attacking the small Tonkawa hunters' camp.

The Comanche are a small and thick people, especially small when compared to the physically large Tonkawa tribesmen, and the effort to overcome the few big hunters was costly. Eight Comanche died and near twenty were wounded. Eventually the many Comanches overpowered the fewer Tonkawa.

Big Nose escaped and managed to save his own life by laying quietly and still where he had crawled when wounded, into high grass and sage a short distance from the camp on a small rise. He was trapped there. Any move he made to remove himself further would have been seen by these foresworn enemies and he would suffer for a long time before the relief of death was bequethed. Weaponless, he layed and witnessed the unspeakable atrocities.

The Tonkawa had not even considered that the Comanches would return and attack. The hungry hunters had been roasting the hams of the little Comanche chief they had killed. When the Comanche had discovered their brother had been butchered and was roasting on a spit, they became insanely enraged. They removed their chief's hindquarters from the cookfire and stoked the fire into a much bigger blaze. The wounded Tonkawas were scalped to the bone. Working two and three Comanches to a limb all the wounded captives arms and legs were amputated. Tongues and other easily severed members were also removed. When the flames were high and hot, the remaining torsos were tossed into blaze. The wicked Comanches laughed and danced, delighted by the sight of the limbless trunks jerking and twisting in the inferno, grease and blood sizzling. The bodies swoll and popped, entrails bursting out, skin shrinking back to expose ribs and vertabrae. The tongueless, guttural screams still rang in Big Nose's skull, his father's screams, and his brother's.

The Tonkawa would never have even given thought to serving an enemy thusly. To kill an enemy was necessary. To eat him was a discretionary convenience. Why waste meat? Young Comanche meat
William W. Worley was much like pork in taste, salty and greasy. The Tonkawa did not comprehend why other tribes and people were repulsed and became angry when they ate their enemies. The caused the vanquished no unnecessary pain. The dead were dead, they could not feel anything. There was no disrespect intended, the provision of providence should not be squandered. The Comanche were the true evil ones. For endless days their captives would be kept alive to suffer unthinkable horrors and suffering only for pleasure of the captors. How could anyone derive pleasure from such inhumanity? The Comanche were the devil’s breed.

When Big Nose’s horse tired of carrying his great weight, he would dismount and run beside the horse’s withers, reins in hand. He would run for an hour or two then rest himself and the horse for a time before hurrying on. A lone coyote had appeared a distance away, running along with them. Big Nose knew the sacred coyote was blessing his mission. The Tonkawa remembered that they were once wolves and coyotes and they knew these who were their progenitors often guided their off-confused progeny. Big Nose knew where he would meet the rangers even though they knew not where they were headed. Big Nose would be there waiting for them.

The evening of the second day he located the tire, struggling rangers. They would be much wearier before they were safe. He presented himself at a distance, ululating and lifting his rifle up in the air, challenging them by riding in small circles. The rangers pace quickened. He presented himself twice more before darkness came. He edged up closer to them effecting an attack and by the position of his approach and retreat he slightly altered the direction of their path to one better suited to enhance their likelihood of avoiding their pursuers as long as possible. When he was certain he had accomplished his assigned task by the tightening of their formation and in the manner in which they kept their guns close to hand as well as their vigilance, and when he was satisfied that they would continue to ride through the night despite their exhaustion, only then did he draw away and set out to rejoin his closest kin, Dead Bear.
William W. Worley

Soon after leaving the rangers, Big Nose heard the cry of a night bird, loud and clear in the cool night air. Except he knew the cry was not a bird. The cry was from the throat of a man, a man who had been a childhood friend, it was Long Talk, a scout for the bluecoat cavalry. He returned the call with a slight variation and reined in to better hear the familiar reply so that he could locate his friend. They drew together and spoke of each his own mission and travails. Long Talk listened to the story of Dear Bear and agreed that the strong spirit of the bear had passed to the boy. Long Talk also agreed to lead the blue coat cavalry in a path to intersect the rangers and thus enhance the chances that both groups would survive any attack from the Comanche. As Long Talk lived up to his name, Big Nose was anxious to return to Dear Bear, so when his friend took a breath from his lengthy discourse, Big Nose simply stated the urgency to aid the boy in his quest and quickly rode away. Long Talk continued to speak as he rode north, increasing his volume as Big Nose increased his distance. The last distinguishable words heard were a blessing and a prayer to the wolves to guide and protect Dear Bear and Big Nose.

The recently arrived commander at Fort Richardson, Colonel Ranald Slidell Mackenzie had been transferred from Fort Concho because his superiors, including President U.S. Grant, thought him the best fighter in the army and wanted him even closer to the Comanche. Mackenzie had sent patrols out regularly since his transfer hoping for contact with any renegade Indians. He wanted his scouts to follow trails that would lead to the hostiles holding captives. He also wanted to find the Thompson boy before the devils did.

Fort Griffin had messengered that Pleasant John Thompson Junior had escaped from the infirmary. He had taken weapons, ammunition, stores and horses and had stated his intention to be finding and rescuing his sister, an impossible task, even for a troop. For a lad not yet reaching his puberty, it was suicide. It was correctly assumed that he had meant what he said and was combing the country.
William W. Worley

for the camp in which the Comanche held his sister. Colonel Mackenzie believed that the heart the
drove the lad should not be sacrificed to an impossible, if honorable mission. He must save the brave
boy and his sister as well, if she lived. He doubted either of the children were still alive; if not, he
would revenge them, as well as a thousand other innocents that the Comanche had murdered.

The patrol led by Lieutenant Crowley had traveled west and north in a zig-zag pattern across the
boundless plain hoping to find some evidence of passage of the two cavalry horses that the Thompson
brat had ‘borrowed’. Or, failing that, try to locate an Indian track of shoeless horses leading to a hos-
tile camp. One of the Tonkawa trackers had found shod horse tracks suggesting a rider of little weight
leading another shod horse bearing little weight also, likely a packhorse. The tracks were a few days
old. Following directly in the tracks of these obvious cavalry horse tracks intermittently and likely only
a few hours behind were the tracks of a large, unshod mustang that the scout knew was Big Nose’s
favorite horse. Johnson’s efforts to obscure and confuse the trail was evident to the keen eyes of the
Tonk and he remembered that Big Nose had asked the scouts to allow the boy and he to evade the
searching patrols which he knew would be sent to apprehend Pleasant John. Long Talk had already ad-
vised all the Tonks on this patrol and soon every Indian from Kansas to Rio Bravo would know the
story of the one that the spirits had chosen and hereafter would be known by the honorific, Dead Bear
The evidence of the passage of Big Nose on the trail of Dead Bear would go unreported allowing their
war chief to assist the boy in his crazy quest. The scout let his eyes and his thoughts follow the tracks
northwest. It would be a compelling story to hear, if either of the pair survived to tell it.

The patrol halted to be informed by a scout that a group of what appeared at a distance to be
civilians approached on a line seemingly headed to Fort Griffin or The Flat. It looked as though they
may be rangers who had retrieved stolen horses. The lieutenant peered at the civilian group through
his glass and confirmed that there were empty saddles on four horses. He then moved the patrol
William W. Worley

to intersect their path.

"Sir! Identify yourselves."

"Welp, howdy to you too, Lieutenant. I am Lieutenant Hill."

"Lieutenant of what, may I ask? Surely you are aware that it is illegal for civilians to trespass on this land under the Medicine Lodge Treaty."

"We're volunteer rangers duly appointed by Governor Davis to pertec' tha frontier from renegade Indians an' outlaws, as it is ab-so-lutely clear you boys in blue ain't doin' nuthin' but drawin' wages."

"You are here illegally,...'Mister' Hill. You have no authority here."

"Naw, ya been misinformed Yankee Boy. This here is Texas land, hard fought and won. It ain't Injun land an' it shore ain't U. S. Gova'ment land neither. That treaty signed up 'air in Kansas in '67 that sapposedly gave this land to the Injuns wuden worth the paper it'uz written on. This wuden never federal land ta give, neva was no Uncle Sam's land in Texas."

"Texas is a state within the United States. The recent war decided that. 'All' the land in Texas is Uncle Sam's."

"Like I said, ya been misinformed, ol' son."

"You will leave this land reserved to the Indians forthwith, and you will not return."

"Yep, we're leaving ah-right. We're gonna take these stolen horses to Fort Griffin where they kin be returned ta their rightful owners up 'air in Jacksonville so that Pleasant John Thompson Junior can receive the re-ward fer 'em an' fer tha robbers he kilt. That is, 'if' he returns alive from tryin' ta rescue his sister. But,... 'Mister' Crowley is it? Ya don't give no orders ta us rangers. We'll come an' go as we please, anywhere in Texas."

"You saw the Thompson boy? Talked to him?"

Lieutenant Hill took off his dusty hat and fingered the bullet holes in the crown.

"Yep, we seen 'im."

"Why didn't you bring him back with you?"

"Well, we tried. He shot at us. What were we gonna do, kill 'im?"
"He's just a boy. A grown man, a whole squad of 'rangers' should be able to capture and contain him."

"Guess we could say that 'bout the whole U. S. Army. Diden' ya'll have 'im tied to a cot at Fort Griffin? Hell, he stole horses, guns, ammo an' provisions right from under yer noses. But, soon's we get these horses back an' report ta Captain Baker, I reckon we'll be goin' back ta get 'im."

"Where'd you see the boy? That's our mission, to find the boy and return with him."

"As ya prob'ly noticed Lou, they ain't no landmarks in this country, not a rock nor a tree ta remember. Justa' sea a' grass, a few sage an' mesquite bushes, some cactus. Last we saw 'im wuz 'bout five 'ours back 'ataway." Lieutenant Hill pointed.

"That being the case, there is little chance that we could locate him today, maybe not tomorrow either with the boy traveling in the opposite direction. So, we will escort you 'civilians' off Indian land and back to Griffin. We'll contact Colonel Hall and ask for orders concerning you 'volunteers'."

"Yer welcome ta foller us, but ya ain't 'escortin' us nowhere. We're free men, full growed. 'Volunteers'. An' we come an' go as we please. I'm through a' jawin' with ya so'ier boy. Le's go boys. Oh yea. Ya might oughta' know that a whole herd a' Injuns been watchin' us, travelin' on our flanks all day. They probly waitin' for a good chance ta jump us. So be on the lookout. Get up!" Hill urged his mount to catch up to the departing rangers.

The soldiers fell in behind them. The Comanche scout laying in the tall buffalo grass a quarter mile away silently observed.

Winnie watched the boys approach with her head down and her eyes lifted. They were led by the boy who had been laughed at when she bloodied his nose and knocked him down before. Shaking Hand

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1 Portions of this segment of the manuscript were so faded as to be indecipherable. A scientific method suggested by Professor Johnathon Scott of Austin, Texas was employed and rendered the pale print perfectly legible. WWW
William W. Worley was gone from camp now. Smiling Dog had walked away from the fire where they had been cutting small pieces of buffalo meat into a big iron pot. Winnie did not know where Smiling Dog had gone, she only knew that she was more than alone without her. Other women, few of which had shown her the least kindness, were sitting around beading moccasins, tattooing one another’s face and braiding their hair, chirping to one another like a neighborhood of prairie dogs. She wondered what they were so excited about. If trouble was on the way, she realized there would be no one that might help her now.

When she noticed the sticks and stones in the boys’ hands she rose quickly and turned away, started to run. A rock, two, three rocks hammered into her back and head, slamming her to the ground. The gleeful laughter and yells of joy from the gang of boys surrounded her, echoing through the ringing in her ears from the injury to her head. The little devils ripped, tore and cut her clothes from her. They beat her with sticks, breaking her nose, busting her lips, bruising and battering her. She could not fight back, the blows to her back and stomach took her breath and the shock to her head seemed to paralyze both her body and her will.

Overwhelmed and fearful, still she bared her teeth like a feral cat as ten or twelve hands held her and clubs hit her wherever they could. The bully whose nose she had bloodied days before lifted her pale blonde braids and hacked them off close to her skull. The thought that her hair had never been cut before passed through her traumatized brain. Many hands on each arm drug her tender, naked body across the hard, rocky ground until she was lifted and thrown through the air to land in a prickly pear patch, the thorns penetrating deep into her soft, white flesh. Bright, shining blood ran from hundred of the punctures.

Clawlike hands grabbed a foot, then the other, and she was dragged out of the cactus and further along the stony ground leaving a trail of blood and torn flesh. The insane, joyful laughter of the infernal fiends drowned out her own instinctive, irrepressible and shrill screams. Several strong little hands gripped each limb and tied her to stakes driven deep into the ground, she was spread
Worley 

eagled and totally vulnerable. The imps danced around her, poking and beating her with their sticks, laughing and grinning. She believed she was to be gang-raped. And then the red ants began to crawl over and sting her, hundreds of mad ants swarmed over her biting her soft skin, her delicate places. She writhed and screamed through torn, swollen lips. The rawhide strips she was tied with torn her wrists and ankles. Stinging, burning pain enveloped her. And still the boys laughed and beat her and poked her with the sharp sticks. The torture lasted forever, driving her insane.

Miraculously, through a narrow slit of a grotesquely swollen eye, came a vision of Smiling Dog. She was there with the other wives and women with sticks of their own clubbing the demon-boys to the ground, driving them away. The women jerked the stakes from the ground, threw her away from the wide ant bed and rolled her through the prairie grass to remove the angry ants. Then she was crying and groaning in Smiling Dog's arms as the wild-eyed Indian woman carried her back to camp.

The gathered Comanche pack numbered approximately one hundred-fifty. The rode directly into both flanks of the rangers and soldiers, sending arrows and lead ahead of them. In the past when the army fought Indians, the mounted infantry would dismount and fight from the ground and that is what the Indians expected. However, this was the 4th Cavalry and rangers and they fought from horseback. Increasing their speed, they shot their Spencer repeater carbines as they continued toward Fort Griffin and safety. They were outnumbered near four to one so cover was needed to fight a defensive battle; cover was not available for a ways further, until the Clear Fork of the Brazos. None of the men needed to be told but Lieutenant Crowley had a need to tell them.

"To the river men! Don't stop until the river."

One soldier died on the way to the Brazos. He fell wounded to the prairie, his scream muffled by the hundreds of pounding hooves. Three sadistic Comanche helped him die on the bloody grass, laughing,
William W. Worley

cutting off parts of him and displaying them to him. The last thing he felt in this life was also the last
he saw, his own sharp knife touching his wide blue eyes.

Four others were wounded. The horses were stumbling and winded when they gained the river,
three had arrows piercing their hides. Reins were handed to the men who were designated to handle
them and they were tied to a tethering rope tied to the roots of a towering pecan tree that emerged from
the edge of the bank, securely placed out of the line of fire.

“Assume prone positions and fire accurately, make every shot count!” the lieutenant yelled above
the din to the soldiers. The soldiers and rangers were already spread out behind the ledge aiming their
with precision.

Lieutenant Hill went to the wounded rangers and examined his wound. He was still fit to fight dis-
pite painful lacerations where a bullet had passed completely through his hand. Hill wound his kerchief
tight around the hand ensuring it could still be used to fire his weapon.

One wounded soldier had an arrow stuck in his back. The distance the arrow had traveled had
slowed the velocity and, as it hit the shoulder blade, its sharpened iron point had been prevented from
deep penetration, but had painfully fractured the bone. The arrow was jerked out. The blood flowed an
cleansed the wound.

The other wounded soldier had a bullet pass through his right side and was lodged in a pucker
between ribs just below his chest. The army medic sliced the skin and the lead slug fell out, pushed by
the pressure of the man’s pain. He was wrapped full around with a bandage, and soon laid on the
other side to shoot.

The men had taken advantage of the four to five foot steep embankment along part’s of the river’s
edge to shelter them from the storm of arrows and bullets the yipping Comanche hailed down on them.
The embankment was only inches high in some places and as high as eight or nine feet in other places,
men spread out to defend as wide a front as possible and defend the flanks.

Hill made the hard, but necessary decision to send three of his men across the river with their horses
to watch for Comanche who would certainly cross over upstream and downstream to surround and
The Comanche withdrew after the soldiers and rangers dropped a few of them as well as a few horses. When they fell back Hill told his men, "We'll fight 'em off here fer an hour or two, give the horses a little rest. Don't let 'em drink too much, 'cause we need 'em to run. Rest up an' get ready 'cause we're gonna be runnin' fer our lives in a while. Shoot straight fer a couple 'ours, then we'll race these devils to Fort Griffin."

"Mister! I'm the ranking officer here," Lieutenant Crowley crowed, "You do not give orders to any one here. We will remain here under the cover we have until the Indians withdraw."

Hill and the other rangers just looked at the lieutenant, saying nothing.

"Do you understand?" I give the orders here. You rangers will remain and defend this ground."

"Mister Crowley, fact is, we ain't soldiers. You kin order all you want, but we're gonna do what we have to do to save our scalps. Them Comanche out there ain't quit, they just resting, same as us. They ain't leaving here 'til we're all dead, or gone. We intend to be gone. Stay here if you want, but us Texicans will be leaving in awhile."

"I will give orders to shoot you if you try to leave."

"An' we'll shoot you back. Then we'll be helpin' the redskins. You stay here an' they'll kill ya and skin ya', or skin ya an' kill ya much later. Your stand 'bout an even chance if ya come with us."

"These renegades cannot penetrate this position if we continue to defend it, we can and will...."

"Bullshit! When dark comes these Comanches will crawl up to within ten feet of ya before ya know they're there. Over a hunnerd of 'em! They'll swarm all over us with knives an' tomahawks an' guns. None of us will survive! It's four, maybe five to one. Think ya kin come out on top in a knife fight with four Comanches? It's 'bout five 'ours 'til dark. By dark we kin make it ta Fort Griffin if we leave in 'bout two 'ours. Some ah us'll make it if we hurry an' foller tha river, an' don't let 'em get too close.
"We'll be going with you Lieutenant Hill. I'll ride up front with you," Crowley added.

Hill looked up from the cinch he was tightening around his big bay's girth.

"Due respect, Lieutenant Crowley, if ya head out an' folle th' river, I'll come up the rear an' pick off a few a' them Comanch that venture too close. Jes keep up as fast a pace as you kin with the wounded."

"Agreed. I'll keep up a fast pace."

The horses had stiffened up some after the hard run and the short rest and were a little beligerent when the cinches began being tightened. Preparations were made in short order however and Lieutenant Crowley mounted up, staying low in the saddle.

"Soldiers, keep low and mount up: You wounded fall right in behind me. We'll be running these horses for all they're worth, so hold on. Nobody dawdles. Double file. Move out!"

The Lieutenant spurred his big gray and the horse jumped to a run beneath him. The others fell in quickly behind.

"Hell fer leather boys!" Someone agreed with a rebel yell.
"...they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace;" – Ezekiel 13:10

Pleasant spread out his guns on his ground cloth before his stoked campfire just after waking on the misty May morn. He checked the loads in the Colt revolvers and wiped the heavy dew from them. There was still a chill in the foggy air and he pulled the heavy bearskin with the head still attached over his head and shoulders, sitting beneath its captured warmth from the fire.

The peaceful dawn was abruptly interrupted by arrows penetrating the bearskin, just missing his rocking torso which leaned toward the fire. Instinctively reacting, he took both Colts to hand, twisted in the direction the arrows indicated and saw four Indians with bows. His first two shots felled two of the startled bowmen and the smoke from the fire and the fog hid the other two who fleetly fled.

Hurriedly saddling his riding horse and loading the packsaddle on the other horse, Pleasant led them quietly away for near two hundred yards, walking silently over the damp grass and ground. Once clear of the camp, he rode swiftly away.

Later that day, Pleasant nearly fell from his saddle as he physically felt blows that came from nowhere, heard evil laughter and insane screams of cruelty as unseen hands clawed at his clothes. He then did fall from his horse when he felt needles pierce him in a hundred places. Then the agony and torment of venomous bites made him squirm and writhe in the dirt.

As if awakening from a nightmare he stood up onto trembling legs and checked his body for evidence of the pain he had certainly suffered. There were no visible wounds. His spirit whispered in the language of the ether and made known to him that he had vicariously suffered the same torments of his sweet sister. Empathy had overwhelmed him, then anger washed over him in a hot, immersing wave. He stumbled to his shying horse and rode hard northward.
"Hold on Winnie," he whispered to the wind, "I'm hurryin'.

Hold on."

The rangers and soldiers managed to gain over a hundred yards before the Comanches adjourned their conference and began to give chase. Only a few eager ones were quick to their ponies and close enough to shoot at the fleeing companies. The rangers bringing up the rear angled their horses to the left so they could manage reasonably accurate shooting at the closest warriors. Two racing braves were knocked off their ponies by chest shots, that demonstrated accuracy imbued caution in the fervent followers. Practicing this tactic of aggressive withdrawal through the days in camp rendered satisfying recompense.

The other rangers observed the effectiveness of the tactic and began to fall back in relays trying their aim from a running horse and hindering close pursuit by the savages whose brave hearts had quickly learned caution. The Comanches countered this maneuver by sprinting their mounts and circling to the front, leaning to the off-side of their horses and shooting from under their necks. To the green lieutenant's credit, he and his men put enough lead into the air from their carbines to cause the mad redskins to back away from the front also. Still, two cavalrmen were hit by the rain of arrows and one was an already wounded man who was almost ripped from his saddle by an arrow between his ribs.

The river on their left protected the white men from attack on that side and Lieutenant Crowley wisely had the wounded move to that side, shielded by the able-bodied soldiers whose guns grew hot in their hands from furious firing to keep the swarming Comanches at bay.

After an hour's run the fort was still a few miles distant. The horses were reaching the very end of their endurance, stumbling, foam and froth sliding off their shining, straining bodies. Bill thought about halting beside the river and making a stand, but he feared the horses could not be started again. Still, his burning
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eyes scanned the Clear Fork’s banks for a defensible site. A couple of wounded men fell to the rear of
the bunch and were in danger of being separated from the group. The sergeant reined up to them,
spanked their floundering mounts and hollered, “Get on up ‘air!”

An arrow struck Lieutenant Hill’s cantle and he reined his horse to the left so he could bring his
rifle into play. His shot at the closest Comanche missed, but the near miss caused the brave to veer
away and slow his pony. When Hill turned back to the front he saw Lieutenant Crowley dismounted
beside the river a hundred yards ahead. He was waving the soldiers and rangers into a clearing, a
clearing made by a woodcutting detail of infantry with a cavalry escort. The approximately forty sold-
der of the detail were crouched behind the big felled trees throwing a hail of bullets into the now scatter-
ing savages.

“Thank God!” Hill spoke aloud. And meant it.

The whole and healthy men dismounted and helped the wounded from their horses, carrying them
to shelter behind a tall pile of limbs and logs. The wounded men’s good friends ran to them with
canteens of water and began tending to their wounds as the woodcutter and their escort were popping
caps into the passing Comanches as fast as they could cock and fire. In less than a minute the warriors
began to break off the attack and retreat beyond the range of the rifles. The Indian’s horses were spent.
Their discussion was brief and they began to melt away in many paths to the west and north.

The only places on these plains where wood could be found with any consistency or size was along
the rivers, and so in the subsequent evaluation of Lieutenant Crowley’s decision to follow the river in
his retreat, he was lauded by his superiors as wise and worthy of commendation. Those who had not
been present for the conversation between the two Lieutenants regarding this eventually mutual dec-
ision to make a run for it along the river were never apprised of it and Lieutenant Crowley was
eternally grateful to, and a good friend of Lieutenant Hill. The soldiers all knew that
woodcutting details were sent out almost every day and a heavy escort was typically sent along from the frontier forts. Neither of the lieutenants thought of that as a factor before their decision to retreat along the river where the only trees of any size grew, but who were they to disillusion their grateful admirers?

Within half an hour a large detachment of cavalry arrived with ambulances and wagons and even fresh horses for the dehorsed. The gunfire of the battle had been heard distinctly at the fort and the young ambitious captain had charged gallantly into the silent battlefield, disappointed that he was not to engage the murderous Comanches. The captain had previously witnessed the horrible remains in the aftermath of Comanche visitations; he was incensed and anxious to punish the heartless monsters. It was an effort for him to restrain from giving chase to the cowardly brutes. His orders were, as always, not to engage unless the Indians were caught in the act of murder and mayhem. He had always obeyed orders, but he was sorely tempted to more liberally interpret "in the act of murder and mayhem." That moment of an expanded and punitive interpretation was fast approaching.

Lot-T- Da had been christened with her most recent handle since her arrival at the remote abode of misfits simply because she had been taught manners by her upper class parents and behaved accordingly. It wasn't that she was particularly haughty or pompous, she was simply a creature of her breeding and tutelage. And, among the wild and wooly ruffians that inhabited the sinful settlement named The Flat, she seemed to hold herself aloof and apart from the muleskinner, buffalo hunters, outlaws, card sharps and assorted riff-raff.

Her Christian name was Mabel and the men used that name preceded by Miss when in her presence. She was a practical woman by nature, was Miss Mabel. She lived by her wits on the wild frontier. If she knew nothing else, she knew how to manipulate men and she prayed a silent prayer that she could sway the fort's commander on that bright, promising May morn as she drove her prancing team to army headquarters. Bat Masterson, John Larn and Billy Nixon escorted her fancy buggy on tall dancing steeds. Fifty patrons of the Bee Hive Saloon who
had been inspected by Miss Mabel trailed them in support and were sober, clean and dressed in their best. For The Flat, they were a fine-looking delegation.

Colonel Wood politely gave his attention to the presentation, intrigued by Miss Mabel and by the number of volunteers wanting to brave Comancheria to rescue the captives. He expressed his sincere wishes that he could lead such an honorable mission, but concluded his response by expressing his standing orders and how infuriating the orders were to obey. But, following orders is what he did and what he expected of those under his command. The army would not be initiating any such expedition, not yet anyway.

The colonel then enunciated an explicit explanation as to the manner in which civilian citizens protected their lives and property was beyond his purview. In these circumstances in which citizens were determined to retrieve captives and stolen property, certain provisions might be issued to such a party to ensure their safety, such as ammunition, firearms, foodstuffs, horses or even scouts who were actually civilian free-agents employed under contract.

The commandant further enlightened them that some enlisted men at the fort, actually some of the best and most experienced Indian fighters were due time on leave and he would not presume to order what they should do with their vacations. Some of these men had expressed a desire to explore the lands to the west and north to see the sights. These strong-hearted men very well might be interested in accompanying such a civilian search party. But no, he must follow the orders of his superiors. He could not order a company of soldiers into Comancheria in violation of the Medicine Lodge Treaty.

Miss Mabel graciously accepted the good colonel's refusal of their petition, smiled through the old soldier's apology and told him that she understood his position restrained him. She shook his hand, thanked him, brightened his day with her beaming smile and the twinkle in her eye. The men all honored him with words of respect and hearty handshakes. Mabel asked him to pass along an invitation to any and all of the soon to be furloughed, strong-hearted men to visit the Bee Hive or Shauqissys Saloon in The Flat for free drinks and meals and compelling conversation. She also cordially extended invitations to him and his officers at their convenience and leisure.
That very afternoon a bold and barrel-chested Irishman attended Miss Mabel's table at the saloon. He identified himself as 'Citizen' O'Malley, on a two fortights leave from his occupation as a sergeant with the U. S. Army. He expressed interest in touring the Staked Plains through a cycle of the moon and viewing the sights.

"Sid, drinks on me for this prime and fit worthy. And feed him a beefsteak and the trimmings whenever he feels peckish. Boys, here is a stout-hearted soldier who will ride by your side. Is he welcome?"

"Sure is."

"Hell yes!"

"Welcome Sergeant. Welcome."

"Have a drink with us friend."

Cheers and backslaps and words of hospitality warmed Citizen O'Malley's heart and the many who had been graciously granted authorized absence by their benevolent commander.

Time was not to be wasted in this endeavor, captives were suffering and Lottie urged the men to organize and set out to return these innocents back to their people. Billy Nixon was voted to lead the dozen scouts that included Tonkawas, buffalo hunters, as well as Dutch Henry Born and two other rustlers who knew the panhandle's secrets well. Charles Goodnight, Bat Masterson and Citizen O'Malley were elected leaders of their separate parties and Lieutenant Hill was added to this group after his arrival with his tired but willing rangers that evening.

Preparations began the following morning. The 'two fortnight citizens' from the fort obtained army horses for the few who were without good mounts and the army also provided packhorses with packsaddles filled with supplies, liberally extended by the fort's sutler. All of the eighteen saloon owners donated goods to the undertaking and plans were made to depart the following morning after a breakfast provided by the proprietors of The Flat to be held at Fort Richardson Road and Third Street in and around Charlie's Restaurant.
Thorpe, the blacksmith, and his two helpers were busy late into the night ensuring the hoofwear of the horses. Pete Haverty's Livery ran out of feed for all the horses boarded there. Men slept on bedrolls all along Collins Creek and three big wagons loaded with provisions waited at the wagonyard across from the Bee Hive.

Next morning, when the men rose and worked the kinks out of their bones, they were fed and listened to a short speech by old Charlie Goodnight as they finished their coffee, smoked and bit off a chew.

"Looky here boys. Lissen up fer a minute. While we're on this job of work together we're all on the same side. Some a' ya'll wuz Confederate solgers an' ya fought a'gin these good men who've volunteered to risk their scalps ta rescue the poor women an' children out there sommers. We're all gonna hafta be best frien's fer tha next little while. Some a' you fellers has stole some beef from my ranch I reckon, but fer tha next few weeks I won't hold it against ya. An' some a'ya'll has took a bit a' my money at poker tables here'bouts, an' I didn't like 'at a'tall. But, we all gotta get along 'til we bring them children back.

"Now, what we're 'bout ta do ain't purly legal, but it is moral, an' I congratulate each man here fer standin' up an' doin' the right thang. This is a good group a'men here, an' them damned Comanches'll surely rue the day we come ta get our own. If I hafta', I'll buy those babies back. I got money fer that. But, if them red devils wanna play rough, well, I suspect we kin teach 'em a thang er two 'bout rough. Lives er on the line here boys, our own lives, but more importan', those poor children and women. Le's go get 'em back boys. Whaddya say?"

A cheer went up from the gathered troop and Goodnight yelled over the din.

"We may hafta do some fightin', Injun fightin'. They's a buncha' us, but they's a bigger buncha Injuns out there. It ain't gonna be all biscuits an' gravy, it may be a bloody, hard trail. So if ya ain't fit ta fight tooth and nail, stay here. I won't tolerate no whinin'.

"'Nuff said. Those that'er willin'. Le's ride."
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"Go with God men. Bring those babies back!" Mabel hollered.

Then all those who were to remain in The Flat cheered as the one hundred twenty one men rode out in a trot, northwest.

A group of ten teamsters driving wagons full of supplies bound from Fort Richardson on the trail to Fort Griffin rode out that same May morning in 1871, headed south southwest.

Smiling Dog fumed as she gathered the thins she would need to minister to Winnie whom she had begun to think of as Sky Eyes. When she thought of or looked at Winnie it was always the vision of her clear, candid eyes that touched Smiling Dog's mother-heart. She had already adopted the pretty white girl in her mind and her heart, begun to love her as a the daughter she had never had.

She had ordered some of the other women to stand guard outside the tepee against the return of the cruel, unruly boys. When the men returned, Shaking Hand would be furious that the boys had taken the girl's hair, he was amazed at the thick, luxurious, almost white man and was proud to feel that he owned such an exotic servant. She would be highly prized and valuable when she came of age. Because of Shaking Hand's fury and sure reprisal, Smiling Dog must not let any further harm come to Sky Eyes, but her own growing love for her was even more motivation than Shaking Hand's anger.

Other of the wives and girls she had inside the tepee helping her. Two were required to help Sky Eyes to stand. The soles of her feet were found to be the only area of her skin not seriously penetrated by the cactus thorns. The bottoms of her small feet were tough and calloused from running barefoot over the prairie playing with Pleasant. She had only one doll that her mother had made for her when she was very small and she had not played with it for years. She had slept with the doll though, it had been a comfort. Now it was ashes, blown in the wind.

The women used their long, strong nails to remove the many thorns from her tender flesh. Some of the larger thorns had penetrated an inch into her body. One of the more hateful women had been
purposely rough in her treatment of Sky Eyes; Smiling Dog beat the mean hag out of the teepee. Winnie jerked and shivered involuntarily in reaction to the removal of the stinging barbs, and though tears ran from those distantly focused blue eyes, she did not utter a sound. Smiling Dog believed those eyes saw something or someone far away in distance or in time.

The poison thorns were everywhere, in her most private parts, her scalp, cheeks, eyelids, neck, ribs, buttocks and legs. Hundreds of spines, tiny and large, emitting their prickling, stinging toxin into her tender tissues. Winnie's legs were beginning to bend and buckle after the long hours of standing. The bloody cactus darts the women had removed near filled a bowl when all the thorns in view were withdrawn.

Finally, mercifully, they laid Winnie down on soft buffalo robes. Smiling Dog held her head in the crook of her arm giving her cool water to sip that had an earthy aftertaste. Winnie felt trust, comfort, appreciation and affection, and though she fought against it, she felt a growing kinship. These emotions confused her. She tried to think objectively, to weigh her situation, but her thoughts were jumbled. Visions of violence that she had witnessed and endured presented themselves irrepresively to her mind's eye. And, before she sank beneath the still waters of Lethe into sweet oblivion, she clearly saw her brother riding through the mist. She heard his assurances. "Hold on Winnie. I'm hurryin'. Hold on." She slept deep and in peace, trusting in the surety of love.

Smiling Dog mashed two handfuls of Shaking Hand's precious tobacco leaves into a bowl of warm water, then rubbed the leaves gently over the innumerable ant bites leaving tiny shreds of the crushed leaves on the girl's inflamed flesh to draw out the poisons of the stings and punctures. She wrapped the girl's whole body in strips of buffalo gut, leaving only her nostrils and mouth uncovered. She had instructed the girls of the camp to catch and bring her horned lizards and she placed four (four was a holy number to the Comanche), in the soft, dark folds of the robes that covered Sky Eyes' lean and desecrated body. The horned lizards would eat the ants poison and defend her from another attack. They were strong medicine.
Smiling Dog sat cross-legged beside her patient, her daughter. She rocked back and forth, humming more than singing a fervent petition to the Great Spirit. The other women and wives of Shaking Hand watched and slept in turns.

When Winnie awoke it was a full minute before she could bring to mind who she was, then another while before she recalled where she was and why she was so very stiff and hot and achy. She groaned and when she opened her eyes she could see very little light, diffused and blurry. She began to panic and then felt hands on her shoulders and heard soft sounds of reassurance. Fingers unwrapped the swaddling intestines from her face and head. Winnie inhaled deeply in relief, welcoming the now comforting sight of Smiling Dog's lovely face.

Winnie returned a simile of a smile to the motherly squaw and moved to remove the wraps, but her gentle nurse prevented her. By calming motions and soothing tones she was coaxed to lay back onto the soft fur pallet. When she did she felt a wriggling lump beneath her and moved her hand to remove it from under her. One of the horned lizards scampered out from her covering, turned its ugly head to peer out of its tiny dark eyes at each of them, then returned decidedly to its place beneath the robes. Smiling Dog laughed and clapped her hands. She spoke to the other women in an excited manner and they all seemed to be pleased. Winnie was perplexed by their reaction to the creature, but not being a city girl and still feeling weary from her ordeal despite all the rest, she curled back up with the lizard and its still slumbering kin beside her.

Recalling her torture, she was further confounded that she felt no great pain. When she moved she felt a deep soreness, a bruising to the bone, but as she lay still no stinging or pounding pain, no burning discomfort delayed her return to the arms of Morpheus.

Through hours and days that Winnie could not number, Smiling Dog attended her, giving her cool water, warm broth and soft sounds of assurance. Then came a morning when she awoke with all the wraps removed. Smiling Dog was washing her with what seemed to be the fleshy, wet pulp of some succulent, perhaps prickly pear with the thorns removed. She inhaled the healing fragrance as the sticky
substance coated and soothed her inflamed skin which was multi-
colored in its thorough bruising. The many punctures and bites
were almost completely healed, only scabs remained in places.
She lay naked as a baby allowing this wild Comanche squaw who
smelled of grease and woodsmoke to bathe her. She felt no shyness
nor shame. She felt mothered, safe.

Winnie succeeded in conveying her need to make water and
Smiling Dog brought her a big, chipped bowl to squat over. The
movement caused a groan to escape her, her whole body aching from
the horrific abuse and her inactivity. When she crawled back to-
ward her nest, Smiling Dog pulled her up onto her feet and walked
with her, made her stretch and bend her creaky body. The movement
was painful, yet relieving and loosening. Winnie knew it was nec-
essary. She recalled a similar hurting experience when thrown from
a colt. That bittersweet memory caused her to shut her eyes tightly
to dam the tears that came as the vision of her father standing
above her, smiling and telling her, "Get up girl. Gotta' finish
what ya started. Ain't no quitters in the Thompson clan." His
words rang clear and seemed actually audible, not just in her head.
The wise advice seemed to apply to her present predicament. "Finish
what ya started." She planned to. She would.

The one hundred fifty Kiowa and Comanche had slipped away from
the Fort Sill reservation in Indian Territory and crossed the Red
River down into Texas. Leading these renegades were Kiowa chiefs
Sittanke, Satanta, Kicking Bird and Big Tree. This war party had
been coaxed into action by the supposed visions of a Kiowa medicine
man called Do-ha-te, or Owl Prophet. ¹ The murderous mob camped
close by and scouted the trail between Fort Richardson and Fort
Griffin through the Salt Creek Prairie.

¹ Other historians have reported that the shaman who directed the
warparty was Mamanti (He Walks Above), the rival shaman of Napawat
(No Moccasins), but the author's research convinces him that the
preponderence of the evidence indicates Owl Prophet.
The first group of white men to pass over the trail in the scouts' sights were headed from Fort Griffin to Fort Richardson. This group was an inspection tour led by the General of the Army, William T. Sherman and the Inspector General of the Army, Randolph Marcy. Sherman was of the uninformed and prejudicial opinion that the reports of Indian atrocities on the Texas frontier were over-dramatized and inflated beyond belief. His biased and oblivious viewpoint was about to be vehemently disproved. Only by the grace of a merciful God was his life spared.

Owl Prophet advised the anxious warparty to spare this first group of white men because his 'vision' so urged him specifically to attack the second group encountered. The second group to come along the trail was the Henry Warren wagon train of supplies driven by ten teamsters headed south from Fort Richardson to Fort Griffin. They had passed the inspectors on the trail. This group of honest, working men were attacked, assaulted, murdered and molested by the merciless devils with malice aforethought.

The savages, with faces painted black, ambushed the supply train and despite being outnumbered fifteen to one the white family men fought bravely and well. Either four or five of the teamsters escaped death and mutilation. One of the teamsters, Thomas Brazeal, despite being severely wounded, dragged himself twenty miles to Jacksboro and raised the alarm.

When Thomas Brazeal was transported to Fort Richardson for medical treatment, he was questioned by General Sherman. Sherman immediately ordered Colonel Mackenzie who had recently been transferred from Fort Concho to Fort Richardson with four companies of the Fourth Cavalry to the field to investigate the attack and track the hostiles. Mackenzie led the cavalry out in a blinding rainstorm. The Fourth was initially hindered in trailing the Indians because of the rain, but eventually managed to track them all the way from the burned wagons at Salt Creek Prairie back to the Sill Reservation.

\[2\] Memory fails after over 50 years and reports vary wildly, but I believe either four or five men survived the massacre.
Mackenzie's patrol found the victims at Salt Creek stripped, scalped and mutilated horrifyingly. Some had been decapitated, others disarticulated or their skulls had been crushed and their brains scooped out onto the rocks. In his official report of the scene, Captain Robert G. Carter wrote:

"The teamsters were horribly bloody and mutilated, their bodies covered with flies. Their fingers, toes and private parts had been cut off and stuck in their mouths,...bodies bloated and swollen beyond all chance of recognition were filled with arrows which made them resemble porcupines... Upon each exposed abdomen had been placed live coals. One wretched man, Samuel Elliot, who, fighting hard to the last, had evidently been wounded and was found chained upside down between two wagon wheels, tongue cut out, and, a fire having been made from the wagon pole, he had been slowly roasted to death...burnt to a crisp."

After returning to the reservation the Indians boldly boasted and gloated over the massacre. It is suspected that the Southern Plains Indians believed that Texians were a separate people from United States citizens and the U.S. Army, such suggestion was surely generated from the hate born in the War Between the States and still demonstrated through Reconstruction. Some Indians believed Texians were a common enemy of the U.S. and the tribes. After all, they had never been punished for their murderous raids into Texas after they had returned to their government-sponsored refuge. This presumptive state-of-mind of the Indians is indicated by their leaders' response when questioned regarding the massacre. Satanta and Big Tree freely admitted the horrible murders, theft of supplies and mules when interviewed by General Sherman. Kicking Bird also admitted taking part in the butchery and he offered to retrieve the stolen mules. The army, in its gullibility, released him. His deceit, and the army's ludicrous judgement was clearly exposed by his failure to return.

General Sherman ordered the arrest of Satanta, Sittanke and Big Tree forthwith. After a tussle on the porch of the headquarters building at Fort Sill the three were subdued and chained.
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General further ordered that they be returned to Texas to face trial. That had never happened before, it was an unprecedented action that marked the beginning of the end of the Comanche and Kiow ‘nations’. General Sherman and Sheridan as well as President Grant urged Colonel Mackenzie, sub rose, to take whatever measures were necessary to subdue the marauding Indians in Texas, particularly the Comanche and the Kiow. The Quaker Peace Policy had been a total farce and failure.
CHAPTER SEVEN

"...Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?"
- Job 2:10

Big Nose was aware of the two Kickapoo approaching across the plain before they noticed him. He halted his horse, pulled his Spencer carbine across his saddle, cocked it and waited for them. When one saw him, sitting motionless, letting his horse graze, he alerted the other and they stopped and stared. Slowly, Big Nose raised his arm and showed them his empty hand; the two Kickapoo returned the gesture.

Riding up close to one another they began a conversation employing various languages and using sign. Big Nose alerted them to the large Comanche warparty southeast of them and the white rangers headed to Fort Griffin, maybe either there by now or all dead. They told him they had been searching for the buffalo herds and showed him their success with meat and hides stacked on travois behind three pack horses. They told him also they had lost two of their brother hunters in a strange occurrence. They had come upon a big bear sitting before a campfire early on a foggy morning two suns ago. They had shot three arrows into the bear and a boy came from inside the bear shooting many bullets with handguns killing two of them. These two managed to get away from the angry bear who had a boy inside.

Big Nose spoke to them of the boy who had taken on the spirit of the bear he had killed. He was Dead Bear, and it was he that Big Nose sought. The Kickapoo had left their dead there and asked Big Nose to honor them with burial. He gave them his solemn promise. And thus, the legend of Dead Bear grew, and spread.

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The Tonkawa scouts showed Dutch Henry the tracks of the many unshod Indian ponies driving a herd of cattle and shod horses. The Tonks estimated that the tracks were laid two 'fat' moons past, or about eight weeks ago. These tracks well might be the tracks of the warparty that had taken the captives that they sought. And considering the direction of the tracks, northwest into the wilds.
of the Staked Plains instead of northeast to the reservations in Indian Territory, these tracks may well have been made by Quahadis, Kotsoteka or possibly even Yamparika bands of Comanche.

Dutch Henry had made it his business to learn of all the Comanche and Kiowa bands because the livestock he rustled was driven through their territory into New Mexico and Colorado. He knew they called themselves Nermernuh or Numunu which meant 'the people', just as the people of the United States had called themselves 'we, the people' from their beginning of banding together. There were five primary bands of the Comanche: the Yamparika (Yap Eaters); Kotsoteka (Buffalo Eaters); Penateka (Honey Eaters); Nokoni (Wanderers); and Quahadis (Antelopes).

The Quahadis were the most primitive and hostile band. They were led by many dangerous chiefs, but their primary war chief became Quanah (Fragrant or Stinker) Parker, the son of Peta Nacona (One Who Wanders and Returns) and Cynthia Ann Parker, a woman captured by the Comanches when she was a girl. This band was the last band to give up their home in the Llano Estacado, an area larger than all of New England. The Quahadis would not trade with Anglos at all, only with the Indian-Mexican mixed breeds, Mestizo or Comanchero, from the Santa Fe area and thus avoided the cholera plagues of 1816 and 1849 that ravaged western tribes and destroyed fifty percent of all other Comanche bands. They were the richest of all the bands primarily because they were the most war-like and were always supplementing their wealth with theft from raids deep into Mexico up through the Texas frontier. Dutch Henry surmised they were dealing with either the Quahadis or Kotsoteka, the worst of the worst.

Dutch Henry had planned for this. He believed it was likely a mix of Quahadis, Kotsoteka and Kiowa who had lately raided from the isolated ranchos in Mexico through south and west Texas taking lives, captives, livestock and goods that caught their fancy. He knew these particular Indians would not even discuss the ransoming of captives with Anglos and so he had recruited Pancho 'El Indio' Arriaga, an ex-Comanchero trader who was now a trusted member of
his gang of rustlers. If the opportunity presented to possibly buy back the captured women and children, Pancho would be their spokesman. Dutch Henry knew that there was a better chance they could purchase the freedom of those taken than to retrieve them by force of arms. These particular Indians would typically kill captives rather than allow the possibility of rescue. But, with Pancho doing the haggling, there would at least be a chance. Pancho was a wily horse trader and that was how the Comanche viewed captives, as livestock and property.

The two month-old tracks faded out in places for miles, but the scouts managed to pick them up within a few hours or so and the troop made the passage up and across the Staked Plains with dispatch, covering up to sixty miles a day.

The scouts rode back to the main party one evening an hour before sundown and reported that they had found evidence of a large bunch, likely a warparty, having passed a few miles east from their own heading moving in the direction of Fort Griffin. It was thought these tracks may have been laid by the Indians who had fought the soldiers and rangers a few days previous.

Discussion was made around the camp that night and there were several opinions offered. The scouts believed the tracks to be a warparty since there were no tracks of the travois that the squaws employed to move their belongings and no tracks of lodge poles or mocassin tracks of women or children. There were mostly unshod Indian ponies making tracks, at least a hundred fifty horses and likely more. Discussion centered on the single choice of either continuing to follow the old tracks to what would likely lead them to the Indian camp in which the captives were being held, or to turn back and pursue the supposed warparty. Goodnight made the suggestion that the men agree to not split up and to accede to the majority vote which should wait until the morning giving everyone time to weigh their thinking. Goodnight's suggestion was accepted and additional pickets were posted throughout the night to give warning should the warparty be in the vicinity.
After coffee and further discussion in the first light of day it was decided to leave the warparty to the army and the rangers remaining in the forts and camps and to continue on their mission to rescue the captives. Hopefully there would be few or no warriors remaining in the Comanche's camp and the captives might be easily taken. That was the general consensus. The company traveled briskly through the day toward their objective, hoping the scouts would soon report an enemy camp not far ahead.

Dutch Henry Born was every bit as avid to rescue the children and punish the cruel Comanches as any of the other so-called respectable, honest men in the volunteer party. He felt the others' hate of him and his cohorts almost as a physical sensation and from some he felt anger which he knew was truly fear disguised and unrecognized. He understood that these attitudes and emotions, even his own, were created of each particular perspective and position in life. These attitudes were as predictable as the path of a stream which ran in the easiest track and not of its own volition, inclination or determination. These men's thoughts, values and convictions were molded and governed by their particular level and station in life as well as their needs. To many of the strongly opinioned any other viewpoint was skewed and unacceptable.

Take old Charlie Goodnight for example, Dutch Henry thought as he drank his after-supper libation in his coffee standing outside the circle gathered by the fire. Charlie's more knowledgeable than most of these other law-abiding citizens, Dutch Henry admitted to himself, he's been around and seen a variety of life. Still, he is a law-dog. He was once a Texas Ranger who hunted down suspected criminals, shot them or hung them without a trial, no judge, no jury, and that never disturbed Charlie's sleep. His 'law', his frame of reference, supported his actions. He was a rancher; the 'ownership' of a particular area of land he believed was indisputable because he had paid for a piece of paper, signed and sealed by the same authorities he weighed as unnecessary before he executed those he 'believed' were guilty of theft. He believed he 'owned' everything within the borders of that land; it was 'his' grass, 'his' water, 'his' earth. They were 'his' deer, 'his' cows, 'his' buffalo, 'his' everything simply because they happened to be on 'his' land.
The Indians 'said' they didn't see it that way; that is until someone encroached on "their" hunting ground or killed 'their' buffalo. Dutch Henry thought such a view was ludicrous, though he did not know the term to employ it.

Goodnight and these other Christian brothers would agree that when Charlie bought land everything that land touched was his. Wild horses and longhorned cattle that had wandered onto 'his' land and had never felt a brand were Charlie's property. Dutch imagined that old longhorned bull did not give thought as to who 'owned' the particular grass he was grazing on and would not ask permission to eat it. As far as that old bull was concerned that was 'his' grass. Tomorrow, after that bull had used that grass for his purposes, he would return it, albeit in a different form. And that fragrant form might well embody Goodnight's idea of ownership.

Dutch knew that he was as worthy of God's provision as Charlie Goodnight. Those wild cattle and horses and buffalo and deer and grass and water were not Charlie's just because he had paid for a piece of paper that appointed him a 'lord'. A man may as well print a document that ordained ownership of the clouds, the sky or the air.

Old Goodnight was plainly a hypocrite, but would never admit it. He had not eaten a beeve that had his own brand on it in years. A neighboring rancher's cow that wandered onto Charlie's land was shortly afterwards butchered and grilled, but if a cowhide with his brand on it was found in another man's camp, old Charlie was keen on a hanging. No trial, no judge, no conversation, just a hanging. It was his 'right' to eat another man's branded calf, but another man would not be afforded any such leniency or privilege.

Dutch and Charlie had butted heads before, likely would again. They were differently bent by different circumstances, each of their views slanted by the pressures of their experiences and the position they occupied in life. Dutch could see that, despite Charlie's self-serving support for the status quo, he was generous and had a good heart in other ways. And Charlie, by just being in the proximity of the old shameless rustler Dutch Henry Born, begrudgingly admitted that there were traits of good character in the thieving bastard.
Charlie allowed that Dutch Henry knew this mythic vastness called the Staked Plains better than about any other white man and was fully aware of the dangers that increased with every step deeper into its endless waves of grass, but he still risked his life for no hope of reward to rescue these innocents whom the cruel Comanches had stolen away. Goodnight knew the dangers of pursuing Comanches, he had fought them a few times. And he was aware of the added danger of scouting for them, alone, miles away from the protection of a troop. Charlie conceded Dutch a half-hearted respect for his honorable bravery, but he would still stretch his neck from the nearest strong limb if he caught him with any of 'his' livestock, with no compunction.

Billy Nixon, the buffalo hunter, had some of the same views as Dutch Henry. Billy wouldn't have fully understand what it was that you wanted if you asked him for his philosophy of these matters. His actions displayed his views clearly, though he was incapable of voicing his notions with any clarity. He hunted buff; wherever they roamed, he went. If and when he killed a beast it was 'his' hide and meat and if you made a move to deprive him of 'his' kill you may live to regret it, or you may not live to reconsider. He granted no ownership of the buffalo to the Indians, nor did he consider ownership of the land by deed and official seal a hinderance to his hunting. If Billy found himself on land that Goodnight claimed was his, would Billy become Goodnight's property? In Billy's mind nobody 'owned' buffalo but God.

Stepper and Abe might argue both sides of the question. They had staked claims that they believed gave them exclusive rights to the minerals found there, but they had never imagined that they owned the water and the fish in the stream that ran through the claim or the animals that came to drink. Now, old Grumpy Hogue, he would likely lay claim to everything around, just to have something to argue about.

What all these men from sundry stations in life did agree on was that these Indians had no right, moral nor legal, to kill and burn, steal, torture and mutilate those who meant them no harm. The Indians 'said' a man could not own the land, yet they protected their own hunting grounds with deadly, malicious force. In the opinion of many Anglos and Mexicans these particular species of Indians
were predatory varmints that should be driven away or eliminated altogether. This assembled group would gladly eliminate any of the women and children stealers that got in their way. If only they could find the camp, or find the warriors. Dutch Henry kept a close watch on their back trail. He thought the warriors might find them.

Winnie peered at the primitive but pretty face beside her that the coals of the low fire cast a red light upon. Smiling Dog was fast asleep, tired from her many chores and from the stress of watching over her charge. Winnie appreciated her efforts to protect her from those others who hated her only because of the color of her skin, eyes and hair. Winnie had done nothing to deserve the pains and the indignities she had suffered. And she realized that her only friend within the camp of savages would likely be punished when she escaped, but in Winnie's mind, there was no choice. She must escape. Blood called to blood.

Winnie's heart went out to Smiling Dog. She wished she could write her a letter telling her how she felt, some words to possibly assuage her sufferings, cause her to understand why she had to escape. There was really nothing she could do to ease her sadness and whatever other miseries she would bear. She knew, she felt Smiling Dog's love. And Winnie had feelings inside her for the sweet savage too. Regardless, what Winnie must do is leave, effect her escape now, while the men were absent from the camp. And she must be successful the first time. There would be no second chance.

Moving very slowly and carefully, in increments, her eyes watching Smiling Dog for the slightest indication that the movement had disturbed her sleep, she slipped silently from beneath the heavy robes. Watching all the other wives and women closely, she crawled across the floor of the teepee to gather a knife and an Indian-braided bridle and reins. She peeked out the entrance of the tent and seeing no one she crept through the dwellings barefooted, as quietly as a cat. Winding away through the surrounding
sea of grass, keeping low, she made her way to the horse herd about a half mile away. When she was within fifty yards of the horses she stopped and knelt, searching for the one, or maybe two, watchers of the horses. After maybe five minutes without seeing any movement, she began crawling closer to the herd. Then there was movement, a figure sitting and scratching his head. Winnie froze.

The figure was about twenty yards ahead and she heard a sleepy sigh. "Yes, sleep, sleep," she silently urged. Tying the bridle and reins around her thin shoulders and biting down on the blade of the knife, she inched forward on all fours, praying for God's help. As she crawled, her hand found a rock half as big as her head. Trembling, she lifted the heavy rock and stood crouching ten feet behind the nodding shadow. Soundlessly, slowly, holding her breath she moved close enough to touch the shape. Raising the stone above her head as high as she could reach, she brought the weight down directly on the back of the head of the silhouette. The crack seemed very loud to her and she slunk down into the tall grass beside the now prostrate form laying on its side.

Some of the horses shuffled a few feet further away, their heads and ears turned toward her. She remained on her knees beside the body and studied the area all around the herd. No alarm was sounded. There seemed no one else around to notice her actions. She glanced down at the unconscious boy and wondered if he was still alive. She noticed a horsehair rope beside him and also a bow and quiver of arrows which she pitched off into the darkness. She looked to see if he still breathed and noticed something hanging around his neck. It was her hair, must be her hair, blonde and almost white, braided and tied with rawhide, an adornment for the boy who would soon be another cruel warrior. She turned his head to the light of the moon and recognized him. He was the demon who had tortured her, cut her hair. Her hand went to the knife, but she stuck it into the sash around her waist, She lifted the stone again and growled.

She hesitated, then laid the heavy stone aside. She picked up the horsehair rope and moved to the horses. She selected one
that seemed docile yet young and strong. Without any trouble she slipped the tough rawhide bit behind the great teeth and lifted the tied reins over the bowed head.

A smile formed on her still swollen, bruised and scabbed-over face. She led the horse back to the evil boy. After one foot was securely tied with his own rope she tied the other end round the horses neck and began to slowly walk her gentle mount away to the south. After a good distance she heard the first groan from the dragging creature. She mounted the stolen horse and put her heels to the mare's ribs quickly gaining a gallop. She was gratified to hear his trembling scream, but somewhat concerned that the noise would alert the camp. She increased the speed and turned the mare causing the trailing boy-bundle to swing into and through a huge patch of prickly pear, then a few mesquite bushes. When the boy's screams ceased, she cut the drag rope and continued to gallop south. She would have to spare him the ants she thought, and she felt both disappointment and guilt.

Looking back, she saw figures running around in the firelight, heard voices of alarm. Her escape would soon be discovered. They would be coming for her. Dawn wasn't far away. She refused to think about what they would make her suffer if she were caught.

"Help me God," she prayed with every jump of the horse beneath her, "Help me God!"
"My times are in Thy hand, deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me."

- Psalm 31:14

Pleasant wondered at the sight of the scavenger birds on the far horizon as his horse trudged wearily through the waning of daylight. At full dark he unsaddled his horses and he watered them by pouring the contents of his two canteens into the big sombrero he had salvaged from the banditos. After tying them by his long rope to the only mesquite in sight he situated himself by the stars as Poppa had taught him, slung the Spencer carbine over his shoulder and began to hike northward to scout the area that the buzzards circled.

After a walk of over an hour he smelled woodsmoke, mixed with the unmistakeable reek of Comanche. Men had argued with his father denying that Pleasant could smell Comanches. They also did not believe he could smell snakes, but he could and both were evil stenches. The glow of campfires came in sight perhaps a mile farther on. Keeping low and trotting, mindful of all around him, he found a small mound that would afford a higher view of the encampment.

Among many teepees he saw women and children ambling around. He noted a herd of horses standing over a quarter mile away to the west. He stayed for an hour, until the village seemed to be asleep. Judging with care every body that presented itself to the fire's light, what he did not see was a full grown man. He carefully withdrew, mulling over how he could determine whether Winnie was there, and if so, where. By midnight he had returned to his horses. He led them south, farther from the Indian's camp to a place by a small oak coppice which nourished itself with the waters of a bubbling stream. This small growth provided a measure of concealment, but he realized that the spring was surely known to the Comanches and was a danger. Nevertheless, while the horses drank deeply, he dozed, pistols close to hand, dog-tired.
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Pleasant’s essential slumber was interrupted by the rumble of running horses across the plain and the distance pulsing warbled of attacking Indians. The dawning sun was throwing just enough light to allow his keen sight to see a rider with long skirts whirling over the croup of a horse running flat out from the north. The rider was leaning low over the horses neck and the bareback rider both confused and heartened him. The skirt suggested a she, and she rode exactly like Winnie who rode like a boy. But where was her hair? He rubbed his sleepy eyes and refocused. Hopefully, he ran out of the copse into the open prairie.

“Sister?” he spoke to himself, than decidedly yelled, “Sister! Winnie! Winnie!” His throat was injured from the effort at volume. Jumping and waving his arms he managed to catch her attention.

The battered girl astride the big, stolen bay reined toward the unlikely vision of her brother. Her surging hope, then her realized faith overflowed her heart and burst from her eyes in a torrent of tears. She pulled the exhausted horse to a sliding stop and jumped into her brother’s welcoming arms.

“Brother, oh Pleasant! It’s really you!”

“Thank God yer still alive. Thank God. Thank God.” Pleasant managed to speak with the gravedeled voice of an injured throat.

A quarter mile away and charging toward them were the Comanches giving chase, they sounded like a pack of wolves baying their pleasure in pursuit.

“You have fresh horses. We gotta’ run!”

“No. They’ve come a far piece. We hafta’ fight.” Are there a lot of ‘em?”

“I’m not sure. Eight, ten, maybe more. But they’re boys, jes’ boys. But mean, evil boys! They’ve chased me fer sport, not really tryin’ too hard to catch me, thinkin’ I couldn’en get ‘way, but with yer horses…”

“No Winnie. Tha horses are tired. Used up. We hafta’ fight.”

“Then fight we will,” she resolved and took up the Henry rifle leaning against an oak trunk.

Pleasant handed her a box of bullets. They each ran to a
a protected place to shoot from behind the small tree trunk and bush. The nine charging Comanche lads were doomed to die by the misconception taught them of weak, cowering whites. Intelligence always triumphs over brutality eventually and these boys’ eventuality became reality that day.

The nine were reduced to six at the first volley, then to five, then four, Comanche dying with each salvo. The remaining few turned in pursuit of the better part of valor and Winnie, in Christian mercy, held her fire. Pleasant killed another.

"Let them go Plez’, they’re only boys,” she urged him.

"An’ what am I? An’ You! Look whut they done to you!” Pleasant growled teeth clenched.

Pleasant’s eyes watered as he looked at his sister’s hair, her cuts and bruises. With three quick shots he dropped the retreating boy’s horses. The boys all managed to escape serious injury in their falls and hit the ground running as Pleasant shot all around hurrying their retreat.

"Yea! Run you cowards! Not so tough now are ya?” Winnie yelled.

Her brother’s anger was slowly dissipating, his face inflamed, his hands trembling. He began reloading the hot-barreled Spencer immediately as Poppa had taught. Winnie watched him, then begin reloading the Henry as well.

Pleasant glanced into her battered face and then they were in one anothers arms again, just tightly holding on to what remained of their family, the remnants of that love. Thankful they were, both happy and sad, relieved yet afraid. Winnie trembled, dropped the heavy rifle she used so effectively and her legs gave way. She fell in a squat. They kneeled, forehead to forehead.

"They hurt you bad Sis?”
"Yes. They hurt me. My body’ll heal Plez’, but my heart…?”
"Yer hair,...yer face...”
"All over Pleasant, They hurt me all over. But, I’ll get better. If they don’t catch us an’ take us back,” she said as she peered into the northern distance.

Pleasant walked to the three wounded horses. He shot the one
standing with bloody froth dripping from its nostrils first. Then the one struggling to stand he shot mercifully through its head. The third horse lay quietly on its side staring at him, his heart spoke to the innocent horse, "I'm sorry," before he ended its too short life. It was another grievous injury to his young, torn heart to kill them, though he knew it was necessary to delay the pursuit and to end their suffering.

Winnie sat on the ground, silently weeping. Pleasant went to her.

"Winnie,..." Pleasant started.

"The memories. It's the memories Plez'. What they did to Momma, to Poppa. To me. They're devils! Devils! Whut'd we ever do ta them? An' they've done worse ta others. Much worse."

"Are there many others?"

"Yes. Women, children. They tortured an' cut the men into pieces! Murdered'em, butchered 'em even 'fore they killed 'em! An' they laughed! They laughed at their screams! They're evil! .......Most of 'em."

"Well, yer free now Winnie. We'll get away from here. Go back ta home. Rebuild the place,..."

"No! Pleasant, we hafts help the others! Now's the best time while the men are away. We hafts go get 'em! Don'cha see?"

"Winnie, we're jes' two kids."

"I'm jes' one kid Plez' an' I managed to escape. They ain't so much. Together we whupped a passel of 'em. Whupped 'em good! See whut we kin do? We got guns. We kin get their horses, we kin..."

She jerked the rifle up, cocked it and shot just as Pleasant slapped the barrel. A feather from Big Nose's headband fluttered to the ground as he crouched to run.

"Wait Winnie! He's a friend. He he'ped me get here."

Winnie and Big Nose stared at each other.

"I's wonderin' how three Comanches fell when jes' two of us shot. Was you shootin' at them devils? Friend?" Winnie grinned.

"From buffalo wallow," Big Nose pointed to the distance.
"You kin come on over here Mister Johnson, she ain't gonna shoot at'cha no more."

"Isn't Plez', she isn't gonna shoot. Ain't isn't a word," Winnie corrected and they gazed into one another's eyes in burning sadness and loss.

"She isn't gonna shoot at'cha no more."

Big Nose straightened to his full height, pulled the broken feather from his headband and silently studied it.

"Sorry,...Friend. Don't usually miss what I shoot at, but glad I did."

"Never see woman,...girl, shoot like you. You remember, me friend."

Brother and sister smiled.

"Quick, let's go get their horses, and weapons."

"Me get, you stay with sister."

After Big Nose rode away, Winnie asked, "Where'd you find him?"

"He found me. Jes' come along. Been a real he'p, he has."

"What tribe is he?"

"Tonkawa. Lives by Fort Griffin."

"It's good you had a friend."

"Yep. The doggone rangers wuden come. So'jers neither. They locked me down, held me prizner, the so'jers did, an' the rangers was gonna take me back. But, Mister Johnson, he he'ped me."

"What's his name?"

"Calls hisself Big Nose Johnson."

"Where'd a Injun get a last name?"

"He never said. I never ast."

"Oh! It's good ta be with you Pleasant. I miss Momma and Poppa so much."

"Me too. We're all we got left. Jes' gotta make do. Get on home an' rebuild tha place. We kin..."

"Oh Pleasant, listen! There ain't,...isn't nobody but some boys, some women an' a few ol' men there in that camp. It's tha best chance ta sneak in an' get 'em outa' there. I hate ta jes' leave 'em, Plez' they'll tear 'em inta pieces!"

"Winnie, you jes' got away! It's a big chance."
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"Pleasant, I know. But these poor women, ...and the children, ...they won't even let them cry. Beat 'em and worse."

"You sure Winnie?"

"Please Pleasant, we kin do it."

"Maybe we kin. We'll do it. You an' me.....an' our 'friend',"

Pleasant grinned.

The assembled band of a hundred fifty warriors followed the hundred twenty one white men, believing they were unseen and unprepared for. They planned to surprise the large group of intruders and slaughter them to the last man. They had seen, from hiding, the fine horses, the plethora of weapons and supplies and coveted it all. As it happened it was those who planned to surprise who would be caught unawares, the stalker who would be snared. These men were not defenseless and greatly outnumbered settlers, these were real men, determined white men, not farmers, women and children whom the Comanches were accustomed to vanquishing. This was the beginning of these primitive savages learning fear and subjugation, at least those would learn who managed to escape destruction.

Charlie Goodnight, Lieutenant Hill, Citizen O'Malley, Henry Born, Billy Nixon, Bat Masterson, John Larn, Abe, Stepper and Grumpy each gathered their friends around the four campfires that had cooked their supper and which now were ringed with coffeepots. The big cookfires had been purposely lit to demonstrate to the Comanches which they knew would be watching that these white men were either ignorant or unconcerned that they signaled their location. These men hoped that the Comanche would believe them fools and would attack into the trap of these expert gunmen.

"Reckon they'll attack tonight?"

"Hope they do. But they won't. They'll wait until first light, or just before."

"Sleep back from the fires, out of the light. We'll set pickets out fifty yards from the camp an' switch 'em out ever 'our er so. If ya see some grass a'walkin' or some feathers a'floatin',
fire a shot to alert the camp and get back within the lines. At
dawn, jes' 'fore dawn, ever'body needs ta be awake an' ready. That's
when they'll be a 'comin'."

Some clothes were stuffed with grass making dummies to sit
before the fire to draw the Comanche's fire and arrows just in case
they came during the night. In the bed of the big supply wagon
covered by canvas which could be quickly drawn aside sat a fully
loaded and ready Gatling gun. Over a hundred men lay with carbines,
rifles, revolvers, shotguns, knives, hatchets and swords. Each man
was just itching to employ these tools for the purpose for which
they were conceived and manufactured. The cowardly Comanche had
never met such men as these and for many this fateful meeting would
end their beastial existence.

There were no gunshots in the night, no hint that anyone was
nearby. All seemed peaceful, safe, serene. The Comanche truly
believed these white men were as foolish and as unprepared as the
frontier farmers and settlers; they had no doubt that they would
be as easily overcome. Just before the dawning, at the moment that
Chantecler would announce the day, as expected, Comanches with black
paint covering their stinking bodies exploded like the mates of
banshees through the gray-violet mist from all directions. By then,
all the pickets had withdrawn and all the contingent of European-
stock men were composed and ready to welcome these craven savages
with their just desert. In concert the lead and arrows, screams
and gunsmoke filled and heated the cool morning air. The intelligent
troop had waited until the near-naked primatives were very near and
thick before the repeating rifles and revolvers began to dispense
justice and repulse the attack. Blood, feathers, bone and flesh
thickened the mist and lent a stench of death to the ether. When
the curtain was drawn from the Gatling devil-gun many of the braves
knew pure fear before they were torn apart. The Comanches tried to
outrun the wall of lead thrown at them, their horses fell beneath
the hail of death that rained down on them. It was a perfect rout.

It was mostly young warriors, the ones who thought they had
to prove their manhood who were left in pieces on the battlefield.
These young braves were in the front of the dawn attack and when
over a hundred guns began to fire at once repeatedly and the devil's gun started spewing death these brave and foolish youths could not retreat for the almost as foolish thick on their heels. Line after line of dead Comanches and their ponies lay surrounding the camp of the white men.

Shaking Hand knew the survivors must race by separate paths back to their own camp to pack up the women and children, the horses and all their possessions and flee fast and far. These white men would surely pursue relentlessly. Because of the humbling defeat, Shaking Hand knew many of the captives would suffer terribly in reprisal. He urged his pony by a straight path directly to their camp. He wanted to prevent the shamed and angry, frightened and defeated ones from harming his own captives. His captives were a large portion of his riches, his standing within the tribe, and his pleasure. The white-haired girl with the eyes of sky would soon be an exotic and valuable prize worth many horses and guns. He must not lose her or his other captives to the childish reactions of reprisal that the widowed wives, the mothers, the fatherless boys; all these would be vicious and dangerous to the captives after losing their kin. He had seen it before.

It had been a terrible defeat. Many brother warriors died. It was a shame that they had to leave the bodies of their brothers on the battlefield. It was a grave dishonor. There were many fewer warriors and these particular white men did not seem content with this signal victory. From high places he had looked back and seen the eager white hounds on their trail. It was evident that these white men would advance insistently, they were prepared and expected to achieve their purpose. And what, he thought, might be their primary purpose, the goal that, when achieved, would send them back to their wooden and rock homes? Were they determined to utterly defeat the Comanches as they had so many of the other peoples? Was their resolution to fence them into the Indian reservations north of the Red River, there to open the earth, to grow and eat plants like the herds the white men kept and branded? The Comanche had ever been hunters, warriors, predatory as their
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brothers the eagle, the hawk, the wolf and the cat. Now these white men with their fast shooting guns had turned them and were running them like rabbits. It was humiliating, mortifying, such a shame as to be unbearable. Many Comanche would choose death rather than accept such subjugation.

Possibly, Shaking Hand thought, maybe these men would return to their homes if the Comanche gave them the white captives. But there was a danger that some of the captive's conditions would enflame their anger. Some of the captives had fingers cut off or noses burnt off, some had been driven crazy by the endless torture. All the women had been repeatedly raped. No, the return of the captives may well cause the multitude of whites to turn and concentrate their attention on the annihilation of The People. Certainly there was no consideration, they must surrender or fight.

Dutch Henry Born enjoyed the total victory about as much as any of the group. Too long he had slunk across these bare and dangerous high plains with the cattle and horses that he had 'liberated' on his way to New Mexico and Colorado to sell these herds and he had always had to fear, to hide, to run from the Comanches. It was sweet to witness the 'Lords of the Plains' tuck their tails and run like scalded dogs. He would love to be a part of the troop that exterminated the Comanches and Kiowas, or at the least to conquer, subdue, immure them and clear this wilderness of their deadly menace. It sure would make his work easier.

Billy Nixon had been dodging and fighting Comanche and Kiowa for years by then. Just like the ranchers who believed they owned the longhorns that happened to be grazing on their ranches, the Comanche, Kiowa, Sioux and Cheyenne thought they owned the buffalo and the land where the buffalo grazed and roamed. To Billy and his ilk, the buffalo were free game wherever they happened to roam and the man who killed them was the man who owned them. He celebrated the victory and was anxious to press their advantage and remove the savages from the plains by whatever means necessary.
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Citizen O'Malley and the soldiers, as well as all the rangers had suffered the sights, the smells, the aftermath of ravage and rape, murder and mutilation, destruction and depredation of the evil, insane Comanches and Kiows, the Cheyenne and Arapahoes; hate for these brutes burned hot in their chests. Righteous wrath drove them to risk their very lives to rid the world of such a depraved and despicable plague.

Bat Materson, young John Larn and certain of the others were there to demonstrate their manhood, as much for the adventure as for principle. Most of the men had mixed emotions, they were incensed by the devastation, they were heartbroken for the stolen children, the murdered and desecrated parents. They were mostly believers in the rights of property and the rule of law and order. They felt that justice and punishment should apply to the marauding redmen as it did to white outlaws, federal 'Indian Policy' be damned. Mercy should be extended only to the merciful, they set store by the Good Book's clear directive:

"He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall surely be put to death...And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death...Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, stripe for stripe."

These men believed this was the will of God, the Word of God, it was a sin to disobey. They were honored to be the Hand of God.

These were mostly Christian men, of Christian upbringing, moral men, considerate and kind in their manner. Still, when confronted by such malignant menace as these wild and evil plains Indians, they were an indomitable, indefatigable foe. These were white men of European culture and civilization whose kindness and civility, chivalry and Christianity had often been mistaken by the ignorant for cowardliness or weakness. Over the centuries those who had so misjudged the power of these European stock had done so at their peril. These were white men. They ruled the world.

1  Exodus 21:12, 16,24-25
CHAPTER NINE

“...He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God;...” Isaiah 61:1-2

The tall and portly old man sat comfortably in the rickety, ancient chair that had been brought from Alabama several years before. With his every movement the chair groaned under his weight, complaints screeching from its loose, wired-together joints. It was a challenger to sit still in the chair and keep it silent. The grey bearded man smiled as he suffered the continual creaking of the old chair, enjoying his second cup of hot joe in the perfect morning air. He felt akin to the straight-back, wobbley legged chair. He had lived with the chair as far back as he could remember. It was one of the few things that had survived the yankee's destruction of his former life. He too had survived, the worse for wear. He too complained.

The huge mongrel bulldog that dozed at his feet had joined his flight to Texas somewhere along an unmapped way in Mississippi. He had fed the poor beast some scraps, which benevolent act had evidently appointed him the adoptive parent of the appreciative cur. The old man had welcomed the company, the mongrel listened to his every word as if they mattered and hardly ever passed judgement. He was a true friend. And despite his dozing, the dog earned his keep. He kept peace in the saloon most of the time; he did not countenance nor abide loud noise nor angry voices, his quiet growl moved most arguments outside the bar, and for that job of work he was fed and tolerated. There had been a sign painted at the entrance to the saloon, 'Beware of Dog'. If the man merited the warning of little consequence, the mad fury of the bulldog's attack might soon sway a patron's opinion.

Most folks called the old man Wash. It was an easier handle than Washington Harrison Witt which was the name his father had imagined would take him far in a successful life. In his maturity
Wlljiaxn W. Worley

there had been a designation of Doctor added to precede the
the hopeful name and later still the appellation of Reverend
was added so that the Reverend Doctor Washington Harrison Witt
was held in high esteem for many years in Alabama. Then the
war came and took so much from so many.

His beloved first wife had died from complications during
childbirth and his aching love and heartbroken loneliness had
driven him to immerse himself in the study of medicine. Years
later he fell in love with a pastor's wife and joined the
Baptist Church in Birmingham. When the Lord called the pastor
home Doctor Witt studied the Holy Writ until he was ordained
by the deacons as the Reverend Doctor. The ex-pastor's widow
was suitably impressed by his dedication and soon they shared
the parsonage as husband and wife. The Reverend Doctor and his
sainly wife Prudence lived a few glorious years together and
Wash cherished the memory of those golden days. But, the war
came. Poverty, hunger, sickness and death came by the hand of
the invading yankee army and destroyed so much in the South,
both good and bad. The chair, his Bible and a thin thread of
hope was all that remained to him when the dark days of war
had passed. He had lost all that he owned, all he had shared,
all his love and all his pride.

The church and his home was burned to the ground. The
yankees blamed the freed negroes and they did not deny it. No
one had the fervor, the faith or the money to rebuild it. The
Reverend Doctor took to drink to dissolve the heart-rending pain
of losing another love. Despite all his learning and expertise,
despite all his pleading and praying, disease destroyed his
lovely Prudence. He was left alone, alone with the only remnants
of the sweet life he had shared, alone with his Bible and the
one chair. He had tied the chair to his back, put the Bible in
an empty pack and started west, hoping to leave the sorrow in
Alabama.

The beligerent dog that Wash had dubbed Happy scratched his
ribs with his hind leg in an effort to move a few fleas around and
disturb their breakfast. Wash named the mongrel Happy because
the dog's eyes and countenance mirrored his own despair most of the time, except when he got irritated by loud noises and then his eyes glowed red like a dragon's eyes, and his long yellow tusks were bared in warning. Happy was a sarcasm, an irony, an unattainable characteristic of the Mississippi cur.

The pair of them lounged on what served as a porch on the saloon Wash had built on the banks of the shaded stream of the North Concho River. Wash never named the establishment, just called it the bar, but, with the saloon being a quarter-mile from the other buildings in the little settlement of Angela, past the bend of the river, some wiseacre had begun calling it Witt's End. Wash came to like the appellation, it seemed fitting, so he paid a drunken sign painter to letter the words on a wide plank atop the porch. He enjoyed looking at the sign and letting his mind wander back over the years and paths that had led him here.

Wash inhaled the fragrance of the bacon that Peanut was frying on the stove inside the bar. The cool smell of the air across the lazy water of the river and the delicious aroma of the curling strips of hogmeat eased some of the worries and pains of his personal history, age, and present struggles. Peanut was the self-appointed swamper, cook, advisor, bartender and general handyman of the establishment. Like Happy, Peanut had attached himself to Wash, became his loyal friend because he had no other. Wash was his refuge in the storm of life, his home and family. Peanut was pleased and comfortable with his place in life. It was the best he had ever had.

Peanut had been displaced from his abode among the slaves at the plantation in Louisiana where he was born. He, like many thousands of others, was made a homeless vagabond by Lincoln's 'freedom.' With no other available opportunity to be fed, he joined the army for food to eat and a warm, dry place to sleep. The army had sent him here to the Texas frontier where his unschooled ignorance and blustering courage had contributed to some of his incisors being knocked out and an eye knocked out of line by an impatient, inebriated, and hefty fellow buffalo soldier. The army had discharged him after he had stabbed his
attacker while he slept.

With his discharge money he had ended up at Witt's End, spending his last nickel on a cool beer. Wash had given him a warm spot close to the fireplace on the dirt floor to sleep. Peanut had made a pallet and a home there ever since. He had made Wash a good hand too, trustworthy and loyal. Wash had taught the lad how to cook chili beans and tortillas and the hunters and farmers had brought other food in barter for whiskey and taught Peanut how to cook much other fine fare. Peanut had become Wash's only and best employee, his adopted son and his friend since that day.

Peanut was the boss of half of the saloon, and often the manager of the entire establishment when Wash was absent or too drunk to mind the store. A time after opening the business it had become necessary to have a wall built down the middle of the building to separate it into black and white sections. The black freedmen who regularly spent their pay at Witt's End and the half-wild and often outlaw buffalo hunters and cowboys had all too often had violent confrontations. Wash had first built a plank wall to separate white and black but the big bore rifles and Colt revolvers had begun to regularly penetrate the barrier with random lead. Now the saloon had an orange and white native rock wall with fireplaces on each side constructed by a master German mason. Most days Peanut oversaw the black side and Wash tended to the white side. The roof leaked like a sieve, the floor was dirt swept clean by Peanut every morning and, in cold weather the doors were covered by buffalo hides, but to Peanut, to Happy and to Witt, it was home.

Actually, only Peanut and Happy stayed at the saloon most nights, Witt rented a room at a widow's boarding house downriver. He had his own entrance there on the side of the big house and usually made it there at some hour of the night. Daily he would rise with the roosters and walk the path along the river west, then north past the river's bend to the saloon where Peanut would have coffee ready. It was a quiet life, mostly boring, but there
were worse things than boring.

The past several weeks he had punctually visited his patient who convalesced at the house of his friends, the spinster sisters Karmalita and LaDonna. The pair had taken the terribly injured woman from Fort Concho's all-male infirmary and the single, over-worked surgeon's care to their home and asked their friend Wash to help them tend to her. Wash had instructed the kind sisters in the treatment of the lady's serious injuries and there was really little need for his daily visits, medically speaking, but he was truly amazed by the woman's healing progress which seemed to be accelerated only by her will. And, of course, Wash enjoyed feminine fellowship and the sisters themselves were very entertaining and enchanting in their own unique manner.

As Wash approached he saw LaDonna sitting on the porch steps in her slippers and houserobe sipping her morning libation of tea. As he approached she stood and met him at the gate. He could not restrain the smile that lifted his moustache and his spirits at sight of her characteristic enthusiastic vitality and energy. Her normal constant state of excitability seemed even more stimulated than usual by some occurrence that morning.

"Wash! Wash! Wait! Before you go in I must tell you. She's trying to leave! She's asking the loan of a horse! Lord knows she's in no condition to travel! You must stop her! Please! Talk some sense into her!"

"Where does she want to go? Her house is destroyed."

"She said she had to go looking for her children, or else go crazy."

"Well, I'll talk to her. But I suspect we'll just have to help her the best we can. Can't lock her in can we?"

"You can talk sense to her Wash. You must! It'll kill her to go riding out who knows where. You hafta' talk some sense to her Wash! She won't listen to us at all. She's gone plum crazy!"

"Let me talk to her alone for awhile. Get Karmalita out of her room."

LaDonna led him into the clean little house whispering,
"Please, make her see that she has to stay here Wash, she must stay here. She can't go traipsing..."

LaDonna's voice faded into Wash's own inner voice as he walked down the narrow hall to the room the patient was trying to escape. He took a deep breath, adjusted his vest down over his beer belly, and turned the doorknob into the room where the severely injured, crazily worried and adamantly determined mother was preparing for her mission, her sadly impossible mission to retrieve her stolen children. The relatively young woman trembled as she endeavored buttoning her boots.

"Still weak, aren't you ma'am?"

The lady turned her head up to look at him through the thin lace veil that hid her terribly scarred face.

"Just a bit stove-up Doctor, I'll be fine once I get to moving around some."

"Madam, with all respect, my medical training and experience compel me to seriously advise you to forego any foray outside this house or too far away from medical treatment. Actually, you should not yet be out of bed. Please. You will do your children no good deed to kill yourself in such a foolhardy mission. Who else do they have? You must ensure your own survival so as to be here for them when they are rescued."

"Doctor, you are right in asking who else do the children have. They have only me. No one else cares for them like their mother does. And I trust God will go with me into and through the Valley of Death, just as the Psalmist wrote. I would appreciate the loan of a good horse sir, three of them, if possible."

Good mother, your devotion to your children is admirable, but in this instance it is misguided. You are in no condition to travel. You must direct your energy into your physical recovery so you will be able to care for your dear ones when they are returned to you."

"And who will return them to me? The army has made no effort to recover any of the captives the savages have taken, nor has any of my good neighbors. They are afraid. They are cowards and selfish men who are not of the same stuff as my dead husband. No. I will go and get my children. God will help me."
"Ma'am, a messenger from Fort Griffin has brought information that a volunteer group, a rather large group, has gone from there to find and rescue those who have been taken by the Indians. There are concerned soldiers, hunters, clerks and ranchers, even saloon keepers in the party. Your neighbors are no cowards, they simply are not driven by the loving concern and maternal worry that assails you. Their calmer and clearer thinking directs them to wait and pray."

"Perhaps I misspoke. It may be that they aren't cowards, but they do not fathom the severity of suffering of these children and women every moment they are in the hands of the Indians. They do not sense the urgency. These blameless ones are at death's door daily. They must be saved now! Quickly! Before the heartless ones kill them for sport."

"If you will not listen to reason, if you refuse to be turned from this suicidal quest, I will furnish good horses,...for both of us. And for the children once we find them."

"No. I will not allow you to go."

"I can be as mule-headed as you, dear lady. Besides, you will undoubtedly require medical attention every day of the arduous journey. Hopefully I will be able to extend your life until the Comanches kill us."

"God will protect us."

Witt just stared at her, and slowly nodded, his crazed commitment fully washing over him.

"We better move around some Pleasant, the ones that got away may bring more. An' they'll wanna get their dead. 'Sides, tha men'll be comin' back ta camp soon an' we don't wanna try'n fight 'em if we don't hafta."

"How many warriors in 'at camp?"

"None right now,, like I said, but they'll be comin' back anytime. We gotta get in 'ere an' get tha children an' them poor women outa' there right quick."
"Thought ya didn' wanna fight tha men."

"Tha men'll be comin' after us when they get back to tha camp, don'cha see? They may be comin' here an' we'll be there."

"They'll foller our trail back there!"

"By then we'll be somewhere else."

"Le's circle around some. Mister Johnson, would'ja bring them ponies along? Try not ta let 'em raise any dust. We'll head west a mile er so, then head north to tha camp."

The closer they got to the Comanche camp the more Winnie had to fight the fear. She admitted to herself, and to God, that she was afraid. She would be a fool not to be afraid. She hoped that the Comanches would believe that she was so terrified that no thought would be given to returning. She prayed for God to calm her so that she could think and act as the circumstances presented and required.¹

Winnie took deep breaths and chewed on her cheeks to moisten her dry mouth, steeling her resolve. She did not have to imagine what the malicious boys and women would do to the captives in revenge for the deaths of the boys. They must succeed. She must contain her fear and not let it hinder or disable her. She would not have a life worth living if forced to live with the knowledge of the extreme suffering that her escape and the resulting deaths of the Comanche boys would bring to the captives. Better that she die trying to free those poor women and children than to live with the demons of guilt and regret that would eat at her soul and grow into monsters that tore her life into pieces. She 'must' free the innocents, for if they failed she and the captives would die slow and horrible deaths and her last link to family would die alongside her. For the others and for all those who loved them, for Pleasant, and yes, for herself, they 'must' succeed.

Pleasant was afraid too, but he tried to contain it. He knew that fear was contagious, though he did not know the word. He must think clearly and act decisively, for Winnie, and for the captives. The three of them were the only chance that the poor

¹Some parts of the following pages of the original manuscript have crumbled with the passage of time and are impossible to read, so some phrases have been rewritten, but the facts remain true.
suffering souls had. It was a great chance the three of them were taking and he knew that they may not make it out alive if their success depended on their little strength, and so, with every breath, he begged God's help.

Big Nose felt little trepidation, he was confident that their mission would succeed. In fact, it was curiosity that consumed his thoughts. He had seen what he considered miracles performed by the boy and knew that the Great Spirit had touched him. He hated the Comanches and loved it that he had another opportunity to be a part in defeating, even humiliating them. He could not restrain the smile that stretched his broad face imagining possibilities of the next few hours. He was anxious to witness the methods that the Great Spirit would employ in allowing the blanket of events to unfold.

Shaking Hand had ridden all day and all night. As dawn approached his horse finally quit on him. Head down and trembling from head to hooves, the horse refused to walk despite the beating that Shaking Hand dispensed. When he slid off the horse's back the horse fell sideways. Shaking Hand retrieved his rifle, bow and arrows, then kicked and cursed the dying horse before he began his walk to the camp. It was not far to walk now, but it was an added shame to walk into camp, to be defeated and de-horsed.

He strode into a camp of confusion and grief. Several of the defeated warriors were already there and had told the news of the many who had died in the teeth of the devil's gun. He ran to his teepee and inside he found his second wife cutting her arms in sorrow for her son who had been killed in the battle. Shaking Hand had not known until then that he had lost a son. He restrained others there in the teepee from beating the captives too severely.

Smiling Dog sat silent and seemingly composed beside the fire. He grabbed her shoulders and asked where the white-haired girl was. She told him the facts in a few short words. He began to slap and
beat her, kick and curse her, and continued until he was winded.

He began yelling at all the women to pack only the essentials hastily and flee. Hurrying out of the tent he began ordering everyone to pack and take flight on the ponies. Death was fast approaching, escape while they could, he counseled.

He gathered all the returning warriors and instructed them to catch fresh horses and follow him. They would quickly overtake the girl and her rescuers and take her again, killing all the rest. The boys who had survived and returned from the chase of her had told him that there many white eyes, but after he had cuffed the boys and threatened them the truth came out. There were only the girl and perhaps two or three others, but they had many guns and shot very well.

Shaking Hand rode out leading fifteen other very tired warriors who were very reluctant to ride southwards, possibly into the deadly guns of the determined white men. They drove the horses into a run, anxious to find and retrieve the prized white girl so they could flee with their families to safety.

As the warriors rode away, Dirty Face, the second wife of Shaking Hand, stood dripping blood from her self inflicted wounds in the midst of the camp and screaming insanely, urging all the women to bring the captives to her tepee. They would revenge their sons, brothers and fathers, all the brave dead warriors. They would tie the hated whites and Mexicans in the tepee and stack all the wood in the camp around it and burn them all before they fled. Let the white warriors find only dead and burned carcasses where they hoped to find grateful women and beloved children.

The Comanches had posted scouts southeast to warn of the pending approach of the white men. From a position west of the Indian camp Big Nose and the twins laid low in the waving prairie grass and watched the chaos and confusion in the Comanche camp. They saw Shaking Hand and all the men in camp mount and ride hurriedly south.
and knew they were pursuing Winnie and her rescuers. They could see only old men within the melee of rushing and packing squaws and children. They witnessed the captives being beaten and herded into Shaking Hand's teepee and they surmised that these were to be slain in short order. As Shaking Hand and his followers grew smaller into the distance Pleasant spoke low to Winnie.

"Ya know, they ride real good, but their aim with those ol' rifles ain't much if the boys who chased you are any sample. Don't they know they can't hit anything from a horse running over uneven ground? An' them ol' rifles look rusty, need cleanin'.'"

"Believe me brother, them Comanche don't much cotton to cleanin' nothin', not even themselves," Winnie related with a wrinkled nose. "See those two ol' witches sitting in front of that teepee where they're taking all the captives? Those two are meaner'n a washtub fulla' rattlers. If we have time I'm gonna whup 'em, whup 'em good."

The warriors riding away with Shaking Hand were whooping and crowing into the distance, putting on airs of courageous and dangerous men within sight of their women and children as they rode bravely out in numbers to capture a single child. Big Nose smiled grimly, hate filling his heart as he watched the cowardly, posturing imps.

"Le's go line-out a plan with Mister Johnson," Pleasant spoke. We need ta hurry an' get the prizners an' get away 'fore more a'them warriors get back here."

The trio backed away and made hasty plans.

Big Nose rode their horses in a wide circle to a position close to the Comanche's herd and away from the camp. Crouching and making his way through the horses he met those Comanche women and children who came for horses to pack and escape upon. He met them and introduced them to the stonehead club he wielded so very efficiently. None of those touched by the club ever moved again and Big Nose felt no remorse, only satisfaction. He waited until the unfortunates had roped or bridled their horses and then he fell on them with no winnowing, no mercy. All met the same fate, a broken head. Big Nose pulled all the dead outside the circle of the herd and tied all the horses that the Comanches had gathered for him in a group as he
awaited Pleasant and Winnie bringing the captives to their mounts.

The twins ran low to the edge of the camp where the teepee containing the captives was located. As Winnie used Pleasant's knife to make a back door to the teepee, a squaw came around the structure with an armload of wood. Pleasant clubbed the surprised woman with the Spencer and continued to beat her until she was still.

Winnie stuck her head inside the wigwam and the bloody second-wife of Shaking Hand, Dirty Face, ran at her with the dripping knife screaming her hate. Without thought Winnie shot her with the Colt her brother had handed her and as her father had taught her, then she also shot a warrior that was among the captives. Immediately screams of warning rose from the throats of all nearby Comanches.

"Hurry! Get out!" Winnie pointed to the slit she had cut in the buffalo hide wall, "Run to the horse herd. Run!"

As the beaten and frightened prisoners hurried to escape, Winnie pushed them toward the opening and looked around the teepee for any injured captives possibly hidden under the robes that covered the floor. Her eyes fell on Smiling Dog sitting quietly watching her. She had been beaten badly, her face was swollen and bloody, and her sad eyes spoke to Winnie of her broken heart and her understanding of Winnie's leaving. Winnie restrained herself from running to her arms and, though she knew Smiling Dog could not understand her, she spoke the words, "I love you."

The woman who had protected her and nursed her simply smiled, revealing broken, bleeding teeth, and that ruined smile broke Winnie's resolve. She ran to the squaw and hugged her.

"Winnie! Come on!" Pleasant's raw voice penetrated her sorrow and she ran to the slit in the hide, looking back once more at how goodness and love had been rewarded before she slipped out into the melee of gunshots and screams.

Pleasant kneeled behind the teepee sending deadly lead into any and all Comanches responding to the screamed alarms. He killed them as he must, without discretion, as they would kill him.
Winnie snatched up a small girl that was having a hard time keeping up in one arm and grabbed the hand of another, tears clouding her eyes as she ran across the prairie to the horse head. Big Nose stood there holding a few long ropes of horses, some bridled, some not. The captives shied at the sight of the giant Indian and Winnie quickly assured them.

"He's our friend, you kin trust him. He's helping us. Don' be afraid. Get on a horse! All of you! Help the little ones! Ride that-a-away, north. Go! Stay together, go!"

Big Nose watched Dear Bear back up to the horse herd, making those pay who chanced to pursue the captives. When his carbine was empty he slung it over his shoulder by the strap and began using the remaining Colt. Big Nose held a horse for Pleasant while he mounted then stepped across his own horse's back. Together they drove the horses that remained in the Indian's herd before them, following the fleeing captives.

As planned, the freed captives rode north at a gallop. When they attained a distance of about five miles and chanced upon a propitious rise in the plain, Pleasant and Winnie dismounted and kneeled in the waving grass to ambush any that chased them. The women and children continued their flight, Big Nose escorting and hurrying them along, the horse herd following along. Soon enough, four warriors and two boys came in sight, riding fast and hard. Pleasant and Winnie let them come within fifty yards before they opened up on them. None escaped.

They quickly gathered up the dead Comanche's weapons and drove their horses before them. Within half an hour the twins had overtaken the group. They put a handful of those who were riding without bridles on the bridled ponies and gave weapons taken from the banditos and the down Comanche to the adults and older children, imploring them not to drop them. They redirected their flight eastward, still driving perhaps fifty horses from the Comanche herd before them. Many of the horses had veered
away or quit the drive and they did not waste time chasing them, 
but continued to ride hard and drive those horses that accepted 
the herding. it would serve to delay any pursuit if it broke off 
to catch the scattered quiqers as the Comanche warriors came after 
them. And come they would.

Shaking Hand surveyed the fallen boys and horses, then he 
rode to the small spring surrounded by trees. There he found 
spent brass cartridges and the footprints of two children. Children! 
One must be his own white-haired girl and one must be the one whose 
name had been on the lips of all the travelers through the past 
weeks, the one they named Dead Pear, said to be the brother to 
the sky-eyed girl. These mere children could not be allowed to 
disgrace the proud Comanche nation.

He saw that they had taken the weapons of the boys and the 
surviving horses as well. The tracks revealed another enemy, 
a heavy one with a big foot riding a big horse. So there were 
three, only three. He and his braves tracked the three west 
and when the tracks turned to the north instead of the south 
he was bewildered. Surely they realized they were headed back to 
the Comanche camp. Why would they? Then he understood. Their 
insane intent was to free the remaining captives while the men 
were away. These were brave children, exceptional children who 
thought like the fox. He put his heels to his horse and ran 
him north toward the camp.

When the warriors returned to the village and found the 
captives gone as well as the horse herd driven away they would 
be as angry as yellow jackets recently deprived of their nest. 
The squaws and children would have no way to flee except afoot 
as the warriors would not give up their mounts and the white men 
would swoop down and capture, if not slay, them all. These 
thoughts that came to Big Nose caused an irrepressible grin 
to split his big, red face,
William W. Worley

Without consultation with the others, Winnie began angling their path to the south, little by little, in the hopes of finding or even intersecting the path of the rangers or soldiers or whoever had sent the Comanche packing.

Winnie’s thoughts were being pulled by her heart back to Smiling Dog. Had Shaking Hand ran her away or even killed her by now? Her heart went out to the kind Comanche woman who had befriended her, nursed her, mothered her. What if Smiling Dog had tried to stop her rescuing the captives? Could she have shot her? She couldn’t imagine that she could. What would happen to the uncharacteristically compassionate Comanche lady, for lady she was in Winnie’s mind.

The Comanche warriors led by Shaking Hand would be coming after them relentlessly, Big Nose knew this. Being defeated and tricked by children would be unacceptable, their pride would not let them abide such a loss of face as well as their horde of riches. Big Nose had been driving the horses at a distance eating pace for hours, thus far the children had kept up. He could see that the malnourished little ones were fading fast however, and e was interested in just how the Great Spirit would rescue the Dead Bear and his sister. They had a substantial start on the mad Comanches and hopefully the anger would cause the Comanches to ride their horses into the ground in their rush to catch and to punish the coyotes who had made fools of them. Big Nose wanted to ensure that the escaping whites and Mexicans would have plenty of prime and relatively fresh horseflesh to ride far and steady.

They rode all night under the soft blue light of a silver full moon, a Comanche moon, and a countless spray of stars. After a rest of an hour, they mounted fresh horses and rode until two of the smaller children almost fell, then they stopped again beside a narrow trickle of a stream in mid-afternoon. They were all very hungry and still very frightened of the devils they knew chased them, but eventually exhaustion overcame their energizing fears and they slept. Dirty, hungry, on the hard-packed ground, they slept, deep yet fitful.
Big Nose and Pleasant sat with the horses and when it came Pleasant’s time to sleep he found Big Nose gone. He leaned against the trunk of the stunted oak waiting for the Big Tonk to return from relieving himself or wherever he had gone and though he fought himself to stay awake, he fell into a deep sleep.

It took a full minute for him to awaken several hours later when Winnie was shaking him and speaking words that he could not immediately understand. His ravenous hunger however, clearly comprehended that there was meat in his sister’s hands, warm, sweet-smelling, delicious meat. As he tore, gnawed and devoured the juicy meat, his mind began to unravel and decipher the sounds Winnie was making.

"I said," she spoke, exasperated at his stupified expression, "Mister Johnson brought buffalo meat, lots of it. Ever’one is eatin’. Tha food is gonna make ever’one drowzy agin an’ we can’t afford ta linger any longer. At daylight the Comanche will be trailin’ us agin if they ain’t,...if they haven’t already caught us an’ scalped ever’ one of us! We need ta get movin’ Pleasant! So wake up an’ get some horses ready. Get up!"

"Umhuh," Pleasant managed around the meat.

"Brother! Come on, get up!"

"I’m a’comin’," he determined as he pushed his weary body onto his still booted feet.

Some of the children were barely old enough to walk and wore only a filthy nightdress or were completely naked. One fragile and tiny girl of eight or nine wore what must have been one of her daddy’s shirts. Only one or two had shoes. There were no blankets or other comforts and the women were patient in their efforts to quell the tears of the little ones. Overall, they were a courageous group. They wanted only to return to what life had been before the Comanches had come. Sadly, most had no family left except the few who had siblings, children or a mother here with them. Mostly, their families were murdered and worse. Many small babies who had cried too much had been cruelly killed before their mother’s eyes.
Before noon on that day they came to a river and followed its northern bank southeast until finding a shallow place to ford. They followed the southern bank eastward, knowing it would take them to white settlements eventually. Only Big Nose knew what river it was, it was the Red. Winnie gave silent thanks to the saving, gracious God that He had provided such a one to guide them.

That afternoon Big Nose rode beside Pleasant and spoke chilling words.

"Comanche across river. Look for place to cross. We must go away from river, and hurry up."

"Yes. You drive the horses south," Pleasant pointed, then rode to inform Winnie of their plight. He told her to hurry the captives south while he slowed the Comanche from crossing.

Pleasant watched them flee at a run away from the river, then turned and drew his Spencer into his arms. When in sight of the river an arrow slid through the grass beyond him. He turned to see the Comanches just downstream driving their struggling horses onto the stream. His first shot knocked an eager savage from his mount to bloody the water. His second shot hit a horse that went under, leaving the rider to swim back rather than face the aim of the one they now knew to be Dead Bear. The two that continued trying to gain the southern shore made the wrong decision. One died and one was severely wounded as well as losing his horse. The other warriors on the far shore rode away up and down the river seeking a safer crossing. Pleasant knew he could not stop them all. He rode swiftly to catch the others.

A quarter mile away he turned in the saddle to look back and saw them coming. One, two, then more coming on their floundering ponies intent on catching the fleeing women and children. There were too many to fight. He could only flee.
CHAPTER TEN

"Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously on the head of the wicked." - Jeremiah 23:19

President Ulysses S. Grant was enraged by the report of the Salt Creek Massacre. Ignoring the restrictions of the Quaker Peace Policy, he ordered his generals to "clean up the mess in Texas." General Sherman unleashed his dog of was; Colonel Mackenzie immediately led a three-hundred man force of the Fourth Cavalry out of Fort Richardson. The severely edited and redacted report of this expedition was thought to be necessary for political reasons at the time, but investigation and participants over decades since have revealed a more candid history of those events, as they are hereinafter disclosed.

Mackenzie sent scouts in all directions and after a week they found Indians, more Indians than they expected. They found an allied war-party of Comanche, Kiowa, Southern Cheyenne and possibly some unidentified Arapaho. There were also a few of the mixed breed Comancheros who profited through the continuing conflict of these plains Indians with the whit immigrants by bartering for the stolen property, including children and women, and providing the Indians whiskey and weapons which served to escalate the violence.

Recorded statements gathered of participants generally agree that these allied tribes were primarily led by the Comanche half-breed Qua nah (Fragrant) Parker who had left the Nakonis band to live with the Quahadis band of Comanche. Other chiefs of the Comanche present in this campaign were: Isa-tai (Coyote Droppings), Kobay-oburra (Wild Horse), Isa-habit (Wolf Lying Down), Hitetesi (Small Crow), Isa-nanica (He Hears a Wolf), Isa-rosa (White Wolf), Pearva-akup (Big Red Meat), and Taba-an-ice (Sound of the Sun).
Comanches constituted the majority of the war-party since the Kiowa who had participated in the Warren Wagontrain Raid at Salt Creek Prairie had, for the most part, returned to Indian Territory across the Red River and the Southern Cheyenne were a less populous tribe than the others. Hahkioomah (Little Robe) was usually a peaceful Cheyenne, but there were reports that he was present. Also reportedly present among the Cheyenne contingent were Stone Calf and White Shield. There were many warriors of renown among the Cheyenne but time has forgotten them and history is always written by the victors, and, more to the point, by the literate.

The few Kiowa chiefs among the war party were Mai-yi-ten (Woman's Heart), Zepko-etta (Pig Bow), and possibly the medicine man Mamanti (He Walks Above). The onde class were the highest rank of the Kiowa aristocracy. The second rank were the Odegeupa and the third rank were the Kaan. The military societies of the Kiowa were called Dog Soldiers. Young boys constituted the rabbit group and ranks were divided all the way up to the Koitsenko who were regarded as the ten greatest warriors of the Kiowa. The war chief of all the Kiowa was Gui-pah-go (Lone Wolf), and he was almost certainly not present with this war party.

Some have said that these gathered plains warriors numbered as many as eight or nine hundred, though others more objective have estimated four or five hundred. Though the actual number cannot be known, suffice the record to state that the numbers undoubtedly greatly favored the assembled savages when they crossed paths initially with the volunteers who sought the captives. The buffalo hunter scouts gave warning that a war party was on its way to attack and perhaps only minutes away. Some of the scouts were not fortunate enough to make the run back to the main column of the Bee Hive volunteers and suffered the untender ministrations of the cruel butchers.

The Bee Hive men had the discretion and the favor of Providence in retiring to a shallow cut in the plain made by an unremarkable, seasonal creek which was convenient to their instant and urgent
requirements. A bugle blew from the Indian's ranks to signal their charge, which caused some confusion among the volunteers.\footnote{It was later discovered in a subsequent battle that the bugle had been blown by a buffalo soldier deserter. The deserting bugler was found dead on the battlefield in an ensuing engagement with the same allied group of Indians a few days later.} The banks of the dry creek bed afforded some small and expedient shielding from the hail of deadly projectiles which the swarm of Indians continued to launch, yet despite the protection of the trench, quite a few casualties were suffered in halting the horde's attack. The commencing confrontation was perhaps a fifteen or twenty minute segment of bloody hell which all the men in attendance endured that day. Many men died in the channel and on the plain in that first assault and before the dust and gunsmoke completely dispersed the red men stormed the volunteer's line again.

The second attack of the allied Indian forces employed the tactic of dividing their force to besiege both flanks as well as the volunteer's rear. The white men's defensive lines were overrun in places and the fighting was hand-to-hand until the savages were chased back by the expert employment of Colt revolvers. It was only the Colts that made the eventual repulse of the hostiles possible, without the revolvers the Indians' numbers and tomahawks would have ruled the day.

There was an hour's respite after the second attack. The brassy smell of blood and the burning tang of gunpowder clogged the nostrils but sharpened the thinking. The innate mechanism that causes a man to react and fight or run without thinking in sudden, dangerous situations was not a factor in this battle. The Indians' decision was a conscious, deliberate one, considering the fact that they outnumbered the white men at least five to one. And the white men had no choice, except fight or die. Maybe fight 'and' die.

After the hour's lull, the painted devils began to torment their foes by lobbing storms of arrows high in the air to fall down
from the sky bringing pain, fear and death. It was a game to
the red men, target practice. They screamed in glee and laughed
in celebration at the groans of the injured. Both factions awaited
darkness, for when it came the white men would surely suffer.
Possibly none of the Bee Hive volunteers would survive to see
the dawn.

The confidence of the Indians caused them to relax too soon.
They failed to place scouts out from their own lines which sur-
rrounded the white men; this mistake enabled Mackenzie's Tonkawa
scouts to locate and report the beleagured volunteers. There
were two hours of daylight left when Mackenzie ordered his troops
to prepare to charge to and through the line of hostiles and to
only stop when they gained the defenses of the white men. Within
ten minutes the Bee Hive volunteers clearly heard three buglers
sound the charge and some believed the warparty of Indians was
attacking again until they actually saw the bluecoats.

The bugles of the Fourth Cavalry were answered from the
bloody ditch with a hearty cheer. The savages were totally
surprised and their immediate reaction was to flee. They soon
regrouped however and rode into the bluecoats with wild abandon.
There were many casualties on both sides, but after a half-hour
of fighting, the Indians' confidence waned and they withdrew.
Or, more accurately, they endeavored to disengage as Mackenzie
ordered pursuit and the cavalry chased the routed savages for
more than a mile, until the bugles restrained them.

Mackenzie, while walking through the ranks of the volunteers,
heard someone address Asa Hill as lieutenant and he stopped and
watched Hill as he helped the ranger surgeon with a man whose
arm had been mangled by bits of shattered lead.

"Are you the leader of this group of civilians sir?"

"I am Lieutenant Asa Hill of the Seguin volunteer rangers
formed by order of the governor of Texas. I am the commanding
officer of this patrol of rangers, but I do not presume to be the
leader of this group of civilian volunteers," the lieutenant
spoke utilizing the most proper enunciation he could manage in
the presence of this honorable personage whose troop had surely saved them.

"Lieutenant Hill, you are aware that you are in violation of certain treaties and government policies in traversing this land reserved for Southern Plains Indians hunting grounds."

Being once again accused of wrongdoing when risking life and limb to protect and rescue innocent citizens, Lieutenant Hill reverted to a more natural and less respectful tone.

"I'm aware that's how you may see it Colonel, and, fact is, we're all shore glad you happened along with your troops 'also' in violation of treaties and policies sir, to save our scalps."

"Lieutenant, let me make you aware that these particular Comanches were led by Quanah, Wild Horse and other Quahadi's who have never submitted to treaty or agreed to be removed to the reservation. These Indians were identified by our Tonkawa scouts as renegades and therefore we legally intervened when our patrol caught them engaged in an attack upon your party of civilians, notwithstanding your transgression of treaties and policies by trespassing on land reserved as Indian hunting grounds."

"Colonel, your 'patrol' is a great big 'un, wouldn' ya say?"

"Necessarily big, sir. There's been a massacre of peaceful teamsters on the Salt Creek Prairie. General Sherman has ordered a reconnaissance of this entire area, a gathering of the hostile bands to force them onto the reservation."

"'Pout time. Seems there's plenty of hostile bands out there for the gatherin'."

"Exactly what are you citizens doing out here Lieutenant Hill?"

"I'm sure you know Colonel, these Comanches an' Kiowas an' prob'ly the Cheyenne too have a bunch of white and Mexican captives that no one else seems to care about. That's what we're doin' out here Colonel, tryin' ta free the stolen women and children."
"There's a boy that escaped custody in the Fort Griffin infirmary awhile back,..."

"Yep. Pleasant John Thompson. We uh,...we met 'im."

"You saw him? And you let him go?"

"Naw, we didn' let 'im go, he jus' went. Only way we coulda' stopped "im woulda' been ta shoot 'im. 'Sides, he wouldn'a been out here 'cept he escaped from the United States Army."

"We would like to find him. And his sister if she is still alive. As well as others."

"So,...I s'pose we're on the same mission Colonel."

"Mmmmm, I suppose so."

Big Nose had switched his own spent horse for the biggest one within the stolen herd. All the others of the fleeing company had also exchanged mounts. Despite their best efforts, many of the horses in the herd had quit or turned away from the drive. It would have been counter-productive to chase the runaways and it was sure that the pursuers had caught some of these relatively fresh horses and managed to keep up. Some had even caught up to within sight of the escaped captives. When the closest Comanche hounds began shooting at them, Pleasant made a necessary decision.

"Le's scatter the herd Mister Johnson. Let 'em chase horses 'stead of us fer awhile," Pleasant yelled to Big Nose as he pulled a Colt and rode into the herd driving horses out the sides and away from the path of their party. As planned, some of the pursuing Comanche veered off to catch the scattered horses. But, a few continued the chase.

The Comanches were excellent horsemen, taught to ride from an early age and living much of their lives mounted and hunting or traveling across the endless plains. It would be hard, perhaps impossible to outrun the Comanches. They must find a way other than simple flight to escape the hard-riding Comanches.
Scanning the lone stunted hill that rose from the plain with his keen eyes as he brought up the rear of the weary, flagging group, Pleasant searched for he knew not what, but trusting he would recognize an advantage, a salvation, a refuge for the exhausted and frightened fugitives.

He heard shots behind him and turned in the saddle to see that the Comanches had managed to catch up to Big Nose and he had turned from the path of the captives, leading some of the pursuers away from the primary chase to follow him. There was nothing that Pleasant could do to help him. In such instances Pleasant had been taught from his mother's knee to ask for God's intervention and he reflexively did so, shortly and simply he asked God to help them all.

The warriors that had continued to chase the children and women were now close enough to begin launching arrows and shooting into them, some of the arrows flying close by Pleasant. He wheeled his horse around and stopped, jerking the Spencer from its scabbard, cocking and shooting with deadly accuracy until the close pursuit fell back. The other screaming Comanches were not mad or crazy enough to come closer to the dead-eye shooting of this brave boy.

Those ahead of him were kicking their horses ribs urging them on, but the beasts were failing from the long run. Pleasant looked for a gully, a creek, a thicket to protect them, some place to make a stand. He knew that water was rare in these plains, but what else could he hope to save them? And then his green eyes brightened at the sight that caused the realization that his prayer had been answered.

He ran his horse through the mass of captives to the front screaming at them with his injured voice; "Follow me!" He rode up the slope of that lonely hill and fought his horse into the dark hole twenty feet up from the plain.

Once inside the dim cave he jumped off the back of his mount and ran outside to help the others pull and push their horses in. He jerked and urged the winded beasts into the relative coolness of the limestone hollow. A few of the terrorized horses broke free
and ran across the plains, but the others followed the lead of
the calming farm girls and boys, shuffling to the safety of the
cave and away from the cacophony behind them.

The Comanches saw the effort of the prisoners to hide in the
cave and a handful of them made a rush to prevent them from entering.
Pleasant made them pay with their lives and the wiser remainder
turned away.

Winnie's eyes adjusted to the low level of light within the
small cave and she viewed the winded horses pushing to gain access
to a tiny stream of cold, clear water that flowed over the floor
and out one side of the entrance.

"Ya'll don't let these horses drink too much, hear?"

Pleasant moved directly to the horses packed with the guns and
supplies. He handed the woman who seemed the calmest a double-
barreled shotgun, taking the long rifle from her trembling, exhausted
hands.

"Shoot any Indian you see darken the door,...wait! Anybody
seen Big Nose, the big Indian who's been with us? Don't shoot him.
He'll likely yell out that he's Big Nose Johnson, a friendly Indian
'fore he tries ta come in here. But shoot anybody who ain't him."

He handed the woman a bunch of shotgun shells, then handed
another shotgun he had liberated from the banditos to a stable
looking lad who already had a heavy pistol aimed at the door.

"I reckon you know how ta handle this."

"Shore do. An' hope I get ta use it too."

"Maybe Big Nose got killed?" Winnie asked.

"Maybe. But I think he just led a few a'them Comanch away
from us. He may be along direct."

Pleasant laid out an army blanket and spread the remainder of
the guns and ammunition over it.

"Be sure all the guns are full loaded jes' in case some a'them
fool Comanches make a run at that door."

Winnie had noticed the stack of old dry wood that some past
traveler had gathered into the cave. There was a large supply.
Using some lucifer matches from the pack she built a fire in the
entranceway. She figured the fire would hamper and highlight any crazy Comanche who may err in an effort to enter.

Once the fire began to burn the dry wood Pleasant noticed that the little smoke the fire generated seemed to be drawn farther into the cave. He followed the smoke through a narrow tunnel near the floor from which the narrow stream of water came and the tunnel widened after just a few feet to another chamber with a rough rock floor. The small stream of water sprung from a hole in the boulder-strewn ground and directly above the spouting water was a small opening, a window that allowed light to enter. The wisps of smoke were exiting the cave through the aperture.

Returning to the first chamber Pleasant told Winnie what he had found and gathered up the army blanket and returned to the back room of the cave. Climbing nimbly up the boulders that lined the back wall to the hole where appeared only blue sky and white light he pulled himself out of the cave atop the hill. As he looked around he stuffed the blanket into the hole so the wisps of smoke would not show the Comanche the separate entrance to the cave. If they had been aware of this hole, surely they would have already scaled the hill and entered this back door.

Laying on his stomach and worming across the top of the hill Pleasant observed an ancient channel cut in the top and over the rear side of the hill where evidently the stream of water from the underground spring ran once long ago before the interior of the cave collapsed. He could hear the animal-like cries of the stymied savages down below, furious in the loss of their brothers to this little devil of a white boy. He realized, without doubt, they would not leave until they killed all these children and women, and especially him, who had caused them so much sorrow and trouble. But, as he crawled around the perimeter of the summit he knew that the Comanches murderous lust would not be sated here. God had provided a refuge and a way for their salvation. He had been shown the way to safety. He feared no evil.
Gunfire from down inside the cave grabbed Pleasant's attention and he scurried across the rocky hilltop back to the chimney entrance. He again covered the hole by stuffing the blanket in it as he lowered himself back into the cave, dropping the last few feet to the floor. Scampering back into the front chamber he found Winnie and two women using long limbs from the stack of firewood to push two dead redskins who were growing redder from the fire in the entrance. Winnie explained.

"They tried ta jump over the fire an' come in. We shot 'em 'fore they cleared it."

"Don't expect any more of 'em'll try that fer awhile. They're maddern a hive'a bees at get-honey time. 'Spect they may try ta come in if'n tha fire goes out. They may even try'n put tha fire out. Keep it a'blazin'."

"We got plenty a' wood. Last 'til tamorra."

Pleasant smiled pleasantly.

"Don't 'spect we'll be here tamorra."
CHAPTER ELEVEN

"...The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in Him will I trust: He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower and my refuge, my saviour, Thou savest me from violence." -2 Samuel 22:2,3

From Bosque Grande down the Pecos to Horsehead Crossing and across the barren plains on a two-day waterless trial to the headwaters of the Concho John Chisum had driven his mules, horses and men. They were all rugged men, men of the frontier and accustomed to hardship, but that long, dry test across the desert plain was always exhausting. They had followed the widening stream to the tiny town of Angela and Fort Concho. Chisum was hoping to recruit either civilian or army help in recovering around a thousand head of longhorned steers stolen a week past. The thieves had a few days to put the herd into hiding or even possibly to sell them, but John had as soon catch the thieves and hang them as recover the cattle.

Chisum and his fifteen drovers were brave and capable survivors and were wise in the assessment of their vulnerability out on the staked plains due to their small numbers. They knew they needed volunteers, whether cowboys or ranchers, farmers or soldiers, shopkeepers or hunters, whoever, they would be grateful.

They followed the banks of the river northeast and finally came in sight of the first indication of civilization, which, from this point of the compass was the welcome sight of the shack that had come to be known as Witt's End. The old Reverend Doctor was sitting, smoking and drinking, his usual occupations, curiously watching the arrival of the tough and tired troop. A thoughtful expression was easily read in the lines of wrinkles in his weathered face, but he kept his silence, patiently awaiting the revelation of the surprise appearance of this cowboy company. The spent mules and horses and the men loosely attached to them wove their way through the great pecan trunks and Witt saw in their rolling shoulders and arching backs that they eagerly anticipated rest and refreshment, here at last.
Chisum grounded his reins and stepped down from the tall mule, loosing the reins of the trailing horse from his saddlehorn. Hands on hips, he arched his back and rolled his corded neck, then smiled at the old man studying him.

"Hardly recognized you Mister Chisum without a few steers preceeding you. Would you light and wet your whistle with me?"

"I been anxious to do just that Mister Witt, purely anxious."

Chisum turned and drawled to his hands, "Ya'll gi'down an' have Peanut draw us all a tall one. Let them hosses and mules a'loose over yonder in that new graze," he swung his arm indicating the tall patches of grass weaving in the evening breeze outside the shade of the pecans.

Witt nodded his gray head at the empty rocker beside his chair in invitation, puffed air through the burning bowl of tobacco and emitted the drawn smoke out of the side of his lips in quick and audible, rythmic pops of percussion, stoking the embers in the long-stemmed pipe.

"Here you are Mista' Chisum suh," Peanut spoke as he handed over a thick glass mug of cool beer.

"Thank you, Peanut. I've been having visions of this moment for many miles now."

"Yassuh, I 'spect you have. Dat's a long, dry road I heah."

Chisum handed Peanut a few coins and asked him to get beers for all the crew, took a deep, long swig from the mug and asked him to bring him another. Sitting the mug down on the hard-packed earth the tired cattleman took out the makings and rolled himself a smoke, taking obvious pleasure in the lighting and taste of the strong smoke.

"Did not consider enjoying your company again so soon Mister Chisum. Is it your intention to add to the herd you previously gathered?"

"Witt, fact is, I done lost that herd to low-down rustlers, likely Comancheros. I aim to retrieve that bunch if I can and hang me some thieves. But, I have need of more men to go a'trailing across them renegade's plains. I'd like to find some volunteer help, but I'll pay a dozen or so more hands if need be."
"Guess you haven't heard Mister Chisum, from here to up past The Flat it's about volunteered out. Men from all the settlements have bunched up and gone out there hunting the Comanche and the Kiowa and the Cheyenne to retrieve the captives they have taken lately. I've been trying to recruit some men to go with me to escort this distraught mother who has lost her children to the savages, but have found that there is not much male stock left around here to spare. Of course I realize it is almost sure suicide to wander off into Comancheria with that injured mother in tow, but she is determined, and I, in a weak, or empathetic moment, made a promise."

Chisum chuckled. "Yessir, women have a natural ability, when so inclined, to draw promises from a man. Some a' them promises tie a man up tight as a rope, and sometimes that rope turns out to be a noose."

Peanut was filling mugs of beer as fast as he could for the gang of thirsty men and gathering nickels as he went, smiling and agreeably laughing at the jokes that the drovers made about him, taking no offense. He was good for business, Wash was grateful for him, and to him.

The cowboys overflowed the small saloon and lounged under the rustling pecan trees, peeling off their hot boots and letting their stinky pinkies air out. A handful of young men waded into the green water in their sweaty underwear, utilizing the coarse sand as soap and thereby eradicating a portion of the trail dirt and dead white hide. Chisum recognized the bather's intent and hollered down the bank.

"You boys gettin' all spruced up for the doves down in Angela best make it back up here 'fore tha dawnin'. We might be headin' north at sunup an' I ain't got time nor patience to be a'searchin' through them whore's rooms fer drunk lovers. You better hear me."

"You know John, old Rich Coffee down below the mouth of the Concho on the Colorado, I've heard he's lost some stock awhile back. He might care to join a cow and thief hunt, or he might send a few hands."
"Coffee's a good man. I might do well to hold up a day or so an' send a man downriver to see what he has to say."

"He's about the only rancher hereabouts that hasn't sent men after those children the Indians have taken. He has been gathering and branding. He may be feeling a bit guilty by this time, or at least anxious to recover some of his stock."

Chisum pitched the cigarillo butt perfectly into the spittoon and leaned forward to slide the suspender straps off his shoulders. They watched a trio of sparrows flip and roll in the powdered dirt of the path down the riverside, shaking their wings and feathers to distribute the dust down to their skin in an effort to discourage the mites. Happy lifted his head from where its weight had rested on his big paws and lowly growled his warning at the exuberant celebration of the beer-swizzling cowboys scampering and wrestling in the shade beside the saloon.

"Boys, ol' Happy ain't happy with all that racket, an' when Happy ain't happy it makes me nervous," Chisum hollered over his shoulder. Wash and John glanced at one another and grinned, each of them recalling a day when a drunk soldier failed to mind Happy's grim remonstrance and consequently lost the seat of his britches. Momentarily, the pair of them could hear the lazy river flow.

Chisum's grin faded and his face grew stern. He stared off into the distance and spoke softly. "Wash, don't know if you've ever heard tell of a place away up north a'here that the meskins call Valle de Lágrimas," Chisum's pronunciation of the Spanish was practiced and indistinguishable from that of a natural-born Mexican. At least half of his men were Mexican or mestizo and he could converse with them on an equal footing.

"Valle de Lágrimas, that means Valley of Tears. The tribes have come together there for many years along with the Comancheros and outlaws from Santa Fe and the wilds to trade and separate the captives they've taken to lessen the danger of their escape and make 'em more likely ta accept their fate. They tear mothers
William W. Worley
apart from their children, send a brother one way a sister another way, kinfolks never to see one another
again after they leave that valley. Chances of ransom are slim. I reckon most of those taken by the red
devils have gone through that valley by now.

"Hate to think I'd let ya give yer life away like 'at, I coulden' hardly stand ta look at myself in tha
mirra' if I didn' he'p ya. Much as I believe a woman on a mission or trail drive brings misfortune, I
'spect ya better get that woman ready ta ride 'long with us."
"I'd be obliged John Chisum."
"Yep. You shore will."

Those of Chisum's employees who had money put back or good credit enjoyed the carnal pleasures
available down the river at Angela. There were a few of the older and wiser who kept to the camp and
kept their money. John picked a likely pair of these wiser ones to send as emissaries down the Concho
and Colorado Rivers to seek Rich Coffee's help in their quest.

After breakfast, Wash rode up to the neat little home of Karmaleta and LaDonna and again found the
younger sister sipping a cup of tea on the steps.

"Morin' LaDonna."

"And what might you be doing so early in this fine day? Don't tell me you've come for your patient,
to take her away."

"I know you will be displeased dear lady, but I must prepare the good mother for our mission. We
be leaving in a day or so, in the company of John Chisum and his brave crew, and possibly with John
Coffee and his troop."

"Oh no! I sure hoped she'd come to her senses or that you would find some way to prevent her,...
ain't there some drugs,...don't look at me like that! I only mean to keep her alive. Wash, you mustn't
encourage her. Disabuse her of these fevered ambitions!"

"LaDonna, Your know, you must accept that she is going. She will not be turned from her purpose.
She is a good mother and she will go, with or without our help, she will go. All we can do is
do what we can to help her."

"Wash, you're impossible!" LaDonna slung the dregs of her cup of tea out into the well-tended bed of Mexican petunias and spun on the small porch to open the door. "Well, you comin'?" she asked him, her impatience and consternation evident in her pale, pretty face.

"Yes,...if I am still welcome," old Wash spoke, hat in hand. And, as he paused in the small foyer to place his hat on a peg on the wall, he turned back to the usually kind and gentle lady and asked, "LaDonna, do you still read your Good Book?" Without getting a response other than a perplexed expression to the seeming irrelevant question, he continued, "Would you please, for a friend, read Galatians, fourth chapter, sixteenth verse for me?" He smiled and walked to his patient's room.

The door was open so he stopped at the entrance and softly knocked. The lady turned from folding clothes and Wash was encouraged to see that she was not wearing the veil he had become accustomed to associating with her. It was plainly a painful effort to begin exposing her disfigured face to others, even to him who had seen it most everyday since the Comanches attack, and he was pleased that she managed a brave smile.

"Good morning, doctor. I'm about ready to leave, I've packed only the necessaries. Have you got the horses ready?"

Yes ma'am, the horses are ready and raring to go, and,... Mister John Chisum, a rancher from the Pecos River is here and heading in the same direction we must go in his search for stolen cattle and has invited us to accompany him and his crew. It would be prudent and convenient to travel with them.

"Are they leaving today? I need to be on my way."

"Patience good mother. A man has been sent down the Colorado to hopefully enlist John Coffee and some of his men in our quest. We will have to wait until tomorrow. Or possibly the day after."

"Doctor Witt. I know you have been very patient with me, but, please, my children's very lives are at stake. Day after tomorrow has to be my limit. Please understand. And please don't try to
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hold me back. Day after tomorrow I'm heading out."

"And I'll be with you. Do you have a parasol? The new skin
on your face and arms is as tender as a baby's skin, it must be
protected from the lengthy exposure to the sun."

"A parasol? Me? Ha! No Doctor, I'd be too embarrassed.
That would be inconvenient and pretentious. I have been supplied
with a sombrero, that'll have to do. Along with my veil, of
course. I must spare others from viewing my ugly face, though
you are used to it by now."

"You are not 'ugly'! You are injured. With time, your looks
will improve."

"As you say, but now it's a trial bearing the reaction of
those subjected to the sight of my face. But, my concern is for
those others, it makes them uncomfortable. I've mostly accepted
the fact."

Witt managed to refrain from speaking an admonition that
she should also accept the small possibility of the success of
their foolhardy mission. The lady would have to deal with this
cruel truth on her own, perhaps she never would accept the fact
that her children were dead, tortured and murdered, their small,
tender bodies torn and consumed by scavengers, bones strewn across
the prairie. What loving mother could visualize her beloved babes
come to such an end? Only in terrors of the night, dreams which
tore her from repose in unbearable screams. Such apparitions
would not be countenanced in her conscious thoughts, in her ever
hopeful, prayerful and trusting mind.

"Day after tomorrow, come what may, we will be on our way.
May God guide us and protect us."

"He will. I am assured. He will."

Witt felt a physical, enfolding warmth surround him as her
faith, so surely evident in her clear blue eyes, momentarily
overcame his pessimism. Her assurance in God's grace and strength
washed over him in a comforting wave removing all his misgivings.
For that fleeting moment he believed, as she believed, that God
would restore the lost ones. 'It would be no miracle to Him',...

...Witt felt the epiphany more than thought it, but the moment passed.
William W. Worley

Witt had witnessed the prayers for the ill and injured come to naught over many years. He realized how great, how very devastating her pain would be through tear-filled days and nights, forevermore.

The morning of their departure came, as most new and fresh mornings, bright with promise and opportunity. Witt and the good mother managed to extricate themselves from the loving farewell tears and entreaties of the sweet sisters of mercy and ride with the waiting Chisum and Coffee crews to the street of oaks where they loaded more supplies onto the pack animals, then followed the Fort Chadbourne Road north. Once clear of the little village Chisum halted the column beneath a scattering of scrub oak and mesquite nearby the creek where the wild grapes grew.

“Ya’ll lissen to me ‘fore we get too far out in this wilderness. Some a’ya’ll ain’t spent much time out this away and ain’t ust’ ta havin’ yore best hoss tied behind a lesser mount, but jes’ put up with it fer a day er two an’ it’ll become less bothersome. You might even try dismountin’ and swingin’ up on yer fast hoss an’ cuttin’ tha tired mount loose. Practice a few times these first few days, it may save yer scalp if er hafta run from a big buncha Comanche, cuz’ looky here, them red devils can ride, far and fast. Those of ya ridin’ mules, jes’ accept tha fact that ol’ mule’ll be some Injun’s supper if ya hafta cut him loose. That’s part a’ tha plan. They love mule meat like you boys love fried chicken an’ a few a dem’ll break off chasin’ us an’ chase their supper if it comes down to it. Won’t be nothin’ left but bones, teeth an’ ears, an’ tha ears’ll be gnawed on some.”

“You boys ridin’ point, drag and flanks, be sharp an’ keep yer head on a swivel. We’ll switch out ever’ couple ‘ours, so’s nobody gets tired an’ lazy. If ya see any sign of Injuns, why hightail it back a’hollerin’ and a shootin’. Better to be safe than sorry.”

John Coffee cut in, saying, “We gonna take it easy the first few days, just mosey along ‘till we get used to tha trail and to trailing a fresh horse. Hopefully we’ll make Fort Chadbourne
by noon, day after tomorrow, an' we should camp on the Colorado
tonight. We'll jes foller tha road up 'air, its mostly smooth
an' straight."

Chisum cut back in with a reminder. "Might be that they's
some ol' son who don't realize that this person with the big ol'
Meskin sombrero astride this big-foot mule is a lady. She's
dressed like a feller, but it's best that you 'member she ain't.
She's a lady. An' I know you men will keep that in mind all
along the way."

"Ya better pay heed, they won't be no rough talk tolerated
round tha lady," John Coffee instructed.

"Yau point riders head on out north an' ride wide of tha
road," Chisum directed. Riders began milling for position as
the point galloped away.

Witt continued his position beside the veiled lady with the
big brim shading her face further. She had cut her hair as short
as a man, wisely. If misfortune came down upon them and Comanches
overcame them, her hope was that they would kill her before they
discovered her gender. She wore britches and a loose shirt and
vest which also disguised her sex. An army carbine was strapped
to her saddle and a revolver was close at hand on her belt. The
saddle itself Witt had paid a bootmaker to cover in washed wool,
cushioning her tender flesh. He had tied the very fastest horse
that he knew of to her saddlehorn. If they had to run, she was
likely the lightest rider on the fastest horse, and it was
evident that the woman could ride very well.

Witt watched her, searching for signs of her tiring or of
pain. The morning sunlight from low on the horizon pierced the
thin veil and highlighted her grim and determined visage. She
seemed intent, relieved to be on the way, expectant, alert, ex-
cited. He expected her to tire quickly. Only she didn't. He
grew weary long before she lifted her veil to mop the sweat which
was stinging the thin red flesh that stretched over her cheeks
and forehead. She seemed to be observing him, monitoring his
fatigue.

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That evening after they had eaten Witt watched the lady return from the stream they had camped beside with a pot in one hand and the soiled wraps that had covered her wounds through the day. She boiled the strips of cotton cloth, cleansing them thoroughly, and returned to the stream to rinse them before stretching, winding and hanging them through the twisted limbs of surrounding mesquite to dry.

Spreading her groundcloth and arranging her bedroll like a practiced hand, she removed her boots and placed them close by beside the carbine and the revolver. She laid back with her head on the soft saddle, fully dressed, and within minutes she was fast asleep.

Witt didn't recall the ground being this hard when he had journeyed the long road to Texas a few years before. He had to consider that his aging body might be a bit softer these days. He couldn't get comfortable. He rolled over and over trying to find a position where some part of his body did not ache. He was tired, so tired. He was fully experiencing the effects of the accumulation of the years. He was so old, so tired. And this was just the first night.

He watched her sleep and envied her relative youth. He admitted he may have been mistaken in his idea that accompanying her would be a precaution. He felt like he was sure to be a liability.

Big Nose had hoped that more of the Comanche pursuit would break off from chasing the women and children, but only a few pursued him. He had ridden the tired horse in a zig-zag path in an effort to spoil the aim of the chasing murderers and he was successful for awhile. Eventually one of the many arrows did unexpected damage; his horses neck was pierced and together they tumbled head over heels at full speed as the devils screamed their victory. The celebrating warriors jerked their reins to turn their mounts to prevent them from following Big Nose and
his horse over the edge of a precipice.

As he fell, Big Nose's instincts caused him to reach out and grab for a thorny limb growing out of the cliff's steep face. The small plant held his weight. He watched the horse and his weapons fall freely down into the canyon and strike the hard pan at the bottom with a significant final note.

The thorns of the limb had punctured and torn his palms. The hot blood caused his grip to slip as the roots were pulled loose by his weight from the stone escarpment. The Comanche had gathered on the edge of the cliff and laughed as they shot arrows and rifles at him. Quickly he made a choice and released his hold, hoping to survive the fall. What may be his last breath was expelled in the scream of his descent.

As he fell, a flint arrowhead stuck into, but not through, the bone of his skull, causing Big Nose to lose consciousness. While he slept in freefall, his big body bounced off a limestone projection, slowing his drop. Ten feet from the floor of the canyon he passed through the new growth of a young cottonwood which slowed his fall and pitched him atop the dead horse. He landed hard, but he sustained life, even if he was unaware of his good fortune. The screaming Comanches overhead were certain he was dead and they hurried away to rejoin the chase for the captives.

Big Nose lay sprawled like a drunkard, unable to move, scratched, bruised and torn, bleeding in many places. The shaft of the arrow that had stuck in his head had been broken off as he passed through the limbs of the cottonwood, only the flint stuck in the thick bone of his skull remained. Blood continued to drip into the bedrock.

A few minutes, an hour, a few hours? An indeterminable amount of time passed before thought returned to Big Nose and he slowly realized that he was considering the broken shaft of the arrow that swayed in the limbs of the tree above him. He decided that he must be alive. Unless there was such pain in death, he was alive. All his great body ached as he made a small effort to rise. He lay back down with a groan and gazed
at the edge of the cliff high above him and the circling buzzards floating against the blue, so high and slow and effortlessly, patiently awaiting their meal. Inch by inch he raised his bleeding hand to the hard and sharp little rock imbedded in his head. So gently as he was able he worked it loose before he lost consciousness again. The blood flowed faster for awhile, then slowed and stopped.

When he awoke again he found the flint in his hand. He sat up and let the hot swimming blood in his head settle and become still. When he could think, he began cutting a strip of cloth off of his already too short britches leg for a bandage to wrap around his throbbing head. A long and torturous time passed as he moved his trembling body to the dead horse and recovered those scattered items he required. He drained the hot, wet water from the army canteen and yearned for more. Shaking and jerking, he managed to gain his feet and began an erratic, stumbling walk down the floor of the canyon, eastward.

Shaking Hand had sent some of the warriors who had joined him in the chase back with horses they had caught for the women and children of their camp who were still fleeing to the north. Some other of the men with him he had sent westward to find and bring meat, for a handful of warriors could contain and recapture these weak white women and children. Word had come to him that the bluecoats had joined the Texicans that had the devil's gun and the two groups had united to chase the brother Comanche warriors who had attacked the Texicans. But now, word had come that the Texicans and the bluecoats had quit their pursuit, that they had sought out the Comanche scouts who watched their advance and approached them with white flags offering to parlay for the white captives. They believed the Comanche still held the captives. This misconception was all that saved the fleeing Comanche from destruction. For this reason, it was more imperative that the white children and the few women be recaptured. If he could retake the captives he would not only save face but save his race.
and secure a position of strength to deal with the white warriors.

He had lost a few good men to the one who was being called Dead Bear. That one must die, he must be totally defeated and disgraced. The fame of the child warrior had reached even into the Comanche camp, his medicine was strong to have stolen the captives back and defeated his braves through the long chase. He could not be allowed to further enhance his image. He must die. And he must die an ignoble death, humiliated, shamed, totally vanquished.

However, Shaking Hand was still entranced with the sky-eyed girl and he was driven to recapture her. She would not be harmed. Neither would she he returned to the whites. She was his, she was his wealth, his stature and power within his tribe. The others had to be retaken alive. He could collect ransom for them and obtain the safety of his people. These goals he would accomplish or he must die in the attempt. He would not return defeated by children and women to his kith and kin. He sat staring at the fire at the entrance to the cave, his hate and murderous anger burned behind his dark eyes.

Calling two of the trusted few young warriors that remained with him, he sent one to his fleeing band of women and children with word to turn from running northwest and turn to the east. He wanted the women and children to return to the reservation where they would be safe and fed. They were not to allow the whites to know that the captives had escaped. They were to say that the warriors had the prisoners, they knew not where. The other young warrior he sent to the scouts that parlayed with the Texicans and the bluecoats. They were also to tell the whites that Shaking Hand had the captives in a secure place and he would soon come to sell the women and children back. But the scouts must emphasize that if war was continued against the Comanches, the captives would die.

Shaking Hand watched the young warriors ride swiftly away then turned his fixed gaze to the red glowing entrance to the cave. They had water from the small spring that flowed within the hill, but no food that he knew of. They would hunger. He must wait, patiently wait.
Pleasant showed Winnie the hole in the roof of the cave and they climbed and lifted themselves up through it, having one of the boys plug the opening behind them with a blanket so that the smoke would not follow them into the air atop the hill. Carefully they climbed to the side of the hill where the cave entrance was located and peered down through a patch of sage at the Comanches. Two facts were obvious; one, there were fewer warriors now, and two, they were unaware that there was another entrance.

Crawling slowly and silently around the perimeter of the summit they surveyed the distant landscape. Far away, perhaps ten miles, was a line of trees from the northwest trailing down southeastwards. From what Big Nose had told them they surmised it was the Brazos River since they had forded the Red and crossed the shallow headwaters of the Pease. If they could manage to get to the river they could follow it and eventually arrive at the white settlements, though several days away without horses.

Pleasant managed to make out what other eyes might pass over; the tracks of ponies headed out from the Comanches position at the bottom of the hill, tracks headed north, south and west. These may have been sent to scout, to hunt meat, or they may have been sent for other purposes, but there were clearly no tracks heading eastward. Pleasant imagined the evil in the mind of the Comanches, the warriors may have been sent to obtain dynamite or gunpowder or even barrels of kerosene to roll into the cave and dispense with them handily. Maybe they would try to starve them out or even seal them up with many big rocks trapping them in what would be their grave. Whatever the Comanche plan, they had better hurry it along because Pleasant did not intend to be trapped here long. Not long at all.

The depression remaining from the former bed of the spring-fed stream that ran off the top of the hill led down and off to the northeast in gentle increments which leveled off twice in its descent to eventually meander across the plain to the distant line.
of trees which marked a larger flow which he hoped to be the Brazos.

The actual stream of water which now flowed from the cave's entrance ran down the western side of the hill. There six Comanche sat beside the narrow stream watching the cave entrance in muted conversation. Their mustangs grazed along the narrow trench carved by the cold water and leisurely drank from it farther along. The new grass was high and the tired ponies dozed as their bellies filled with the sweet leaves.

Brother and sister slipped silently back into the cave and began to prepare the somnolent women and children. After they had rested as long as he thought necessary, he woke them all and told them of the plan that he and Winnie had devised. Winnie encouraged them and there was a silent prayer in her tender heart for the scared, tired and hungry little ones whose lives were in her and her brother's hands. They must be protected and saved. Without words thought or spoken, Pleasant's own prayer was lifted to the God of his mother and of his father, the God who knew their need and knew what tomorrow would bring.

Shaking Hand thought of the young women and children in the cave. He wanted them back. No mere boy would steal them from him. They had foolishly trapped themselves, only delaying their certain recapture. But delay he could not afford or allow. He was well aware of the many white warriors with their repeating rifles. These white devils were not the defenseless and weak farmers and settlers the Comanche had beleaguered for so many years, these were men to be feared, men devoid of patient foolishness and full of violent wrath. His people had also come to believe the legend of Dead Bear, that the spirits of the strong monster beast abode within him, that he was invincible. Shaking Hand admitted that the boy had made some fortunate shots that killed some of his brother warriors that chased him, but he was still only a boy. The fear of the boy and the white devils growing in Comanche breasts would surely defeat them if he did not kill the boy and subdue the white warriors with the threat of the captives'
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deaths. He could not let this mere boy win again. Shaking Hand's deadly determination caused his jaws to flex and cramp and his teeth to grind together. His hate seethed and boiled into a murderous rage.

His intention had been to trade some of these captives to the Comancheros who lived toward the sun at end of day. A selected few he had intended to keep as slaves to do the drudging, dirty work in their camps. He would enjoy humbling and wounding them, he wanted them to feel the inferiority and fear he now felt. He disguised his own fear within himself as anger and hate, and the consuming envy coupled with the undeniable future demise of his people emasculated him. He could not win in the end, this he knew, but he would fight. With his last breath, he would fight.

And he needed white prisoners. For when he grew livid and full to everflowing with hate and envy and rage he would let it boil out of him as he tortured his captives in even more novel manners. Cutting off eyelids, poking eyes out, removing ears and noses and fingers and other appendages, kicking and hitting and cutting and burning until they screamed like wildcats and lost their minds, quivering in fear. This only brought him joy and he smiled at the thought of this retribution. He needed a few white weaklings under his hand, only in this did he have control and feel power. He would have them again, soon, and he would retain a few for this enjoyment. Only by keeping some of their loved ones could he use their love against them, control them, restrain them from eradicating all of his kind.

Shaking Hand stood, stretched, breathed deeply. He must take control of his thoughts. He could not destroy the hill, he must draw the captives out. They were stupid white oafs, he could trick them and capture them again. He would devise a way. This night he would rest. Tomorrow, perhaps he and his brothers would draw away pretending to have given up. And when the fools came out, . . . yes! He could have his prize: girl and some captives to trade for his people's safety. And he could have a few of the little white beasts to play with and enjoy.
CHAPTER TWELVE

"...be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"

-I Peter 5:8

From the scouts' reports Colonel Mackenzie believed that nearly half of the renegade warriors they had fought had returned to their reservations in Indian Territory across the Red. That left two to four hundred hostiles out in Comancheria somewhere to deal with. His supplies were dwindling, horses and men were tiring, but the will of all the participants to rescue the captives was undiminished. The volunteers were surprisingly well-supplied and the Colonel took note that many of their mounts, weapons and stores were U. S. Army property. He had also noticed enlisted men among the ranks of the volunteers, though they wore civilian clothes. Thoughtfully, he worked through the questions that these facts generated and arrived at the answer that the regional brass at Fort Griffin and possibly even higher command were aware of, even approved, the army's support of these highly motivated civilian volunteers. And, in full agreement that every effort should be made to rescue the innocents, he neither saw, heard or spoke of the obvious disregard of army regulations. He was a pragmatic old soul, wise and wily.

The scouts had explored a great expanse of the fleeing renegades' passage across the plains and in their espielle they sometimes caught glimpses of Comanches peeking through sage bushes or over prickly pear, monitoring the advance of their pursuers, and thus Mackenzie realized that the renegades could not be surprised. Intuition advised that the savages would retreat in a great circle back to the safe refuge of the reservation. He may be able to intercept the murderous and cowardly Comanches before they crossed the Red River where they would surely try to hide behind the protection of the Quaker Indian agents. He desperately wanted to punish these despicable murderers.
The volunteers had clearly communicated their objective; free the captives. Their discussion around the campfire in the evenings centered around this intention and they had come to the accord that they should seek to avoid any more conflict with the captors as they believed further fighting would endanger their mission and the prisoners. They wanted to find the Comanche camp which held the kidnapped women and children and peaceably return them to civilization.

A growing percentage of the volunteer group believed that, though they were safer from attack from the Comanche while they were accompanied by Mackenzie's cavalry, the renegades would be less inclined to surrender the captives with the U. S. Army threatening. There was discussion of separating from the troops. Those in favor of separating accepted the dire jeopardy it would place the volunteers in, outnumbered and far from safe haven, but their safety could not be their priority if they were serious about retrieving the captives. Most of these selfless heroes were adamantly willing to expose themselves to whatever dangers necessary to achieve the freedom of the suffering innocents. They thought that Mackenzie's strength was more hindrance than help.

When scouts returned with the information that a few hundred Comanche women and children were fleeing mostly on foot to the northwest, Mackenzie mulled this new recoginance over and called for the leaders of the volunteers. The volunteer group was clearly a democracy, devoid of any commander. Mackenzie knew that the proposal he would present to them would have to be discussed, debated, probably voted on, but to his pragmatic mind his proffer could only enhance the success of both the army's objective and the volunteers' goal.

A larger contingent of the volunteers than Mackenzie had expected gathered to hear his plan. Mackenzie had waited until the tired men had eaten and rested a bit before he called them to the meeting, knowing the benefits of rest and nourishment in agreeable consideration and accurate judgement. Simply and directly he laid the facts before them.
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"Gentlemen. Our scouts report that hundreds of Comanches, primarily women and children, are fleeing northwest. They are, for the most part, on foot. We are unaware of what has happened to their horses. The are perhaps three score warriors trailing their women and children, putting themselves between us and their families. Their direction would suggest that their retreat is not to the reservation, they want us to believe that they intend to continue their renegade status.

"Certainly many more warriors survived from our battle and it is reasonable to assume that a portion of those are monitoring our progress. Another portion may be visiting other renegade camps in an effort to recruit a number of warriors sufficient to overwhelm us, this would account for the relatively few horses our scouts tell us that are in the possession of the Comanches.

"My recommendation is that we choose a defensible site and make a stationary camp from which we can send emissaries with white flags to parlay release of the captives,...perhaps trade horses for captives. I fear that this chase is endangering the lives of the prisoners. And, I believe that there is a good chance that the Comanche women, children and possibly even the warriors will turn for the safety of the reservation if we allow it, and I think the captives would have a greater chance of survival and rescue at the reservation. What say you?"

The ranchers and cowboys and gamblers and rustlers and volunteer soldiers and assorted volunteers all looked around at one another and generally nodded their heads. Dutch Henry was the first to speak.

"To my way a' thinkin', we jesta'bout hafta' parley with these red devils. We all know they'll kill the prizners 'fore they let us take 'em alive."

"An' I b'lieve we'd better send somebody who ain't wearin' army clothes, an' somebody who don't look too much like a ranger er a Texican eithe fer that matter. Them Comanche hates Texicans." old Stepper suggested.

"How's a Texican s'posed to look?" Goodnight asked with a smile.

"'Bout like you," Citzen O'Malley grinned.
The general laughter lightened the tenor of the assembled body, the merriment flummoxed Goodnight owing to the fact that a severe case of the measles during his ranger service had impaired his hearing. Good-naturedly accepting that he had likely been the brunt of the joke and choosing to forego questioning what had been said he continued the conversation from the point of his last inquiry.

"Well, my bride Mary Ann back in Pueblo never had any objections to my garb."

"Maybe it's not so much the attire Mister Goodnight, as the attitude, or possibly the Comanches' experience with the type," the Colonel suggested.

In the end, a couple of the soldiers dressed in civvies and the three jacks-of-all-trades, Abe, Stepper and Grumpy were elected to parley with whatever Comanches they could lure in to listen to the proposal. Between them they managed to get the idea across with the help of a Pawnee translator and by that time the group had located and settled into a camp to await the hostiles' response.

Pleasant put the belt of a loaded carbine and a double strap of ammunition over his shoulder and stuck two of the big Colt revolvers in behind his belt. He tied a sharp Bowie knife to his thigh, then walked back and forth adjusting the heavy weight of the weapons and ammunition. It was quite a load, too much for his weakened frame, so he left one of the ammunition belts there in the cave. He went over the plan once again with his sister and as they said their farewells Winnie hugged her brother to her and trembled in his embrace. They had just been reunited, it took all the courage and faith that they retained in their young spirits to voluntarily separate again. Each of them enjoyed for the fleeting moment the comfort and warmth of the blood that united them, the blood that had borne them and had been spent for them. They looked hard into one another's eyes for what may be the last time.
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Pleasant had blackened his exposed flesh with the cooled coals from the fire, his eyes were the only light color to be seen. With a struggle to lift the weight of the weapons with silence out of the small aperture atop the cave, he took a moment to regain his breath before he stealthily crawled across the hill to the same thick tuft of grass standing on the edge of the slope. Counting the Indians he was satisfied that he had located the sentinals as well as all his objectives. He inched backward and crawled to the opposite side of the incline. Carefully descending, mindful not to dislodge even a pebble and alert the killers awaiting him below, he arrived at ground level after half an hour of patient creeping.

Homemade boots with soft soles silently progressed in a wide arc through the sparse brush and eventually brought him about fifty yards behind the Comanche encampment. Locating the guards overseeing the horses, he steeled his resolve to do what he knew must be done. All his young muscles clinched at the idea of the hands-on murder he must carry out, it was an act that repulsed him and frightened him. He asked God’s forgiveness. And His help.

He felt the ancient ancestry of warriors rise within him, the blood hot and pulsing, yet controlled. The mongrel mixture of Highland Scots, fighting Irish and the inherited Anglo and Saxon gore of killing lust boil in his heart and pound in his ears, giving him strength and preparing him to strike. Quiet as a cat he slipped over the hard earth keeping low to the ground, approaching the shadow that sat silent and still against the night sky.

The moment Pleasant came within arms reach he slashed. The young Indian hardly felt the razor-sharp steel which slid into and through his throat to halve his arteries and spill his life-blood over his legs and feet. Suddenly he had lost his wind, he could not cry out and he realized he was dying only a moment before he did.
The horses shied and chaffed at the sudden smell of hot blood. Pleasant lay still beside the Comanche corpse and refused to allow himself any debilitating reflection of this mortal deed into his thoughts and possibly distract him from his mission. He allowed the horses to settle and when he could discern by the slight starlight that their eyes again began to lower and relax, he moved around the herd to find a pony that still wore the Indian bridle with gnawed reins. There was no saddle or blanket on the chosen horse, but Pleasant did not require such. By the available light the pony looked young and strong. Slowly he approached the horse, making the reassuring, soft sounds his mother had taught him. In one long stride and leap he was astride the horse’s back and held tight with his legs, one hand gripping the reins as the animal jerked, hopped, then ran.

With his free hand Pleasant pulled one of the heavy Colt sixguns and began shooting at the Indians who had risen from their rest, the shots stampeding the startled horses. He yelled and shot and drove the herd to a dead run into the darkness, westward and away as the surprised Comanche yipped in anger behind him. Glancing back as the pony sprinted beneath him, the silhouettes of two naked savages ran like deer in pursuit. He emptied the second Colt at the two dark forms and saw both fall, either struck by lead or dodging it.

Perhaps half an hour later he pulled the reins on the Indian pony and let him walk and blow. Turning the winded beast in a wide arc to avoid the expected pursuit he headed back to the hill and the cave. If he had made the correct assumption, the Comanche were now split into many parties, some hunting meat, some returned to their families with the recaptured horses, some chasing these stolen horses and likely some remaining to watch the captives in the cave. They could not know who the thief who drove away their horses was, they had to be confused and wary. They must now be weighing the bad medicine that had fouled their every effort to retake the captives.
A full hour or more passed as Pleasant allowed the pony to walk around and back to the area of the hill. Dismounting, he tied the reins to a mesquite limb a safe distance from the place where the Indians had encamped before the cave. Easing forward in a crouch he gained a rolling elevation that allowed him to view the Comanche's fire and the glow from the fire in the cave entrance. The renegades, unsure of who their attackers had been, were drawn back from the light of their now low-burning fire. Despite their precautions, Pleasant's sharp eyes managed to locate three of the enemy over the next few minutes by waiting for their movement in the shadows.

He drew the heavy carbine from over his shoulder and wrapped the strap around his skinny forearm as his father had instructed him. The thought of his father brought a momentary emptiness to his heart, but then the vision of his father's rugged, smiling face encouraged him, assured him and made him smile himself as loving memories washed through him. With a shell already in the chamber, he lined the sight on the shadow within the shadow of the brush, then swept the barrel of the carbine to and through the next target and the next. This practice exercise that had been well taught him by his father came to him without conscious thought, it was ingrained, and his muscles and nerves adjusted his grip and his prone position allowing the most efficient motion and deadly accuracy. His confidence in his acquired skills afforded no trepidation in his keen young mind and noble heart. One final glance over his shoulder to remind him of the path back to the pony, then a medium breath of air into his lungs, begin to exhale, shot. Cocked, swept, shot. Cocked, swept, shot.
And he was running, swiftly and low, back to the tied pony. When he arrived at the mesquite to which he had left the pony, securely tied, it was gone.
Winnie had settled the weary ones and told them what they must do, then they prepared. They would begin by putting all the remaining fuel on the fire now that Pleasant had gone, then when they heard the gunfire start and knew her brother had started the stampede of the Indian's horses, they would quickly and quietly climb up and out of the cave through the hole in the roof. The guns would first be lifted through, then the little ones would be handed through to the women that awaited atop the hill. She impressed upon them the importance of silence. The stampede and Pleasant's plotted racket would cover some of their unintentional noise made in their escape, but the night air descending from atop the hill could possibly carry some sound to the Comanches and alert them of their movement.

The steadiest young woman, though the smallest, was Pauline. She would lead the way and direct the others while Winnie watched the Indians. If there was any indication that any of the Comanches heard the prisoner's descent, Winnie would begin shooting, drawing the pursuit to her and allowing the others to gain some distance. Pauline would lead them across the plain to the tree-line that was distinctly evident on the horizon and lined the stream that ran from the northwest to the southeast. Winnie would follow them when they were clear and cover their retreat.

Winnie emphasized their silence and advised them to keep low to the ground and watch their steps so as not to step on loose rocks or trip and fall. Hopefully the noise and confusion caused by the theft of the horses would cover any accidental noise they made, but they couldn't count on that. One falling stone, one child falling or speaking might cause all of them to die that night, or worse, to be captured.

The three young women spoke quietly to the children who ranged in age from four to thirteen, calming them and assuring them that they would get away and be home soon. Only they must be very quiet and very careful how they walked. Considering
the horrendous abuse these pretty young women had endured and the fatal loss of most of their children and kin to the murderous savages, they exhibited wonderful fortitude and courage. Hate, love, fear, all the captives were motivated by these emotions in varying degrees.

Pauline seemed to be the strongest emotionally; Alice trembled periodically and moaned aloud, but then she pulled herself back together by sheer will to return and salvage what was left of her life. Ruth was the most skilled with a rifle or horses or any of the necessary and hard-earned skills of the frontier, but she had been beaten severely for her unremitting resistance. She probably had broken ribs and one eye was grotesquely肿胀 shut, one ear puffed to twice its normal size and her once-perky nose burned off. Winnie wanted her at the rear of the retreating column for even with one eye she could out-shoot all the others.

They were prepared and sitting in a curved line beneath the opening in the roof. When they heard the gunfire and the rumbling of the stampede, Winnie closed her eyes and mumbled a prayer.

"Put whatever wood remains on the fire Ruth. Come on Pauline, lead them out. Quietly! Shhhh," Winnie instructed as she exited the cave.

Winnie crawled to a spot on the edge of the hill to watch the reaction of the Comanches to Pleasant's single-handed attack. She couldn’t see her brother, but she could hear him shooting and yelling and smiled at his success and the reaction of the Indians that were ducking and chasing the stolen horses. She wanted to yell and shoot the sprinting form that she believed was Shaking Hand, but restrained herself.

1All those who survived their captivity testified to the brave behavior and exemplary performance of one another throughout these dangerous and trying days. In their unity, and their love, was their salvation.
There was an instance as the group trailed down the hill in the dark when Winnie's heart skipped a beat in response to one of the children stepping on a loose stone and causing a small avalanche. She kept her eyes glued to the Indians remaining below in the shadows where they had fled after the unexpected attack from their unidentified enemy. But, they continued to speak their unintelligible language to one another in gutteral tones of surprise, anger and confusion and kept their focus and faces turned toward the flight of their horses and peering around for other unseen enemies that might be lurking. Six of the remaining Comanches separated from the others and trotted along different paths in the direction of the fleeing herd.

Glancing back over her shoulder she saw that she alone remained on the hill, so she silently moved across and down the hill carrying the carbine strapped across her back and a sixgun through her belt. Making her way through the sparse brush to one side of the path that Patline had led the others, she kept low, her eyes scanning all around. In around an hour she had the line of fugitives within sight as they moved silently through the starlight that sparkled through the leaves of the tall pecans that lined the quietly flowing creek. She estimated that they were about three or four miles from the hill, not completely safe, but making progress. She wondered about Pleasant, whispered a word of prayer as Momma had done and taught. It eased her fear and strengthened her.

Red Horn had traveled apart from Shaking Hand and his followers trailing the escaped captives. Red Horn knew that Shaking Hand wanted to recapture all the children and women, especially the one others had called Sky Eyes. He also knew that the boy, Dead Bear, had caused Shaking Hand to experience defeat and loss of face and Red Horn knew that Shaking Hand would not allow the boy to live. The boy had been won by Red Horn, the boy would be his son. Red Horn would not allow
Shaking Hand to kill the boy, neither would he allow the boy to escape him once again. He lurked in the shadows, hidden from all the others, awaiting his chance.

Big Nose also skulked in the darkness and watched as the Comanches scattered and hid after Pleasant's attack. He had recognized the boy as he drove the Indian's mounts away, but he doubted that the Comanches knew who it was. Big Nose knew Pleasant from the way he moved, the way he rode, because of the time they had spent together, but he felt that the Comanches had no idea who their enemy was.

He watched some of the pursuers trot away after the stampeded herd, others found places of concealment to watch the cave where the captives must have taken refuge. Big Nose trailed one of these to his hiding place behind a stunted cedar and once the Comanche had settled in to watch for other enemies and survey the cave's entrance, Pig Nose silently crawled to a position allowing the flight of his long arrow clear passage through the brush and into the soft meat between the ribs and into the heart of the hated Comanche dog. Just as the dead Comanche fell, Big Nose alerted to another slinking through the tall grass and mesquite. Remaining still, Big Nose watched the Comanche move farther away from the hill and his brother tribesmen. Surely this one was a coward and not to be trusted. Big Nose trailed him through the starlight.

After a distance the Comanche stopped and turned his head as if to listen, a cupped hand going to his ear. Big Nose heard it too. It was a walking horse. Even in the darkness and at the distance Big Nose recognized the small, slouched figure on the bare back of an Indian pony. Both he and the Comanche watched Pleasant dismount and tie the braided Comanche reins to a tree limb, then walk quietly away toward the hill along a rolling rise. When Pleasant passed from sight the Comanche arose from his crouch and quickly moved to the tied pony. Big Nose, knowing the injuries from his fall would prevent him from intercepting the Comanche, fitted an arrow
to his bowstring and slowly stood. The Comanche snatched the reins from the limb and swiftly mounted the shying horse, putting his heels to the pony's ribs just as Big Nose loosed the arrow. The pony was frightened by the falling warrior and by the sudden smell of hot blood and cut through the brush in an explosion of flight just as the report of gunfire resonated through the night air.

Big Nose wondered what the shots meant. It could mean the Comanches had attacked the cave, or it could mean Pleasant had been discovered, or... he did not have to wonder further as he saw Pleasant running low through the brush back to where he had tied the horse. Big Nose hurried, as best he could, to meet the boy.

Pleasant discovered the pony was gone. He heard movement through the grass and swung the carbine at the big dark form moving toward him.

"Big Nose! I thought you were prob'ly dead."
"No. Big Nose hurt, not dead yet."
"Where's tha horse?"
"Run off. Comanche tried to steal. I kill," Big Nose pointed to the dark form stretched over the ground.
"You got a horse?"
"No. Big Nose walk."
"We need ta get outa'here, to tha other side o' tha hill. C'mon! Foller me!"

Before they could draw away two screaming Comanches charged them, rifles in hand. Pleasant fell to one knee, cocked, shot, cocked shot, and silenced the panther-like screams that had split the night, both naked savages dead on the ground.

As they quickly moved away around the hill Pleasant whispered to Big Nose, "Whyn't they shoot? Can't figger why they didn't shoot. Was they tryin' ta scare us ta death?"

"Maybes° no boolets. Maybes° try take us alive. Comanche always be crazy."

The pair drew away before other enemy could draw near
and they made it to the summit of the hill without being seen. Pleasant quickly instructed Big Nose regarding what he could do to enhance the chances of success of the next undertaking, handed him the carbine and a belt of ammunition, then disappeared down into the cave. Big Nose crawled to the edge of the prominence and laid gently on his shrunken stomach, careful not to put any weight on the separated ribs in his side, only his eyes peering through a brush of sage were exposed to view. He could see only three forms that he took to be Comanches. Soon he became aware of a loud sizzle piercing the still of the night and noticed the reflection of the fire in the cave's mouth flicker, fade and darken.

The scream of horses startled him and the rumble of their great weight and hard hooves on the floor of the cave and then thundering down the side of the hill alerted him that Pleasant had begun to drive the horses out. Some of the descending horses slid and tumbled after slipping in the streambed that trailed down the hillside and, just as Pleasant had predicted, the hidden Comanches stood, rifles in hand, looking for riders. One of the Comanches, an older one by his carriage and build, had the quick wit to begin shooting the horses, the others seemed immobilized by their surprise, likely looking for riders.

When they rose, Big Nose discovered there were five of them, not only the three he had seen. He remembered to aim low as Pleasant had told him and he shot at the only Comanche shooting at the horses. Pleasant rode the last horse out of the cave, leaning low over the neck of the cavalry mount, Colt in hand. When Shaking Hand ran to leap onto Pleasant's big horse, Big Nose shot, hitting the red man in his arm and turning him just as Pleasant turned the horse's muscular shoulder into the running savage, rolling him across the hardpan. Then he was through the Indians and rode to turn the herd around the hill.

Only two of the Comanches tried to give chase and Pig Nose was sure he killed one and wounded the other. The others
scattered and vanished in the brush and darkness. Seeing no other movement from the Indians, Big Nose ran across the hilltop and mostly tumbled down the other side. The Tonkawa sat in pain holding his arms hard to his sides and breathing shallowly in an effort to recover from the fall. He had managed to hang onto the carbine though many of his previous wounds had again opened and bled. Pleasant rode up beside him with a big horse in tow.

"Can you get on this horse Mister Johnson?"

Big Nose rose, grunted, caught his breath and answered. "Maybeso."

Together they herded the horses eastward on a line to intercept the walking captives.

Witt's butt ached. His back was numb, mostly, but there was a part that gave him a sharp pain when the iron-footed mule stepped a certain way. Witt's legs were asleep and hurt in that particularly peculiar way a sleeping limb will. The steamy air beneath the crown of his little bowler hat was heated by the unobstructed sunlight and his thin white hair dripped stinging hot sweat off his frying scalp to further redden his slitted eyes. His head pounded and his vision seemed to waver and fade and made it seem to him that the barren landscape was underwater. Speech was impossible, his tongue so dry he couldn't separate it from its attachment to the roof of his mouth. His canteen was empty and he'd be damned if he'd ask the good mother beside him to allow him a sip from her canteen.

The lady had her face turned toward him. He knew that because the bright light of early afternoon penetrated her veil despite the cool, blue shade provided by the great brim of the sombrero that covered her like a roof. Her eyes came into focus, then blurred to his sight. He knew that she spoke some words to him, the sound was distorted and strangely distant, but he distinctly heard the rising tone at the end of her
words which bespoke a question.

Not relishing revealing his present afflictions, he grunted in an affirmative timbre, hoping it was the appropriate response. It was not. Witt groaned as he was unceremoniously peeled off the back of the tall mule by two rangy cowboys. When his somnolent feet touched the ground his knees buckled. The cowboys pulled and drug him under the sparse shade of a young mesquite using his arms as handles. He thought of a steer about to be branded.

Someone gave him a taste of water, not near enough, then washed his red face with a wet cloth. A garbled voice posed another undeciphered question. He knew it was a question, he knew that much. And he thought whatever the question was, if it concerned him, then the answer should be obvious. His tongue was a swollen, unmovable instrument incapable of wrapping around words, but he managed to convey by smacking his barked lips and pointing a shaking finger that he wanted more water. Again they were stingy with the drink and he growled his aggravation.

"He ain't goin' no further today Chisum," John Coffee declared.

"Nope. Tha Big Spring ought not ta be more'n fi'teen miles, ya' think?"

"Spect it's 'bout that. I'll send three men an' extra hosses ta fetch water. If they don't dally they can get there an' back here 'fore dark. These animals need water bad as we do."

"Ma'am, if ya' please, sit here beside him an' keep a'coolin' him off with that wet cloth an' we'll find somethin' ta make some shade with. In the meantime, yer Meskin Hat will keep 'im outa' tha sun."

The lady complied, but to Witt's opinion was still not over-generous with the water. When his mouth became moist enough for speech he admonished the good mother.

"You know, it's supposed to be me doctorin' you. I never expected to be a hindrance to this mission. I suppose I over-estimated my endurance. Forgive me."
William W. Worley

"You are no hindrance, Doctor Witt. If not for you I would not be here. Just too much sun, that's all. I needed to rest a bit myself. Once some of your store of alcohol burns off, I expect that you'll be fine."

"Maybe that's it. Maybe I need some whiskey."

"You know that's just what you don't need Doctor, whiskey is why you are so dry now."

"Yea, I know you are right, but I don't like to hear it. Could I at least have some more water?"

"Pace youself Doctor, don't make yourself nauseous."

"Hmmmph. Seems the patient has become the physician."

Witt gazed across the flat forever of plain, and thought, 'That's just what it is - plain.' There was no distinguishing feature to the landscape as far as his eye could see. In the far distance, heat waves distorted the horizon and he was certain that even beyond the curvature of the earth the 'plain' continued unchecked by any disturbing landmark. The grass, the stunted brush, more sky than seemed credible. That's all there was. How could they hope to find anything, anyone, in this maze of similitude?

They had headed northwest after leaving Fort Chadbourne, then veered more directly west in the hope of finding some sign or trail or track of unshod ponies or passage of humanity. They had discovered tracks that led north in places and had followed them for a distance, but they had always vanished into the hard land.

Only these few days and Wash was spent. He more fully realized the folly of expecting to find anyone in this forsaken country. The blistering sun, the stinging deluge of rains, the unoccluded, howling winds left little trace of the passage of man or beast on the hard, rocky surface of this arid earth. He wanted the words and could not summon the courage to persuade this noble lady that it was futile to seek the little ones she had borne and loved so dearly. She could not, would not see the truth that they were forever lost. Her hope and faith sustained her, her blood called to her across the barren
miles searching for a clue that would direct her to her children, her suffering precious children. Her love allowed no doubt, harbored no hesitation; and if her love and persistence begat inconvenience for others she offered no apology, remained unrepentant, and kept on course to recover her little ones, defeat and despair be damned. Trying to discourage her seemed a sinful thing, but a necessary evil.

It was her eyes. Even the veil could not conceal the misery of her love, the longing, the loneliness, the desperation. Her eyes were depths that drew him so that he was pulled and fell into her suffering and sorrow, and her pain triggered his need to help her, demanded his assistance, and denied him the ability to utter the cruel, disheartening truth. These, the fruit of her womb, a portion torn from her heart was lost, gone forever.
"...hide me under the shadow of Thy wings from the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about."

-Psalms 17:8,9

Red Horn tracked the horses that had been driven from the hole in the hill by the sound of their passage. He followed the herd because he knew that only the Dead Bear could be driving the horses to the east, away from the slavery or death that Shaking Hand intended for all these who had created so much trouble for the People. No Indians would be heading east toward the forts and towns. It must be the one that the spirits had given him for his son, it could be no other. Only the Dead Bear could accomplish such heroic feats. The morning light would prove him to be right. He must stay close and await the opportunity to capture his spirit-given son. He would not lose him again, but would keep him close and teach him the ways of the People until the boy realized it was the will of the Great Spirit that he use his gifts to protect and defend the Comanche nation. That time would come.

It was evident to Red Horn that the Dead Bear had driven away the ponies of Shaking Hand's warriors, and he knew it was also the Dead Bear who had somehow returned to the cave without being seen and drove them at and through Shaking Hand and those with him. Undeniably, the boy was instilled with the great spirit of the bear, able to walk unseen and in his power overcome many men. If Red Horn could recapture the boy, raise and train him in the ancient and correct ways, Red Horn would forever be revered as he who had saved the Comanche, as the father of the New People who would drive the white devils from their land and again be the true Lords of these lands. With the power of the Dead Bear, they would be invincible.
William W. Worley

Shaking Hand had been knocked out of the path of the charging horses that exploded out of the cave by a bullet that had come from some confederate of the boy which ruined his chance to shoot the horse on which Dead Bear rode. The bullet wound itself was not debilitating and after he caught a momentary glimpse of the boy riding low on the big cavalry horse, Shaking Hand was able to swing himself upon the back of the last horse to pass. He was unable to control the beast as there were no reins and the animal was terrified from the fear of passing over the steaming coals of the fire, the gunshots and the stampede down the hill. But he was able to stay mounted even as the horse bucked and ran, and using the horses mane as lever to turn its head he was able to separate the frightened horse from the rest of the herd. It took awhile before the pony abandoned his wild dash across the prairie, but finally it slowed to a walk, then stopped.

Shaking Hand did not dismount when the horse tired and stood, but using rawhide fringe from his leggings he braided a bridle and reins. The hungry horse pulled greedily at the tall spring grass, absorbing the collected dew until Shaking Hand had completed the makeshift reins. The Comanche pony accepted the twisted hide bit and Shaking Hand tore the malnourished beast away from the graze and forced him back toward the hill and the cave. Dead Bear's medicine was strong, but Shaking Hand knew that his hate was stronger. He would catch the boy, for that was all he was, a mere boy. And when he caught him Shaking Hand would make him scream like the pup he was before a humiliating and painful death quelled the boy's magic.

Approaching the now dark cave, Shaking Hand listened intently by the entryway. When he heard nor sensed no danger he hazarded to slip inside to investigate. His moccasins became wet as he walked over the dead embers of the fire and through the little stream. He stepped gingerly, reaching out with the carbine he had recovered from before the cave.
to explore the deep darkness, probing for whatever might remain. His carbine found no children, no women, but the passage of air from the cave's entrance through the cave to the opening in the roof in the rear chamber drew him to investigate. Seeing the starlight blinking through the hole, he howled his anger as he climbed the rocks up and out of the cave to the top of the hill. There he put his face close to the earth and discovered the small tracks of the children and women who had passed this way. His anger blazed. Dead Bear was misnamed, he should be known as Fortunate Bear or Sly Fox. Surely the spirits were smiling on him.

Skipping and sliding down the hill to the tied horse, he rode it around the hill and to the trail of the women and children which his keen eyes plainly saw even in the night. Then he rode to where the trail of the horse herd which Dead Bear had driven away. Two separate trails, one leading northeast toward the creek that he knew ran there; the horses tracks led nearly directly east toward the river the whites called the Brazos. Shaking Hand correctly calculated these disparate groups planned to meet somewhere along the Brazos and his experience estimated the place of joining. He drove the weary horse hard for a hill he remembered that afforded a perfect view to observe the meeting and the movement of the fleeing cowards. Despite being abandoned by his companions who had departed to parts unknown, he would have the Dead Bear. The Dead Bear would die slowly and he would be grateful for the sweet escape from pain that death brought.

There was a gravel bar that extended from the near edge of the Brazos out into the flow and the river was wide and slow. It was here that Pleasant and Big Nose hit the river and allowed the thirsty animals to drink and graze until the dawn. Each of them rested for an hour while the other watched. At full light they started the horses up the river to meet the women and children walking down the riverside. They were
vigilant. Pleasant had counted the horses and knew three were missing. Possibly all three had been shot. Maybe they had ran away from the herd, or it could be that a Comanche or two had managed to catch one of the fleeing ponies. He could not know. He must be watchful and use these horses he had retained wisely, saving their strength for the long haul homewards. And he had to burden the beasts as soon as possible with the exhausted and starving children and weary womenfolk.

The smaller children had to be carried down the hill and a distance away from it in order to assure their silence. Each adult and larger child carried another little one as well as the rifles and pistols, and the absence of any food to generate any energy taxed these stouthearted, if fearful, heroes. Bleeding from wounds, barefeet blistered and torn, they trudged on, homewards, to homes that were destroyed in every way except in their memories. Despite the conditions and hardships, there was no complaining, no whining children. Everyone expended all the strength that remained to them.

Their feet were swollen, leaving trails of blood and tissue, skirts and pants that had not been taken from them were filled with stickers and thorns from the weeds and cactus but they struggled on like disciplined soldiers through the night. When they began to stumble and slow, Pauline called a halt to rest. It was clear that Winnie had not given thought to rest. She was focused on putting as much distance as possible between those devilish Comanches and the innocents. Evaluating the others who were collapsed on the bank of the river, she realized that she may have pushed them too hard. Their very lives depended on their efforts however, and on her wisdom. She was glad Pauline had called for a rest, but it could not be a long one. Winnie was determined to get them to safety even if it nearly killed them. Too much time spent in repose and their legs would stiffen. Soon, she urged them to their feet.
The dawn revealed the beauty that surrounded them and seemed to lift their spirits somewhat. The steady flow of the water and the soothing sound of its passage accompanied their progress and the waking birds sang to the glory of life in the golden light. The trees arching over them seemed to breathe peace and the grandeur of the towering clouds signaled the promise of heaven. The verdant foliage, the muddy earth and the warming air was an invigorating tonic breathed into each weary soul, and it was difficult to remember and truly believe a murderous, evil horde pursued them to do them deadly harm; hunted them as they would animals to feed their malicious appetites, their lust for innocent blood. Tramping on and on in rhythm with the quiet water beneath the cerulean sky filled with all manner of graceful and happy birds flying and gliding through the high branches of the ancient trees in simple joy of life. Winnie's thoughts drifted to her home as it once was; Momma and Poppa, Pleasant, old Juanio, the big, clumsy puppy they had named Durnit, the chickens, milking, feeding the stock, cooking, washing clothes, planting...Winnie had to wipe the tears away. She had to stop thinking such thoughts, she couldn't let the others see her tears. She must be strong, for them.

Besides, that was all gone. All except Pleasant. Gone forever. Dead. Burned. Sorrow she swallowed before it overcame her and the emotional protection of hate conquered her fear and sorrow. Love and loss had died and hate and vengeance gave her strength. Her young, strong heart yearned to turn and wait for those who chased them, to reap revenge on these murderous, unconscionable heathens. But first she must do what was necessary to return these vulnerable lambs to the fold. Now, she must run. Soon though, she would turn to face the devils.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the growing sound of horses approaching. She quickly surveyed the surroundings and spoke quietly but urgently.
"To the river!"

She hoped the high bank would hide them, protect them. As she ushered the last of them down the cut of the river, she unslung one of the two rifles over her shoulder and set it for firing. Then she saw the riderless horses trotting toward them, the other half of her family waving his arms and calling her name. Oh! What a welcome sight!

Pleasant bounded off the tall horse and ran to hug her. Around them the others were thanking God and petting the horses, laying down the heavy guns.

"Bring me the extra guns. I'll tie them on this big ol' plow horse. You older and bigger ones keep a revolver or a rifle in your saddle or your belt. Come 'long now, we gotta' hurry."

Minutes later the ranch and farm children were mounted and Pauline set a brisk pace eastward. Winnie held a tiny four-year old before her on the saddle.

"We goin' home now? Go see Momma?"

"Yes, Baby Ann, we go home now."

Winnie made no mention of Ann's momma, she didn't want to lie. She looked hopefully at Pleasant and they followed the group at a trot.

No one saw the dark eyes that watched them unblinking from atop a nearby hilltop.

The Bee Hive's volunteer emissaries had conveyed to the Comanche scouts the message of the offered peace for the return of the captives. After three days the Comanche approached the encampment and communicated their agreement, but asked that they be given food for their women and children while the captives were being located and returned. Colonel Mackenzie considered the Comanches' request and replied diplomatically. He offered his word that all the Comanches and all the other renegades would be fed and otherwise provided for as soon as the captives were turned over and the Indians returned.
to the reservations. His answer was not well received by many of the hostiles, but army scouts had reported that many separate groups were moving steadily east toward Indian Territory.

Many of the Comanche major chiefs had not been located or accounted for. That worried the Colonel. Hopefully, they were on a hunt to feed their people and not raiding settlements or recruiting other tribes to join them in attacking those who sought the release of the captives. The minor chiefs who had met with him outside the camp had promised the return of the captives, but only when they had returned with them to the reservation where they believed the Quaker Indian Agents would protect them from retaliation as they had in the past. For so many years the southern plains tribes had been rewarded for stealing white women and children with the ransoms the surviving family members and friends were willing to pay because they knew the torturous days that the captives were forced to endure in the hands of the savages. And now, even in the face of annihilation, the Comanches were reluctant to return captives simply for the promise of peace and sustenance.

Some of the Bee Hive volunteers felt that their mission was completed when the Comanches agreed to return the captives and wanted to leave the 'mopping-up' to the army. Others, more experienced in the ways of these wild men of the plains, knew that the promise of one Comanche or even a few minor or major chiefs did not bind the others who acted independently in every instance, and these experienced ones convinced the others who were weary and growing homesick to stay the course and finish what they had started. The primary point that cinched the argument to continue their mission was the certainty that those who returned without the captives would have to face the wrath and censure of Mabel Goldstein and others of her ilk. Even hundreds of miles distant, Mabel continued to inspire and exercise influence, thereby contributing to the effort.
A contingent of concerned Mexican citizens had arrived at the Rio Grande requesting entrance into the United States to continue their search for their loved ones, their revered mothers, beloved wives, precious children. Federal officials, though sympathizing with the seekers, disallowed them to bring all the weapons they had brought from their homes deep in Mexico to exact vengeance on the despised Comanches and Kiowas, Arapahoes and Cheyennes. And so the law-abiding Mexicans sold some of the rifles and shotguns at the border town and brought only single-shot pistols for the most part, and their long knives to combat any Indians or outlaws that might dare accost the angry group.

Traveling from fort to fort, they inquired of all they met for news of the wild Indians and of any word of the captives. The string of federal forts, mostly manned by buffalo soldiers, ran all along their path northwards through the Texas frontier and the presence of so many forts and soldiers instilled a measure of hope in their broken hearts. The word of the expedition of Colonel Mackenzie, as well as the volunteer group that had formed and left Fort Griffin weeks earlier encouraged them. Though they freely gave the Mexicans the news of the developments and efforts in retrieving the captives, the soldiers and the Texicans sold them more formidable weapons. Their respected leader, Senor Ramon Gutierrez Gonzalez, was adorned with weaponry and ammunition hanging and strapped to his body that nigh doubled the weight his finely bedecked Spanish stallion bore when he pranced into The Flat surrounded by a small army of concerned kin of the Mexican captives. Senor Gonzalez was one of the few of these good southern neighbors that spoke English and he did so with surprising skill and learning.

Having been directed to the Bee Hive Saloon and to Miss Mabel as being the likely most informed personage regarding the efforts to find and redeem the lost ones, Gonzales approached
her, grand hat in hand, and with the deference of a gentleman and the demeanor of a courtesan, he spoke.

"Madam, may I introduce myself. I am Ramon Gutierrez Gonzales from Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico. I have had the pleasure of receiving many fine reports of your kind character and honorable personage, Misses Mabel Goldstein. I am most pleased and honored to make your acquaintance."

Here Senor Gonzales executed a deep bow, sweeping the hard-packed dirt floor with his awning of a hat. Mabel, despite herself, found herself curtseying formally and answering in kind.

"I too am honored Senor Gonzales."

Retiring to a table and surrounded by the Mexican entourage and the protective, curious clientele of the Pee Hive, Mabel related all she had gleaned from her sources regarding the volunteers and the army efforts as well as the engagements with the hostiles. The report of the escape of a portion of the captives delighted Senor Gonzales, and he translated her words for those of his countrymen who did not understand the language. They in turn expressed their pleasure in this delightful development. When Mabel had divulged all she knew, Gonzales was prompted by a confederate to ask a question of her.

"Are the tales we have heard even across the border about a boy that the Indios call Oso Muerto,...Dead Bear? Are they true?"

---

1 Ramon Gutierrez Gonzales was a noted philanthropist and humanitarian who invested much of his inherited and earned wealth in seeking a peaceful solution to the Indian raids that plagued northern Mexico and had begun to depopulate the area. He advanced untold amounts of money to ransom the innocents taken by the Indians, but he eventually learned that it was counter-productive to pay the savages as they were pleased by the reward and greedily increased the practice of stealing women and children. Senor Gonzales did a great service to the north of Mexico through his employment of the banditos and peasants in forming patrolling troops to battle the hostiles that had made a practice of kidnapping those who lived in the remote stretches of Chihuahua, Sonora and Coahuila.
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Many of the Comanche major chiefs had not been located or accounted for. That worried the Colonel. Hopefully, they were on a hunt to feed their people and not raiding settlements or recruiting other tribes to join them in attacking those who sought the release of the captives. The minor chiefs who had met with him outside the camp had promised the return of the captives, but only when they had returned with them to the reservation where they believed the Quaker Indian Agents would protect them from retaliation as they had in the past.

For so many years the southern plains tribes had been rewarded for stealing white women and children with the ransoms the surviving family members and friends were willing to pay because they knew the torturous days that the captives were forced to endure in the hands of the savages. And now, even in the face of annihilation, the Comanches were reluctant to return captives simply for the promise of peace and sustenance.

Some of the Bee Hive volunteers felt that their mission was completed when the Comanches agreed to return the captives and wanted to leave the 'mopping-up' to the army. Others, more experienced in the ways of these wild men of the plains, knew that the promise of one Comanche or even a few minor or major chiefs did not bind the others who acted independently in every instance, and these experienced ones convinced the others who were weary and growing homesick to stay the course and finish what they had started. The primary point that cinched the argument to continue their mission was the certainty that those who returned without the captives would have to face the wrath and censure of Mabel Goldstein and others of her ilk. Even hundreds of miles distant, Mabel continued to inspire and exercise influence, thereby contributing to the effort.
A contingent of concerned Mexican citizens had arrived at the Rio Grande requesting entrance into the United States to continue their search for their loved ones, their revered mothers, beloved wives, precious children. Federal officials, though sympathizing with the seekers, disallowed them to bring all the weapons they had brought from their homes deep in Mexico to exact vengeance on the despised Comanches and Kiowas, Arapahoes and Cheyennes. And so the law-abiding Mexicans sold some of the rifles and shotguns at the border town and brought only single-shot pistols for the most part, and their long knives to combat any Indians or outlaws that might dare accost the angry group.

Traveling from fort to fort, they inquired of all they met for news of the wild Indians and of any word of the captives. The string of federal forts, mostly manned by buffalo soldiers, ran all along their path northwards through the Texas frontier and the presence of so many forts and soldiers instilled a measure of hope in their broken hearts. The word of the expedition of Colonel Mackenzie, as well as the volunteer group that had formed and left Fort Griffin weeks earlier encouraged them. Though they freely gave the Mexicans the news of the developments and efforts in retrieving the captives, the soldiers and the Texicans sold them more formidable weapons. Their respected leader, Senor Ramon Gutierrez Gonzales, was adorned with weaponry and ammunition hanging and strapped to his body that nigh doubled the weight his finely bedecked Spanish stallion bore when he pranced into The Flat surrounded by a small army of concerned kin of the Mexican captives. Senor Gonzalez was one of the few of these good southern neighbors that spoke English and he did so with surprising skill and learning.

Having been directed to the Bee Hive Saloon and to Miss Mabel as being the likely most informed personage regarding the efforts to find and redeem the lost ones, Gonzales approached
White Fork of the Brazos and had crossed Catfish Creek when a shot echoed through the trees and the brave woman Alice screamed. She had been hit in the shoulder and nearly knocked from her horse. The small girl who rode with her helped hold her atop the horse. Another shot pierced the air and a horse bearing two boys fell, mortally wounded, kicking and screaming in pain and fright. One of the boys had a leg trapped under the horse, but was fortunately able to jerk it out from under the great weight with the help of the other boy.

Pleasant had turned to Winnie, "Get 'em outa' here! I'll keep the shooter pinned down. Go on!"

"I'll stay and help you."

"No! Go! I'll catch up."

Another shot rang out, hitting another horse.

"Go! Winnie, get 'em outa' here!"

Reluctantly she had urged her horse up through the group and yelled, "C'mon! Follow me! Hurry!"

Pleasant had dismounted behind a sturdy hackberry and scanned the surroundings for the shooter. Another shot peeled bark from the tree, blasting Pleasant's face with chips, but he had seen the fire from the shooter's rifle and located the murdering coward. Pleasant had fired two quick shots at the spot.

Big Nose had turned his horse from the front of the group and was returning to Pleasant's location. Shaking Hand saw the despised Tonkawa winding back through the trees and shot twice at the big target.

"Get outa' here Big Nose! Go with Winnie! Get her and the children to the fort! Go! They'll need you to guide them. Go!"

Big Nose had great trust in the capabilities of the Dead Bear and obeyed him without argument or question. He had quickly turned and put heels to the big horse.

Pleasant had ran and tumbled to cover behind another tree and looked for sign of movement from the shooter. Whoever
it was shooting had the high ground and a better field of vision than did Pleasant. But the boy knew he was a better shot. He also knew that he could not remain where he was and so decided to move to a specific position halfway up a knoll. Making for the spot in short sprints and taking periodic refuge behind the oaks that grew there, he had been curious that he had not drawn fire from the shooter. He had a fleeting thought that the shooter must be moving too.

When Pleasant had gained the chosen place that would afford him better defense and a wider field of vision, he gave more thought to the realization that the shooter had been silent for awhile. Had the hidden enemy left to pursue the captives? His keen eyes sought any sign of movement, scanning the area from the last place he had known the shooter to be. He had heard a stick crack, a foot on a stick, and he had begun to turn when sudden pain and darkness overwhelmed him.

Red Horn had witnessed Shaking Hand’s approach to attack the fleeing whites and had used the noise and confusion of the attack to draw nearer. He only wanted the boy that he knew the spirits had given him to be his son. Shaking Hand could have the rest. And it seemed that the spirits had helped him as they had drawn the boy toward him. Dead Bear’s attention had been focused away from him and toward where Shaking Hand had been when he began shooting. Dead Bear had turned his back to Red Horn just a few feet away from where he had crouched and hidden himself. Red Horn knew the boy was dangerous foe and took no chances, immediately rising and clubbing him unconscious and carrying him to the horse. He threw the limp body over the withers and tied it to the saddle.
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Shaking Hand patiently waited until Red Horn had secured the boy onto the cavalry horse before he shot him in the back. He had seen Red Horn trailing the boy during the previous day and knew he planned to steal the boy away. Red Horn had coveted a son and he had stolen the boy from the place where Shaking Hand had taken the white-haired girl despite directions to kill all but the girl at the small ranch house. Red Horn's capture of the boy had caused the spirits to frown on the Comanches. The desire of Red Horn for a white son was bad medicine. The boy should not be returned to the tribe. Red Horn was no longer of The People, he intended to succor an enemy of The People. He was a traitor. Shaking Hand had no compunction in killing the betrayer. He stood over the dying man and shot him in his open eye, knowing the bullet would bounce around inside his skull. He would be confused when he reached the other place, lost and dizzy. Shaking Hand chuckled at the thought as he led the horse with the boy tied onto it to Red Horn's horse, then led them both to his pony. He took them all to a place he had selected earlier which would serve his sinister purposes. He smiled, anticipating and relishing his reward for his efforts and patience.

Although Witt had recovered a bit, the lady had regressed. At the junction of the Double Mountain Fork with the Brazos they turned east and headed for Fort Griffin. The lady had fallen once and though there was little additional physical damage, the lady was severely disoriented, talking out of her head. She had a rising fever and had vomited what little food she had eaten. They had to get her medication, and rest.

A ways up the White Fork of the Brazos they had met the volunteers from The Flat who were returning there and searching for the trail of the escaped captives that were believed to be headed for Fort Griffin. There seemed to be reliable word that
most of the captives had escaped and were fleeing back to
civilization, possibly even toward Fort Griffin themselves.
The volunteers had found a Comanche woman's tale credible.
The squaw had wandered into their camp and primarily because
of the details she had been able to relate regarding the captives
it was hard not to believe her. The volunteers were trying
to overtake the captives and protect them as they were almost
certainly pursued by a contingent of Comanche warriors who
needed the white children and women to bargain with the threatening
army. Mackenzie had taken the notion that the squaw was a
trick designed to divert the course of the army from driving
the Comanche back to the reservation, and the troops continued
to follow and herd the Comanche back to Indian Territory.

The Bee Hive volunteers allowed Witt to place the good
mother in their supply wagon and he rode in the bed with her,
dispensing what small comforts he was able. Chisum and Coffee
left the pair of them with the volunteers and continued their
journey north searching for the stock thieves, promising to
return through Fort Griffin to retrieve Witt and his patient.
The volunteer driving the supply wagon did his best to afford
the lady a comfortable ride, but the country was rough and
wild. The evening of the first day of travel with the volunteers,
Witt was able to have a conversation with a few of the men
from The Flat. It seemed they were obsessed with the boy
who had escaped from the army infirmary to ride into Comancheria
alone to rescue his sister. The boy was already a legend.

According to the Comanche woman who had told them of
the escape of the captives, the sister had escaped first and
had returned with her brother to free the others while the
men were away. The warriors, at least a portion of them,
were desperately chasing the children and two or three surviving
women, knowing that without them as hostages, they may face
a total war waged by the blue coats and the Texicans that
they could not survive. The fact that the Comanche woman
claimed to be the first wife of the chief Shaking Hand and
had been responsible for the safekeeping of the sister, coupled
with the clear evidence that she had suffered a terrible beating, convinced the volunteers of her words.

The good mother, when told of the escape of the little ones, immediately closed her eyes and voiced a heartfelt petition to her God. Those around her at the moment were greatly affected by her love, her fervent request and even those who did not believe thought, "Let it be so."

The good mother had lain in the Fort Griffin infirmary for two days and her fever had dropped. She had been able to eat a meal the evening before and had eaten a light breakfast and dinner at mid-day. She was awaking from a drowse and pouring herself a glass of water when there was a noisy uproar outside on the parade ground. Pattering to a window she was first aware of soldiers running and shouting and her thought was that the fort was under attack. Then certain words shouted from one soldier to another began to penetrate into and be processed by her weary mind. "Children." "Captives." "The Flat." "Bee Hive." And then she was running.

Barefooted, dressed only in a borrowed nightgown, she flew out of the infirmary, pursued by surprised orderlies. She couldn't breath. She couldn't speak. They caught her, held her trembling body and lifted her into a wagon. Her ears rang, she could not hear their words. Some unexplainable, ancient sense assured her that her children were near. The horses moved too slow. Out of the fort and down the road from Government Hill, finally the wagon halted before the Bee Hive where a crowd barred her entrance. The soldiers yelled, pushed and made an alley for her and she bolted into the room searching wild-eyed for her little ones.

Winnie saw her coming, saw the horribly scarred face and head. The good mother ran directly toward her, her throat emitting a keening, high-pitched scream. Arms outstretched, the good mother ran right by her to the tiny waif Ann and her brother, little Tim. She hugged the babies to her and
despite their mother's disfigured appearance the children clung to her and whimpered, "Momma!" It took quite awhile until they had all cried out their recent pain and sorrow and then they began to laugh and bawl in turns. Such was their delirious jubilation.

The good mother held her children to her breast with great strength and loving tenderness. Little Ann and Tim felt the love, it smelled like home. And the keening, crying joy clearly communicated in a universally innate language a mother's immeasurable love. The wordless, wailing song had its origin in creation and the deep, bottomless emotion was blended in the blood; in the sweet music of birth and life and love dwelt also the notes of pain and sorrow and loss. These unintelligible groanings and bubbling laughter was the perfect offering of thankfulness and pleased God in a manner in which words were incapable. Those who witnessed this reunion could feel and hear and see the smile of God, it was a vision of answered prayer burned into the soul, unforgetable, unrepayable. This love contained in the trembling tones and tears torn from the hearts of these who had shared life in a single body and who shared the precious and unique blood of family, this love was more than a word or a feeling, it was a living entity, a gestalt, "a threefold cord...not quickly broken."

Winnie watched the reunion in silence, hot tears burning across her sunburned cheeks, thinking of her own dear, lost mother. She was so thankful for them and thankful to God that He had allowed her to be His instrument and to not be eternally burdened with the knowledge that she had thought only of herself and left these others to suffer unspeakable horrors. Yet the sight of the reunion caused her to feel the hole in her own heart tear even deeper and the natural longing for her family nearly overwhelmed her. It was a much more painful wound than the cutting of flesh, it was a rending of the soul, an echoing, haunting attack that visited in the
quiet times, the beautiful moments, remembered joys, a pain that wove itself into the fabric of her life.

She felt so alone. Surrounded by wonderful, caring, sacrificing and protective people, she was so lonely. These good people were not the ones she needed. Only one remained to her that shared the memories, that shared the love and shared the blood that had formed her. She had allowed him to be separated from her once again. What had she done? She must find him. Only he could share her sorrow. Only he knew her heart.

It was pandemonium. Parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, siblings, husbands, friends and well-wishers continually arrived and celebrated in tears and laughter. Mabel managed to separate those who remained unclaimed and sent them to the fort's infirmary where they were examined and treated, bathed and fed and treated gently and special. Many had no kin remaining to them, Mabel knew, and she empathized with them, allowing them the mercy of severance from joy they could not share. When these orphans were settled she sent the medical staff to the Bee Hive to minister to the others. She had to close the bar except for medicinal purposes as some of the men celebrated a bit excessively.

After the freed captives had been treated for their diverse infirmities, fed, and rested sufficiently, they were interviewed by army staff. In some cases army runners were sent to retrieve nearest relatives. Food was sent in by the wagonload by merchants, farmers, ranchers, settlers, even saloonkeepers. All the children were soon dressed very smartly and many were taken in by local families until their own families arrived.

Winnie answered questions until she was exhausted. She was heartened by the fort's commander, W. H. Wood, ordering out a strong patrol to find Pleasant and bring him safely in. She wanted to go with them despite her utter exhaustion, but the food and the comforts seduced her into a deep and much needed sleep.
Awakening the following morning in a bed between clean-smelling sheets was heavenly. For a moment she luxuriated in the pleasure and comfort of the moment, but the moment quickly passed as the thought of her brother caused her to throw back the linen and quickly dress. The owner of a mercantile business on Main Street in The Flat, Sam Newcomb and his wife, took Winnie into their home on Collins Creek above the fort. The families of George Greer, J.C. Lynch, Joe Browning, W.H. Ledbetter and Uncle Joe Matthews all made room for one or two of the children and their families or one of the women who had been captives. Of course Alice who had suffered a gunshot wound was kept at the infirmary at the fort.

Winnie questioned everyone regarding her brother and no one had heard anything at all about him. The army patrol that had been sent out to locate and retrieve him was still out. Winnie could not, would not wait. She began to gather and secrete items she would need to go get Pleasant. It was not an easy task as eyes were almost always on her. It was a slow process, infuriatingly slow. She managed to recruit two of the other children who had not been claimed yet by their kin or friends as her collaborators and by the following morning she had what little she required, save a horse. Before dawn she slipped a pillowcase out the window full of borrowed items and followed it through into the cool darkness, considerately closing the window behind her. Making her way to the family's corral, she saddled a likely mare and was on her way. She prayed that she was not too late.
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"The Lord looseth the prisoners...He relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked He turns upside down." -Psalm 146:7,9

Shaking Hand had left the greedy traitor who had been Red Horn where he fell, food for the wolves and the worms, the buzzards and the harvester ants. He had taken the bound and sleeping boy to the place that he had previously chosen, a suitable site to torture and drive the strong spirit of the bear out of him before he allowed the boy to die an inglorious death. Possibly, hopefully the strong spirit would chose to come into and abide with Shaking Hand when the boy no longer afforded a living host. How powerful then he would be!

It was an unholy and fitting place to which he took the boy, a place desecrated by white settlers who had cut and scarred the earth with the heavy iron knives they made the mules pull. This was the land of The People, a land given for hunting, not for planting. The white beasts that had abode here suffered before they perished under the Comanche knives, almost unrecognizable as human beasts even before the corpses burned with the ugly structure they had erected. The charred bones remained, scattered through the ruins, stripped of all soft tissue by the creatures who did, and should, live here.

These surroundings would provide the time required to remove the strength of the spirit of the bear from the boy before he killed him. It was a safe distance from the roads of the soldiers that led from fort to fort and he had been advised that the soldiers led by Bad Hand was away north escorting the Comanche women and children back to Indian Territory. Shaking Hand had personally witnessed the Texians that they had fought days earlier returning south in the trail of the escaped captives. He had only to be careful of the smoke from his fire. Conveniently, there was a large stack of
chopped, dry wood ready for the burning, which would not produce much smoke.

The fire would primarily be employed as a pyre. The rock chimney still stood, sturdy and strong against the sky, perfectly preserved for Shaking Hand's purposes. The boy himself had provided other necessary materials: a thick, long rope hung from the cavalry saddle as did three canteens of water; the big hide of the dead bear was rolled behind the saddle; and, handily, Shaking Hand even found the lucifer matches that the lazy whites employed to begin their fires. Truly the gods were smiling on the Comanche chief thought Shaking Hand.

He left the slack body of the boy draped and tied on the big horse as he prepared the retribution and offering to the spirits. After spreading the great bear hide before the hearth on a cleared portion of earth, he cut strips from the edge of the thick hide, laying them aside. He formed a pyramid of wood with kindling within its base for the fire which would drive the bear's spirit out of the undeserving boy. Lifting and carrying the sleeping lad, he laid him on the hide which he soaked with water and folded over the thin body of the boy. Arms folded over the chest, knees bent so the heels of the feet pressed against the buttocks, Shaking Hand tightly stretched the bearskin over Dead Bear, tieing and stitching the leather as he went.

When he had completed entombing the boy in the hide, he crowned the bundle with the bear's great skull, the two and three inch tusks barred. He smiled at the sight, pleased. Singing a song of victory, of entreaty, of offering, he spun and danced to the earth and the sky, the fire and the water. He began to feel the power of his medicine building, then a spirit whispered that a gift was being sent to him and this knowledge of acceptance and reward filled him to overflowing with joy and he danced and sang crazily, long into the night.

A lone, curious coyote watched then shied from the fearful sight.
In his deep sleep Pleasant's injured mind was confused about many things. The efforts of his consciousness to surface continued to fail because of a lack of energy with no nutrition having been supplied for many days. A sporadic and mutating order of consciousness surged and flooded his thoughts with the stress and anxiety of the unknown. In the fleeting moments in which awareness drifted over his brain allowing him to guide and direct thought, he searched for the questions that he knew he had answers for, but answers could not be located in the dark, confused corridors of his mind. He knew who he was, he just could not recall his name. He realized that he was in peril, but he could not uncover the reason nor the nature of the jeopardy. It was akin to opening your eyes and seeing surroundings but not 'seeing' anything in the sense of understanding the situation or the circumstances. And when this aggravating partial awakening began to sink under the surface into the dark depths timeless unawareness, Pleasant fought to stay afloat without hope of success. And just outside Pleasant's dark submergement into somnolent purgatory, dancing in the light of life and joy awaited his doom: Shaking Hand.

Big Nose lay in the Fort Griffin infirmary, fevered, weak, and unconscious. Unbeknowst to him, his severe infirmity had been self-inflicted. During the herding of the captives to Fort Griffin he had come upon a doe that the wolves were feeding on and, driven by great hunger, he cut off a slice of the rancid meat and ate it raw to sustain his strength. In the following hours the poison spread through him, giving him a paralyzing headache, a burning fever and delirium. With the help of the captives he remained atop his mount until they reached The Flat, only to fall in a heap, covered with vomit and feces when the lost ones were being welcomed by the celebrants.
Big Nose had lain moaning in the dirt of the road, filthy, unattended, until Winnie saw him through the crowd and told those welcoming the survivors of his heroic help. He was thrown into a wagon bed and carried to Collins Creek where buckets of water were thrown over him to wash the foul stench from his lengthy body. At the fort, three soldiers were ordered to hold him upright as he sat in the latrine purging his guts of the reeking poisons as well as a layer of his stomach lining it seemed, after being dosed with a strong dose of a purgative. Finally, he was roughly washed once more by protesting medical personnel and stretched out upon an improvised pallet on the infirmary floor as the cots were too short and narrow to contain him. He slept the sleep of the dead.

He was discovered to have fractured ribs and forearms. The bones were repositioned as well as possible in spite of Big Nose's protests, then splinted or wrapped. The fever rose and fell. When the war within him raged his skin turned a hotter shade of rouge and he jerked and shouted in an indecipherable tongue. He was out of his head, fighting imaginary battles with phantoms. Had he been in his normal mind, no hands could have held him from returning for Dead Bear. Providence, in His wisdom, kept the stout-hearted titan in the arms of Morpheus.

When the community learned that Winnie had slipped away, the consensus opinion was one of amazement at their failure to forecast matching behavior from the twin of the intrepid boy who had charged single-handed into the mortal danger of Comancheria to rescue his sister. How could they not have predicted and prepared for equivalent deportment from a twin?

Colonel Wood had dispatched a squad to search for Pleasant soon after arrival of the captives, and now he assured a crowd of concerned citizens that another special patrol of scouts would be dispatched immediately to overtake Winnie and return her to safety. He said they must trust the volunteers and Colonel Mackenzie to find and
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protect Pleasant, though the soldiers that he had sent could possibly return with both children. He assured the anxious citizens that the twins would not be lost. If they were not returned soon, within two or three days, he would personally lead a large contingent of cavalry to bring the Thompson children back to civilization.

Around that same moment Winnie was weaving her horse through and around the flanking scouts of the Bee Hive volunteers who were following the two-day old tracks of the fleeing captives south to The Flat and Fort Griffin. She gave thought to stopping and recruiting the men to help her locate Pleasant, but realized that if he had been captured and the Comanche warriors saw the volunteers approaching, they would likely kill her brother and flee. Maybe Pleasant was wounded or hurt. Maybe he'd been captured or even killed. Whatever had happened she must find her brother. Life would be unbearable if she didn't do all she could to save him. Or, at least to find him, dead or alive.

The trail that the captives had left had been more heavily marked by the pursuing volunteers and was easily followed even through the night. At the end of the second day she had arrived at the spot where they had been attacked. She located the heavily shod tracks of the big cavalry horse that Pleasant had ridden for so many miles.

The body of a Comanche laid behind a scattering of boulders and the sudden explosion of buzzard's wings lifting them into the air above the torn and bloody carcass put her heart up into her throat. She thought that it could be the Comanche that had taken Pleasant from the farm as the dress and accoutrements seemed familiar. Scavengers had taken the soft tissue of the face. Coyotes lurked a short distance away, pacing anxiously to return to their repaste she wondered, or just curious about the newly arrived dinner guest. Winnie rode away, leaving the competing hungry beasts to the stinking remains. The tracks led north and west through a maze of brush, three horses, two of which seemed to have been led.
her with a vengeance though she fought to keep her eyes open and continue down the trail of Pleasant's horse. She was forced to quickly find a place to lay and sleep for awhile. She spread the saddle blanket on the ground after tying the horse securely and was deeply asleep within seconds.

She was awakened by what she thought was the friendly horse tugging at her. The early morning sun lit the shade behind her eyelids and she tried to scrunch her eyes tighter shut to block the unwelcome light. An uncomfortable restriction, a pinching sensation at her wrists caused her to blink her eyes open just a slit to discover the cause of the irritation. What she saw generated a reflexive, eye-popping stare from Winnie and a delighted laugh from the face that swayed over her. The laugh transformed into a self-satisfied and sinister smile. It was a face of nightmares, a visage of terror. An irrepressible moaning of despair escaped her, her entire body trembled. She closed her eyes tightly together and shook her head in an effort to dispel the harsh reality, praying the frightful vision would vanish.

Shaking Hand enjoyed the weak wriggling of the little body as he lifted the sky-eyed girl onto the fine horse she had ridden so very far to bestow upon him. In her deep sleep she had not been bothered by his tying her legs and wrists, only now did she expend what little effort she could to oppose him as he tied her to the saddle. Her eyes expressed her pure fear. He fed on her fear, such terror brought joy to his beastly heart.

Shaking Hand had discovered her horse that dawning as he hunted for meat and he was pleasantly surprised to find her asleep in the tall grass nearby, seemingly a gift from the gods. He had planned to return to The People with the scalp and perhaps the fingerbones of the boy for a necklace. Now he would also return with the white-haired girl as his exotic prize. His medicine would be seen by all to be strong, much stronger even than the Dead Pear. He would truly be the Great Lord of the Plains.
demise, Shaking Hand placed Winnie on the dirt floor before the fire he had prepared. The soaked and oozing hide encasing Pleasant like a cocoon had been stretched and stitched tight and was growing tighter as the leather dried and shrunk. Within the fire the hide would shrink faster and further, squeezing the life and the spirit of the bear from the undeserving boy. Only Pleasant's withered face was visible to his helpless sister and she thought him dead until she saw his lip tremble in the exhalation of a shallow breath. The hide ball seemed too small to contain her brave brother.

"What are you doing to him? Let him go! You have me, let him go!"

The Comanche grinned at the reaction of the girl to her brother's plight. He tingled with anticipation of the pleasure he would experience at the simultaneous screaming of the siblings, their song of utter defeat and praise, the boy screaming inside the torturous melting heat of the shrinking hide and the girl screaming at the sight of her broiling and baking brother.

Shaking Hand had considered skewering the boy as he had done others, but he lusted for the longer enjoyment of this slower cooking. He had waited for two days for the boy to awaken, he would not wait another day. He had slapped the boy repeatedly, thrown water in his face, pinched and burned him to no avail. Perhaps he would be aroused when the flames licked the leather compressing and smothering him.

He ignored the words of the girl, the pleadings, the threats. He had seen and heard it all before, many times, one of the white creatures, a mother, father, sometimes just a friend would give up their chance at life and freedom for love. He knew such love was foolish, but he had learned that he could use their love against them, to entrap them, to control them, to even torture them. How he would relish the heart-rending screams and the tears of the sister who had come to save
the brother would help Shaking Hand torment and destroy him. The white-haired sister would be broken, fit for slavery, subjugated, ready to serve him as her Lord.

The long rope he had attached securely to the top of the bundle encasing the boy. He had thrown the other end over the rock tower of the chimney, pulling the rope and lifting the bound boy to dangle above the prepared pyre. Taking a strip of the hide he had cut, he pushed the suspended ball a few feet to the side and tied it to a charred pole that had been a part of the wall of the burned shack. He felt the girl's eyes watching his every move and when she derived his intent her screams began in earnest, most of the words unintelligible.

"No! Stop! Please! No! Why? You can't! Stooooopppp!"

Laughter bubbled from Shaking Hand's gut. When the strip of hide holding the boy to the pole was loosed, the pendulum would swing and come to rest just high enough over the fire to cook, but not enflame the hide and the boy. He lit the kindling with a lucifer and patiently waited for the fagot to light. He grinned as he stared at the girl who twisted and struggled in vain against her restraints, growling her hate, frustration and fear. When the bundle of sticks caught the flame, Shaking Hand strolled to the sister and caressed her head mumbling soft sounds as he lifted her to her feet and dragged her to the hide-bound brother. He lifted her hands, cut the ties that bound her wrists and placed her hands upon the bearskin that encased her brother. He smiled, then cut the strip of hide that held the boy away from the blaze.

Unprepared for the sudden weight, Winnie stumbled and fell. The ball that was her brother swung back and forth over the hungry flames, slowly coming to rest just above the fire.

She rose, fell, rose again and hopped toward the blaze that was roasting her suspended brother, burning her arms
as she pushed at the bundle, hopping and managing to remove her brother from the fire, pushing the weight back, inch by inch, to the post where he had been tied. Her hands burned against the smoking hide, her arms burned where the flames had licked them and now her muscles began to burn and tremble in their effort to keep her brother from the fire. Winnie's tied feet slipped and she fell to the ashes covering what was once the floor of a happy home, her brother swinging back to roast over the blazing fire. She struggled to her feet, started to hop again to the pyre when her brother's scream rent the air. He had awakened! Her feet twisted and she tripped and fell again. Despite her brother's screams and the evil laughter of the red devil that had created this torturous trap, Winnie regained her head and tried to untie the thongs that bound her ankles. She could not! They were tied too tightly, her feet were numb. She crawled to the fire and struggled to her feet once more.

As Pleasant's screams weakened Winnie managed to pull him in a hopping, inching, twisting manner away from the burning hell. The wet hide sizzled and smoked and the sweet, cloying stench of burning skin and meat choked her, yet strangely strengthened her. She strained from her bare toes to her fingertips to pull and push Pleasant away from the insane pain. She put herself between him and the flame, her own hands burning and blistering. But, the weight of her brother, her tired, numb feet, her waning strength eventually caused her feet to begin to slide in the dust and ash.

She heard the tittering laughter of the red imp and she redoubled her efforts to hold their position away from the fire. Shaking Hand clapped, laughed, danced, as she desperately struggled and the weight of her helpless, keening brother pulled them relentlessly to the blazing pain. The sadistic laughter echoed in her head, she prayed and then she screamed as she put all her remaining power, all her physical, emotional and spiritual strength into keeping them from slowly burning to death. Because she would not allow
her brother to burn alone, she would burn with him and deprive this most evil beast from his pleasure.

How could her brother be so heavy? How could she be so weak? Her fevered brain took her for an instant to a place far away, a happy place, years ago. To a time the pair of them were younger and carefree, laughing and playing in the long rope swing that Papa had made for them. The vision made her laugh, which laughter silenced Shaking Hand's laughter and, strangely, frightened him. Surely the girl had been driven insane, and Shaking Hand knew that the insane were often smiled upon by strong spirits and given strong medicine.

She growled and grunted and trembled and shook against the weight and the gravity of the heavy balled body that slowly and inexorably pulled them into the deadly flame. Together their screams ripped the air, accompanied by the Comanche's hysterical, howling laughter.

A close and deafening explosion of a gunshot silenced the laughter.

And then Smiling Dog was rolling Winnie across the clinging powder of dust and ash extinguishing the fire upon her. She rose from the smoking girl and threw Shaking Hand's weapons far away from him as he lay at her feet trying to slow the red life flowing from his stomach. She flew to help Winnie who was again trying to push her brother from the flames. Knocking the girl to the ground she reached into her waistband and took a knife to cut Winnie's bindings around her ankles. Leaving Winnie on the ground, Smiling Dog ran to the now silent Pleasant and pushed him away from the fire. When Winnie managed to join her, she took the knife and motioned to the rope atop the hide. Winnie's hands were cramped, burned and blistered, and thus were disobedient and it took longer than expected or desired for her to cut the rope hanging Pleasant from the chimney. Smiling Dog managed to ease the bundle to the ground, then Winnie was back, the knife trembling in her hand as she began to try to free her burning brother from the hot and smoking hide. Smiling Dog took the knife from her and sliced.
adeptly and easily through the hot hide. Carefully they peeled the smoking skin from Pleasant's own bleeding and blistered flesh. When they had freed him and pulled him away from the bearhide, Winnie could not see her brother breathing. He lay perfectly still.

"Noooo! You can't die now. Pleasant, please, please, please," Winnie's tears flooded down her red and black face, burning a cleansing trail through the injured, tender skin that had survived the fire. Smiling Dog moved on her knees to hold the poor child. Together they poured out their unbearable sorrow.

Pleasant screamed. And they were glad. They broke their embrace and Winnie tenderly kissed her brother's yellow and red blistered and bleeding head. His eyes found hers and his desiccated throat struggled mightily to call out her name.

"Yes. Yes, Pleasant. I'm here. We'll be okay. I'll take you home. Oh Pleasant."

Smiling Dog handed Winnie a skin of water, but her hands could not hold the heavy container, so Smiling Dog gave Pleasant, then Winnie short sips of water. When Winnie's thirst had been quenched, she gave thanks. First to God, then to Smiling Dog. Her zealous gratitude was voiced in that primitive tongue before language, the sounds pleasing to the Creator. Her heartfelt praise was interrupted by the moaning of Shaking Hand, and Winnie's countenance was transformed from reflecting boundless joy to burning hate. She jumped to her torn and bleeding feet and pulled a burning brand from the fire. She ran to the wounded savage and beat him until she had expended all her strength. Smiling Dog sat with the boy gently rubbing his arms and his legs and let the girl, her daughter, beat the vile, iniquitous husband to whom she was no longer joined.

As Shaking Hand moaned, bled and rolled in the destruction he had created, and the dust and ashes stuck to his bloody, battered body, Winnie and Smiling Dog ignored him and tended to her brave and deserving brother.
Smiling Dog's well-practiced hands were not long about the task of constructing a travois from the fir-hardened bearhide. She secured the long poles she had scavenged to the pony of Shaking Hand, knowing the Comanche pony was accustomed to such a contraption. Together they gently lifted the naked, badly burned body that trembled as the breeze passed over it onto the travois and fashioned a loose belt to hold him in. Having to travel slowly and pick the smoothest path, it would likely be a three day's journey to Fort Griffin.

Before they left, Winnie glanced back at Shaking Hand. He lay trying to sing some mournful, disagreeable hymn. Blood still trickled between his fingers from the hole Smiling Dog had put in his stomach. No, she decided, it was too easy. She walked to him and grabbed his feet and drug his filthy carcass closer to the fire, then tied his ankles with the rope from which her brother had hung. His milky eyes opened and as the realization of her intent washed over him he shook involuntarily and began to moan.

"Yea, ol' devil, a dose of your own medicine."

Leading her horse around the chimney, she untied the rope from the tree that Shaking Hand had tied it to, and tied the end securely around the saddlehorn. Backing the horse behind the tree, Shaking Hand was lifted to hang three or four feet above the coals. He tried to lift himself to untie his ankles but great pain prevented him and the blood began to flow down across his chest and into his face. Positioning the horse carefully, Winnie jerked the cinch loose and Shaking Hand's weight pulling from over the chimney unsaddled the horse, the saddle deftly catching between the trunk and a strong limb, suspending the groaning and bleeding Comanche at a height not allowing his fingers to touch the ground.

Walking to the woodpile Winnie carried an armload of the stout sticks back to the coals and patiently arranged them to ensure they would burn hot and long, just out of reach of Shaking Hand's shaking hands. She stirred the red coals until the good dry fuel caught fire, cracking and popping.
She ambled to her now bareback horse, smiling at the insane screams of well-merited punishment. Her sky-blue eyes met Smiling Dog's dark, deep eyes and they looked into one another, speaking to one another sans words. Together they rode away, slowly, homeward.

Shaking Hand's hair became inflamed, and he beat at his head with his hands. He kicked and began to swing and jerk, twist and buck. Winnie judged his screams a sweeter sound than his song, much more gratifying than his laughter.
"For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the blameless shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it."

-Proverbs 2: 21, 22

Winnie and Pleasant had been comfortably imprisoned by a round-the-clock guard at Fort Griffin for over a week. Winnie had spoken with Major Woods who came daily to check on them and had told him that the guard was unnecessary, she promised him that the two of them were not going anywhere except home to Angela whenever the good doctor, Rufus Choate, advised that they were ready to travel. Major Woods assured her that he did not doubt her word but that he had guaranteed his superiors that they would remain at the fort. The pair of them had caused enough trouble for the army and a slew of volunteer citizens. He had smiled good naturedly when he said it, but Winnie knew he was serious.

Besides, he told them he had strictly ordered all reporters off the grounds of the fort under penalty of arrest. He did not want the children bothered. He had also forbidden soldiers from discussing events related to the recovery of the captives with anyone, especially newspapermen. The days after the twins return, reporters from the Leavenworth Bulletin, San Antonio Daily Express, Santa Fe Daily New Mexican, Austin Daily Republican, Dallas Herald, Denison News, Rocky Mountain News, Galveston Tri-Weekly News, Weekly New Era of Fort Smith, Belton Independent, Texas State Gazette and many other unidentified scribes were gathered like ants to a picnic battering Pleasant and Winnie, and even Smiling Dog who couldn't understand a word, with loud and endless questions anytime they laid eyes on them. The excited writers bothered everyone they imagined had anything to do with the events of the preceding weeks until Winnie told the Major they wanted to be left alone,
and then Major Woods had all the reporters herded into the fort and had a sincere discussion with them throughout which they complained about the suspension of their first amendment rights. Most of them quit while they were still free to go home, but some persisted until the Major put them in the brig without due process but with due diligence. The major also sent word throughout The Flat of the wishes of the children to not be written about in the periodicals and a couple of stubborn correspondents were necessarily convinced of the wisdom of returning to their respective homes by the still celebrating volunteers in The Flat.

The army issued a statement that was printed in a few of the frontier newspapers which read:

The recently freed captive women and children have expressed their understandable desire to be left alone and not harassed by the press. They do not want to be heralded as heroes, they want to be listed simply as survivors and ask others who were involved in the events of the weeks past to please refrain from divulging any facts or exaggerations which may serve to sensationalize their escape from Comanche captivity. Please honor the request of these beleagured innocents.

Some other of the participants and survivors had spoken to reporters prior to the pronouncement of Winnie and Pleasant's wishes, but upon learning of their liberator's request, they too curtailed contact with reporters. Thus, a spattering of unofficial, unsubstantiated and often wildly inaccurate fabrications appeared in print in some places, most of it soon retracted. Many of the editors honored the wishes of the children however, and reported the facts of the expedition only in general terms. Even the battles in which civilians had been supplied with ordnance by the U. S. Government in direct violation of all treaties and policies were suppressed.

Some of the children had left Fort Griffin to return with their kin or friends to begin new lives. The army had
provided escorts for each of these groups. The Right Reverend Doctor Washington Witt had waited with the good mother of Ann and Little Tim along with a handful of others who would be returning south under escort through Fort Phantom Hill, Fort Chadbourne, Camp Colorado, Fort Concho, Fort Mason and down toward Uvalde. When Doctor Choate determined they were all able to withstand the hard travel they would be on their way. On their ways to homes that held their broken hearts, and horrors never to be dispelled.

The good mother, whose name was Jan, closely followed her two rescued children from the barracks building that the major had provided for the returned captives and their families onto the parade ground so that they could spend awhile playing with the other children. Jan found a seat on the reviewing stand with Witt who was just lighting his pipe. The pair of them watched Ann skip over to join a group of girls who were gayly skipping a rope. Jan was delighted that the children were becoming children again. Little Tim struggled to run in the stiff new trousers and shirt that his mother thought made him look so handsome, but he could not keep up with the racing older boys.

"Madam, be forewarned. I have observed that some a'these fine children have adopted some most uncivilized mannerisms during their captivity among the wild Indians,..."

Just then, seemingly on cue, Little Tim kicked off his shiny shoes, shucked his shirt and slid out of his trousers to chase unencumbered by the restraints of sophistication, happy and naturally after the older boys. The good mother, completely abashed, moved quick as a cat to catch the bare boy. She caught him quickly, redressed and tried to scold him gently but broke out in laughter with the others who had witnessed Little Tim's performance. One of the bigger boys lifted him onto his shoulders and took off running with Little Tim laughing and holding on tight. Jan returned to sit beside Wash and her face was flushed both with a pretty blush and
winded from the chase.

"As to what you were saying Doctor, yes, I have expended much energy these past happy days trying to re-civilize and domesticate my children. The boy especially seems to have quickly gone feral. It amazes me that the Indians allow the children to run around naked!"

"Well madam, it does save them from the trouble of washing diapers."

Jan chuckled disparagingly and answered, "I'd just 'a soon wash the diapers, thank you sir."

Wash chuckled through the smoke of his pipe as they watched the children play. His thoughts wandered over the women and children that had been captured and had escaped, he hated thinking of those still in the hands of the Comanche. It angered Wash that the 'Friends', the Quaker Indian Agency, had convinced so many politicians and others in power that the murderous, sadistic stealer of children and rapist communities of the Comanche and Kiowa, Cheyennes and Arapahoes, these conscienceless brutes, were not the enemy, not evil incarnate, but primitive children calling out for gracious Christian guidance, forbearance and forgiveness. These sadistic savages were rarely charged or held accountable for their repetitive atrocities and on the rare occasions when they were, political pressure from the ignorant, misguided and delusional statesmen served to pardon their transgressions.¹

¹a case in point: Edmund P. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, persuaded Texas Governor Edmond J. Davis to accept Indian promises to stop their depredations in exchange for the release of Satanta and Big Tree who had been leaders in the May, 1871 massacre at Salt Creek wherein seven men were horribly tortured, mutilated and burned to death. When General Sherman learned of the pardoning of these fiendish murderers he wrote to Governor Davis: "I believe in making a tour of your frontier with a small escort I ran the risk of my life and I said to the military command what I say to you, that I will not again voluntarily assume that risk in the interest of your frontier, that I believe Satanta and Big Tree will
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The recently freed children had regained a portion of their childhood, but much of the happy-go-lucky exuberance of youth was lost. They still retained a measure of fearful hesitancy, reservation and distrust. The women exhibited shame though not for their own willful sins, the sins of their captors were suffered by them in the condemnation and shunning of many of the 'Christian' citizens who reviled them because they had survived.

Witt had watched Winnie as the veiled Jan had ran to and taken her beloved children to her breast. Winnie's sorrow, as well as its cause, was evident. He had felt a great urge to call to her, to take her hands, hug her close and tell her of her own dear mother, but he could not. When they made it back to Angela, to Fort Concho, then she would learn the truth. They all would. Until then, let her focus her love on her recovering brother.

And he had been recovering wonderfully. He had regained consciousness, then memory and speech in increments. His physical strength and healing was surprising considering the severity of his injuries. His body had shed at least one layer of skin over almost his entire body and there remained an indentation in his skull that would remain throughout his life. One ear had seemingly melted against and into the side of his head, but despite all the scarring and injury, he was still a winsome lad.

Winnie's fair complexion starkly exhibited her many multi-colored bruises and abrasions. Some of the other children and the women looked far worse. One of the poor ladies had her nose burned back to the gristle. Certainly it would never

(1 cont.'d) have their revenge if they have not already had it and that if they are to have scalps, that yours is the first that should be taken." (Sherman to Edmund J. Davis, February 16, 1874, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress) Subsequent events proved Sherman's point, Comanche and Kiowa depredations increased 400% in 1874 after release of these criminals.

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grow back and she had worn a bandana around her lower face which caused her to resemble a bandit. She had suffered the worst abuse, poor Ruth, and upon returning she had learned that none of her family had survived, all their scattered remains buried by her neighbors. She would hardly eat. It seemed she had already died. Loving others watched that she did not harm herself, but despite their kind intent, a boy going fishing early in the morning found her floating in the Brazos, drowned. Her death dampened the continuing celebration of the return of the captives. Those self-righteous ones who had condemned her for her sufferings, for living through the endless rapes, beatings and abuse, repented of their censure of this helpless, pitiable victim, too late. Some other sanctimonious, unforgiveable souls believed that she met her deserved punishment. May God forgive their blindness.

Yes, it was too late for poor Ruth, but as a consequence of the suffering and demise of this lonely soul, the others of the survivors, especially the two women, were extended every loving-kindness from some of those who had most reviled and vilified Ruth. God works in mysterious ways. Prayers were sincerely spoken that sweet Ruth was safe and at peace in the arms of The Savior, and her loving family. Surely Ruth was in heaven, she had suffered an undeserved and unjust sentence in hell.

The contingent of returning captives, citizen volunteers and soldiers meandered generally southwards, staying together, being cheered in small settlements, communities and forts along the way. Eventually arriving at the Concho Rivers, the coaches, wagons, ambulances, saddle horses and mules stopped on the parade ground of Fort Concho. Jan and her children, Ann and Little Tim, as well as Winnie and Pleasant found themselves among neighbors and other welcoming, friendly faces, people eager to help them reestablish their lives.
A gaggle of newspapermen again swarmed to the captives, especially thick around Pleasant and Winnie, but Major John P. 'Dobe' Hatch was there to shoo them away with an eager squad of bayonet-bearing infantrymen to escort them safely into the fort infirmary. The commandant ushered the twins straightaway into a room off of a dividing hallway, and within those hallowed walls, sitting by a window in a wheelchair with tears running down her smiling, burn-scarred face was Susannah Thompson, Momma, one arm in a sling and the other reaching out for them. They ran to her and fell on their knees to embrace her.

"Easy children, be gentle with her. She's still very fragile," the fort surgeon, Doctor Notson urged them, then he and Major Dobe left, closing the door behind them.

"Momma."

"Momma!"

"Momma, we thought you were dead."

"Why didn't they tell us you were alive?"

"They should have told us, I hate them!"

"No," their mother breathed softly, barely audible, "Hush now,...listen to me."

Susannah took a deep breath and wiped away some joyous tears, then spoke just above a whisper, "Pleasant, if you would have known that I was barely alive, would you have gone to get your sister or returned to be with me? And Winnie, if you'd have known I was fighting for my life here, would you have come to me or gone for your brother? Both of you would have been torn between coming to me and helping your twin. You would have carried guilt with you forever because of forsaking one of us. You each needed to concentrate on what you were doing, you didn't need to have me to worry about too. And the truth is I'm just now "out of the woods" as the doctor said. There was no guarantee that I would live another day. You believed me dead. Should I have you suffer my death twice? Double your grief? No. It was my choice to keep my bare survival from you, all these good people honored
my wishes. But now,...now, the three of us have survived. We have only Poppa to mourn. Juanio. Durnit."

Susannah had expended her little strength, these last words were more breathed than spoken.

"Oh Momma."
"Thank God you're alive!"
"Do you understand?" Susannah whispered.
"Yes."
"Umhuh."
"Oh I love you two!"
"We love you too Momma."
"Umhuh."

The tears were of sorrow and joy, of loss and restoration. Tenderly they held on to one another physically. Emotionally they grasped one another desperately. No further words were spoken, all communication was through their touch, their tears. Silent prayers of gratitude were lifted up to their Savior.

Smiling Dog stood silently watching the reunion. She felt like an outsider, just as she had when Shaking Hand had beaten her and all those she had shared her whole life with, even the sweet children, treated her as if she no longer existed, as if they could not see or hear her. She turned to leave the room but Winnie's eye caught the movement looking over her mother's shoulder to see the downcast, lonely woman who had treated her so kindly moving toward the door, head down, shoulders slumped. She ran to her, took her hands and pulled her to stand before her mother and wiping her face on a donated handkerchief began to explain to Susannah.

"This is Smiling Dog. She was the wife of Shaking Hand, the cruel Comanche chief who took us. She was like a mother to me. She saved me, and she saved Pleasant. For her kindness she has been driven from her people. She is a true friend. She has no one but us. Can she stay with us Momma? She loves me Momma, and I love her."

In answer, Susannah struggled to stand, pushing with her thin arms on the rests of the wheelchair. When she was
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shakily standing, she smiled at Smiling Dog and held out her arms to her. Each of them tried to blink back tears but were unable to stop the release of emotion as they came into one another's arms. Winnie, then Pleasant surrounded the pair with their own bruised and battered arms. From this moment there was an unspoken, and forever unbroken pact that bound them throughout what life was to bring.

The road to the Thompson place had become well traveled in the fortnight since the return of the twins, wagonloads of lumber and rock, fenceposts and shingles and all manner of building materials and donated housewares, dishes and pots and pans and quilts and bedding and tables and all the items that make a house a home. Good neighbors were a-plenty around the Conchos, Old Tankersley, Mister and Misses Sarge Nasworthy, J.L. Millspaugh, Bert DeWitt, Dutch Henry and many of the volunteers from The Flat as well as a rotating gang of soldiers were all pitching in to help restore the Thompson home. Of course the Thompsons were not aware of any of this and were itching to be released by the post doctor so they could begin the work of restoring their place.

Winnie spent most of her days helping William M. Notson, the fort surgeon, learning and assisting the medics in treating and caring for the injured and ill. Her displayed and expressed devotion for the welfare of the patients made her a favorite with everyone around the infirmary. Doc Notson, in a rare moment of rest, requested that Winnie afford him a few minutes in his office. Once settled in with a cool glass of lemonade the doctor began to speak his mind.

"Miss Thompson, it is evident to anyone who has witnessed your behavior since your arrival here that you care deeply for these unfortunates who suffer various maladies. You have been among the Indians for awhile of course, and one of the most savage tribes, the Comanche. I would be interested to
know whether you observed any sympathy for others within those savage's camps."

The doctor and Winnie both looked to the door where the old Reverend Doctor Witt now stood.

"Come in Doctor, come in."

"Please, don't let me disturb this interesting inquiry. Just let me listen in. Go ahead Miss Winnie, answer the man."

"Hello Doctor Witt. Well, yes sir, I saw a few, but just a few of the Comanches who seemed to care for others. And, come to think about it, they were all women. Not all the women seemed to care about others much, not even most of them. They seemed to do what they did out of necessity or fear of being beaten by the men. I was blessed to have been given to one who cared for me. You know her, Smiling Dog. She tends me and my family as if we were her own. And we are her closest friends, think of her as family now. She saved me from serious injury, maybe death, and saved Pleasant from being burned alive by her crazy husband, Shaking Hand. She was the exception. She would have given her life for me. I believe that."

"Strange. Among these wild tribes even the mothers of wee babes don't seem to care much for their children, at least not like mothers of European stock," Doctor Notson said.

"The children run around filthy and naked and usually eat scraps like the camp dogs. The girls are roughly trained in the work of squaws and the boys in the ways of war, theft and cruelty, but deprived of any lessons in compassion."

"They're mean! Evil and mean! They laugh at the screams of the captives they torture. They treat their animals better than their captives and don't treat their animals very well at all," Winnie interjected.

Wash strolled from leaning in the door frame to lounge in a straightback chair by the window, hat in hand.

"The purpose of my inquiry is to further establish my theory concerning the origen of love, kindness, empathy and the other humane emotions," Notson explained.
Winnie had to pay close attention to the doctor’s words to gather an inkling of what he spoke of.

“It seems ever more clear to me that good in a person seems to derive from the emotional trait of empathy. Empathy appears to be the foundation, the soil, the nutrients from which grow the fruits of charity, compassion, benevolence and sacrifice which comprise brotherly love, and the goodness of humanity.

“I have seen babies less than a year old which exhibit facial expressions which communicate their distress toward a person in pain, even to reach out and touch in an effort to relieve the suffering. A year or so older I’ve witnessed toddlers move to hug and comfort another in pain.

“Not all children demonstrate this seemingly innate humanity however, some seem totally unaffected by another’s affliction and others obviously enjoy viewing another’s affliction, even laughing at their calamity. This lack of empathy in childhood is often an augur of an inability to feel guilt in adulthood, or at least a separate moral model than the one our society has adopted.

“And then there are those societies such as the Comanche ‘Nation’ that seems to teach, expect and honor viciousness, callousness and evil, which perceives empathy, kindness and good as a weakness to be exploited for selfish gain against those who are so foolish as to make themselves vulnerable.

“My search is for the origin of empathy. Is it taught? Yes, certainly, but that does not seem to be its genesis I have come to believe that the potential for goodness, for empathy, is borne in the blood, passed from generation to generation, a certain predisposition, a predestination to be nurtured by families and societies. Children which exhibit this precious love for family and others are prized in our culture, treasured and aided in every manner to become successful.”

“And adversely,” Wash interposed, “Those born without this potentiality for empathy or goodness because of disease
or the injury or sins of preceding generations, or those born into societies that have made concerted efforts to suppress and eliminate such 'womanly' behavior never experience the phenomena of empathy and its related 'fruits'. And such a child born with no potentiality for goodness or conscience into a culture of Christianity such as ours will not arouse any desire to nurture him with love and care. Thus, both ends of the spectrum, both good and evil, are proliferated. Is this your thinking Doctor Notson?"

"Yes, Doctor Witt. Well stated. Winnie, you witnessed first hand how your true friend here, Smiling Dog, suffered for her goodness within an evil society. Christ-like, if you will. Finally, she was banished, beaten and driven away for her kindness, her empathy. And are we of the 'Christian' culture superior, when we treat those born without the potential for empathy just as the so-called 'heathens' have treated Smiling Dog?"

Sweet Smiling Dog did not understand a single word that the doctor spoke, she was only aware he spoke of her because of his hand gestures and their glances toward her. She reacted as was her nature, kindly, with a smile, a spontaneously curious smile.

"Smiling Dog follows you everywhere you go doesn't she? Winnie, you must keep in mind that though she most certainly saved you and your brother, you saved her life too. She has found in you her own kind, one born in congenital kindness. Smiling Dog almost certainly has blood from another clan, for how could empathy be born into and survive such a society as the barbarian Comanches? To us, she is a hero. To the Comanches, she is a traitor, weak and contemptible. Now, only now, Smiling Dog is home. I hope you will allow her to stay with you Winnie."

"Oh yes! Always. I love her." Winnie held out her arms to her great friend, her protector.

"I'm sorry Miss Winnie, I should not presume to impose
my opinions so blatantly. Forgive me."

"Doctor, there's nothing to forgive. I didn't even understand everything you said, but I have opinions too, though I'm sure not as smart and educated as you, and Doctor Witt. My opinion is that most of them Comanches are jes' mean, evil and mean. Dangerous too. We never meant them no harm and they did all they could do to hurt us. They need a good killing,..." Winnie glanced at Smiling Dog, "...Most of 'em."

"Doctor Notson, have you considered perhaps the necessity of certain people's development of both empathy and callousness for survival purposes?" Wash asked.

"Yes, you're right I believe. Since tribes had to compete for space and food and water and so forth, some members of a tribe which were almost certainly always men, had to become vicious and inured to violence. And, over generations, the physically stronger men influenced the women to teach the children to be thick-skinned, hard-hearted. And thusly, perhaps, cold, heartless lack of compassion came to be celebrated as it enhanced the probability of survival.

"Kind-heartedness, or empathy seems likely to have been of a maternal origination through the caring and nurture of the young and the injured provider. The young, the sick and the injured must be cared for and these acts enhanced the likelihood of the survival of the tribe."

"And in this manner," Wash appended, "Humans became both angel and devil."

"We do what we must, don't we?" Doctor Notson summarized.

"Or, sometimes, we do what we can," Wash answered, looking up from the floor to peer through the window into the distance.
"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven; A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;.....A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace."

-Ecclesiastes 3:1-4,8

After another week in the Fort Concho infirmary, Pleasant and Susannah were informed that they could leave for their land the following morning. Doctor Notson gave them warnings regarding over-exertion. As a result of the actions of Major Dobe Hatch, newspapermen had found other events elsewhere that needed their attention. A few other of the citizens of the settlement had asked to be notified of the release of the Thompsons and the Nasworthy family had donated a wagon pulled by army 'decommissioned' mules. The wagonbed was filled with staples and stores from Sterling Robertson's General Store and well-wishers hurrahed them all along the way.

Susannah gratefully sat on and leaned back on a bunch of pillows Misses Frank Tankersly sent along from her hotel, knowing that Pleasant and Susannah were still tender from their burns and wounds. An army escort surrounded the wagon and their arrival was cheered by an unexpected group.

There had been an obvious effort to delay their return to the ranch and Susannah suspected that there was a general benevolent effort to clean up the burned structures and perhaps erect an army tent for the family's use until they could construct permanent shelter. She had overheard snippets of conversation that hinted that something was being prepared for them but she certainly wasn't prepared for what confronted her at the last turn of the road.
It seemed to the Thompsons that they had been transported back in time, for the house that stood where the ashes of their former dwelling had been was almost identical to the house that the four of them had constructed, piece by piece, over the past few years. Except it was all new, freshly painted and furnished in every way with gifts of furniture, chairs and tables, beds with newly stuffed feather mattresses, freshly made rag quilts and rugs, pots, pans, dishes in spacious cupboards, it was all too wonderful. It seemed everyone for miles around had contributed something, those who had little had chipped in their time and work. The Thompsons were so grateful. God's hand was not shortened, He had many to lend. Susannah could not find the words to thank them, she cried. And Winnie cried. Which made Smiling Dog cry. Pleasant didn't really understand what all the crying was about, he was smiling and shaking hands and thanking everybody. He was a bit concerned about the womenfolk though. They would cry awhile, then laugh. Women were just beginning to confuse him. He was of that age when he wanted to understand women, and just as all other men, he never would. They would remain an intriguing mystery.

There was no shed for the animals built yet, but there was stacked lumber and a pile of stone blocks that had been brushed and washed of the soot that had covered them. There was firewood cut and stacked and a corral fenced in to hold the army mules. There was a whitewashed outhouse with a tin roof not far from the back of the house. And there was a henhouse and hardy bantam hens all over the yard. A littler boy than Pleasant walked up to him and handed him a little, wriggling hound dog puppy.

"She ain't been named yet, that's up to you I guess. Ever boy should have a dog. Now you got one Pleasant."
"Why, thank you. What's your name, sorry I forgot."
"Chez. We used ta fish together some. 'Member?"
"Oh yea, down by the honeybee tree."
"Yep. The honeybee tree."
Harsh weather was always a consideration there on the western frontier and the men had already dug the hole for a storm cellar but had yet to complete it. Also, cold weather wasn't far away and shelter for the animals must be provided. So, three men had stayed and would abide in the tent the army had loaned and would help the family finish these two necessary structures. All the other neighbors and good folks who had lent a hand or had given what they were able from their good hearts shook hands, hugged, blessed the returning survivors and left them to rebuild a life together.

The Thompsons and Smiling Dog sat on the bright new porch with the three men who had stayed for a short while, just quietly settling in. The day had exhausted Susannah and she and Winnie, with Smiling Dog following, retired first. Pleasant was obviously in need of rest also but he had determined to sit with the good men as long as they wanted to linger and talk. Aware of Pleasant's condition and his grateful hospitality the three men left for their tent in the gloaming, leaving the boy to go in the house to bed.

Pleasant watched the good neighbors retire to their tent and he stood letting his mind go where it would. Looking at the ground before the porch Pleasant could see no sign of the ashes he had drug Momma through, Nor was there any indication of where Poppa fell from the wagon. The only physical evidence of the Comanche's unprovoked attack was in the scars carried by the surviving family, and the grave containing the mutilated remains of Pleasant John Thompson Senior atop the slight hill. The family had visited Poppa's grave earlier in the day with some of the neighbors and had thanked them for their respectful Christian burial of Poppa, but Pleasant found himself standing before the grave once again, trying to see through the mound of packed earth, trying to make contact with his Poppa. Words came unbidden, unplanned.

"I did my best Poppa. I heard you talkin' ta me all tha way. Thank you for your he'p Poppa. An' thank God for
His he'p too. I wish mor'n anythang that you's still here Poppa ta tell me what ta do. All I can do is what I learned from you Poppa, 'bout plowin' an' plántin', 'bout cattle an' savin' money an' takin' care of the fam'ly. I still hear your voice tellin' me what ta do sometimes,...hope you'll keep on doin' that. I miss you Poppa,...you're still my hero,...I love you."

Pleasant sat down there before the grave and cried in the dark until he was cried out, then he walked to the well, washed his face, drank the cool, sweet water from the dipper, looked up into the black velvet sky shimmering with a million stars and felt Poppa looking down on him. He heard the encouraging words from his Poppa clearly,"You'll do well son, jes' take care of the womenfolk an' foller your heart. You'll do well."

Pleasant never would tell anyone that he heard his Poppa talk to him from time to time, they'd know for sure he was crazy then. But it was a blessing to hear him, a comfort.

Susannah heard Pleasant come in and settle down in the small closet-like room on the other side of the small house, then heard the puppy crying. Pleasant whispered something to the puppy and Susannah knew without seeing that Pleasant had lifted the hound up into the bed with him. She smiled. He was looking so much more like John as he grew older. It wouldn't be long until he would be a man, in fact most of his ways were mature beyond his years already. He even walked like John. She lay there for a long time, physically exhausted but unable to sleep in the new, but familiar surroundings. She needed her John.

Winnie had made Smiling Dog get into the bed with her, trying to get her accustomed to living like the rest of the family. And Smiling Dog was still until she heard the soft breathing of Winnie that told her the girl slept, then she edged off of the high, soft mattress and spread a blanket on the floor. She was still thinking about the strange ways of white people when sleep overtook her.
It bothered Winnie that Smiling Dog followed her everywhere at her heel like a dog, slept on the floor beside her bed like a dog, had only learned some basic commands,—come, stay, sit,—like a dog. She had been treated like a dog her whole life, worse sometimes among the Comanches. It would take a good while to change that. The Thomspsons had talked about it and they agreed that the first thing was to teach her English so that they could communicate and they all patiently taught her throughout each day. And the more they could communicate their wishes for her, the more confident she became in her place among them. Within a few months Pleasant was able to build a room onto Winnie's room for her. Smiling Dog was proudly pleased to have her own place, something that she had never had before. She wove blankets to hang from the walls and made paints to draw scenes of the family on the ranch. Childlike stick drawings of which she was proud. She seemed to smile even more then. Everyone agreed to forget the 'dog' from her name and just call her Smiling.

Thanks to the reward money they had paid Pleasant for the dead banditos and the return of the horses, the Thomspsons were able to purchase some Hereford stock and make it through that first winter without much hardship. Pleasant's health was completely restored, though his head wounds may have caused some problems with his thinking. He seemed to get angry about inconsequential things sometimes and that made him feel guilty and sorry for talking bad to people too often. People seemed to avoid him and that wasn't what he wanted. When he tried being friendly some people grew leary and that made him feel oafish. So, his silence around most others was his natural habit.

Susannah went slowly and quietly through her days also, she couldn't seem to shake her sorrow. The first few weeks back at the ranch her health seemed to improve and she seemed to be happy to be with her children. But, as autumn's yellow leaves sprinkled down from the mesquite and the warm air began
to cool and chill into winter's stinging winds, her health seemed to mirror her thoughts. She grew quiet, introspective, and would go walking alone over the prairie.

One cold, foggy morning in December, Winnie awoke and dressed and when she walked into the kitchen she found only Smiling there feeding the cookstove with firewood.

"Where is Momma?"

Smiling walked to a window and pointed, "Momma go up hill."

Winnie grabbed a rag coat and walked up the hill to her mother who stood beside the place that the neighbors had buried Poppa. Her mother's eyes were not on the ground that her husband lay beneath but into the eastern horizon where the sunlight lit the morning fog with a golden glow. Even the birds were silent that cold, still morn, the only sound Winnie's feet breaking the thin layer of frozen dew covering the ground. Susannah held her arms out to her beloved daughter as she approached and hugged her to her frail, thin body.

"Momma, it's cold out here, come back inside."

Susannah trembled in Winnie's arms and spoke in a whisper, "Winnie,...one morning not so long ago,...oh! you seemed so much younger then! I was so much younger too. Your father and I, my John, we woke up before daylight and before I could get breakfast on he took me by the hand and led me here, right here where they've buried him,...it's like he knew where he would lie."

A tear slipped down Susannah's cheek and Winnie hugged her closer.

"We sat here on this little hill, just John and me, beneath this skinny little tree and we just held one another, not a word spoken, we just held one another and watched the sun come up into a beautiful, golden sky. The birds sang then, and I felt the life and the love and the promise and happiness deep down inside. Maybe that's because my heart was full of all that. The roosters crowed, the old milk cows bawled, the bees were already busy touching every tiny flower that
bloomed despite the drought. Life was so sweet. You an' Pleasant slept inside our snug little house, you two were our treasure, we had all we could ever ask for,...I was, ... happy, so happy. I want that feeling again,...but I'm afraid God only gives it just once in a lifetime. Oh, I miss my John,...so much."

Winnie held her beautiful mother, sought but could not gather words to comfort her. They simply cried together, trembled in the cold, golden morning, not a spoken word.

One evening, just before supper, Big Nose timely appeared. He was standing up in the stirrups when Pleasant first noticed him, placing and tying the bear skull on a high post at the corral gate. Pleasant walked out of the house, Winnie following.

"Well, hello Mister Johnson, glad you got yer health back," Pleasant held out his hand to shake with the giant.

"Hello to you Dead Bear. Hello to you sister of Dead Bear. I bring you the good medicine of the dead bear."

"Well, Mister Johnson, I'm a Christian. An' I b'lieve that my God brought me through all the hardship, not no dead bear. But,...never mind. Where you been?"

"Big Nose youngest wife have baby girl. Baby girl sick, but no sick now. I go get bear head for you Dead Bear. It good medicine. No Indian bother you when see head of bear."

"Well,...thanky, I guess."


"Good. He comes around here again, I'll make sure he's plenty dead," Winnie seriously spoke.

"Shaking Hand never come. Bad Hand chase many Comanche and Kiowa, Cheyenne too, make them go to reservation. Many soldier chiefs and buffalo soldiers chase wild Indians."
William W. Worley

"Bad Hand is Colonel Mackenzie," Pleasant explained to Winnie.

"Well, come inside Mister Johnson, it's suppertime. I expect yer hungry."

Big Nose smiled.

"Hope ya'll cooked a whole bunch," Pleasant warned.

"We got a big pot of red beans, we can fry some more taters if need be, and cook another buncha bisquits if need be."

"Well," Pleasant grinned, "Here's Need Be," Pleasant held out his hand to Big Nose.

Big Nose left the following morning after decimating most of a side of bacon and a dozen sourdough biscuits. Through the ensuing years he would return unexpectantly every few months to empty the pantry, coming less often as the years took their toll and aged his big bones. They all enjoyed hearing the news and the stories he told.

After Big Nose departed that first visit, Pleasant considered removing the big and ugly burned bone of the bear skull from the high post where it had been tied. That old bear certainly meant him harm, but God hadn't allowed it. Good had come from that bear's attack. That terrible bear had brought him a friend, had nourished him, closed and healed his wounds with its very guts, warmed him, protected him, shielded him and made his enemies fear him. Pleasant had climbed the fence with the intention of cutting the big skull down. But, God had certainly used the bear to bless him. It was a proverb that he would do well to remember. Pleasant jumped down from the fence, he would let the fearsome skull stay seated on the post where Mister Johnson had placed it. Not a trophy displayed to please his ego, not any honor to the bear, but a humbling reminder of God's mysterious ways and His power to bring good from evil, joy from sorrow, life from death.
William W. Worley

Old Wash lived out his days, as he thought he might, at Witt's End, visiting with cowboys and soldiers and the businessmen of the growing little burg of Angela. On slow days, and they came more often as the gin joints closer to the fort grew in number and popularity primarily because of the always available girls, Wash would sit on the porch with his boots on the rail, smoke his pipe and watch the river flow. Peanut had saved his money over the years and one day he bought a thoroughly used mule, threw his meager belongings up behind him after shaking Wash's hand and headed out for California. Wash never knew what happened to faithful Peanut after that.

Sometimes Doctor Notson would ride down the river to talk about some insightful and thought-provoking idea he had and sometimes LaDonna and Karmalita would invite him for a meal, but mostly old Wash was abandoned and lonesome. When Witt's End went a week without a paying customer, he climbed up a rickety old ladder that had lain behind the saloon for years and took loose the faded and cracked sign he had the man paint years before. He threw the sign down, a rung of the ladder broke and Wash fell down on top of the sign, his neck broken.

There were just a handful of people at his funeral, just some old people that no one paid much attention to anymore. There were a few words said that summarized his seventy plus years of living into a dry recital. A few tears were shed by old friends, then they blew their noses and he was lowered down into the dry, hot ground. Forgotten.

After the hole was filled with dirt and the gravediggers loaded their shovels into their wagon and left, a woman with a veil over her face walked to the grave, knelt and planted some flower seeds in the soil, watering them with her tears.

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Asa Hill visited the Thompson place after the new year had come. He brought gifts from Colonel Mackenzie and from Lieutenant Crowley. He brought the guns that the captives had brought into Fort Griffin, quite an armory of them all total. Pleasant's favorite gift was the big, noble cavalry horse that had carried him so very far. The horse had been well fed and cared for, restored to vibrant health, his coat well brushed and shining over the well-sculpted musculature.

Retired ranger Asa Hill was a welcome visitor through the years, he did his best to be a good friend to the boy (and the man he became), who had shot a hole in his hat. He learned much of the struggles, the feelings and thoughts of the twin heroes during these visits. He was even honored to be shown the woven necklace of Winnie's white-gold hair that she had retrieved from the young Comanche imp. Those humble, unassuming and private people opened their hearts to Asa Hill and accepted his promise not to tell their story until they had "crossed the river." Asa Hill hoarded the treasure of their tale through the passing of an age.

One warm winter afternoon Winnie found her Momma standing at the well sipping from the dipper. The precious moment in time less than a year before came to Winnie's mind, when she beheld the natural beauty of her mother, that last peaceful moment of the sweet life they had before tragedy descended upon them, before her mother's face was burned and scarred. That fleeting moment she would forever hold within her heart.

Susannah took her daughter's hand and Winnie quietly spoke to the gentle woman she loved so dearly.

"Momma, you used to tell me that beauty is only skin deep, but I think you were wrong. I think beauty can be deeper than that Momma, a whole lot deeper."

"Yes. There's different kinds of beauty isn't there
William W. Worley

Winnie?"

Susannah looked at her child, her fingers lightly touching the halo of now evenly trimmed hair that had grown out so fast it seemed. She looked over Winnie's shoulder at Pleasant chopping firewood.

"I'm beginning to see that Winnie, and it's a joy to behold."

Winnie hugged her Momma and whispered "If only Poppa was here with us."

"Baby, he's here," Susannah touched her breast, "and here," she touched Winnie's breast. "Always will be, won't he? We'll all be together always, right there, closer than close," she tapped over Winnie young strong heart.

Her words warmed Winnie. Through her lifetime she visited the love of her family that was within her, through the good times and the bad.

Pleasant's face that looked back at him in the looking glass didn't look so bad he thought. Winnie was always after him to shave the white fuzz off his lip and chin, he usually did not concern himself with his looks much, but when they went into town Winnie and Susannah always had him clean up some. The burn scars he had were not as bad as his mothers, except the one ear melted to his head. Vainly, he supposed, he let his hair grow down long over his ears and cover the disfigurement.

The neighbor boys and all the boys in town flocked around Winnie whenever opportunity presented, and it made Pleasant smile, most times. Sometimes, when the boys seemed to get too familiar, he didn't like that. She was a beauty, he understood that, but he could not quell a tinge of jealousy at the prospect of losing his best friend to some boyfriend or even a husband before too long. The boys drew away when his eyes settled on them too long. It was like they could read his thoughts, and he didn't really wish them ill, but if he lost Winnie,
it would hurt. Because the other girls seemed to only want to watch him from a safe distance, like he was an unpredictable creature not to be approached. Without Winnie, he would be lonely.

After a couple of years, when the Thompsons prospects grew and they were able to hire a hand or two at times, Pleasant's social skills improved, he became more approachable to the fellows around his age, and more importantly, the girls began to smile and talk to him some. He became almost as magnetic to the girls as Winnie was to the boys. Almost.

She awoke before the dawn and the pain beneath her breast that had come more often now came again, but so much stronger. For a few minutes she seemed to be paralyzed and she hoped it wasn't permanent. She didn't want to be a burden. And she must walk, she had somewhere to go, someone to meet. Carefully she rose and she found the pretty dress that Misses Nasworthy had given her, the one that she knew John would like with the lace at the throat and sleeves and the pretty blue material about the color of her eyes. It was a slow struggle but she managed to slip it on over her thin frame. She could not manage shoes, but John always told her that she had pretty feet. She brushed her hair despite the pain and let the blonde tresses fall freely down her back and across her aching shoulders.

Quietly she paddled across the smooth floorboards and the rag rug that the neighbor ladies had given. Slowly, so slowly and carefully. She was anxious, but she must not fall, she might never get up again. And she didn't want to wake the children. Easing the heavy door open, she shuffled out across the yard, relishing the feel of the cool dew beneath her feet. The small amount of air she was able to pull into her chest smelled sweetly of sleeping wildflowers, rich earth and the promise of rain.
Some gentle spirit had woken Smiling. She stood up from her blanket and walked out into the dark violet morning. Silently she watched Winnie's mother inching up the little hill beside the house and Smiling somehow knew it was her time of passing. She knew she was not to interfere, she was to watch and guard Susannah until her children found her.

Finally, Susannah reached the place she was to meet her John and, using his sturdy wooden marker for support, lowered herself. She felt the cold, damp earth through the fabric of her dress welcome her and she smiled in her heart despite the pain. She let her memories transport her back to the happy, blessed times. She was so grateful to have been given those wonderful days. And just as the sun peeked over the far horizon; as the first shining rays of soft, promising light entered her sky blue eyes, she felt her John's loving arms slip around her once again, blending her tenderly into the golden light.

Pleasant and Winnie buried their beautiful Neara there beside their Poppa, John and Susannah forever facing the golden coming day. After full and happy years with family and friends, through rainy days and fair, the heroic twins were layed there too, peering into the eternally dawning day.