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The Gold in the Hill

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THE GOLD IN THE HILL

by

Jeffrey Clark Wood

B.A., St. Cloud State University, 1981
B.S., St. Cloud State University, 1987

Creative Work

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

St. Cloud, Minnesota

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This creative work submitted by Jeffrey Clark Wood in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.

Chairperson

Dean
School of Graduate and Continuing Studies

STATEMENT OF ARTISTIC INTENT

The Gold in the Hill is a historical fiction novel for juveniles, written to entertain, inform, and change attitudes.

The setting is Minnesota in the wake of the Dakota Conflict. The principal characters are David Hughes, a mixed-blood boy, and Good Singer, a Dakota boy. Through the eyes of these two 14-year-olds, young readers should understand the clash of cultures that killed more than 500 whites and caused the death or exile of nearly every Dakota.

David and Good Singer meet in the Dakota refugee camp below Fort Snelling in the fall of 1862. They develop a relationship based on mutual need. David seeks friendship, escape and adventure. Good Singer realizes his family's survival may depend upon David's help. The story climaxes with a nighttime journey to Scott County, where Good Singer and David dig for buried gold coins.

The Gold in the Hill should inform adolescent readers. The setting includes political and natural geographic features, as well as Minnesota flora and fauna. Through Good Singer young readers learn about Dakota language and culture. Saloon owner Abram Felsenthal tells of a pogrom in Prussia and a financial panic in St. Paul. Catherine Hughes' point of view presages the 20th century concept of cultural relativity.

Anti-Indian attitudes are Minnesota's most pervasive race-relations problem. Young readers should be repelled by the ethnocentrism, racism and cultural oppression evident throughout the novel. *The Gold in the Hill* is intended to help young readers appreciate all cultures, past and present, particularly that of the Santee Dakota.

PREFACE

I was born in New Ulm, where monuments and plaques proclaim the town's role in the Dakota Conflict of 1862. I grew up in Mankato, site of the largest mass execution in U.S. history. A monument at Pike and Main streets told the world: "38 Sioux Indians Hanged Here Dec. 26, 1862." As a boy I read about the conflict and visited most of the historic sites.

My childhood experiences became useful years later when I began teaching Minnesota history. I emphasized the Dakota Conflict because it illustrated valuable human relations concepts. My main teaching tool, Rhoda Gilman's *Northern Lights: The Story of Minnesota's Past,* delivered the historical facts in a balanced manner. I then used the events of the conflict to explain prejudice, ethnocentrism, racism and discrimination.

After two years of teaching this way, I realized the traditional cognitive approach was limited. Recognizing and rejecting racial oppression seemed to be an affective act. I wondered if the emotional appeal of a novel could better promote cultural relativity. I began writing a children's novel in June 1993, with the intention of using it in my classroom and as a master's thesis.

I read extensively and did research at Mendota, St. Paul and Prior Lake. Common Minnesota Plants, Readings in History, Advanced Fiction Writing and other courses in my program were helpful.

In January 1995, Dr. Ed Bavery began editing chapters, focusing on language, mechanics, characterization and plot. In April, my 6th grade reading students at Talahi Community School read the first complete draft and gave me frank feedback. In June, Dr. Roy Meyer critiqued the manuscript. Dr. Meyer is a retired English professor and author of *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial*, the definitive history of the Eastern Dakota.

Rhonda Wilson, an SCSU graduate student of Dakota and Omaha descent, also critiqued the manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Three State University System faculty emeriti edited or critiqued *The Gold in the Hill*: Dr. Ed Bavery, Dr. Truman Wood and Dr. Roy Meyer. Their efforts confirm the notion that teaching is a calling, not simply a job.

Dr. Bob Louisell, my adviser, helped me hurdle several bureaucratic barriers. He supported the idea of a novel from the outset and never gave up.

In the midst of a busy school year, Dr. Ed Pluth found time to direct an arranged course for me.

Dr. Christie Gordon and Dr. Dennis Nunes creatively solved the problem of writing a novel as a Creative Work.

Rhonda Wilson's praise and encouragement were much appreciated.

Graduate tuition and costs associated with the thesis were borne by the estate of the late Dorene Hoover, my maternal grandmother.

My wife, Julie Wood, told me I could write a children's novel. I am grateful.

To study the past is not to live in the past, but rather to gain a fundamental and humanistic perspective on the present.

William L. Barney
Department of History
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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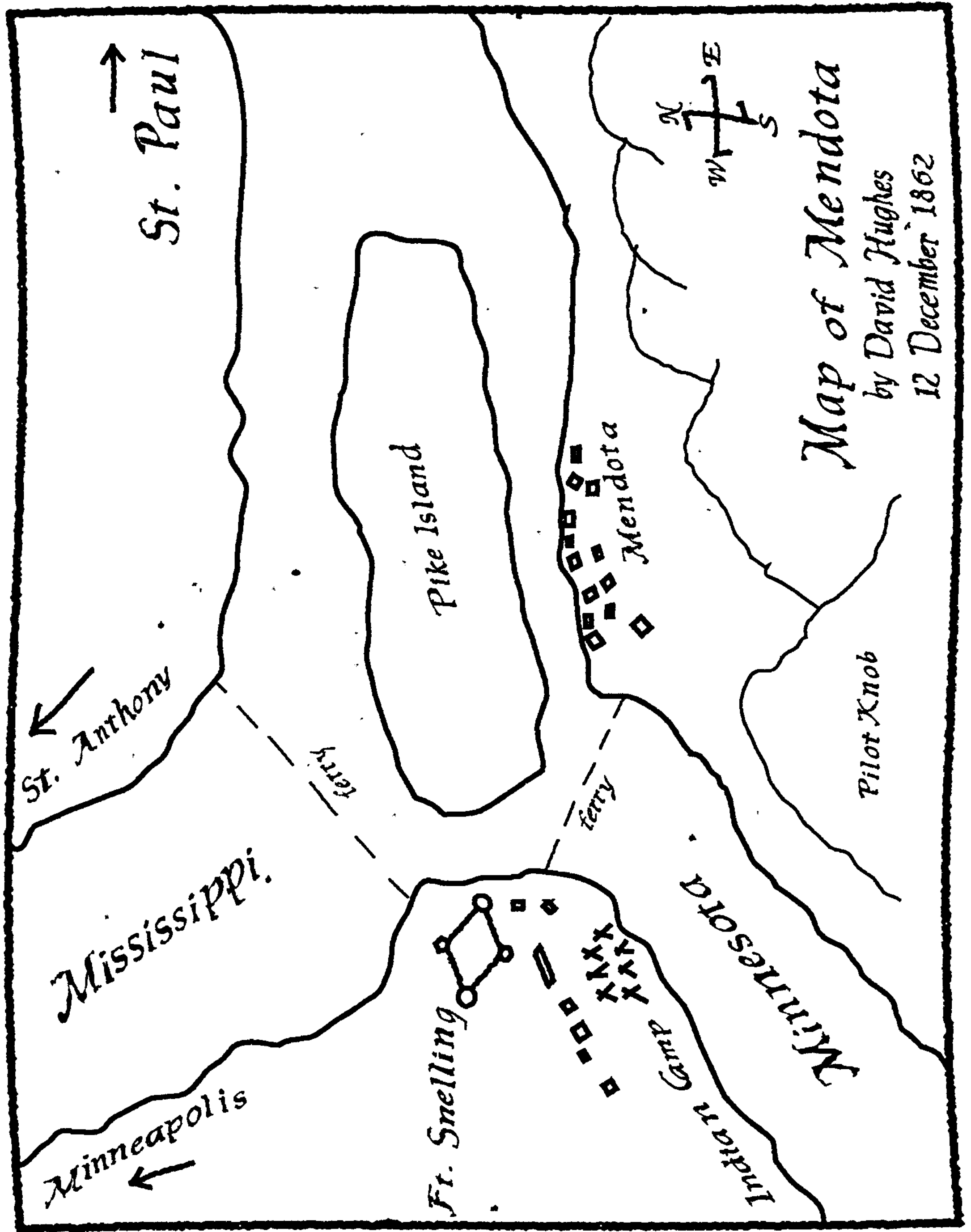
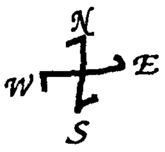

Map of Mendota
by David Hughes
12 December 1862
N
E
S
W
St. Paul
St. Anthony
Mississippi
Minneapolis
Pike Island
ferry
ferry
Mendota
Pilot Knob
Ft. Snelling
Indian Camp
Minnesota

Map of Minnesota

by David Hughes
20 December 1862

Ft. Ridgely
Battle of Birch Coulee
Battle of Wood Lake
Camp Release
The Gold in the Hill
(Maya mazazi hapi)

Mille Lacs Lake
St. Croix River
St. Cloud
Mississippi River
St. Anthony
St. Paul
Minneapolis
Mendota
Hutchinson
Chippewa River
Minnesota River
Dakota Territory
Swan Lake
Good Singer born here
New Ulm
Mankato
Ann's Farm
Blue Earth River
Des Moines River
Wisconsin
Iowa



PROLOGUE

The Santee Dakota tell a story of treasure buried on a hill in southern Minnesota. They call it *Maya mazazi hapi,* "the hill where the gold is buried." It is said that gold from treaties was buried for safekeeping on a hill west of Prior Lake.

Chapter 1

DAVID

David Hughes stepped onto the north shore and heaved a frosty sigh of relief. Crossing the Minnesota River on new ice was a hair-raising experience. If his mother found out, he'd be in a peck of trouble. Head down, shoulders hunched, he found the path and began walking.

Curiosity and a stiff December wind kept him moving toward the Indian camp below Fort Snelling. What would the Sioux look like, he wondered? Governor Ramsey called them blood-thirsty savages and said they'd killed hundreds and hundreds of people last summer. General Sibley, who led the expedition against the Sioux, wanted to hang 303 as an example to tribes throughout the west. David's father called them heathen and predicted the Army would ship the whole tribe out of state. His mother always found the good in people, always found something to cherish in even the most uncharitable person. She thought the Sioux were simply people, no better, no worse.

David paused to catch his breath and marvel at the massive limestone fortress above him on the bluff. Less than three years ago Fort Snelling was empty, save for a flock of sheep and a whole lot of cobwebs. Now it was crowded with soldiers itching to fight the Sioux or the southern Rebels.

The Sixth Minnesota was in winter garrison, preparing to hunt down Chief Little Crow and his followers, who had escaped to the western prairies after their defeat at Wood Lake. The Third Minnesota was reorganizing for service back East.

Men from both regiments often crossed over to Mendota to drink. David's father, who frequented Clement's Saloon, brought home their stories, including details of the Third's disgraceful surrender at Murfreesboro and its redemption against the Sioux at Wood Lake. David enjoyed tales of the encirclement at Birch Coulee, except for the parts about the 90 dead horses and the poor woman found wandering the prairie with Indian buckshot in her back.

He pushed on. The damp wind and memories of last summer's massacres made him shiver. Refugees from the frontier poured into eastern Minnesota cities, taking shelter in hotels, homes and businesses. They brought with them horrible tales of families slaughtered in their homes, of villages burned, of roadsides littered with scalped and mutilated bodies.

The Hugheses took in a refugee family from Blue Earth County. Jane Bowen and her daughters, Ann and Emma, met David's mother during a Ladies Association meeting in St. Paul. Mrs. Hughes and Mrs. Bowen talked more than they sewed and the next day the Bowens moved into the spare bedroom opposite David's. Mr. Bowen was searching for his son, Thomas, who disappeared during the Uprising.

Waves of wood smoke washed across David, bringing him back to the present. He stopped on the frozen-mud path and

looked at the board fence that hemmed in 1,600 Sioux. Gray-white clouds of smoke from hundreds of tipi fires billowed over the rectangular fence, which enclosed three acres. When David read about the camp in the *St. Paul Pioneer* he had quickly calculated the number of people per square foot. To his amazement, he figured each person got the equivalent of a five-foot-by-five-foot piece of ground. His bedroom at home was bigger than that, he thought.

David pulled up his coat collar as he neared the camp gate. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his Bible. The leather-bound book was the key to bluffing his way inside.

"Hello there, boy," called a sentry as David came into view. "Whatcha doin' down here this mornin'?"

"I'm here to preach," David said. He hefted the Bible in his hand and kept walking toward the camp gate. His face flushed as the sentry gave him the once-over. "Ain't you a bit young to be convertin' the Injuns?" The sentry who spoke was seated on a barrel with his back against the fence. A metal cup in his hand held coffee, and perhaps more. A partner was dozing downwind of their fire, unaware his uniform was sprinkled with ash. Two muskets were propped against a large stack of firewood.

"Uh, my father is Reverend Hughes. He's in Mankato preaching to the condemned Indians. He sent me here to do his work."

David was lying. His father was a traveling tinker and trader. He was in Mankato, all right, selling his pots and

pans to refugees. David hoped this soldier wasn't familiar with local clergy.

"Go on, then," the sentry said. "But you got competition. Reverend Williamson and Reverend Hinman been comin' regular."

Trembling, David watched the gate open. "Watch out for the little ones," the sentry called after him. "They'll hound you for food, money, anything." David kept walking, deaf to the guard's warnings. There were people everywhere: crowded around fires, huddled in groups, stamping their feet to keep warm. Axes chopping wood echoed counterpoint to the music of a hundred conversations.

The camp was a jumbled mess of two-toned tipis, brown at the base and smoke-blackened at the top. Between the tipis were piles of kindling and firewood. The air was hazy with harsh smoke that burned in David's nostrils, a far cry from the fragrant aroma of his mother's hearth. Muddy snow and clumps of horse dung made him step carefully. To his left were wagons and two-wheeled carts. All around were inquiring eyes.

A woman with a child on her back was emptying a kettle of gray water along the fence. Small boys were running between the tipis, weaving a playful path through the wood piles. Groups of women and old men stared at David, their eyes flinty with suspicion.

David felt a tug on his sleeve. A small boy half his size looked up at him and said, "Candy?" Another boy approached him, wearing a man's Sunday suit coat. David

pulled a handful of his mother's fudge from his pocket. As he shared the sweets, a third boy, this one taller and older, called out to him: "You are a reverend's son? You tell us about Jesus?"

David blinked. More children came. David felt fingers on his coat sleeves, hands pummeling his back. Dozens of dirty palms wriggled before him. He passed out fudge as fast as he could. The tall boy stepped closer, hands on hips, waiting for David's answer.

"Yes. No! I mean, I'm here because I . . ." David was confused by the older boy's blunt question and unsmiling stare. David pulled candy from his pockets and fumbled for an answer. He noticed the tall boy's shabby appearance. Filthy fingers held together a blanket that covered the boy from shoulders to shins. Woolen pant legs and tattered moccasins showed beneath the frayed end of the blanket.

David turned out his coat pockets and held his hands, palms up, to show the candy was gone. The shouting children were standing so close David could not move.

"I told the soldier at the gate my father sent me here to preach. That's why I brought the Bible, to get past the sentries." The children--calling to him in Sioux and English--were so loud that David had to raise his voice. "I'm only visiting! I'm not going to preach!"

The tall Indian boy lunged toward the children, scattering them with a shouted command and a wave of his hand. Then he turned and walked off. David followed, whistling tunelessly. He could feel eyes all over his body.

Heads turned, conversations stopped, as David followed the older boy along the narrow paths between tipis. Mingled with the smoke was the smell of unwashed bodies, of rubbish, of human waste. David tried to stay calm, but his stomach was churning. The other two boys tagged along a step behind to keep the young children away. At last, David was led into a tipi. He felt the warmth immediately and was grateful. The older boy gestured for him to sit down by the fire.

"I am Good Singer," the older boy began. "I am called *Tantanyandowan*. I speak English from Doctor Williamson's school."

David fumbled in his coat pocket. The three boys leaned forward, expecting candy. He smiled sheepishly, pulled out an inkwell and pen, and set them on the dirt-covered floor. "My name is David Hughes. I am fourteen. I live at Mendota, across the river." He pointed his pen at the older boy. "How old are you?"

"Same," the boy answered.

David listened and wrote quickly on the blank pages of his Bible. On pages meant for family births, deaths, and marriages, he scratched out the beginnings of a journal. Dipping the pen in the inkwell, David looked at the smaller boys. "What are your names?"

"They talk Dakota," Good Singer answered. "This is The Owl. He is Blue Turtle."

David nodded a greeting. In the Bible he noted that The Owl wore the suit coat and the small one who coughed and

sneezed was Blue Turtle. He also noted that Good Singer referred to his people as Dakota, rather than Sioux.

"What do you want," Good Singer asked, abruptly. "Why are you here? We have nothing left to take."

"I won't take anything," David said. "I'm only looking around."

Good Singer translated, then began arguing with The Owl. Blue Turtle argued, too, when he wasn't coughing. The flow of strange syllables fascinated David. It sounded to him like a mixture of nasal, guttural and long-vowel sounds, sprinkled with strange clicks and shooshes. When they stopped arguing and looked at him, David tried again to explain his presence in the camp.

"I'm--I was curious. I don't have anywhere else to go." It was true. He didn't fit in with the other boys. One day they liked him. The next day they were on him like mosquitoes, stinging him with taunts and insults. He ran home many times with the chant, "Mama's Boy! Mama's Boy!" echoing in his ears.

Or, they'd start in on his looks. David had brown eyes and black hair and a nut-brown complexion that kept its color clear through the winter. The fair-skinned boys of Mendota would dream up outrageous lies to explain David's appearance.

"You part nigger, Hughes, or part Injun?"

David would explain that his mother's family was black Welsh, from the island of Anglesea in Wales.

"Wales? You're part whale, then." The laughter would begin. Then pushing and shoving. "Which kind a whale are

you, Davey-boy? Blue whale? Sperm whale?" The laughter would get louder. The boys would try to trip him.

"He sure ain't a white whale like Moby Dick! Hey! Hughes ain't Moby Dick. He's Moby Dark!"

By that time David was usually on his back on the ground, looking up at a world in which he didn't belong.

Life wasn't a whole lot better back at the house. On the rare days his father was home, Humphrey Hughes loomed over David like a lightning bolt in a thundercloud, ready to strike with criticism at a moment's notice. His father's kind of lightning struck the same place more times then he cared to recall. No matter what he did, he couldn't please Humphrey Hughes.

David continued to immerse himself in his thoughts as the Sioux boys talked among themselves. And he began sketching a stuffed wren that hung from a lodge pole above Good Singer. Sketching often helped him think. He outlined the small bird's basic shape, then added the head and cocked tail. He could sense the boys watching him, because their conversation had slowed to an occasional phrase or word. The individual feathers were difficult to draw because the ink was thick and stiff-flowing. David moved the inkwell closer to the fire. In a rush, it came to him. The reason he came to the camp spurted from his mouth, as if someone was speaking for him.

"I want to be friends. Can't we be friends?"

Good Singer looked puzzled. The Owl picked fudge from his teeth. Blue Turtle coughed, wetly. They watched David

as he put the finishing touches on his sketch. Finally, Good Singer cleared his throat and spoke:

"Bring us food."

Chapter 2

GOOD SINGER

Wasicun. It meant "takes the fat." The Dakota people called whites *wasicun* because they took without giving. They bought without paying. They killed without feeling. Good Singer hated them.

He didn't know what to think of this *wasicun* boy. What did he want? Years ago the Dakota people were rich with land and food. Now they were poor. Once they were powerful. Today they were feared and hated--strangers in their own land. What could this David Hughes boy want with the Dakota now?

The change happened years before Good Singer was born. His grandmother talked often of days gone by when the prairie teemed with buffalo, when deer and bear were plentiful in the river valleys and the Big Woods. His grandfather once hunted in seven different river valleys. Good Singer knew only the Minnesota River. And he knew only traders' flour and brine pork.

The Dakota would never enjoy deer hunts that fed a band for a moon. Bowls of bear fat would never again brighten their diet. Even roots and berries could not be found where they once were. The animals had been slaughtered or driven toward the setting sun. The trees were eaten by the saw

mills that made boards on every river. The grass was buried by the farmers.

Good Singer knew only a barren land. He could almost count on his fingers and toes the times he'd eaten deer. The only buffalo he'd eaten was bought from traders or bartered from his western cousins. It was dried or jerked, not fresh. His mouth watered when cousins bragged about his grandfather eating half a haunch in one sitting.

Grandfather had been a hunter. Grandmother was a gatherer. Now the Dakota were waiters. They waited for treaty money. They waited for whiskey sellers. They waited for tomorrow.

While the Dakota were waiting their children were dying. Good Singer helped bury Red Hawk yesterday and Lives in the Sky this morning. Both had been children of his mother's band. He worried that some day he might have to bury a friend or family member. Would it be Blue Turtle? His friend's cough sounded worse and he had not been seen today.

Sadness seized Good Singer's thin body as he imagined a safer, happier, life outside the board fence. Life on the reservation suddenly seemed wonderful. He'd lived along the south shore of *Wakpaminisota* as long as he could remember. When he was 10 winters half the reservation was sold. Now, in his fourteenth winter, the people had no land. And they were scattered. Some, like his father, were imprisoned at Mankato. Some were wandering the prairies. Some--like Good Singer, his mother and sister--were held in the crowded camp below the fort. He hated living there, penned up like the

white man's buffalo. It was humiliating. Tears of frustration welled in Good Singer's eyes.

Day and night the people talked of their fate. Rumors swirled about the camp like the dirty snow that blew in gusts between the tipis: *We will be forced to live with our thick-lipped enemies, the Ojibway. We will be sent to the white man's South, where it is forever hot. The soldiers will hang us.*

Sickness was sweeping through the camp, attacking children and old people. The sick ones made the noises of their diseases. Coughing and moaning buffeted Good Singer's tipi like the wind before a storm, making sleep difficult. When death approached, sleep was impossible. The women would wail and the singing and crying would echo across the camp. Tempers flared and there were shouting matches, until healthy families shunned those who lived among the sick. Good Singer's mother said the people were acting like buffalo trapped by hunters in a coulee. Instead of massing together as a herd and forcing their way free, they were milling about blindly, goring each other with their horns. Sickness would claim many more if the people did not band together, she said.

The size of the burial ground frightened Good Singer. To comfort his mother, Good Singer sucked on a pebble to keep from coughing and made a great show of how healthy he was. He told his sister, Her Knife, to do the same.

He thought often of his father. A recent letter from the prison, written by a missionary, had been bittersweet.

It was joyous proof his father was still alive. But, it was a painful reminder that the family was divided.

The Owl poked his head though the tipi flap, startling Good Singer: "The soldiers are talking to your sister. Hurry!" He followed his friend to the gate area. Near the two-wheeled carts they saw Her Knife facing a trio of soldiers. The men were laughing. His sister seemed in no hurry to leave. Good Singer and The Owl edged closer, but remained out of sight.

"Hey, girlie girl. Why don't you talk to me? Hey! Look at me! You're always looking at the ground. Look here, I got a blanket for you." The speaker had a red beard and was called Broyhill.

Good Singer flinched when the burly soldier reached out and lifted his sister's chin with a red-haired hand. "Well, well. Look at them pretty eyes. What might your name be?"

Her Knife stood still, her legs and feet rigid like the roots of a cottonwood tree. She cast her eyes downward but held out a beaded bag with trembling hands.

"This trainin' and drillin' ain't exactly a day at the fair. Me and my companion want some fun before we whip them Johnny Rebs. We could leave for Tennessee any day now. So, how 'bout a little kiss?"

"This ain't a dance, Broyhill. And she ain't no belle," Kenney said. "Get on with it, man. She don't understand a lick of what you're sayin'. Get on with it!"

"Shut up, Kenney," Broyhill said. "Girlie, we don't want no beads. We want you to come to the gate tonight."

Good Singer stepped into the soldiers' line of sight. He boldly walked toward the men, singing the Dakota tune of terror. Broyhill laughed at him and mocked his singing. Kenney pitched stones at Good Singer and laughed louder still when the stones found their mark. Neither soldier saw The Owl pull the girl to safety among the tipis. When The Owl and his sister were out of sight, Good Singer dashed behind the carts and continued running until he reached his tipi. Once inside he bellowed at his sister.

"You do not have to talk to the soldiers. You trade, and then you come back," he shouted. The Owl slipped out of the tipi to avoid the war of words.

"You do nothing! All you do is daydream and complain," his sister said. "I have to talk to the soldiers. They have better food."

"They have Father in their prison. What if they hang him? Will you still talk to the soldiers?"

"You cannot trade without talking," she said. "If Mother and I do not trade with them, we will not live to see what they do to Father."

Before Good Singer could respond, their mother stepped into the tipi. He held his tongue and swallowed his pride. This time he would let Her Knife have the last word. He did not want to upset his mother. He paced in an arc around the fire to release his anger.

When he was able to talk calmly he told them what he was doing to help the family. He described the chance meeting with the white boy. He glared at his sister when he

explained that David would bring food and write letters for them. "For doing this he wants nothing in return," Good Singer added.

"Whites always take," said his mother, shaking her head. "They are stronger so they take what they want. He will want something. Stay away from him." She sat by the fire. "There are two kinds of people. There are people who take and people who share. Since time began we have divided what our hunters killed. Do not trust the whites. They are takers. They take from each other. They take from us. They have taken everything from me but my children. Stay away!"

"You don't understand. He is going to write letters for us," Good Singer said. "He is different. I think he will share."

"Hah!" his mother said. "I want to see this boy. Will he come again?"

"The boy will come tomorrow and I will tell him to write a letter to the prison," Good Singer said. "We will send it to Red Iron. He will speak to General Sibley about Father."

"Write to Sibley," his mother said. "The Long Trader and I are cousins."

"You are related to Sibley?" Good Singer could scarcely believe his ears.

"His first wife was Dakota. She was my cousin."

Good Singer knew what his mother was thinking. Kinship meant obligation. Perhaps Sibley would help his Dakota relatives in their time of need.

Good Singer wandered outside. Between the tipis he could see the fence. Beyond it was *Wakpaminisota*. Not so many days ago her waters flowed past the prison where his father lay in chains. Last night the river spoke to Good Singer in his sleep: *"Go to your father, Good Singer. He needs you."*

When Good Singer woke he began to plan his escape. By mid-morning the power of the dream waned and he realized escape was impossible. His Indian face would get him killed. The white boy is our only hope now, he thought.

Chapter 3

HOME

Whenever possible David watched his mother bake bread. He loved sampling bread fresh from the stove. More than that, bread baking meant time together. He and Mother talked about life, friends, the War, the Uprising, everything. Almost everything, anyway. When he asked her about reproduction she dodged his questions like a scared rabbit. He'd ask her: "I came from an egg in your womb, right? Well, how did the egg get into your womb?" She'd blush and then prattle on about bees pollinating flowers.

Clearly, his mother was more comfortable talking about romantic, writing-poetry-and-swooning, love. Last week he told her he was in love with a girl. But he refused to say whom. That didn't slow his mother any. She rattled off a list of tips for winning a girl's heart, from giving flowers to penning poems to springtime walks along the river. He felt embarrassed and overwhelmed by her enthusiasm. Today, he told himself, they would steer clear of love.

Poetry was this morning's focus. David was reading "Paul Revere's Ride," part of Henry Longfellow's new collection, *Tales of a Wayside Inn.* It was about a Boston silversmith who warned colonists during the Revolution that the British were marching on Lexington and Concord. David's

teacher recommended Longfellow because he often wrote about David's favorite subject, history. "The Courtship of Miles Standish" was romantic and a bit sad. "The Song of Hiawatha" was long and confusing. "Paul Revere's Ride" showed promise. It was written from a storyteller's point of view, like a yarn his mother might tell while knitting.

The December sun shone through the four-paned kitchen window. Its brilliant rays caught his mother's twisted crown of brown braids, creating a halo of light around her head. The effect was fitting. She was no longer angry about his disappearance yesterday. Crossing the river was risky this time of year. She scolded him but seemed curious about his adventure. She was remarkably calm as he described his visit to the Indian camp.

"Not dangerous?" she asked. "Then why is there a fence? Those Indians massacred hundreds of people. You read the newspapers."

"They're not dangerous. The fence is there to keep white folks out. All I saw were mostly old men and women and children. The warriors are down by Mankato." Then he added with a grin, "Father's the one in danger."

Mother and son laughed at the thought of anyone threatening the life of Humphrey Hughes. He was six feet tall and weighed 220 pounds. Big voice, big belly, big beard.

"What a hoot," he said, rocking back on the hind legs of his chair. "If one of those Indians got rambunctious, Father would talk him to death."

Catherine Hughes wanted to correct her son, but the giggles tumbling out of her made breathing--let alone talking--difficult.

"Really and truly! I'd like to meet the man who could out-talk him. One of Father's sales speeches could drive Little Crow to his knees."

David puffed out his chest and moved his hands like a magician summoning a rabbit from a hat. He lowered his voice in imitation of his father. "Now ma'am, this here is the finest skillet made in North America. I carry nothing but the best and this is it. You'll cook smooth and even with this beauty. Feel the weight of it. Mmmmm. See what I mean? It can hold heat like the Devil's own stove. Your family deserves the best, doesn't it? Don't they love you more when their meals are cooked up just right? Well, then, my good woman, you need this skillet and you need it now."

Catherine Hughes stopped kneading the dough and gave David a stern look. Her jaw was set. Her lips were compressed. He knew he'd been impertinent. Still, he could see her eyes twinkling through the curly strands of loose hair that hung down.

"David Hughes! Your father is a respected man. People like to talk to him. If they like him enough they usually buy something. If he didn't talk, you wouldn't eat. Now you either talk about your little adventure, or get back to that poetry book."

"Okay, but you may not like what you hear," he said. He told her about the crowded, dirty, conditions. He described

each of the boys. He recalled word-for-word the conversation in the tipi.

"You went into a tipi?" she said in amazement. "We can't tell your father any of this. He wouldn't understand."

"Why do we have to tell him? He won't be home for a while. How's he going to find out?"

"But if he did, he would never trust you again," she said. "Or me either, for that matter. David, dearest, I don't think we can do this without involving your father. It wouldn't be right."

"You said 'we'! You said 'we!' Does that mean you'll help me, you'll let me go? They need me, Mother! Their menfolk are in prison. They have no place to go. Everybody in town says they'll be sent to Isle Royale in Lake Superior, and the small one smiled, and Good Singer is my age, and they didn't tease me, and--"

"Slow down, Davey! We'll talk about it!"

"But I don't have anything to do," he complained. "You sew for the refugees and knit mittens for the soldiers and all I do is sit in my room and read. We're fighting a civil war. Our frontier is red with blood. But, I sit in my room and read old copies of *Atlantic Monthly*. I want to do something."

Catherine Hughes sensed urgency--real need--in David's tone of voice. This was more than begging for a new book or whining for candy money. This was more than Christmas break boredom. David needed a cause, something to which he could devote his time and energy.

"Dearest, I need to think about this," his mother said. "I know the missionaries have been over there, but plain folk like us--well, it might not look so good. As for conspiring behind your father's back, David, I've never done such a thing." She swept some loose hair back with a floury hand. There was a look of zeal on her son's face, a far different look than the hang-dog expression he used to wheedle money out of her. She knew she was about to cave-in to his demands once again. Only this time it might cost her family more than money.

"Can you take me there tomorrow?" she asked.

"To the camp?"

"Yes. We'll take this bread and some cornmeal and sugar. If you're set on helping these people, I'd best help you do it. That's what mothers are for."

"But you're going to tell father, aren't you?"

"I don't know, dearest. Let's do this one step at a time. You take me there, and we'll see. Perhaps if I know more I'll know what to do. Davey, some of your father's friends were killed by them. It would be hard for him to understand you helping Indians. And, you know how the Bowens feel." She smoothed back the wisps of hair again and nervously chewed the inside of her cheek. "You get back to your book and let me finish this bread. Go on, now, I have some thinking to do."

David read, but he didn't comprehend. Longfellow's rhymes and rhythms were no match for the hum and hubbub of an Indian camp. He was going to see Good Singer again! David's

mind hatched plan after plan. He could sketch the camp and draw portraits of his new friends. He could teach Good Singer how to read. He could learn Dakota words. Good Singer could tell him about the reservation, about the Chippewa, about the Uprising.

"Mmmm . . . I smell bread. Is it ready to eat?" The front door slammed and Ann Bowen breezed into the kitchen, a vivacious blend of brunette curls and blue eyes. "If I can have the butt end, I'll wash all the dishes," she offered.

"You slice off that heel and enjoy it," Mrs. Hughes said, emphasizing the word heel. "None of us care too much for the heel, so you just go ahead. We're out of butter, so the raspberry jam in the cupboard will have to do. David, dearest, would you heat the water for Annie? I'm going to rest a bit and work on my mittens."

When Mrs. Hughes was out of hearing, David and Ann burst out laughing. David struck a haughty pose and mimicked his mother's voice. "It's a heel, Annie, dear. In this home we call the end of the loaf a heel."

"David! Don't you talk about your mother like that. You'll go to H-E-double broomsticks," Ann said.

"Annie, dearest," he continued, "we say hell in this house. Hell is mentioned frequently in the Bible. If used in a sacred context you are quite able to say hell."

"The hell you say," Ann shrieked, dropping into a chair. She was convulsed with laughter, a feeling she missed, a feeling she enjoyed regularly before the Uprising.

David saw a dark look cross Ann's face. He pulled a chair up next to hers and watched her laughter dissolve into tears. "We have to keep living, don't we," she sobbed. "Mother and Emma said they're going to mourn for a year. It seems like a year already. I can't shut myself up that way."

David listened. He knew he had no answers. Ann would have to grieve her brother's death in her own time, in her own way. She was crying softly on his shoulder. He put his arm around her, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Should he ask her how it happened? He was hungry for details of the Uprising. The newspaper stories only said who was killed and what was destroyed. This girl in his arms saw the Uprising, lived the Uprising. The Bowen family was part of biggest thing to ever happen in his life. While he read history, Ann lived it. If it weren't for her brother's death, he'd almost feel jealous of her.

"I loved him, you know," she began. "Oh, he could be mean. He use to squirt milk at me every milking. He'd make me do his chores, so he could go fish in the creek . . . He could be so nice sometimes . . . When I didn't understand my school work he always helped me . . . Once, when Father was out in the fields and Mother was helping with the neighbor's baby, he let me drive the wagon."

David gently squeezed Ann's shoulder, silently encouraging her to continue.

"Everybody loved Thomas. Our teacher, Miss Lewis, asked him to read the Declaration of Independence at the Fourth of July picnic. He said the whole thing perfectly. Can you

believe it?" Ann lifted her face toward him. He nodded and smiled. She rested her head on his shoulder again. "Thomas was so smart and handsome and funny. One time he woke me in the middle of the night and made me put on my coat and follow him out to the pasture. The moon was full so we could see everything, clear as day. I stood there and watched him walk up to a cow and tip it over."

"What?"

"He tipped a cow over. He lifted its hind leg and pushed it over."

David wondered if she was pulling *his* leg. "You mean like you'd tip over a table or a barrel?"

Ann sat up and wiped her eyes. She was nearly herself again. "Sure. If you can sneak up on a cow without it noticing, you can tip it over."

David took advantage of the lighter mood. "What happened, Ann? I mean, how did your brother die?" David avoided her eyes. To his surprise she began telling the story.

"Father was out checking the corn. Mother was sewing. I was hauling water for supper. I heard a wagon coming . . . screaming and shouting . . . it was Father and two neighbor men. They were all talking at once . . . about Indians killing people and farms burning and people murdered in their fields. Father kept asking me, 'Where is Thomas? Where is Thomas?' I was so frightened I couldn't remember where he'd gone."

She covered her face with her hands. "Then I remembered he'd gone to the creek. We only had time to put on our shawls and shoes. Emma and I walked and ran all the way to South Bend. Father and Mother drove to the creek and looked everywhere, but they couldn't find any sign of Thomas. When they saw smoke and heard gunshots they followed us to town."

"What happened then," he asked. Ann removed her hands from her face and continued, slowly, quietly.

"We hid in the flour mill, more than a hundred of us, women and children. People were crying and arguing. My job was to help keep a big kettle of water boiling. We were supposed to dump it on the Indians if they tried to come inside. They gave Mother a pitchfork, for protection, I guess. God only knows what we would have done if they'd broken in."

"Did they?"

"One of the men shot at something, but it was probably a deer. The mill was barricaded with cord wood and wagons and the men were standing guard at the edge of the village. When I look back on it, I suppose we were fairly safe. But, at the time, it was terrible. We were hysterical."

David held Ann close, in case she began crying again and to make sure he didn't miss a syllable.

"We couldn't sleep. We couldn't talk. Every noise made us whimper and cry, we were so afraid. Then we'd all hush one another so we could listen for more noises. The night lasted forever. In the morning Father drove us to Mankato. Then he joined up with the Butternut Valley Guards and went

to New Ulm."

Ann looked at him, her wide eyes moist and sad. "We asked everyone about Thomas. 'Have you seen a 16-year-old boy with curly brown hair? Have you seen a curly-haired boy all by himself?'"

"You mean he could still be alive?"

Ann shook her head. Her eyes squeezed shut. "The South Bend men told us everyone between New Ulm and South Bend was either gone, holed up in a stockade, or dead. When New Ulm was evacuated they all came to Mankato. We talked to anyone who would listen."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

"But the burial parties--didn't they find his body?" said David.

"No," Ann said. "He wasn't with the Indians who surrendered, either."

"I'm sorry, Ann," said David. "I shouldn't have asked like that." He helped her stand, then led her to the parlor where their mothers were knitting and sewing. "You sit here and relax. I'll go down to the livery and see if anyone has heard anything. I'll check at the fort, too."

He left quickly, feeling guilty. It was bad enough he made her talk about her brother. What would Ann say if she knew his newest friend was an Indian?

Chapter 4

FORT SNELLING

On his way to the fort David stopped at Pettijohn's Freight and Livery. He often wandered by the barn to pick up gossip and read the newspapers. Pettijohn's teamsters brought newspapers from towns where they made deliveries. Caleb Pettijohn nailed them to the barn wall as a courtesy to customers.

David scanned the newspapers for news about Thomas, but found nothing. Thomas could be hiding from the Dakota, he thought. Anything was possible. A man escaped the Redwood massacre and walked to St. Cloud. A German lady and her three-year-old daughter wandered the prairie for eight weeks. Perhaps Thomas was hiding somewhere waiting to be rescued.

"David Hughes. How are you today?" It was Mr. Pettijohn, hands black with axle grease, an unlit pipe between his teeth.

"Fine, sir. I'm checking for news about the Bowen boy."

"Ah, what a shame. They say he was a fine boy," Mr. Pettijohn said. "How is the family feeling? I see the oldest girl around, but the mother and the younger one don't see daylight much, do they?"

"They're in mourning," David said. "They think he's likely dead."

"But you're checking just in case, huh? Well, none of my drivers have heard anything about hostages or unidentified bodies for quite some time. Month or so, I suppose."

"I'm going over to the fort. They should know if any more refugees were rescued out that way."

"Well, good luck to you, then."

David walked down to the ferry house and out onto the ice. He rehearsed his words as he slid and skidded his way across the Minnesota. Half way up the landing road he had his speech memorized. He slowed his pace and straightened his back in an effort to look strong and capable. Appearance was everything in the Army.

The smell of mules and horses drifted down the sloping road from the post stable. He wished Father sold mules or harness instead of pots and pans. With ten Minnesota regiments to outfit, they'd be rich by now.

At the gate house he stated his business and was directed to the Commandant's House. "Ask for Colonel Crooks," the sentry advised. "He's with the Sixth. They were down that way all fall. Maybe he can help you."

David crossed the parade ground to the two-story limestone house at the far end of the fort and addressed the sentry. "Good morning. I'm David Hughes. I'm here on behalf of the Bowen family. They're refugees from the Uprising who live with us. Their son, Thomas, has been missing since August and I would like to speak to Colonel Crooks about this matter."

"Have a seat, please," the soldier said. He showed David to a chair in the entryway. The soldier went upstairs, then returned a few minutes later. "The colonel will see you now. Follow me."

The colonel's office was wall-to-wall books. On his desk was a stack of ledgers. He sat behind them, hunched over a sheaf of papers.

"Sir, this is the David Hughes."

"Have a seat, son," the colonel said. "How can I help you?"

"I'm here on behalf--"

"I know, son, The corporal filled me in. What specifically do you need?"

"They want to know if the Army has found their son or his body?"

"We haven't found anyone new, dead or alive, for almost three weeks. Whereabouts did he disappear?"

"Butternut Valley. West of Mankato, sir."

The colonel stood and stretched. He examined the map on the wall with arms extended and back arched. David thought he looked less like a commanding officer and more like mama cat. Yet when he spoke every word was crisp and sure. "I'll notify St. Paul. They'll send dispatches to the companies in the area. I can send a message myself to the stockade at Judson. I know the captain of the Ninth's Company E. They could have a look around. What's the boy's name again?"

"Thomas Bowen, sir. He was, he is, 16. Blue eyes, I think, and brown hair."

The colonel jotted down the particulars. "Tell the Bowens we'll keep a look-out. That's the best we can do for the time being. If I were you I'd start preparing them for the worst. The boy probably is dead, his body dragged away by wolves or eaten by the buzzards. If he hasn't been found by now, it's likely he'll never be found."

David nodded.

"I'm sure you know Indians don't generally take young men hostage."

"No, sir. Thank you, sir." David turned to leave.

"Just a moment, Mr. Hughes. I need some information from you."

David spun around in surprise. "Sir?"

"My men tell me you've been down below with the Indians. What is your game?"

David's heart rate doubled. "Game, sir?"

"I have a report that you are preaching to them. Is that true?"

Time slowed to a crawl as David fumbled for a answer.

"No, sir. I fibbed about that so I could have a look around."

"But your father is a preacher?"

"No, sir. He's a tinker and a trader."

"Have a seat, son," said the colonel. David slumped into the cane-backed chair. "Now what's this all about? Are you trading with them? For your father?"

"No, sir. He doesn't know I went there. See, I'm interested in Indians, so I wanted to talk to them."

"Your visit was scientific? Sort of a fact-finding mission?"

David saw the opening and darted through, using his most profound voice. "Yes, sir. I've read a lot about U.S. history and Indians. I wanted to see for myself what the Sioux are like."

"You're sure this isn't a business deal," the colonel asked again. "You're telling me this has nothing to do with your father's business."

"No, sir," David said. "He's down to Mankato. Truth be told, sir, my father and I don't carry on too well. He's mostly gone, anyway. My mother and I want to take some food down to them. Is that okay?"

The colonel picked up his pen and began writing. "This is a pass. Show this to the sentries and they will let you in. As long as you don't interfere with Army business, I don't see any harm in a little charitable sightseeing."

Chapter 5

MOTHER'S VISIT

"Mother, I know what you're thinking," David shouted. "But these aren't the Indians that killed all those people. It was the Sioux, all right, but not these Sioux. Aren't you always telling me not to paint everyone with the same brush? These people were just trying to live, that's all."

Catherine Hughes focused on David's backside and struggled to keep her balance. She could see puffs of frozen breath on either side of David's head, like smoke trailing a locomotive. Her son was hauling her across the river on his sled.

"We have slavery in America, right?" David called back. "Does that mean you and Father are cruel and evil because you're Americans?"

"Of course not. We don't own any Negroes. You know that."

"But all Americans must be cruel and evil because America has a cruel and evil practice called slavery," he said. "Right?"

"You know better than that," she said. "Mr. Lincoln's proclamation freed some of the slaves. And when the war is over all the Negroes will be free. Besides, Davey, many Northerners have opposed slavery for years."

"There! You see! Not all Americans are slave holders and not all Indians are murderers."

"Yes, dearest," she sighed, shaking her head.

David dropped the topic. He knew his mother believed most of what he said. That's why she was going to the camp. She simply couldn't admit it out loud. She also feared what people might say. David let her think while he pulled her on shore.

They cleared the gate with the pass and walked into the camp. David led his mother through the throng of children, clearing the way with one hand while while passing out fudge with the other. Good Singer and his mother were standing by a fire outside their tipi.

"Hello, Good Singer. This is my mother, Catherine Hughes." Good Singer nodded and translated.

"This is my mother. Come in."

When they were seated David handed the food to Good Singer. The Dakota boy nodded his thanks. There was a smirk of satisfaction on Good Singer's face. He'd proved his mother wrong. The white boy was not a taker.

"Thank you. The whites are angry with us and you bring us food," Good Singer said.

"Not all of us," David said. "Bishop Whipple and the Quakers back East--they're not mad at you. And the President isn't going to let the Army hang all the men in Mankato. And I got a pass to come here any time I want. And my mother is here."

"I think this is right," Good Singer answered. "All should not be mad at us because all of us did not kill the farmers. My father was at the battles. I know he did not go killing at the farms because I was with him. I made his fire arrows at Fort Ridgely. I cooked his meals when we surrounded the soldiers by Birch Coulee." Good Singer paused, then looked directly at Mrs. Hughes. "My father fought the soldiers. He did not kill farmers or women or children."

Good Singer's words brought silence to the tipi. The distant murmur of women talking in groups and the sizzle of green wood on the fire seemed amplified in the stillness. David looked at his mother. On their walk through the camp she seemed nervous and agitated. She kept turning her head every which way, as if she thought someone was watching her. Now his mother appeared more calm, even relaxed. She cleared her throat and spoke.

"We are helping the white people who lost their homes during the summer," Mrs. Hughes said, delicately. "We are helping our soldiers who are fighting back East. We will help you."

Good Singer nodded. His mother elbowed him for a translation. The boy interpreted quickly then spoke to David.

"I will be your friend. You can teach me English better. Thank you."

David opened his Bible, inked his pen, and asked Good Singer to say his parents' names.

"My father is called Strikes the Buzzard. I do not know how to say my mother's name in English."

More silence. Then David helped his mother to her feet. He thanked his hosts and ushered his mother outside. They gave out the last of the fudge and shooed the children away, when a loud voice called out.

"Mrs. Thompson!"

His mother's head jerked sideways in response and she nearly stopped walking. David turned to see who was speaking English, and who this Mrs. Thompson was. His mother kept walking.

"Mrs. Thompson!"

The voice seemed aimed at them. Between the nearest tipis David saw Dakota men standing around a fire, but he couldn't tell who was speaking.

"David, dearest," Mrs. Hughes said, urgently. "Let's go!

"Mrs. Thompson!" The voice belonged to a small, blanket-clad man walking toward them.

"Mother, he's talking to you," David said.

"David! Her voice was sharp. "We're leaving!"

The man was looking right at them. He was frail-looking and old. His voice was thin, yet loud. "Mrs. Thompson, please."

Catherine Hughes grabbed David's arm and towed him toward the gate. "He's begging, Davey," she said. "He probably calls all white women, Mrs. Thompson. Most likely that's the only English name he knows."

David walked backwards to keep his eyes on the man. The gate caught his elbow as the sentries waved them through.

Mrs. Hughes' pace forced David to turn and walk forward. When he looked over his shoulder again he could see only sentries. But the voice followed them as they walked to the river's edge. It cleared the fence as if borne on cloud of wood smoke.

"Mrs. Thompson! Are you Catherine Thompson?"

Chapter 6

FATHER

David could not sleep. His world was as messy as his toy box. Lead soldiers, wooden guns, bats and balls were jumbled together in the walnut box at the foot of his bed. He could straighten his toys in a minute. Sorting out life was far more difficult.

Who was the old man at the camp? He seemed to know his mother. He looked right at her and called her by name. But the name was Catherine *Thompson*.

His easy relationship with Ann Bowen had become hard work. He had to lie to her every time he went to see Good Singer. He was running out of explanations for his absences. Every time he looked at her he knew only his heart was telling the truth.

David flipped on his side and arranged his pillow. He wished he could tell Ann the truth about everything.

"David." With a whisper and a squeak of the door, Catherine Hughes slipped into David's room.

"Mother?"

She lit his lamp, turned it down low and sat on the edge of the bed. "Davey, I want to apologize for the way I spoke

to you today. That crazy old man put me in a bad way. I'm sorry."

David played with the corner of his quilt.

"I'm proud of what you're doing for the Indians, Davey. You were right. It's a busy world right now and we shouldn't stand in the wings watching. We all need to get on stage. The day I took my first batch of mittens to the Ladies Association meeting I felt so good. I felt like I was helping President Lincoln win the war. I suppose you get that same feeling helping Good Singer."

The quilt corner was folded over itself several times. David held it up and watched it become a shadow dragon on the wall, moving ominously in the flickering lantern light.

"Davey?"

"You know that old man, Mother. I can tell. You are keeping secrets from me."

Catherine Hughes clutched her robe tightly at the throat. In the awkward pause they both heard horses neighing and snorting in the drive. Jingling harness and the creak of wheels grew louder, then stopped.

"It's your Father. Get dressed and help him with Bill and Bob."

For the first time David looked his mother in the eyes. He held her gaze until she looked away.

"Go on, Davey. He's waiting."

David dressed quickly, shivering without the quilt and comforter to protect him, shivering at the thought of seeing

his father. At the back door she gave him a scarf and a reminder: "Do what he says, David."

Bill and Bob were sweaty despite below-freezing temperatures. David edged past his father and went to work on Bob. The team was as oddly matched as David and his Father. Bill was fawn-colored with a dark mane and tail. His hairy socks were white. Bob was a small, stocky, roan with matching mane and tail. He had no feathers and his only marking was a slender star on his nose. Though Bob was a full hand shorter, he was still Bill's equal in harness. Despite their appearance, they worked wonderfully together.

Mother wasn't so lucky. Teamwork was nearly impossible in the Hughes house. When he was home Humphrey Hughes was gruff and short-tempered. What humor and laughter he possessed surfaced only when talking to customers. His freckles seemed entirely too gay for someone so serious. The massive sandy-brown beard made his poker face even more inscrutable. His blue eyes were constantly moving, seldom resting on his wife, never on his son. He rarely spoke with David, choosing to talk at him or about him.

Swish! Bob's tail smacked David in the shoulder, bringing him back to the task at hand. He wiped Bob's chest a second time and hung the blanket on a peg. He checked Bess, the family's carriage horse, then fed and watered all three horses.

"Make sure and pick Bob's hooves," Father said. "Do Bill, too. I'm going up to the house. I haven't eaten a damn thing all day."

Humphrey Hughes tossed Bill's blanket at David's feet and walked out. "Double oats, David. My boys worked hard today," he ordered. The barn door slammed shut.

David worked slowly, silently cursing the cycle of his life: *Father's gone. Father's home. Father's gone. Father's home.* When Father was home David walked on tip toe and silently rehearsed everything before speaking. Pleasing Father was nearly a full-time job. When he was home fun went out one window as gloom came in the other. He and Mother talked less. He did his school work alone. Bread baking was just another household chore. When weather allowed, he avoided his father by going outside.

David hung the blanket and fetched a pick. A pat on the leg and a cluck of the tongue prompted Bill to lift each massive hoof. David carefully pried dried mud and pebbles from the concave sole. Over Bill's moist breathing David could hear Mother and Father talking. The cold air carried the clank and clatter of every kitchen utensil to him, but his folks' words were muddled.

Chores finished, David trudged up to the house. Father was through eating. He was sitting in his favorite chair, his arms clasped behind his head, picking bits of supper out of his teeth with a fork.

"Merry Christmas, Father," David offered.

"Merry Christmas," his father answered. "I was telling your mother how well I did down to Mankato and thereabouts. People have been staying home, what with all the Injun

scares. I bring a store right to their door. That's what I tell 'em."

"How did the wagon hold up?" David asked.

"Fine. Fine. I didn't do near the traveling I usually do. I parked just off the levee in Mankato for weeks, selling to the refugees and the sightseers."

"Sightseers?" Mother and David sounded a duet of surprise.

"Why, the Injuns! You can't actually see them, but the folks who come to town don't know that. They held 'em in a stockade at South Bend for a while. Now they're in Mankato, locked up tighter than Queen Victoria's jewelry."

Father set his feet on the floor and leaned forward. He stroked the frizzy ends of his beard and spoke in a low, conspiratorial tone. "Those scoundrels been awful good to me, sending all those homeless customers my way, then drawing gawkers from every town around. I oughta give them a cut of my profits."

Humphrey Hughes roared with laughter, an explosion of sound that caught David and his mother off guard.

"A cut of the profits," he repeated. "How do you like that!"

"Humphrey," Mother said. "You'll have to be quiet. We've got guests upstairs. I took in some refugees, the Bowen family. I wrote you about them. Did you get my letter?"

"I believe I did. And I'm glad you took it upon yourself to help them out. What are you charging them?"

Catherine looked blankly at her husband and then at David.

Humphrey Hughes sniggered hoarsely. "I'm joking. I'm joking. Can't you take a joke?" He hoisted his bulky body out of the chair, groaning from the aches and pains of the road. He slipped on his coat and tugged on his boots.

"Where are you going?" Catherine Hughes asked.

"Down the street for a glass or two. I want to find out who's going to Mankato for the hanging."

"They've set a date?" said David. "When!"

"Day after Christmas. I was in the newspaper office in Mankato when they got the news. Should be something in the *Pioneer* tomorrow."

Humphrey Hughes shuffled out the door and into the night.

Chapter 7

THE NEWS

December 23rd was a mild day, one of many during the waning days of 1862. Warm breezes and thin, patchy snow prevented David from sliding down Pilot Knob, the prairie knoll behind Mendota. David was the champion of Pilot Knob. He could beat any boy to the bottom on his sled with steel runners. His mother had it shipped from Chicago with money she earned washing clothes for the bachelor officers at the fort.

Snow or no snow, David wouldn't be up on Pilot Knob today. He had to get a look at the *Pioneer* or one of the newspapers Mr. Pettijohn's teamsters brought back from outlying towns. He had to find out if Good Singer's father was to be hanged.

After breakfast dishes were done, Mrs. Bowen, Emma and Ann sat in the parlor. Mr. Hughes went to check the mail. Mrs. Hughes started knitting a new pair of mittens. David puttered near the parlor door. When the womenfolk got to talking he grabbed his coat and slipped out the house. He ran most of the way to Pettijohn's, where he found a crowd gathering at the barn. He wormed his way past the soldiers, store clerks and teamsters.

"How are they going to hang 39 of them," a voice said. "Does it say how they're going to do it? They ain't gonna do 'em one at a time, are they?"

Mr. Pettijohn was still pounding a newspaper into place. "It doesn't say," he answered. "I suppose they'll build one big scaffold and swing them all at once."

The crowd laughed at Pettijohn's remark and dissolved into parallel discussions of how to build a gallows that could hang 39 Indians.

David scanned the front page, looking for any mention of Good Singer's father. In the far right column were the names of the condemned, in both Dakota and English. He traced his finger down the English side twice. Strikes the Buzzard wasn't on the list.

David retraced his way back through the crowd, bound for the ferry landing. If the ice was still good, he would cross over and deliver the news to Good Singer, personally.

"David!" A voice hailed him from somewhere down the street. He swung about until he saw Ann Bowen walking toward him, waving a mittened hand to get his attention. Trailing behind were Mrs. Bowen and Emma.

"We heard you leave and we followed," Ann said. Her brown eyebrows were furrowed with concern. "Are you mad at me? You've been avoiding me lately."

"No," David replied. "I saw the commotion down here and I was curious."

Emma and her mother caught up. "What is all the fuss about?" asked Mrs. Bowen.

David led them away from the crowd toward the freight office. "The Indians, uh . . . the Army is going to hang 39 of the Indians. In Mankato. The day after Christmas," he said.

Ann looked over his shoulder at the crowd. Her eyes were pained, the eyelids blinking back tears. "Oh, I thought for a moment the Indians had freed some hostages. . . ."

David wagged his head no. He offered Mrs. Bowen his elbow and escorted the grieving family down the street. They'd not gone ten feet when David heard his father calling. Humphrey Hughes waved to them from the other side of the livery yard. He pushed his way through the crowd, excitement showing in his every motion.

"Mrs. Bowen! I'm glad you are here. I've just spoken with Caleb Pettijohn. He's offered to drive us to Mankato for the hanging. I thought, perhaps, you might have a special interest in attending."

"Well, I suppose." Mrs. Bowen seemed uncomfortable with the idea of watching a mass execution. "Why don't you take Annie and David. I don't want to leave Emma alone, and I'm not sure taking her would be a good idea. She's so young."

"Catherine could watch Emma," Mr. Hughes offered.

"Well, I suppose the neighbors will all be there," Mrs. Bowen said reluctantly.

"Good. Good," said Mr. Hughes. "Then it's set. We'll have to celebrate Christmas early, of course. Pettijohn wants to leave at sunrise on the 25th."

David blocked out the rest of the conversation, thinking how he could tell Good Singer the news. Christmas provided the answer.

"Father, I have one more present to buy," David fibbed. "If we're having Christmas early, I've got to hurry to the store."

"You run along, David. I'll take these pretty ladies home," Mr. Hughes said in his booming sales voice.

David trotted off to the mercantile, fingering the coins in his pocket. He'd buy a candle for the Bowen family, a newspaper for Good Singer, grab some potatoes from the root cellar, then run over to the camp.

Chapter 8

BURIED GOLD

Good Singer was outside the fence when David arrived at the camp. He and The Owl were shoveling frozen clods of dirt into a long burial trench. David stood a respectful distance away and watched. When they finished, he waved slowly to the boys and wondered if they would be in a mood to play today. Perhaps his news would brighten their day. He showed his pass to the soldiers.

"You're that boy that's been coming here, aren't you," one of the soldiers said. "You part Indian or something?"

"No." David nervously pushed back the straight black hair that hung just above his eyes. "My father is a missionary," he lied. "I'm here to help them."

"All right. Go on in," said the soldier. "But you look a touch Indian to me. Doesn't he?" The other soldier muttered "Injun lover" and shouldered the gate open.

Inside the gate the three boys walked toward Good Singer's tipi. David walked in silence. He did not know what to say. Was the person they'd buried a friend? A relative? Good Singer and The Owl exchanged a few words in Dakota, making no effort to translate. David felt uneasy. He wasn't sure they knew he was there, or cared that he was visiting.

At Good Singer's tipi Her Knife waved them away. They went on to The Owl's tipi. The Owl's uncle was talking inside with a group of old men. He told The Owl to join them.

"What about Blue Turtle's tipi?" David hadn't seen the other boy since his first visit. He hoped it wasn't Blue Turtle whom they'd buried.

"Sayaahinapapi." Good Singer pointed inside his mouth. "White spots." He touched his ears and neck. "Red here."

"Measles?"

Good Singer nodded, tentatively. David shuddered and recalled his own bout with the disease.

"We will go to the fence by the river," said Good Singer. The Owl filled David's arms with firewood and gave Good Singer tinder and burning stick from the fire inside. Then he waved goodbye and joined his uncle and the men in the tipi.

In minutes David and Good Singer had a fire burning along the south fence. David pulled a small sack of potatoes from inside his coat and set it next to Good Singer.

"Pilamayaya."

"That's 'thank you,' isn't it? You're thanking me." David was eager to learn some Dakota. "Say it again."

"Pilamayaya."

"No. Say it slowly."

Good Singer said the words syllable by syllable. *"Pee--LAH--mah--yah--yah."*

"Again." David dipped his pen and began writing the sounds and definition in his Bible. "Say it again."

"Pee--LAH--mah--yah--yah."

"Once more." David held his pen poised above the page, ready to write the last two syllables. When the Dakota boy did not repeat the word, David glanced up. Good Singer looked angry.

"I'm sorry," David said. "It seemed like a good word to learn. I guess I was too pushy."

Good Singer stared into the fire. David was groping for something more to say, when he suddenly remembered the most important reason for the visit. He'd been concentrating so selfishly on his own needs that he forgot what Good Singer needed.

"Good Singer. Your father isn't on the list."

Good Singer looked blankly at David.

"It's in the newspaper. The list of the men they are going to hang is in the newspaper. I read it not more than an hour ago. Here! I've got it here somewhere."

David rummaged in his coat pockets, pulling out the Bowens' Christmas candle and several pieces of hard candy before he found the folded copy of the *St. Paul Pioneer.* The gist of what David was saying seemed to dawn on Good Singer. A smile of joy exposed both rows of teeth. David had never seen his friend smile.

"Right here. It's in English and Dakota." David handed the newspaper to Good Singer.

"Thank you, David." Good Singer stood up with the potato sack in one hand and the newspaper in the other. He turned to run to his mother's tipi and ran smack into an old man, knocking them both to the ground. Good Singer jumped to his feet. The old man rose slowly. David recognized the blankets and pants instantly. It was the man who had followed him and his mother the other day, the one who called her Mrs. Thompson.

Good Singer knew the old man as Long Walker. He was from Wakute's band, the next village downstream on the reservation. During the fighting last summer Long Walker was repeatedly threatened by the young men, some of whom wanted to kill him because of his close ties to the traders.

Long Walker walked stiffly to the small fire and sat cross-legged, shifting his blankets to cover his torso. Good Singer recovered his newspaper and potatoes.

Long Walker told David to sit down in English, then spoke Dakota with Good Singer. Though David could not understand a word, he knew from Good Singer's tone of voice and hand gestures that his friend was arguing with, even mocking, Long Walker. He was amazed that a boy could talk so crossly to an adult. His father called boys who talked like that "incorrigible." The exact definition of the word escaped David, but he knew it meant something worse than "naughty." He imagined Good Singer must be miserable living in the camp, eating lousy food, missing his father, watching friends die. David sensed Good Singer was not incorrigible, only sad and angry.

Long Walker switched back to English and nodded at David: "We tell him about the gold."

"Why?" said Good Singer. "There is no gold."

"What gold?" David asked.

"At *Maya mazazi hapi,*" Long Walker said. He pointed south, the blanket slipping from his bony arm. Good Singer erupted with laughter, his first merriment in months. David leaned back on his elbows, bewildered, confused. One moment Good Singer was angry, the next he was laughing.

The old man responded with surprising fury. "Do not laugh! I know where the gold in the hill is buried."

"I am laughing because I have heard many stories about gold. I have heard as many stories as you have gray hairs, old man. I do not believe them. No great chief is going to ride down from the clouds on a war eagle and save us. Great floods will not destroy the white villages." The Dakota boy paused and spit into the fire. "And there is no *Maya mazazi hapi!*"

"Hear my story! It is true! I helped bury the gold myself," Long Walker snapped.

Good Singer was silent, but suspicious. A sidelong glance revealed David listening carefully to Long Walker's words. The fact the old man was telling David about the gold made Good Singer even more skeptical. But he nodded his willingness to listen.

"Eleven winters ago we got some gold on the high ground over there." Long Walker pointed through the fence in the direction of Pilot Knob. "We signed a paper that sold our

land to the whites. But the traders took most of the gold coins. They said we owed them many debts. When we knew we had been cheated we were angry and afraid. One man ate his last few coins and carried them in his insides. It hurt him, but he was not cheated. The traders did not get his gold."

David winced at the thought of passing coins in the privy behind his house.

"The chiefs of two villages asked their people to give a coin from each tipi, so that we would have money for the day we had no land. One night after everyone was asleep, three of us took turns carrying a bag of coins to the hill. It took most of the night. When we got to the hill, men from another village were digging. We put our gold in the ground and we walked home."

The old man stopped speaking. He rubbed his temples, the fingers of his hands shaking slightly from the effort. David supposed Long Walker was searching for a word or coaxing a memory from his mind. The old man sighed and spoke again.

"Three winters ago when my village was sick, I thought I would take some of the gold and buy the white man's medicine. I went to the hill one night. There was white men's houses all around and I was afraid. I did not dig up the gold." Long Walker stared into the fire. David watched the old man carefully, sensing the story was about to end badly.

"When I returned," Long Walker said, "most of the village was well, but my family was dead. I thought then it was a sign that I should not have gone for the gold. I do

not know. But I know now that this is the time. We need the money to survive. We have no land, so we need money."

Long Walker seemed smaller and older, as if telling the story had drained some years from his reservoir of youth. David was moved by the old man's tale. Yet, he wondered why he'd been told such an important secret.

"Where was this gold when we were starving last winter?" Good Singer demanded. "Last summer when the treaty money was late, the traders wouldn't give us food. You knew we were hungry. Where was your gold then?"

David looked around, wondering if his friend's loud voice would attract onlookers.

"If there is gold, old man, you better get it now," Good Singer shouted. "They are going to hang our men in Mankato."

Long Walker stared into the fire. Then he clutched his blankets and stood with the caution of an old person. When he was erect, or nearly so, he spoke: "Come see me when you are ready to hear--both of you."

The old man turned and walked away along the narrow path between the fence and the tipis.

Good Singer said goodbye and ran off to tell his mother the good news.

David kicked snow into the fire, then spread the coals. Having no one to talk to, he talked to himself: "I think that old man knows my mother."

Chapter 9

STRIKES THE BUZZARD

The prison door opened. Daylight streamed into the darkness of the log building, trapping straw dust in its bright beam. The Indian prisoners near the door shielded their eyes or rolled over on their stomachs. Soldiers and civilians filed through the small door. An officer stepped forward and read slowly from a sheaf of papers. As he read, a missionary moved among the prisoners, translating in his loudest preaching voice and pointing at prisoners.

Near the back of the prison, Strikes the Buzzard sat up, tenderly touching the chafed flesh above and below his leg irons. He found his tobacco pouch and pipe under his blanket and crawled over to Baptiste Campbell. Baptiste was a mixed blood who knew English. Others gathered around as Baptiste echoed the officer's words in whispered Dakota.

"They are choosing men to go to another place," Baptiste said. He translated the names as they were announced. "Rattling Runner . . . He Comes For Me . . . Wind Comes Home."

"Are these the men who will be spared," whispered Strikes the Buzzard. His eyes followed the prisoners out the door. "Or, are they going to be hanged?"

"I do not know. They did not say," Baptiste answered. "White Dog . . . One Who Stands Clothed with His Grandfather . . . Cut Nose . . . Near the Wood . . . Wind Maker."

"Where are they going?" Strikes the Buzzard puffed deeply on his pipe to hide his fear.

Baptiste shrugged and continued translating. "Little Thunder . . . Red Face . . . Broken to Pieces--"

Baptiste Campbell did not repeat the next name. He stood, gathered his things and then, chains clinking, shuffled to the front of the prison. Strikes the Buzzard relit his pipe and looked straight ahead, steeling himself for the moment his name would be called. He pulled steadily on the red stone pipe, savoring the strong mixture of tobacco and dogwood bark. His body was rigid; his face still. He listened to the missionary's accented translation, hoping he would not hear them say his name.

The meaning of his name had become sadly ironic. The buzzards were circling the Dakota people, waiting for them to die. Would the black-winged scavengers pick at his bones, or would he live to fight them off? Strikes the Buzzard had defeated them once before, long ago, when he was just five winters old. His family was returning home from the trading post. Five Ojibway hunters fell upon his father, killing him instantly. His older sisters were clubbed to death. He hid in the folds of his mother's skirt, crying so loud he could not hear her screams, crying because the thick-lipped demons in grandfather's stories were true. The tallest Ojibway grabbed his mother by the hair and cut her throat. Another

struck him about the head with a club until he fell unconscious. A day later he was found by relatives, covered with blood, sitting among the buzzards, swinging at the birds with a stick as they flapped about the mutilated bodies of his family.

The missionaries and soldiers filed out. The door slammed shut, bringing Strikes the Buzzard out of his daydream. The prison was gloomy again, lit only by a few lanterns, daylight leaking between logs, and the glow of the wood stove. But Strikes the Buzzard felt a spark of hope glowing inside, the idea that he would live to see his family. He recalled the men who were taken away. He compared them with those who remained with him in the log prison. The men who were removed were younger, wilder men. Several, he knew, were among the parties of men who roamed both sides of the Minnesota River, killing families and looting farms. Cut Nose, for one, bragged loudly last summer of the many *wasicun* he'd killed. If he, Strikes the Buzzard, killed anyone, it was when the soldiers were surrounded on the prairie by the stream the *wasicun* called Birch Coulee.

He went to his spot near the back of the prison, wrapped himself in his blankets, and resumed daydreaming. He thought of Good Singer. He had long seen his son as the little boy who talked like a crazy wren. But last summer he'd seen his son become a young man. During the height of the fighting, Good Singer had poured lead for musket balls, fetched water, protected his mother and sister.

A father could be proud of such a son.

Chapter 10

PILOT KNOB

Exchanging presents on Christmas Eve morning seemed strange to David. The Bowen family's dark clothes and mourning manner cast a pall over the celebration. After a somber dinner of ham and potatoes, the two families gathered in the parlor to exchange presents. David gave the Bowens a scented candle for their room upstairs. Ann gave David stationery she'd designed and decorated herself. After some singing and storytelling, David pulled Ann aside and offered to take her on a tour of the neighborhood.

"I'll take you up on Pilot Knob," he said. "It's clear, so we should be able to see for miles."

"Is that where you disappear to every day?" Ann said.

"Yep!" David said, relieved to have an explanation for his trips across the river to the Indian camp.

The twosome walked west down the main street to the foot of Pilot Knob. As they threaded through the trees and brush that clung to the base of the hillside, David imagined himself a guide, like Jack Frazier, General Sibley's Dakota companion. Except today's prey wasn't the massive buffalo or the majestic elk. They were after bigger stuff: geographic features, engineering marvels, points of interest. He began narrating in the soft voice of hunter stalking a flighty

whitetail deer. "It's called Pilot Knob because steamboat captains use it as a landmark for navigation."

They continued climbing, slowed somewhat by Ann's skirts. At the top David identified a pair of small lakes below them to the east. He turned to the northwest and pointed out the lakes that dotted the prairie west of the Mississippi. In the far distance they were white ovals rimmed by trees and bushes.

To the north they could see a smudge of smoke that was the twin towns of St. Anthony and Minneapolis. David described the huge suspension bridge that linked Minneapolis and Nicollet Island, the sawmill and barrel works at St. Anthony, and Minnehaha Falls.

Ann nodded agreeably, but David could see she was only slightly interested.

"Are you cold?" he asked.

"No."

"What then?"

Ann turned in a slow circle, one arm extended in a sweeping gesture. "You think this is it, don't you?" she said. "You think this is the greatest place in the world. Well, I don't. This is just where my parents live. That's all. For me Minnesota is just a starting place."

"Well, it's--"

"When I'm old enough I'm going to England. That's the center of the world. You want to see fabulous bridges and buildings, David? You want to see huge factories? They're in England."

"But Minnesota is just starting," David argued. "In 20 years she could be more important than England."

Ann laughed aloud. "You can't be serious. A mosquito-infested state in the middle of North America will never match the British Empire."

"You don't know that!"

"You don't either!"

David stood his ground, with feet spread wide, hands on his hips. "Who is going to take you to England? How are you going to get there?"

Her face colored slightly. "I'll go by myself. I'll live in London. Support myself."

"Girls don't do that," David said condescendingly.

"I'll be a woman by then."

"Women don't travel half-way 'round the world, either," he said. "Not by themselves, anyhow."

Ann smiled and spoke with a coy tone of voice. "If there was someone who could see beyond this wilderness, someone with a sense of adventure, well, then, I wouldn't have to go alone. Now would I?"

The breeze was pulling strands of loose hair across Ann's face, obscuring her eyes. Without her eyes as cues to the meaning of her words, David was confused. Did she mean him? Or, did she mean someone else?

Before he could reason further, Ann linked an arm through his and tugged him down the slope toward Mendota.

"C'mon, Mr. Minnesota. I am cold. Let's go home," she said. The way she bumped against him repeatedly, as they

descended Pilot Knob, gave David the answer he needed. She was flirting. He felt effervescent. Like an uncorked bottle of champagne, he bubbled over with laughter, a giddy, giggling laugh of exhilaration.

"Pilot Knob is probably an ant hill compared to some of the peaks in the Cambrian Mountains," David offered. He winked at her and added: "They're in Wales, you know. Just a hop, skip and a jump west of England."

"So!" Ann exclaimed. "You do know something about the world."

"Sure," David teased. "I know there are thousands of Englishmen right eager to come to Minnesota. They're fascinated by the frontier and Indians and buffalo and such."

He darted ahead of her, laughing as he gamboled down the hillside.

"Oh! Oh!" Ann sputtered in mock anger. "David Hughes! You are nothing but a joker. I should have made you a clown suit for Christmas."

David laughed in reply, waving to Ann when he reached the street.

Walking past David, on a straight course to Pettijohn's Freight and Livery, was Willard Broyhill. The soldier was too deep in thought to recognize David. He was planning a party. The men at his end of the barracks had commissioned him to fetch some whiskey for the holidays. He'd decided to go them one better. He was going to get a wagon full of the stuff, hide it in the post stable, and sell it for a profit.

Chapter 11

SUSPICIONS

Willard Broyhill stepped into the office at Pettijohn's Freight and Livery and coughed. His head swiveled in a 180 degree arc, like a nervous deer entering a forest clearing.

"Hello?"

Caleb Pettijohn appeared in the open door that connected the office and the barn. "What can I do for you?"

"Is there somewhere we can talk?" Broyhill glanced out the office window as he spoke.

"You a soldier?"

"Does it matter?"

"Follow me." Pettijohn led Broyhill into the harness room opposite the horse stalls. He had long since figured out that when nervous soldiers came knocking it meant one thing: whiskey. The soldier likely needed a wagon to smuggle whiskey up to the fort.

Broyhill asked for the weekly rate on a wagon and a team. The men bargained a bit, agreed on a price, then traded idle conversation as Pettijohn counted and pocketed the coins.

"You ever get a look at them Indians across the way?" Pettijohn asked, cocking a thumb toward the fort.

Broyhill was relaxed now. He'd gotten what he came for, no questions asked. Pettijohn didn't seem to care why he--a soldier stationed miles from home--needed a wagon.

"Lately," said Broyhill, "the only duty I been gettin' is watchin' them. And I'm bored as a duck in the desert. All we do is stand around. Maybe open the gate a few times."

Pettijohn hitched his lead gray to a lumber wagon. The soldier held her in place while he harnessed the second horse. "Missionaries, I suppose," said Pettijohn.

"Uh, huh. Bishop Whipple, too. I shook his hand," Broyhill said proudly. "Once some ruffians from St. Paul or somewheres showed up. First they tried to force their way in. Then they tried to bribe me and my brother-in-law, but they didn't get too far. I got rid of them, though. I gave 'em a peek through a knothole. When they saw all those tipis, they lost their fire, real quick."

The two men shared a laugh while Pettijohn led the team into the livery yard. The wagon was ready, but Broyhill was enjoying himself in his role as Jailer of the Sioux.

"Oddest visitor is this boy that comes two, three times a week. He brings food and stays for hours."

"Someone from around here?"

"Think so," Broyhill said. "Name is Higgins. No, that ain't it. First name's David, though.. I know that for sure."

Pettijohn's eyes widened in surprise. "Hughes? Is it David Hughes?"

"That's him. Dark-looking, right? Like he's part Indian himself." Broyhill climbed into the wagon and took the reins from Pettijohn. "You know him?"

"His father's a friend of mine and white as the day is long."

"Whatever you say." Broyhill clucked and gave the reins a snap. "I'm off then. I'll have your rig back in a week." He drove the team out of the yard and turned east.

Pettijohn filled his pipe and fumbled in his coat pocket for his match box. Finding nothing but lint, he pocketed the pipe and wandered into the barn. No matter, he thought. The new Virginia blend in his pipe would not satisfy the urge building inside him--the urge to ask Humphrey Hughes, point blank, about his son.

Chapter 12

THE TRIP

Conversation was lively when the six travelers started out the next day, mostly talk of Christmas food and presents. But discussion lessened as the miles bounced by. The heavy buffalo robes covering each passenger stifled conversation. Speaking above the rumble of four wheels and 24 hooves was difficult, too. David daydreamed and swallowed to soothe a scratchy throat. Ann nestled against her mother and read from *Last of the Mohicans,* David's Christmas present from his parents. In the opposite seat Humphrey Hughes dozed, his head bobbing with every bump on the roadway. Next to him Mr. Pettijohn fidgeted without his pipe. He continued talking, despite the noise and the weight of the buffalo robes.

"They say this will be bigger news than the massacres themselves," Pettijohn offered. "Has there ever been a bigger execution than this?"

"Our dear Lord's crucifixion," Mrs. Bowen said, matter-of-factly.

"Yes, of course, I meant no sacrilege. I was talking about size, ma'am. Hanging 39 human beings!"

"Human beings. Hrrrumph. Tell that to the folks down to New Ulm." Humphrey Hughes said without opening his eyes. "Every soul in Milford Township was killed, every man, woman

and child. You can't tell me real human beings would slaughter women and babies."

"Naturally, I didn't mean humans in a literal sense," Pettijohn said.

Mr. Hughes, his eyes still shut, spoke with authority. "Civilization is marching across America, Pettijohn. One way or another the Red race will have to give way."

"So right," Pettijohn said. "They are a savage race. They'll disappear eventually. Die off, I suppose."

"What we need is another Indian territory, like down south of Kansas," Mr. Hughes said. "The Federal government could put the Sioux, the Winnebago and the Chippewas on one big reservation, where the Army could watch them." He straightened up and rubbed his eyes, waking to the topic. "Put them some place out of the way, maybe west of the Missouri River or up on the British border somewheres."

"Removal is the key," Pettijohn agreed. "But, don't expect Lincoln to do it any time soon. He's damn partial to the Indians from what I can tell. We had a chance to hang a couple hundred of them until he stuck his big, hairy nose into it."

"Three hundred and three, Mr. Pettijohn," David said.

"Right you are, David," Pettijohn said. "And that's just a drop in the bucket compared to the folks they killed. I know a lieutenant in the Seventh Regiment who says there's 500-some dead between the Iowa border and Fort Ambercrombie. I say we wait until '64 and hang them after Lincoln is voted out of office."

"Fine idea. Fine idea," Mr. Hughes said. "The day Lincoln goes back to rail-splitting, we'll start braiding rope."

"How come we don't hang rebel prisoners-of-war," David asked.

"That's different, David," his father said.

"You know, Humphrey, I'm wondering if Lincoln is right with this nigger colony idea. He's thinking about shipping all the niggers to Central America. So, why can't we put all the Sioux on that big island up to Lake Superior?"

"Father?" David persisted. "Why is it different?"

"How is what different?" David's father said. There was irritation in his voice. "What?"

"How come the army is going to hang Indian prisoners-of-war? They don't hang captured Rebels."

"They are two entirely different situations. For one thing, the Indians are not prisoners-of-war," Mr. Hughes said. "They're murderers. It was a massacre. You know that."

"How would they live up there on that island," Mrs. Bowen joined in.

Mr. Pettijohn rearranged the robe covering his legs. "Well, now, I don't know. Hunting and fishing and such, I suppose."

"If they aren't human," David asked. "What are they?"

"Pardon?" Mr. Pettijohn looked at David then at Humphrey Hughes. Mr. Hughes uncrossed then recrossed his

legs. Ann closed the book in her lap. Mrs. Bowen adjusted her bonnet.

David repeated his question.

"Why, they're Indians," Pettijohn said. "That's what they are."

"*Indian* human beings?" David knew he was pushing the adults hard, but he wanted answers.

The coach's occupants swayed to and fro to the rhythm of the road, looking at one another, each waiting for someone to speak. It was a thorny question, one not easily answered.

Mr. Hughes put his arm around his son's shoulders and aimed his sales smile at the others.

"I believe Mr. Pettijohn answered your question, David. They're Indians, plain and simple, plain and simple."

"You're saying they are animals, then," David said.

Mr. Hughes stiffened in his seat. "Please excuse the boy, Mrs. Bowen. He's overly curious about all manner of things. His mother and I, apparently, have failed to teach him proper conduct in the company of adults. My apologies. My apologies."

David pulled his blankets closer to his chin and fell silent. He knew when he was being told to shut up. If his mother were here, she'd say he'd committed a *faux pas*, a French phrase that meant "you put your foot in your mouth." David smelled the adults' disapproval as clearly as he smelled body odor emanating from his father's under arm, now so very near his head. Words weren't the only means of offending others, he thought.

Conversation veered to the recent fighting in Tennessee. Usually David relished war talk. But he'd been silenced. It didn't matter, anyhow. He was thinking about other concerns now, wondering if the French had a fancy phrase for being deceitful. He'd become so deceitful his middle name could be Deceitful--David *Deceitful* Hughes. His mother's middle name, on the other hand, could be Secretive. Catherine *Secretive* Hughes. When they got back home, he was going to find Long Walker and ask him some questions. Then he was going to pin his mother down about her secrets.

At the changing station in Shakopee the travelers rested in the house while fresh horses were hitched and the coach wheels were stripped of slush and mud. David started a sketch of Ann. His pencil skipped over the paper as they talked about the future.

"What are you going to do in the spring," David asked. "Where are you going to go?"

"Mother says we'll go home and fix up the farm. There's no one back East really." She paused to position her hair. "We're here for good."

David worked on her hair, moving his pencil in swirling circles, hoping to capture the sauciness of her long curls.

"Why do you know so much about the Indians," Ann said. "You talk as if you were interested in them."

David outlined her facial features.

"You don't feel sorry for them do you?"

"What do you mean," David asked. He kept his eyes on the sketch, so Ann couldn't see his face.

"You asked all those questions this morning, about the Indians." Ann's nose wrinkled with disgust.

"I'm curious, that's all. You heard my father. I'm overly curious and ill-mannered."

"Well, I'm not the least bit interested. The men will be hung, the rest of them will be shipped out of Minnesota and the whole mess will be put to rest."

The station manager's wife brought bowls of stew for the travelers. David set down the sketch and ate steadily, studying Ann's face as she spooned mouthfuls of stew. He wondered if "putting the whole mess to rest" included believing her brother was dead.

"David." Humphrey Hughes beckoned to him from the far corner of the station house. He gulped one last mouthful of stew and went to his father.

"What were all those questions for?"

"What?"

"On the coach," Mr. Hughes said, severely. "Who do think you are? You were contradicting Caleb Pettijohn and me about the Indians. You were asking us impertinent questions."

"I didn't mean--"

"You are a child. You--"

"I was just curious. I wanted--"

Humphrey Hughes slapped David full in the face. The snap of flesh on flesh turned the heads of the other travelers. Mr. Hughes took David by the shoulders and pushed him into a chair. He planted his hands on the chair's arms and leaned into the boy until his nose was inches from

David's. His voice was harsh, but low, a menacing stage whisper.

"Don't you ever contradict my opinions in public again. Never! When you are with me you will speak only when spoken to. Do you understand me?"

David nodded quickly, but slightly.

"You've always been an odd child. But now you are an embarrassment as well. I will not be embarrassed by a loud-mouthed mama's boy. Do you hear me?"

David did not speak or move.

"When we get home I am going to put a stop to all your extra learning. Going to school is one thing. But this sitting around reading books and discussing and debating with your mother--it's over. You are going to go to work."

David's eyes widened.

"You will earn your keep. And work will teach you some respect. If you're going to be my son, then you're going to be well-mannered and respectful."

Humphrey Hughes walked away, leaving David alone in the corner, stunned and silent like a shell-shocked soldier. His father had called him a mama's boy before. He often complained that David only played, read, ate, and slept. David, himself, was aware of his problem of speaking out of turn. All that was old news. What disturbed David was the remark he couldn't quite figure out: *"If you are going to be my son. . . ."*

Chapter 13

REVENGE

Good Singer went to Blue Turtle's tipi and sat with his friend. He fed the fire while the family wept. When Blue Turtle took one last rattling breath, Good Singer mourned with the family. Then he and The Owl followed the family to the gate where the body was laid in a cart. Outside the fence, the soldiers led them to the burial trench. The women made their keening sounds of grief while two elderly relatives lowered the body into the ground.

When the soldiers motioned to the men to cover the body with dirt, The Owl picked up a shovel. But Good Singer did not. Instead, he sang while the soldiers laughed and smoked. He sang while Blue Turtle's family wailed and wept. He sang as The Owl shoveled chunks of frozen dirt onto the blanket-wrapped body of their friend.

When they were done, The Owl went to chop wood for his mother. Good Singer went to the fence nearest *Wakpaminisota*. Her frozen waters were silent, but he knew she was there. Would he live to hear her lazy waters murmur in the Moon When the Geese Lay Eggs? He had a cough, but no white spots in his mouth, no rash, no fever. Often he wished there were an elm tree in the camp. The slimy coating on the inner bark of

the *petutupa* would soothe his throat and control his cough. In its place he continued sucking on a pebble.

In the distance Good Singer could hear the grating sound of shovels on frozen ground, a sign that more children and old people had died. He felt his forehead and cheeks. He felt for the red rash that David Hughes called measles. He felt behind his ears and around his neck with both hands, then quickly pulled them away. What was a rash on the neck, he thought, compared with the choke of a rope?

The missionaries had gone to Mankato for the hanging. David, had gone, too. There was no one left to tell him what was happening. His face was hot now. Not with the red rash, but with the anger of imprisonment. Good Singer burned with the desire to escape and the frustration of knowing it would never happen.

He felt for the the mystery sack that hung from his waist. Inside was his talisman, his stuffed wren, given him by his father. Back then Good Singer was called Wren Talking Backward, for the way he spoke. He faltered when he talked, tripped over his tongue. But somehow, when he sang, words came out easily and smoothly. And so he sang often.

Good Singer took a small ball of cloth from the sack and unwrapped it. Inside was a lock of Blue Turtle's hair. He fingered the hair and made a silent vow. The grief he felt, the ache in his chest and the sting his eyes, would never go away. But, hurting the soldiers would lessen his pain and honor his friend in death.

"Good Singer." It was The Owl. His suit coat was gone, his face blackened with ashes. "I have been thinking about the soldiers. I have an idea. The guards at the gate sleep during the early morning. Sometimes they are drunk. We could climb the fence and hurt them."

Good Singer felt his frustration ebb. Here was something he could do. Escape was impossible, but revenge would be theirs before the sun rose again.

In the early morning hours the boys went to the gate area. They listened through the fence to make sure the sentries were asleep. One at a time they scaled the fence, landing lightly on the frozen mud. In the moonlight they could see both soldiers sleeping, chins tucked in their coats, boots inches from the fire.

The boys crawled along the fence, their eyes never leaving the sentries. Propped against the chopping block was Willard Broyhill, well known in the camp for his bright red beard. Lying by the woodpile was his brother-in-law, Stephen Kenney. A corked jug of whiskey was wedged inside the wall of split wood. In front of the woodpile was a can of coal oil. Good Singer circled the fire to the far side, keeping out of reach of its flickering light.

The Owl dropped to his knees, inched around the woodpile and grabbed the coal oil can. The hinged handle squeaked. In the still night air the noise seemed tremendous. Good Singer crouched low. The Owl pressed himself to the ground by the woodpile.

The boys waited for sounds that said the sentries were waking, but they heard only the fire crackling and spitting. The Owl peeked around the corner of the woodpile. Both men were still sleeping.

Good Singer willed his heartbeat to slow down then stood and opened his mystery sack. Ahead was the chopping block and Broyhill. Only the soldier's wind burned nose and closed eyes showed through the gap between his cap and coat collar. Out of the corner of his eye Good Singer could see his friend, hunched in a crouch, within four feet of Kenney. The Owl tipped the coal oil can. The flammable fluid flowed in a stream toward Kenney, pooling where it met his coat.

Good Singer moved past the chopping block, searching the fire for a small piece of burning wood. Out of the corner of his eye he saw The Owl empty the can, set it down and back away. The coal oil seeped into the bulky woolen coat. Good Singer plucked a burning splinter from the fire and retraced his steps.

Stephen Kenney was sleeping deeply, dreaming of his home in St. Cloud, dreaming of boiled chicken and potatoes, pining for the new school teacher there. Then, in an instant, he was awake and screaming, leaping in frantic circles, slapping at his burning backside. Flames and smoke trailed after him like the mane on a galloping mustang.

Broyhill was awake and laughing. "Got yourself too close to the fire, eh!"

Kenney yanked his coat off and flung it on the ground. "I was a good foot from the fire! And there ain't no wind!"

Broyhill stamped on the coat, extinguishing the flames. "It was the whiskey, Kenney. You must have been up staggering around."

"Shut up," Kenney growled. He picked up his scorched coat. It reeked of coal oil. "Something ain't right here."

"Brother-in-law, I've seen Injuns that can drink better than you."

"Shut up, will ya."

Kenney looked around, searching for answers. His eyes stopped at the chopping block. Resting on its scarred top was a lock of raven-black hair.

Chapter 14

MRS. THOMPSON

Catherine Hughes left Emma Bowen at the neighbor's house and made a beeline for the Indian camp. Using a mixture of sign language, English, and Dakota, she located Long Walker's tipi. She passed out pieces of horehound to the flock of children slowing her progress through camp. Her long skirts and a heavy wool mantle made movement around lodge poles and between woodpiles awkward. The children laughed when Catherine tripped over a chunk of wood and fell to her knees.

"Mrs. Thompson," said a voice in English.

Catherine looked up. It was Long Walker. He was smaller, grayer, more grizzled, but she recognized him from the old days.

"I will help you," Long Walker said. He helped Catherine to her feet and led her to his tipi. Inside he offered her a seat by the fire and a blanket. Catherine accepted the seat, but refused the blanket. The massacres had made her wary of the Dakota, despite her son's arguments. And this particular Dakota was a threat to her family.

"You are Mrs. Thompson?" Long Walker got right to the point.

"I used to be," Catherine said. "I'm Mrs. Humphrey Hughes now. My son, David, was with me the other day, when

you kept calling to me. You mustn't do that again. He doesn't know about his father. And I don't want him to know."

"You don't want him to know about his father," Long Walker said, "or you don't want him to know he is Dakota."

"Why should he know?" Catherine said. "It will only cause him grief."

A young, female head poked through the tipi flap, looked around, then disappeared again.

Catherine lowered her voice and leaned toward Long Walker. "I loved Jack Thompson. I knew he was a half Dakota and I married him, of my own free will. But things were better then. Jack and the other traders were friends with the Dakota. You and Jack got along well, didn't you?"

Long Walker nodded. "He taught me English those winters we traded with the Yanktonais. He was a good man."

The tipi flap opened and a young woman entered carrying a metal cup of steaming liquid. She handed the cup to Catherine and left. Catherine sipped and offered a small smile. She knew that whatever this pitiful beverage was, it was shared by people who had little to offer. She, too, had little to share. The coins in her purse were all that remained of her laundry money.

"David must be known as a white person," Catherine said. "If word gets out he has mixed blood, we will be hounded out of Mendota."

The young girl returned with another cup for Long Walker and wood for the fire, leaving again without a word.

"My husband has cared for David as if he were his own son." Catherine paused. The anguish in what she was about to say twisted the features of her face. "But, I'm not sure he will stand by us if our neighbors find out about David. He might throw David and me out."

Catherine Hughes wept softly into her gloved hands. She had hoped to play upon Long Walker's sympathy. But instead, she was overwhelmed with fear for her family's safety. Hundreds of refugees were living in the area, including three in her own home. If they knew a Dakota boy was living in their midst, they might form a mob and seek revenge. A mob might burn her home, like the townspeople who burn the monster in *Frankenstein*.

A log shifted in the fire, sending a crackling flurry of sparks upward. Catherine watched glowing bits of ash ascend until her eyes met Long Walker's.

"Why do you think I will tell about your son," Long Walker asked. "You do not need anything from me. I need something from you."

"What?"

"Mrs. Thomp--Mrs. Hughes, I have met your son. He and the boy, Good Singer, are the only ones who can help me. I would not hurt them." Long Walker stopped talking. He weighed the bargain he was about to offer her. He would trade a confidence for a confidence, if she were willing.

"Mrs. Hughes. I will keep your secret if you keep our secret."

Catherine's eyes narrowed. Beneath her layers of clothing, she could feel her skin prickle with bumps, like the flesh of a plucked chicken. Did his secret involve Little Crow? The leader of the Uprising was still at large. Could he possibly want the boys to help Little Crow and his followers?

"Mrs. Hughes?"

"I do not know what your secret is," Catherine said. "I can't trade if I don't know what I'll get in the bargain. Tell me what your secret is about."

The old man stood. With a finger on his pursed lips, he crawled to the tipi flap and looked out. Then he sat down again, this time a foot closer to Catherine.

"It is money. I know where there is money."

Long Walker and Catherine locked eyes, each evaluating the other's motives, each considering what was at stake. Catherine was relieved that the secret did not involve the Indians that escaped from General Sibley. But she remained wary.

"If this money was taken last summer during the Uprising," she said, "I will have nothing to do with any bargain."

"The money is ours," said Long Walker. "It is so old it will be hard to find."

"And you want my son and Good Singer to find it? You are crazy, old man."

"I am not crazy," snapped Long Walker. "I am hungry. I am cold. We need this money. I will do anything to get it."

"But David's just a boy. He doesn't have anything to do with this."

"The boy is Dakota. His grandmother was from my band," said Long Walker. "He is tied to us. It is kinship."

"He is white," shouted Catherine. Fear expanded in her chest, pressing against her rib cage. "He was raised white. He never knew his father or his grandmother!"

"He is white, too," Long Walker said, calmly. "That is why he can dig the gold."

Catherine stood. She pulled her mantle tightly around her neck, as if to ward off Long Walker's words. Long Walker remained seated.

"I won't agree to any of this," said Catherine. "This is crazy."

Long Walker looked up at her and said, "The trade is done. Your son will help us or I will tell the soldiers he is Dakota. It will not be a secret anymore."

Catherine gasped and leaped at the old man, hitting him with her fists. Long Walker toppled over backwards from the weight of the woman. He fended off the blows with his arms, but did not fight back. When Catherine's bonnet slipped over her eyes, and her fists slowed, Long Walker pushed her away and stood. His hands were shaking and his teeth were clenched.

"We are dying, Mrs. Hughes," he hissed. "We need our gold. Send the boy to me."

Chapter 15

MANKATO

Mankato was jammed with people eager to see the Indians hanged. Streams of citizens flowed into the town from both sides of the Minnesota River, gathering around the massive, square gallows that stood on the levee like a partially raised barn.

David and Ann held hands and followed closely in the wake created by Humphrey Hughes, Caleb Pettijohn and Mrs. Bowen. Crossing Main Street would be like fording the river in March--they could easily be swept up by the crowd and separated. People were jostling one another and not bothering to apologize. Wagons, coaches and carriages of every description clogged the streets. Horses, oxen and mules were tied to every hitching post, porch pole, railing, barrel and tree. Boys stood in wagons, hawking copies of the *Mankato Weekly Record,* telling passersby that their newspaper carried the names and statements of the condemned men.

On Humphrey Hughes' signal, the five travelers from Mendota stepped into the mud and manure of Main Street. Hand-in-hand, they dashed between a horse-drawn wagon and mounted soldiers on patrol. They reached the safety of the sidewalk in front of Wigley's Mercantile. Humphrey Hughes pounded on the door until Mr. Wigley let them in.

The main floor was teeming with Mr. Wigley's friends and business acquaintances. Humphrey Hughes had the second floor office window reserved. He'd bartered for it the day the executions were announced.

Once upstairs Ann and David leaned into the windowsill and eyed the sprawling mass of people below them. Ranks of soldiers formed a square perimeter about the gallows. Surrounding the soldiers were hundreds and hundreds of spectators positioning themselves to get a good view. Those closest stood in the mud. Young girls wriggled in their mothers' arms. Young boys balanced on their fathers' shoulders. Further back people were sitting in carriages. Beyond them, entire families crowded together in wagon boxes.

Mr. Wigley brought chairs and boxes for his Mendota guests. Humphrey Hughes sat down on the biggest box and pulled out his watch. "If the Army gets it right, they should swing in 45 minutes. Thirty-nine of them at one time. Amazing! Can you believe this? Can you believe this?"

"The President pardoned another one, Father," David piped up. "It's 38 now."

"Who cares?" grumped Humphrey Hughes. "The damage is done. Damned Indians would have listened if we'd hung 300 like General Sibley said. Hanging 38 won't be real retribution. How can you compare that to 500 dead Christians? Whatever happened to "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth?"

David looked out the window again. The sun shone brightly. What little snow remained was melting. Spectators

had their coats unbuttoned. Some wore only sweaters or suit coats. The mass of people--David figured there were thousands--was overwhelming.

He edged away from Ann. He thought she might start crying and he didn't want to see her that way. He approached his father. Now was the time to deliver the letters. He counted them in his coat pocket: one for General Sibley, one for Red Iron, and one for Good Singer's father. If he slipped away now he could still make it back for the hanging. But, if he didn't make it back, that would be all right, too. The more he thought about the hanging the more confused he became. One moment he was fascinated, the next he was horrified.

His father and Mr. Pettijohn were debating whether the drop was sufficient to break the Indians' necks, or merely choke them, slowly, to death. Mrs. Bowen sat apart from the group, knitting mittens.

"Father." David used the most respectful tone of voice he could muster. "I have to go, badly. If I go now. . ."

Humphrey Hughes dismissed David with a wave of his hand. David headed down the stairway, where Mr. Wigley let him out into the street. His heart was pounding. Time was short and he barely knew where he was going. He headed toward the two-story stone building where he thought the condemned men were held. The soldiers there were formed in two lines, making a path from the building to the gallows. David's progress was blind because he could not see through the crowd of men and women wearing hats and bonnets. Much of the time he walked

sideways, slicing between groups of people like a human knife. When at last he reached to the stone building, he hailed an officer.

"Sir, excuse me. I have letters to deliver to the jail."

The officer looked David over. "Condemned or prisoners?"

"Prisoners."

"Next door. The log building there." The officer turned and beckoned to a soldier. "Escort this boy to the jail. He has letters."

David followed the soldier to a rude log building. The soldier turned David over to the guards, who unbolted the door and pointed him inside. The door closed and David was enveloped in the murkiness of the windowless prison. Dust and the stench of unwashed bodies made his nose itch. It was surprisingly noisy, too. No one person was talking loudly. In fact, most seemed to be using quiet, confidential voices. But the combined sounds of 300-some men confined in a small space made a dense din. A priest came toward him.

"I am Father Ravoux. May I help you?" The priest spoke with a heavy French accent.

"I'm looking for Dr. Williamson or Rev. John Williamson."

"They are next door helping prepare for the execution," said Father Ravoux. "What is your business?"

"I have a letter for Red Iron and a letter for Strikes the Buzzard," David said.

"You are family?" Father Ravoux reached out to take the letters.

David kept the letters tightly in his hand. "No. I'm a friend."

"Young man," said Ravoux, folding his hands in front of his chest. "How are we to know you are not a ruffian, sent here on a wager, to gawk at these unfortunate people? Or, worse, to do them harm."

The priest searched David's clothing with his hands and the boy's face with his eyes. "Time is short. We are busy. Tell me who you are and why you are here."

"My name is David Hughes. I live in Mendota, across from the camp. I met a boy there named Good Singer. His Dakota name is *Tantanyandowan*. He asked me to write these letters for him."

Finding nothing in David's pockets but paper, a pen, and an inkwell, the priest backed off. "Stay here," he said. "I will bring Red Iron."

David's pupils were adjusting to the lack of light. He swept his eyes back and forth across the room, trying to memorize as many details as possible. He would report everything to Good Singer. Directly in front of him three men lay on their backs, staring at him from beneath broad-striped trade blankets. To his left a prisoner was standing on a box, peering through cracks between the logs, apparently describing the activities around the gallows to his friends. Others were sitting or squatting, smoking and talking.

The priest returned, followed by Red Iron. The chief was wearing a white shirt and dark pants, with a blanket wrapped about his waist. He wore the braids of a Dakota, but no leg irons.

David greeted Red Iron in Dakota, calling him *Mazasa*, hoping he pronounced the name correctly. The chief returned the greeting, but sounded suspicious.

Father Ravoux moved closer to David, searching the boy again with a questioning look. "If you do not need me to interpret I must go next door now."

David smiled sheepishly. "Good Singer taught me only a few words. I need you to read the letters, please."

Father Ravoux read to Red Iron by the light of a lantern that hung from a log post. When the priest finished reading, the chief spoke to Father Ravoux, gesturing with his hands. David did not understand a word, but he knew the gist of Red Iron's response. Every shake of his gray head, every shrug of his thin shoulders, spoke of futility and hopelessness.

"He says he will speak to Colonel Miller about Strikes the Buzzard. He will try to speak to General Sibley, too. But he believes no Dakota will be freed."

David nodded. Red Iron and Father Ravoux talked back and forth a bit more.

"He wants you to tell the family to be thankful Strikes the Buzzard will not be hanged," said Father Ravoux. "And he wants to know why you are not in the stockade below Fort Snelling?"

"Does he think I'm an Indian?" David sputtered. Neither man responded. "I'm not Indian. My mother's family is very dark, that's all. They're from North Wales. My Uncle Owen is darker than me and has coal-black hair."

The men talked while David fidgeted with irritation. Then the priest turned and spoke.

"He says you look part Dakota. If you are, he will keep your secret. If you are not, he apologizes."

"I'm not," David said, firmly. He looked directly at the chief. Red Iron matched his gaze. Then the chief's jutting jaw and lips twisted upward into a smile.

"Waste," said Red Iron.

"Wash-TAY," David repeated. "Good."

The two men led David to the back of the prison. Red Iron called to a man sitting with his back against a support post. Strikes the Buzzard stood, brushing bits of straw off his blanket and pants. Father Ravoux introduced David and opened the envelope. Inside was the letter and a portrait David drew of Good Singer. The priest handed the portrait to Strikes the Buzzard.

Strikes the Buzzard nodded and smiled, his eyes moving between Father Ravoux, David and the drawing. When the letter was finished, Strikes the Buzzard spoke rapidly, his face animated, his body vibrating with excitement. He handed David two halves of a broken geode from a beaded bag that hung from his waist. Strikes the Buzzard's broad smile carried more meaning than the priest's labored translation: He wanted David to give the geode to Good Singer. David

glowed inside with pride. This, he thought, was ample reward for the risks he'd taken. This justified the trail of deceptions that began the day he bluffed his way into the Indian camp.

Chapter 16

THE HANGING

David left the letter for General Sibley at the front desk of the hotel and walked back toward Wigley's Mercantile. He felt relieved, yet sad. The letters had been delivered, but they were not going to make any difference. Good Singer's father wasn't going to be free any time soon.

The sidewalks were easier to walk on now. The crowds of people were gathered on the levee, surrounding the troops that guarded the gallows. Some were perched on rooftops or peered through second-floor windows. If Good Singer could see all this, David thought, he might understand that the people of Minnesota want nothing less than the death or exile of every Dakota.

David pounded on the door of the mercantile until Mr. Wigley opened up. Upstairs the mood in the office was somber. Everyone but Mrs. Bowen was looking out the open window. They turned as one when he entered the room, but no one asked why he took so long. David gave Ann a small wave and sat on the box closest to Mrs. Bowen.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Mrs. Bowen?"

"No thank you, David." A second mitten was taking shape between her two wooden needles.

"It looks like you won't be watching the hanging," said David. "Forgive me, but why?"

Her needles clicked rhythmically, adding knot after knot. She spoke without looking up. "Death cannot be repaid by death, David."

"But, doesn't the Bible say an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

The needles stopped. Mrs. Bowen turned and faced David, smiling faintly. The sweat under his collar suddenly cooled. Was this another *faux pas,* he wondered?

"You remind me of my son," said Mrs. Bowen. "Thomas was intelligent and forceful in his manner, much like you. I carry the memory of him with me every waking moment. Hanging these men won't bring him back."

Crowd noise swelled and beat against the front of the building. Caleb Pettijohn shouted, "They're coming out!"

David stood quickly and took Mrs. Bowen's hand. "We've enjoyed having you in our home. I like your daughters very much, especially Ann. Perhaps we can visit your farm when things are back to normal."

"My husband and I would like that. Ann has told her father all about you."

David felt his pulse pounding in his temples. Ann liked him like he liked her! He nodded and grinned at Mrs. Bowen then skipped to the window. He slid under Pettijohn's arm, which was braced against the windowsill, and found a spot next to Ann.

"What are you so happy about, Mr. Overly Curious? I thought you had doubts about hanging Indians." Ann was standing so close he could see flecks of gray in her blue eyes. "What? What is it."

"Nothing," David said, giggling. "I'll tell you later."

The condemned men stood on the gallows drop. Each wore a white sack on his head that resembled a stocking cap. Their hands were tied at the wrists. Soldiers pulled the caps down over their faces and slipped nooses around their necks.

The crowd noise died down. The enormity of what was about to happen was sweeping across the levee, quieting the spectators. The prisoners were singing in unison. Their chant pierced the morning with a melancholy that seemed to affect the spectators. The crowds grew quieter still.

"Look! They're holding hands," Ann whispered. Several men had managed to link themselves together by their bound hands. Others twisted and turned, trying desperately to reach the hands of the next man. The gallows drop shook as the singing and dancing increased in intensity.

The soldiers filed down the steps. An officer beat twice on a drum. The third beat signaled the execution. A man in civilian clothes hacked at the drop rope, then severed it with a long slice. The drop fell to the ground and 38 men dangled in their nooses, their bodies jerking and swaying.

The crowd of thousands roared its approval. Ann went to her mother. David stared in fascination at the bodies.

Chapter 17

TROUBLE

David jerked upright from his night's sleep. He blinked and rubbed the crust from his dark eyelashes. Easing his legs from under the goose down quilt, he looked around the room before stepping from his bed. He was too old to get riled by dreams, but the intensity of this one told him he should take no chances. He shivered in the cool morning air as he pulled on his clothes. The dream had been dreadful: the hanging was replayed, step-by-step, like the pantomime show he'd seen at Ingersoll's last spring. It had the same breathless silence, too. He saw himself in each of the nooses, his face contorted in agony, his mouth frantically forming soundless words. Thirty-eight David Hugheses slowly twisting in the brittle December sunshine.

Involuntarily, David felt the flesh of his neck, imagining a thick rope cinched tightly against his Adam's apple. What were the men thinking as the drum beat marked the last seconds of their lives? He shuddered and stepped to the window, drawn by the pink sunshine leaking over the Mississippi bluffs. But the gallows in Mankato hung in his mind, resistant to the bright optimism of a new day. Did the Army hang the right men? Were they the men who killed families in their homes and fields last summer? Or were some

of them hanged for simply fighting General Sibley's soldiers on the battlefield?

David pushed the curtains completely aside and willed his mind to a new subject: Ann. The trip home from Mankato had been fun. He and Ann talked and passed notes and read and risked a giggle or two. Sitting next to her in the coach David could feel her shoulder touching his. He could smell her hair and see the spark of life in her blue eyes. Best of all, he could see that she felt as he did. It was nothing less than love. And it made every minute of the day longer and larger.

Being in love meant nothing else mattered. When the coach bogged down south of Belle Plaine, the adults grumbled. Ann and David jumped out and helped the coachman free the wheels, laughing like they didn't care a lick they were splattered with black mud.

David tiptoed downstairs and wrote a note to his mother. He left it on the kitchen table, hoping it would buy him time:

Mother,

It's a beautiful day. I went for walk. I'll be back in time to bake bread.

David

A morning walk would best explain his absence to the

Bowen family. His mother would probably guess that he went to the camp to see Good Singer. His father would never know. He was already at Clement's Saloon, drinking whiskey and telling stories.

David fed the horses and the chickens and set out for the river, humming a march he'd heard at the fort, but couldn't name. He could see open water above the ferry crossing, but the ice beneath his feet seemed solid. Half way across David checked his pocket for the broken geode Strikes the Buzzard had given him. The crystal-filled rock was the only possession Good Singer's father could share with his son. Its plain brown exterior disguised a marvelous interior lined with brilliant pink-white crystals. To David the geode seem to represent the Dakota people. Outwardly they were a plain people, poor and primitive. But if you looked inside--really got to know them--they were like any people: full of ideas and accomplishments, rich in history and culture. Like his mother always said, "people are people, no better, no worse."

During bread-baking discussions his mother's words had always made sense. But when David stacked those words against the deaths of more than 500 settlers, when he saw the hatred in the faces of the spectators at the hangings, when he read the newspaper editorials calling for extermination--he had to wonder. A better way of saying it, he thought, would be, "Individuals can be good or bad, but people are just people, no better, no worse." When he thought of it that way, he could reconcile helping Good Singer, with being

a friend to the Bowen family. He wished the rest of Minnesota had the benefit of his mother's wisdom.

He recited Red Iron's blunt words from memory. He knew the truth would disappoint Good Singer, but he was not about to feed false hopes to his friend.

"We don't know what the government will do with the men in Mankato," David added. "There are rumors they will be put in a prison somewhere outside the state."

David began describing the log prison, but was distracted by Good Singer rummaging underneath a blanket. His friend removed a folded piece of paper.

"Long Walker has told me about the gold," said Good Singer, pointing south. "He drew a picture for us to find it."

David took the paper from Good Singer and unfolded it. A crudely drawn map showed an area in Scott County southwest of Mendota. Centered on the map was a long, skinny lake. Along its west shore were tree-covered hills.

Good Singer pointed his finger at a tree that was drawn three times larger than the others. "By the big tree is the gold."

"You believe there's really gold there? And you want me to help you dig it up?"

"Come," said Good Singer. "Long Walker will tell you."

The boys walked to the old man's tipi. Long Walker was alone, smoking his pipe. The old man and Good Singer exchanged a few words while David found a comfortable spot close to the fire.

Long Walker wasted no time. "You and Good Singer can help us through this bad time. You can find our gold and bring it to us. You are young boys, so the soldiers and farmers will not chase you. Only you can do this for us."

The thrill of adventure grabbed David. His mind painted pictures of a night-time journey. He saw himself and Good Singer digging by lantern light, recovering the gold, returning to the camp triumphant.

David reined in his imagination. "I can't do that. My mother would never let me leave Mendota. And I could never sneak away without her permission. Anyway, aren't we too young to be doing something like this?"

Long Walker set down his pipe and folded his hands in his lap. "I have talked to your mother and--"

"I knew it," David said, accusingly. "I knew it. You know my mother. How come you called her Mrs. Thompson?"

"Listen!" Long Walker held his right hand up, to stop David.

"How do you know my mother? When did you talk--"

"Hear me!" said Long Walker. "Listen and then go home and listen to your mother."

Good Singer touched David on the arm, signaling that he should sit back and be silent.

"I have known your mother for a long time," Long Walker began. "She came to me three days ago. We made a trade. Her part of the trade is you will help us dig our gold."

David blinked in utter shock. He looked to Good Singer, reading his face for a grin, a smirk, any sign that said this

was a joke. "What did you give her? What was the other half of the trade?"

Long Walker added wood to the fire, but no new information to the discussion. "It is better for you to talk to your mother."

The doubt in David's mind caused his head to shake in disbelief. "You truly want me to help Good Singer get out of here and go to this hill and dig up gold coins?"

Long Walker and Good Singer nodded in unison.

"My mother said I should do that?"

"We made a trade," Long Walker said simply.

David's brain buzzed with confusion. He bolted through the tipi flap and ran through the camp, pushing children and women aside, slowing only to wave his pass at the sentries and slip through the gate. Outside the camp David ran as fast as the icy ground would allow.

As he ran, a feeling of foreboding, a sense of self-doubt, grew in his throat. When he reached the south shore his chest was heaving. The cold air burned his lungs and made him cough. The coughing grew deeper and more harsh.

The unanswered questions that had plagued David in recent days began to meld in his mind: *Did his mother have a secret life with someone named Thompson? Could this man be his father? Then who was Humphrey Hughes?*

He'd always been teased about his dark looks. In the last week, alone, he'd been twice mistaken for an Indian. *Was this Thompson an Indian?*

David braced himself against a tree and vomited. He threw up because he knew there were things about himself that he did not know. He could smell trouble as surely as he smelled the vomit splattered at his feet.

Chapter 18

WHISKEY AND WORDS

Caleb Pettijohn found Humphrey at Clement's Saloon, reading the *Pioneer* at a corner table. Judging by Humphrey's color, Pettijohn figured he'd been there a while.

"Merry Christmas, Caleb!"

"Merry Christmas. Keeping up with the war news, are we?"

"Naw, scouting for a building in St. Paul. I'm thinking of opening a store."

"Ah," Pettijohn responded as he settled in a chair.

Humphrey leaned forward, confidentially. "Truth be told, Caleb, I needed to get out in the worst way. I got a house full of people who don't know how to have a good time. I couldn't stand another minute." He laughed deeply and eased back to allow the barkeeper to collect his empty glass and wipe up the pattern of wet rings on the table top. Pettijohn ordered each of them a whiskey. Humphrey folded the newspaper and tilted his chair on its rear legs. The buttons on his vest strained to the point of popping as he fought off a yawn.

"I don't think I can sell on the road much longer." Humphrey's speech was slow, the s and sh sounds drawn out and sibilant. "If it weren't for all the homeless folk, on

account of the Uprising, I don't think think I'd have turned a profit this last trip."

"Makes sense all the way around," Pettijohn agreed. "A store holds a better future for David, I suppose."

"Hrrrumph," grunted Humphrey. "The boy wouldn't know a day's work if it looked him in the face." The barkeeper returned with the whiskey. Humphrey took a long gulp from his glass, wincing slightly as it bit into the back of his throat. "Every hour that boy spends reading and discussing with his mother takes another day off his manhood and gives me another gray hair. I tell you right now, as God is my witness, he won't amount to much in this life."

Pettijohn saw the opening. Here was his chance to find out about David's ancestry. "He doesn't take after you, Humphrey. I've always said that. Doesn't look all that much like you, either. Favors his mother's side, I suppose."

Humphrey agreed with a soft belch. Pettijohn pressed on. "A fellow came in the livery the other day and said he thought David looked part Indian, what with his dark looks and all. Can you believe that?"

Humphrey Hughes lurched forward. The front legs of his chair thumped against the floor, punctuating his reply. "Who said that?"

"Some soldier renting a wagon. Said his name was Broyhill, I think," Pettijohn said. Then he added quickly, "Where *does* David get his darkness?"

Humphrey rose to his feet, his bulky body swaying slightly, his nose and cheeks growing redder still. Sandy

eyebrows made a fierce line across his forehead, shadowing his bloodshot eyes like a brushy cliff.

"What are you getting at?"

Caleb Pettijohn looked around the saloon. The handful of patrons were taking no notice. "Sit down, Humphrey," he soothed. "I meant no offense."

Humphrey Hughes picked up his glass and swallowed the last of the whiskey. Without a word, he bumped past Pettijohn, shrugged on his coat and walked unsteadily out the door.

Chapter 19

DISPOSSESSED

David stopped twice on his way home to check his pant legs for flecks of vomit. Each time he felt a another surge of nausea he was sure his mother's betrayal was the source of his sickness. She had secrets about her past and his.

He knew he was supposed to be looking for work. But, his only thought now was to confront his mother. He needed to find out why she would agree to Long Walker's crazy scheme. He needed to find out why his mother was once called Mrs. Thompson.

David vomited again, this time falling to his hands and knees. With each heave of his stomach David pondered the central question of human existence: Who am I?

When the retching stopped, David pulled himself to his feet and walked homeward. Somewhere near the old Faribault house he heard voices, the sounds of many people talking. When his home came into sight, David could see a crowd gathered between the house and barn. He began to run.

The crowd was arranged in a loose circle around the carriage. Sitting alone, holding the reins, was his mother. She was crying.

David burst through the circle and climbed into the carriage.

"Mother! What's happening?"

Before she could answer a snowball, and then a stone, pelted the carriage, inches from David's head. His mother pulled him into the rig. David hunched down against her, covered his head and shouted for an explanation. Catherine Hughes did not answer.

David could hear people talking but he could not make out what they were saying. Then a single voice cut through the noise, silencing the crowd. It was Mr. Pettijohn.

"Stop it! Stop! Let them finish packing and be on their way. The quicker they're done, the sooner we'll be rid of him. Stop it!"

David cautiously sat up and looked around. People pressed closer. The carriage was surrounded by hard, glaring faces, none more hateful than that of Math Hindbacher, a refugee from Renville County. Hindbacher stood at the right front wheel, pointing his finger at David. He began shouting in German, jabbing his finger ever closer. The guttural words flowed from him in a torrent until his face was bright red. He finished by spitting at David's feet, then turned and pushed his way past the ring of staring faces.

The house door opened and Humphrey Hughes tottered out with his arms full of hastily bundled clothing. He bulled his way through the crowd, tossed the clothing in the boot behind the seat and stepped to the front of the carriage.

"The Devil take you woman for your lying ways," shouted Humphrey Hughes. "This is a Judgement on you for deceiving me."

David looked closely at his mother and noticed for the first time her mouth and nose were bleeding. Her left eye was red and swollen. Had she been hit by stones, David wondered, or had his father struck her?

Humphrey Hughes spoke to the crowd. "When this woman came to me she was with child. She said her husband had died suddenly. That he was a trader. She never told me he was an Indian. I never would have married her if I'd known the child was a mongrel."

Catherine shook her head and sobbed. David slumped into the far corner of the seat, away from his mother, and began crying.

Humphrey Hughes' stumbled into the harness, righted himself, then slapped the mare on the rump. "Begone with you--you--whore to an Indian!"

The carriage jerked into motion, rolling out of Mendota at a near-gallop. David peeked out the side of the rig. A pack of boys was chasing them, pausing only to find the next thing to fling.

David could see Humphrey punching his fist into the air, leading his drunken cronies in a chant: "Squaw! Squaw! Squaw!"

In the second-story window of his house David could see someone. He supposed that someone was Ann.

Chapter 20

THE BALL ALLEY

David sat alone in the carriage outside a two-story wooden building. Ordinarily the hustle and bustle of Minneapolis would have captured his attention. But this morning he stared at the front door of Felsenthal's Saloon and Ball Alley and waited. His mother was inside, asking Mr. Felsenthal for a place to stay.

Watching the door kept David from thinking too much about his shattered life. Watching the door kept him from speculating what the Bowen family might be thinking. Watching the door kept him from wondering what, if any, of his possessions were in the boot. Watching the door he saw his mother exit, a faint smile on her bruised and swollen face.

"Davey, we're set," she said. "Mr. Felsenthal has agreed to take us in. He says I can work in his kitchen. There's work for you, too, dearest. If you want it."

David unloaded the carriage without comment. Bitterness and anger raged through his mind with such intensity that it was all he could do to keep from throwing his meager bundle of clothes at her. He bit his lip and pawed through the boot in search of his books and toys.

"Mr. Felsenthal was a friend of Jack's," said his mother. "From the old days. He was a furrier. Your father sold him furs and he made them into coats and hats. He made the nicest wolf gauntlets for your father."

David found two books, his drawing tablet, his Bible, pen and ink, but no lead soldiers. His anger seethed to the surface. "Which father are you referring to?"

"Davey, dearest, you have to understand–"

"Understand?" he shouted, pointing his finger in her face. "For fourteen years I was never told anything. Now I'm supposed to understand! I don't know who I am or what I am! And you want me to understand?"

David's hands fell to his side, but his fists remained balled in anger. He waited while a trio of laborers walked past on the board sidewalk. "I'll never understand what you did to me. I'll never forgive you. You've ruined my life."

Tears rolled silently down Catherine Hughes' damaged face. His words hurt her more than the stones and snowballs hurled by the mob of former friends and neighbors.

"Humphrey wanted to get rid of you, Davey," she whispered shakily. "He was like a madman. He wanted to give you over to the Army so they could put you in the camp. I calmed him down. I convinced him they'd never take you because you've been raised as a Christian. Then he talked about the new orphanage in St. Paul. Then he talked about some poor farm down in Iowa. He wouldn't let up, Davey."

David flipped idly through his drawing tablet, pretending to ignore her.

"He made me choose." Catherine edged closer. "I chose you, dearest."

David unloaded the boot in a single trip, stepping past his mother as if she weren't there. Their lodging was above the ball alley at the rear of the building. Two beds, a table, a dresser and a bath tub furnished their tiny room. Two sheets on a rope separated their room from Mr. Felsenthal's office and living quarters.

"David," said Catherine. "Why don't you look around the neighborhood while I talk with Mr. Felsenthal. He said he'll have a meal for us in a few minutes, so don't be gone long."

When she reached to give him a peck on the cheek, he slithered out of her grasp and quick-stepped down the narrow staircase. Outside, the sky was white with snow flakes. David scanned the streets and buildings before him. He headed east to avoid walking into the snow, traveling the smoother dirt between the buildings and the edge of the road. When he was out of sight, tears welled in his eyes and his throat tightened. He coughed and swallowed as he walked, to keep from crying aloud. He kept his head down, to avoid looking at the people who passed him.

The sound of children playing brought David's sad stroll to a halt. He looked up and saw the children of Union School enjoying their noon recess. He'd never seen so many children in one place at one time. They whirled and swirled in constant motion, chasing one another, playing catch, throwing snow. In one corner of the schoolyard a snowman was taking shape. In the opposite corner a slippery game of baseball

was underway. Fielders and base runners struggled to keep their footing in the new-fallen snow. Their fun fanned the flames of shame and anger inside him. He turned and ran back to Felsenthal's Saloon and Ball Alley.

In the dark, smoky warmth of the saloon David caught his breath and wiped the cold tears from his cheeks. His mother stood at the staircase with a small, middle-aged man.

"David. This is Mr. Abram Felsenthal."

David offered his hand, but withheld his customary greeting and smile. The man before him was slender, without the bulging stomach that afflicted most men of middle years. Abram Felsenthal had a full head of black, curly hair and matching beard.

"Welcome, David. You and your mother will be a change of conversation for me. Seems my customers can only talk about timber or the price of wheat or the war," said Mr. Felsenthal. His eyes twinkled as he added: "I think you'll drink less than most everyone around here, too."

Abram Felsenthal stepped into the kitchen and returned with a tray of food. He led David and his mother upstairs. The threesome pulled up chairs and shared the meal of soup, cheese and bread.

"Your mother tells me you are a good reader and a hard worker in school," Mr. Felsenthal offered.

David answered yes between bites of cheese.

"How would you like to work in the ball alley? My pin boy, Will, is wearing himself out fetching on two lanes. He could use some help. What do you say?"

David straightened up in his chair. "Sure, Mr. Felsenthal."

"Good." Mr. Felsenthal stood and shook hands with David. "I have to get back to work. If you want more food come downstairs."

David returned to his food, eating slowly and deliberately, extending the meal, hoping that he could avoid speaking with his mother. As he spooned the beef and cabbage soup into his mouth he was forced to admit his new surroundings were intriguing. He'd never been to a saloon or a ball alley. He'd read about the game in *Atlantic Monthly.* The object was to roll a ball down a narrow lane at a set of wooden pins. If you knocked them all down, you earned a strike. If you knocked some down, you got a another chance to knock over the remaining pins.

David sensed Mr. Felsenthal would be an interesting man. His German accent suggested an opportunity for David to learn about another country. His ready smile and calm manner were a balm to David's bruised ego. And his offer of employment gave David a chance to prove Humphrey Hughes wrong. He could do more than play, read, eat and sleep.

"Davey?" His mother wanted to talk. "I'm going to give you some time to think about what has happened. But I want you to keep an open mind. I've told you about your fath--about Jack Thompson--but I haven't had a chance to explain why I never told you before."

David bit into a piece of dark bread and avoided his mother's eyes.

"I won't tell you now. But, some day soon, when you're ready, you come to me and I'll explain myself."

David broke eye contact with his mother and fiddled with his cloth napkin.

"I love you, David. You are my one and only child. Give me a chance to explain. Please." She began to cry.

David continued eating, punishing his mother with silence and sullen indifference. Two thoughts cooked in his brain, keeping his emotions near the boiling point: *She married an Indian and made me a mongrel. Then she hid my past and stole my future.*

Catherine studied her son's bowed profile through the blur of tears and wondered how long she would have to wait before his anger subsided.

Footfalls on the stair steps brought David's head up from his meal. It was Mr. Felsenthal, trailed by a gangly boy who looked to be a year or two older than David.

"This is Will Hutchins. He's my right-hand man. He sets up pins and returns balls. He runs errands and sweeps the floors. He does about anything and everything for me. Has so for a year now." The boy smiled and shifted his weight from foot to foot with obvious embarrassment. "Will, this is David and his mother. They're going to work with us starting tomorrow."

David noticed that Mr. Felsenthal avoided using the Hughes name. The doubt surrounding his surname was just another of the many questions that simmered in his mind. Was

he a Hughes or a Thompson? Was he red or white? Was he from Mendota or Minneapolis? Did he love his mother or hate her?

"David," said Mr. Felsenthal. "Why don't you and Will go down to the ball alley? Will can show you around while you two get acquainted."

David took one last pass across his face with the cloth napkin and followed Will downstairs.

Catherine Hughes extended her hand to Abram Felsenthal. "You are saving our lives. We will repay your kindness and generosity with hard work. You'll see."

Chapter 21

MINNEAPOLIS

As the spring of 1863 unfolded, David grew to like Minneapolis. Its energy and lust for progress made Mendota seem small and backward. Minneapolis distracted David, preventing him from being overwhelmed by his problems. Minneapolis kept his mind busy and his body in motion so that neither had time to fester with resentment.

The ball alley was the best. Late afternoons and evenings David and Will each manned a lane, resetting pins and returning balls for the mill workers and store clerks who frequented Felsenthal's. It was hard work, but Will's friendship made it more than worthwhile. Will, by nature, was a listener. He rarely asked questions. When he did, they were simple queries that did not require David to explain his messy past.

It seemed to David that his new friend accepted life as it came, whether good or bad. While David was apt to combat life's ups and downs, Will was calm in the face of calamity. Like the ducks flying overhead that spring, Will had the ability to let troubles slide off his back like so much water.

Drawing Will was difficult for David. His features were easy enough to capture on paper: the long, loose-limbed

body, the red-brown hair, the dusting of freckles across the bridge of his nose and the angular, bony face. But his essence--the easygoing shrug--could not be rendered.

Mornings were relatively free for the boys. A little sweeping and cleaning and they were free to roam the town. Sometimes the pair would walk down Third Avenue, past Union School, both wishing they could join the children inside.

"Why aren't you in school, Will?" David asked once.

"I used to be. I got to work now because my father's Army pay is always late and it isn't enough. When the war is over I'll go back." Will never asked why David did not attend school.

Other times the boys went to the suspension bridge that spanned the Mississippi between Minneapolis and Nicollet Island. Wagons filled with flour barrels groaned alongside swift carriages. Long coaches rolled smoothly, their rooftops laden with luggage. People on foot, or on horseback, paid their 10 cents to cross. The occasional dog slipped past the toll window and meandered to the opposite shore.

Minneapolis was a endless source of amusement. When kegs of Baltimore oysters were unloaded at Willson's Saloon, they calculated the value of the shipment, based on the advertised price of 30 cents a dozen, and wondered why there weren't armed guards about. They watched water wheels turn in the Minneapolis Mill canal and talked about what they would do when they grew up. When they grew bored, they played war games in the stacks of empty barrels outside the

flour mills. When the ice went out David and Will raced homemade wooden boats in the saw mill sluices and watched logs collect in the booms above Saw Mill Row. They knew the war news before everyone else in town by helping unload copies of the newspaper.

When the weather was bad the boys played at Will's house. They played countless games of checkers. David drew pictures for Will. Will taught David card games. They used Will's lead soldiers to reenact the battles that dominated the front page of the newspapers. Will gloried in the bloody Union triumph at Antietam, with David manning the Rebel troops. David led the Union soldiers at Fredericksburg, transforming a terrible defeat by avoiding Marye Heights, in favor of an attack on the Will's Confederate right flank.

When the subject of girls came up one morning, David set aside a fistful of toy soldiers and began to talk. He explained who he was and how he came to Minneapolis. He took the risk because he knew Will would listen. He gambled, hoping Will would shrug.

"I know this girl named Ann," David began. "She's amazing. I mean, she's a girl, but she's loud and talkative and interested in things boys are interested in."

"Hmm."

"She came to live with us in Mendota last fall. Her family was burned out by the Indians and her brother was killed. They still don't know where he went to."

"Hmmm."

"Father made us leave because he was angry about my mother's first husband--my real father," David said, tentatively.

Will was busy arranging two ranks of soldiers on top of a blanket. From the high ground of his pretend hill he would have an advantage over David's Confederate forces. When Will looked at him, David took it as encouragement to continue explaining and a reminder to keep setting up his soldiers.

"I never knew my real father. He was a fur trader. He died when my mother was carrying me. So she married Humphrey Hughes." David's artillery pieces weren't in place, but he fired a cannon shot anyway. "Humphrey Hughes says he didn't known my real father was half Indian. That's what he told everybody when he disowned us."

David hunched over his soldiers. He allowed the smoke from his bombshell to clear before he sneaked a glance at his friend. Will was on his stomach, viewing the battlefield from ground level.

"Chippewa?"

"Sioux," David said. "Dakota."

"Hmm."

"Don't you want to know more?" David asked. He doubted even easy-going Will Hutchins could share toy soldiers with a heathen, mongrel Indian.

"Aren't you angry? Don't you hate me now?"

Will crawled backwards to his bedroom wall to get a long view of the battleground. "Mr. Felsenthal took you in. That's good enough for me."

David was puzzled by both Will's nonchalance and his comment about Mr. Felsenthal. "What do you mean?"

"He does that sort of thing," said Will. "He's a charitable man. He took Mother and I in when we were near-broke and hungry. When the neighbors' house burned down, he took up donations so they could live in a hotel while they looked for a new house."

David looked and listened.

"Before you moved in, Mr. Felsenthal let a convict from Stillwater use the extra room. He stayed there until he found work. And when he lived in St. Paul he supposedly helped a slave escape from an officer at Fort Snelling. Helped him get to Canada. That's what I heard, anyhow."

David grinned, inside and out. Being part Indian didn't seem half-bad compared to criminals and fugitive slaves.

"Why?" David asked.

"Hmmm?"

"Why does he help people?"

Will thought a bit, then said: "My mother says he has a soft heart because he's a Jew. He's had bad times his whole life, so he helps other people when their luck is bad. He went broke, himself, in the Panic of '57. Lost everything he owned. Before that he was chased out of Prussia 'cause he's Hebrew." Will crawled back to the edge of the battlefield. "Ready to start?"

"Huh?"

"Are you going to attack, or should I?" said Will.

David was unwilling to believe Will still was his

friend. Self-doubt was so deeply embedded in his mind that he dared not trust his ears.

"You still like me?" he asked.

"Sure," Will said with a shrug.

Chapter 22

SHOES AND SHOELACES

Working the ball alley gave David a unique window on the world. Each time he and Will lugged balls back to customers, they caught snatches of conversation. It wasn't eavesdropping. It was escape, relief from a boring routine. Deciphering a conversation from only tidbits of talk was difficult. Will said it was like solving a puzzle. David likened it to understanding a book after reading every third paragraph.

Much of what the men said was blather. Fueled by beer, they complained about the weather, wives, the high price of good boots, dogs down the street that bark all night, the pitiful performance of the Union Army generals. One slow night, during a debate over where the Union Army should launch its spring offensive, Abram Felsenthal took David aside. He heard every word his boss said.

"You like working here, David?" Mr. Felsenthal began.

"Fine, sir. Thank you for the opportunity."

"You and Will are friends, then?"

"Yes, sir. I go to his house quite a bit. His mother seems to like me all right."

"What about your mother, David?" Small talk aside, Mr. Felsenthal went straight to the point. "What do you think about her."

"Sir?"

"Her life is broken, David. She needs you."

"I'm here," David said defensively.

Abram Felsenthal matched David's glare with a stern look of reproach. "You hardly speak to her. She's lost a husband and a home and now she thinks she's losing you."

"I'm not going anywhere," David insisted.

Abram Felsenthal leaned back in his chair and exhaled loudly. He stroked the end of his beard and stared at the ceiling. David squirmed in his chair. Behind the bar glasses clinked. The wall clock tick tocked. A handful of customers drank more than talked. Finally, Mr. Felsenthal stood and placed his hands on the boy's shoulders.

"If you are trying to punish your mother, don't bother. You can't hurt her anymore than she's hurting herself. There is an old saying, 'Ten enemies cannot do the harm to a person which he inflicts on himself.'" Felsenthal paused for effect, trying with all his might to penetrate David's defenses. "But you can help her. You can heal her."

David's hands and body moved, wiggling under the weight of his boss' hands and words. Mr. Felsenthal bent closer, his face near David's.

"Life is like a shoelace, young man. Sometimes, no matter what you do, it just comes undone. Your job is to bend over, tie the lace, and keep walking." Mr. Felsenthal

pulled his chair toward David and sat down facing him. "You are tripping on your shoelaces, son. Believe me, I know, I have tripped myself."

David erupted with anger. "What do you know! You know who your father is!"

Customers at the bar turned on their stools. The barkeep began walking over. Abram Felsenthal waved him away.

"You're feeling sorry for yourself, David, and that is understandable. But, self-pity can be a poison. For a short while it feels good, but then it starts to eat your soul. Too much self-pity and you become an ugly person."

David smoldered in his chair, looking everywhere but at Mr. Felsenthal, fidgeting like a guilty defendant on trial.

"Look at me, David, look at me," said Mr. Felsenthal. David reluctantly looked at his boss, his eyes rimmed with tears. "Life is tough for everybody. You're not the only person with troubles. Twice in my lifetime I have lost everything. I do know what you are feeling. I'm 42 years old and I have had to bend over twice to retie my shoelaces. It wasn't easy."

"This isn't about shoes!" David said sarcastically. "This is about my mother keeping my whole life a secret!"

"This is about shoes!" Mr. Felsenthal thundered. "When I was 17, men from the next town came to our village and beat our rabbi to death. They took our *sifre torah* and burned them in the street--the five books of Moses burned like rubbish!" Abram Felsenthal paused for a breath. "Then they went from house to house looting and beating and burning. I

hid in a haystack with my brothers and my mother, listening to the screams of our neighbors."

Teardrops pooled in David's eyes. His chin trembled.

"They killed my father, David. They beat him so badly my mother knew him only by his prayer shawl. The next day I tied my shoelaces and left for America."

Mr. Felsenthal stood and began pacing back and forth. "I lived in New York for a time, then I moved to St. Paul. That's where I met your father--in 1840 or '41, I think. He was the one who persuaded me to become a furrier."

Mr. Felsenthal's story touched David. His hackles were down. Tears flowed and he felt alone and lonely. For the first time, he was genuinely curious about Jack Thompson. He asked Mr. Felsenthal about his father.

"He was an educated man, David. Spoke three languages. Your grandfather sent him to school in St. Louis during the winters when he was trading among the Indians. When Jack was 17, or so, he followed your grandfather into the fur trade."

David took the words and formed pictures in his head, visualizing the father he would never know. He imagined Jack Thompson was like the centaur in Greek mythology, a blend of two beings, a combination of wild and civilized characteristics. David envisioned a rugged man, with long, dark hair and a fringed buckskin suit, a man of the wilderness, like Hawkeye in *Last of the Mohicans*. He saw a man of books, too; a literary man, a man of fine words, like President Lincoln. Jack Thompson was, David decided, a wilderness intellectual.

"David?" It was Mr. Felsenthal. "Why are you asking me these questions? Ask your mother. She knew Jack Thompson far better than I."

David's anger returned. "Not well enough to remember him to me."

"You are tripping on your shoelaces again. Remember! Retie them and keep walking." Abram Felsenthal sat down again, focusing all his storytelling skills on David. The boy had to understand life was a struggle for everyone. He needed to see the necessity of overcoming adversity.

"The second time I tripped, David, I lost everything. I lost my shop, my fortune and my love. When the panic hit in '57, half the the people in St. Paul moved away. Those that stayed didn't buy many coats or caps. The shop failed. I had no money. My friends remained loyal to me, but my fi--, fee--"

"Fiancee?" David prompted.

"My fiancee. She broke off our engagement. Her father never liked me because I was a Jew. When I lost my shop, he used that to convince her I would not be a good husband."

There was a far-off look in Mr. Felsenthal's eyes, an expression of longing and suffering. David looked down at his feet in embarrassment and studied the laces on his shoes.

"I'm sorry for your loss, sir. I can see now it is about shoes," said David. "I'll talk to her. I will. It's just that--"

"You must forgive and forget, son," Mr. Felsenthal said softly. "You have no choice."

Chapter 23

RETURN TO THE CAMP

Catherine Hughes' melancholia came on gradually. David saw his mother move less, then talk less, then eat less. At first he felt relieved. He was still working up the courage to talk with her, heart-to-heart, about their past and their future. Often she went an entire day without speaking. She stopped going outside. Then she stopped going downstairs. Mr. Felsenthal hired a war widow, who lived north of the mills, to take over his mother's work in the kitchen.

She was wasting away. Her haggard features sagged into a face that revealed nothing, an expression that remained unchanged hour after hour, day after day. David began to care for her as she had cared for him. He prepared their meals, washed the clothes, and read aloud to her. He borrowed pans from the kitchen and made bread with her, his heart aching as they labored through a task that was once a joyous ritual.

David swallowed his anger and dedicated himself to saving his mother. During her frequent naps he planned their deliverance from Minnesota. If they moved to a state where the only Indians were those in James Fennimore Cooper's novels, he thought, perhaps they could be happy. His

mother's pasty complexion and dull eyes told him time was short. Their money supply was shorter still.

On a sunny morning in late April, David's fears and frustrations goaded him into action. He set out on foot to see Good Singer. By mid-afternoon he was hiding in an old Army root cellar, below the landing road, waiting for darkness.

Before the moon rose he slipped from the cellar and stumbled blindly along the base of the bluff. He climbed the fence on the side nearest Good Singer's tipi and felt his way through the maze of lodge poles and wood piles until he stood, huffing puffs of steam, outside his friend's tipi.

"Tantanyandowan! David whispered as loud as he could. "Good Singer!"

The flap opened and Good Singer's head and shoulders appeared. "Why are you here?"

"My mother is sick. I need your help."

David handed his friend a three pieces of cornbread wrapped in newspaper. Good Singer stuffed one piece in his mouth and set the others inside the tipi. The boys walked to the southwest corner of the camp, the area farthest from the fort. He told Good Singer about being forced out of Mendota, about his new life in Minneapolis, about his mother's melancholia. Then he supplied the solution to his and Good Singer's problems.

"We're going to dig up the gold, you and I," he said. "We're going tomorrow night."

Good Singer gave a shout and clapped David on the shoulder. "Even if there is no gold, I will be out of here!"

"There better be some. I need money to get my mother out of Minnesota. We can't live here anymore. I just need enough for a steamer to Dunleith and a train back East." David talked quickly. He knew Good Singer did not understand all he was saying. But the part about the gold had hit home.

"When?" said Good Singer. "How?"

"Tomorrow night. I'll come at this same time. Meet me here. We'll walk upriver until we find a boat. Then we'll cross to the south side. I figure it's about 15 miles, or so. You still have the Long Walker's map?"

Good Singer nodded.

"Bring every piece of clothing you own. We'll hide during the day and try to get some sleep," David said. "I'll bring food and a shovel and extra blankets."

The moon was up and shining in the clear night sky. David looked more closely at his friend. Good Singer's shirt and blanket hung on him like garments on a scarecrow. His face was thin. Brown eyes gazed out of deep hollows. Wheezy breath passed over chapped and scabby lips.

"Are you feeling all right?" David asked.

Good Singer smiled and opened his mouth. Resting on his tongue was a pebble.

Chapter 24

THE JOURNEY

Good Singer and David abandoned the borrowed boat on the south shore of the Minnesota and climbed the river bank. By the light of the moon they walked southwest on the Shakopee Road, moving as quickly as they could on the mud-rutted highway. Good Singer had two extra blankets tied around his waist. David carried the shovel and a potato sack filled with food. An awesome sweep of stars overhead told the boys the night would be clear.

The fresh air and wide-open spaces were intoxicating to Good Singer. Pent-up energy from more than five months of captivity gushed from his thin body. He began to laugh.

"Shhhh!" warned David.

Good Singer spun in circles, his arms extended, his head thrown back. A excited mix of singing, laughter and words spilled out of him. David also moved in circles, looking for the glow of lanterns that said they had been spotted. The boys looked like drunken dancers at a New Year's ball. With every farm house they passed near, David tried again to silence Good Singer's silliness.

"Shhhh! Stop it! Are you crazy? Stop it!"

Good Singer ignored David, talking and singing as he swirled around the potholes and wagon-wheel furrows. David

hushed his friend again and again, panicking each time a dog stirred, afraid that some farmer would come to the road to investigate. Desperate to quiet his friend, David handed him the potato sack that held their food. The sack slowed Good Singer down, but he continued to talk and sing, off and on, as they walked.

Finally, what David couldn't accomplish, ill health could. After 90 minutes of travel Good Singer stopped chattering and sat down, winded and wheezing. His thin shoulders rose with each labored breath that rasped from deep within his chest. He coughed with the bark of a hound. David unrolled a spare blanket and wrapped it around his friend.

"You know, it would be easier if you were quiet," David scolded. "Let's find a place to rest. C'mon." Good Singer nodded and coughed.

They walked slowly, with Good Singer trailing David. When they saw a farm, David left his friend in the trees along the road and went ahead to scout the barn. When he returned, Good Singer was standing with the extra blanket tied around his waist again. He was breathing better and his cough was shallow. He handed David a beaded necklace similar to the one he wore. "For you," he said.

David smiled and said thank you, then discreetly pocketed the necklace.

"No," Good Singer said, pointing to his neck. "You wear it."

"Later," David said. He would keep it, but he knew he would never wear it. "We have to keep walking. That dog back there sounds big and mean."

"*Sunka.*" Good Singer trotted after David. "*Sunka.*"

"What?"

"*Sunka* is dog. You remember?"

"Oh, we don't have to practice words anymore. I won't need them back East."

"Why do you want to go? You are part Dakota. You are from here," Good Singer said. "Your father and your grandmother and your grandfather were Dakota."

"Those people are only names to me," David answered. He walked faster, hoping Good Singer would drop his line of talk.

"You were happy about the Dakota before, when you thought you were a white boy. You asked me about the Dakota every day. You asked about words. I told you stories. You made pictures. Now you are some Dakota--and you want to go away. Why?"

"My mother is the only family that counts. She raised me. She's white, so I'm white."

"You do not like the Dakota blood in you," said Good Singer. It was a statement, not a question.

"You don't understand. It's not a question of liking or not liking, it's--"

"If you do not like being Dakota, then you do not like me," Good Singer said flatly.

Beneath the elm and ash along the road, leaves whispered crisply, scooting over the ground on the light night breeze. Their delicate rattling marked the silence between the boys.

"Look," said David, ending the lull. "You people are in a terrible mess. The government is going to send you all away. I'm sorry, but it's the truth. So why on earth would I want to to be Dakota? I've had a hard enough time being a white boy. Why would I want to make my life worse?"

The breeze picked up. David shivered and swung his arms as he walked.

"When we get back with the gold, Mother and I are leaving. Out East no one will ever know I'm Indian," said David. The forceful answer ended conversation. They walked in silence, listening to the sounds of the night, hearing the lowing cattle and barking dogs.

When they reached the Credit River the boys were weary and chilled. The sun was not yet up, but the sky was going gray. They crossed the small wooden bridge and left the road, climbing out of the river valley to the edge of the prairie. In the shelter of three cedars they built a fire. When the fire was roaring, Good Singer left the ring of light and searched for more firewood. He returned with an armful of branches and a broken fence rail, building the fire higher and hotter. Good Singer sat as close as he could, covering his face, head and arms with his blanket. David followed his example. For a half hour they shared some bread and talked about the gold. When the fire burned down, Good Singer unwrapped himself and stood.

"Back," he said, waving David away from the shrinking fire. Using a stick Good Singer spread the embers and ashes into a broad circle. With his knife he stripped evergreen branches off the cedar trees and spread them on top of the ashes.

Wanting to help, David reached into his pants for his clasp knife. "Ahhhhh!" he exclaimed. In one hand was his knife. In the other was a letter. He shook the letter in frustration. "I was going to leave this under my mother's pillow."

Good Singer looked at David with a questioning expression, his forehead wrinkled, his eyebrows raised. David gazed back toward Mendota and gave a long sigh of frustration.

"What?" prodded Good Singer.

"I haven't spoken to my mother for a long time. I've been so angry with her."

David turned the knife over and over in his hands. "Anyhow, I wrote her this letter to tell her how I feel. And to tell her I forgive her."

Good Singer continued to spread branches over the ashes. When the ashes were covered, he unrolled an extra blanket and laid it over the cedar bows.

"Sleep," Good Singer ordered, pointing at the bed of bows.

David laid his blankets next to Good Singer and wrapped himself as tightly as he could. The warmth on his backside was comforting. His final thought, as sleep overtook him,

was of the letter. He would give it to her the minute he got back, along with a pocketful of gold coins.

As they slept the sun rose on a clear April day, shining its warm rays on the boys. Ten yards east the Credit River gurgled its way to the Minnesota River. Birds clustered in the brush along the stream, searching for old seeds and new insects. Their incessant singing woke David after two hours. Good Singer coughed himself awake a few minutes later.

"We need to move farther away from the road," David said. He yawned and stretched. The muscles in his legs felt tight. His feet were swollen and sore. Good Singer stamped his feet to warm and limber his legs.

They followed the stream southward across the prairie. Patches of plowed and fenced land made the grassland look like a quilt. There were farms visible in every direction. Good Singer and David felt exposed and vulnerable without the shielding safety of trees. They moved quickly, checking the horizon for horses or wagons.

When the prairie gave way to clusters of aspen and oak, the boys felt relief. They moved from grove to grove, weaving their way deeper into Scott County. After 50 minutes they found an embankment shielded by a willow thicket and screened overhead by a leaning bur oak. They built a small fire and dozed away the day.

Chapter 25

THE GOLD IN THE HILL

As dusk approached the boys moved the fire slightly to one side and built it higher. David took two potatoes from the sack and buried them in the coals of the old fire. Good Singer examined Long Walker's map.

"If we go here, we will walk into the lake," Good Singer said, pointing to the spot on the map with a finger. "Then we go around it and look for the hill with the big, big tree." He folded the map and tucked it in the bold-striped blanket he wore as a coat.

"What are you going to do with the gold?" asked David.

Good Singer shrugged and mounded more glowing coals over the potatoes. He had been very quiet since last night's argument.

"Do you have to give the gold to someone, like a chief?"

Good Singer did not answer. He moved close to the new fire and sat down cross-legged, without looking at David.

"Don't think I don't know what you're doing," David said, angrily. "I'm used to this, you know. Even when I didn't know I was a half-breed, people treated me different. My father used to go days without looking at me or talking to me."

Good Singer rolled the pebble on his tongue and stared into the fire.

"I'm being pragmatic," David said with sarcasm sounding in every syllable. "There's a word *you* should learn--pragmatic. It means practical, sensible. It's what I've got to be if I want to fix up my life."

The sun settled on the rim of the embankment and the budding branches of the bur oak. The blue sky was going gray.

"I have to help my mother. I will do whatever it takes to get her well and move her somewhere safe. And the first pragmatic step is to convince everyone I'm white." David moved coals from the camp fire to the cooking fire. Then he turned his face toward his friend's and spoke in a kinder voice: "Pragmatic, Good Singer. You are going to have to be pragmatic, too. It's like the coming of winter. The wild animals have to do practical, sensible things like growing thick fur or flying south. The sensible thing for your family is to start living like white people."

The sun slipped from sight and a chill breeze fanned the fires. David pulled his blanket tightly underneath his chin. "Winter is coming for the Dakota and it is going to last for many years. Do you hear me, Good Singer? Many, many years."

The boys sat in silence, each thinking about his family and its future. When the potatoes were done they ate a supper of cheese and potatoes, saving the remaining bread and potatoes for the return trip. As the moon rose, they began walking. Without a road to rely on, they walked slowly

across the rolling countryside, checking the stars to keep their westerly bearing.

David and Good Singer grew excited and nervous as they approached the Scott County lakes. They were excited about the gold and the hope it would bring to their families, They were nervous because they were climbing fences, a sign this area was heavily settled.

A dog barked in the distance and the boys lowered their voices. In the moon glow they could see the faint outlines of a house and several smaller buildings. They changed directions, swinging north around the farm.

Each time the boys reached the top of a hill, they strained their eyes, looking for a lake. The moon was nearly overhead when a dog began barking ahead of them.

"Sunka!" said Good Singer. "Faster." The barking grew louder, even as they turned south to bypass yet another farm. They walked quickly, trotting where they could. Above, David could see the constellation Orion. He checked the starry hunter's belt periodically to keep on course.

"Buildings!" David stopped in his tracks. Good Singer bumped into him. Silhouetted on the top of the next rise were three buildings. Good Singer, wheezing and coughing, grabbed David by the coat sleeve, pointing west with the fist that clutched the food sack.

They ran, stumbling over uneven ground, tripping on tree stumps, falling over rocks, floundering across fields. The food bag swung crazily in Good Singer's outstretched hand. They staggered through a grove of oaks and came upon another

farm. Good Singer flopped to the ground with exhaustion, gasping loudly. David dropped the shovel and sat beside him.

"How much before day comes?" Good Singer's voice was pinched and hoarse.

David wagged his head from side to side, too winded to answer. The sound of barking got them on their feet again, moving north and west. As they passed the house, they could see the vague glow of a lantern, moving between windows on the second floor.

David and Good Singer ran down a sloping field, slipping and sliding across gooey plow furrows. At the bottom of the hill was a willow thicket. Gnats swarmed. Something--a skunk, perhaps--moved through the thicket.

"Water!" hissed David. "We must be near the lake!"

The boys circled the thicket, finding pussy willows, reed grass, cattails and stagnant water. They continued northwest, skirting the swamp. The terrain rose again in a long, tree-covered knoll. Good Singer and David huffed their way to high ground. Below them was a lake. Moonlight reflected off its rippled surface, running southwest in a long, jagged swath of white glare.

"This is the lake," Good Singer gasped. *"Mdemayato."*

He pulled out the map as David lit a phosphor match. The lake shown on the map was shaped like two long, thin, ragged ovals, connected by a narrow ribbon of water.

"Yup," said David. "This is it."

Both boys drank from the lake and ate some bread. Then they pushed west, keeping the shoreline in sight. Ahead they

could see hilltops covered with trees, the edge of Minnesota's Big Woods. In a half hour they were on the west side of the lake, scaling a high hill above a cove.

"Aieeeee!" Good Singer's voice split the silence, making hair on the back of David's neck stiffen. It was the tree Long Walker described, an enormous elm with huge, arching limbs and a massive trunk. The elm was so vast that little grew underneath its spreading boughs. The foliage that dared compete with it reminded David of the Lilliputians at Gulliver's feet.

"Shovel!" Good Singer stared at the elm with his hand outstretched, fingers flexing impatiently. David handed him the short-handled spade. Good Singer circled the tree and began digging furiously on its west side. David fell to his knees and watched the shovel bite into the soft spring earth.

Chapter 26

THE LETTER

For most of the night Scratch lifted his nose to the breeze coming down from the woods and barked. It was not uncommon for the dog to bark at nocturnal animals moving in the hardwoods behind the house. But this night Scratch never let up. He barked with a ferocity that kept Edwin Smith and his wife tossing and turning.

At dawn, cranky and curious, Edwin Smith decided to investigate. "Get up, boys," he called up the stairs. "We're gonna find whatever riled Scratch." In the second floor bedroom 17-year-old Stephen roused his younger brother, Robert. Charles, the youngest, was already awake and headed for the kitchen.

The sun was rising over the wooded ridge that marked the eastern border of the Smith farm. Strands of sunlight shot through the trees, reflecting off the log barn and unpainted, wood-frame house.

"No time for breakfast," said Edwin Smith. "Cut yourself some cheese and let's go. Mother will have breakfast for us when we get back." Stephen tossed the dog a slice of cheese as they assembled in the yard. Scratch devoured the cheese and pranced in a dizzying figure eight.

"Ooh, he's jumpy," Stephen said. "Look at him sniff the air. Might be something still up there." The Smiths followed Scratch up the ridge, speculating on the source of the dog's irritation.

"It's probably buzzards feeding on a dead deer," Mr. Smith said matter-of-factly.

"Maybe the Whitleys' dog is in heat," offered Robert.

"Nah!" Stephen said. "It was a skunk or a fox or something like that. It's long gone now."

Charles--called Charlie by the family--was struggling to keep up. He squinted into the sunlight that streamed down the slope. "It's Indians," he said. "There's Indians up there."

Mocking laughter poured down on Charlie. He shielded his eyes with his hand, more to ward off ridicule than sunshine. His mother always said his brothers made their lamps burn brighter by blowing his out.

"Hey, Charlie! It's General Lee and the whole Army of Virginia," Stephen said sarcastically. "They're invading Scott County on their way to Washington."

"It's the Headless Horseman, Charlie, come all the way from New York State to scare you 'til you pee your pants," said Robert. The older boys laughed so hard they stopped walking.

"Boys," cautioned Mr. Smith, "mind your mouths."

Charlie straightened his back and hurried to catch up. "It could be Indians. Couldn't it, Pa?"

"Not likely," said Mr. Smith. "The newspaper says the ones who got away are in Dakota Territory." Despite his words, Edwin Smith gripped his shotgun tighter and scanned the trees and bushes ahead. Scratch was out of sight, sniffing through the underbrush.

"What if they came back to Minnesota?" Charlie insisted.

"Shut up, Charlie," said Robert. "Pa, make him stop. He's getting us all nervous over nothing."

Before Edwin Smith could answer, Scratch began barking near the top of the ridge, by the elm tree the Smiths called The Giant. Edwin Smith pointed toward the tree and ran up the slope, followed by the boys. There, sitting against the Giant's massive trunk, were two boys. They were rubbing their eyes, apparently just awakened by Scratch. The skinny one had dark skin, long hair, and wore ragged clothes. The other boy was less dark, better dressed and his hair was shorter. The dog paced in a semi-circle in front of them, hackles raised, lips pulled back in a low growl.

"Get up, you!" shouted Edwin Smith. He trained the gun on the boys. "Stand up!"

Charlie pushed his way between his brothers and blurted out: "Indians! I told you so! They're Indians!"

The boy with short hair spoke. "We're not Indians, for God's sake. What do you want with us?"

"Shut up! I'm asking the questions," said Edwin Smith. "What are you digging for?"

Neither boy answered. A shovel lay on the ground next to piles of dirt and several deep holes.

Edwin Smith cocked the hammer on his shotgun. "Empty your pockets! Now!" He moved the shotgun back and forth between his two prisoners.

Stephen crouched cautiously, retrieving the contents of their pockets: a letter, a beaded necklace, a folded piece of heavy paper and a small clasp-book. Robert grabbed the leather bag that was tied to the long-haired boy's waist. He gave the bag a fierce jerk and it came free.

"Father, look at this." Robert emptied the bag in his palm, revealing a lock of black hair, a tiny bird wing, and two halves of a stone.

"That's a medicine bag," exclaimed Stephen. "And this one was carrying a bead necklace. They're Indians, for sure, Pa. From that camp below the fort, I'll bet."

The short-haired boy stepped forward. "No, we're not from around here. Those are just souvenirs." Edwin Smith pressed the shotgun muzzle to the boy's chest and shoved him against the tree. The long-haired boy stood silent, wide-eyed and nervous.

"From where?" Edwin Smith growled. "Where you traveling from?"

"New Orleans," said the short-haired boy. "I'm French and he's Mexican. We were stranded here last fall when our steamer got froze in."

Edwin Smith raised the gun muzzle to the boy's throat. "That's a bunch of hog slop. I've been to New Orleans and

you ain't French or Mexican. You're too young to be anything but runaway Injuns."

"Hey, you!" Stephen Smith pushed the long-haired boy back against the tree and glared down at him, enjoying an advantage of four inches and 40 pounds. "Let's hear some of that Mexican talk."

When the long-haired boy did not answer, Stephen punched him in the stomach, doubling the boy over in pain. The short-haired boy watched his friend writhe on the ground in pain.

"What are we gonna do?" asked Charlie. The Smith boys looked to their father for an answer. In that split second, the long-haired boy jumped up and began running. Edwin Smith swung his shotgun on the fleeing figure and fired. The boy stumbled and fell face first in the leaf litter.

The shotgun blast echoed, reporting off the next ridge. The black-powder smoke drifted and thinned on the morning breeze. The short-haired boy stared in horror at the still body 20 feet away.

"You dirty bastards!" he shouted. They were his last words. Edwin Smith bashed the butt of his shotgun into the side of the boy's head.

For a moment no one spoke. Only the rattle of last fall's leaves, clinging to a gnarled oak, filled the void. Edwin Smith groped for what to do next. Should he take their scalps? Last he'd heard Albrecht Furs in St. Paul was offering top dollar for Indian scalps. He'd taken an ear once--off a Mexican during the last war--but he'd never cut a

man's scalp, let alone a boy's. Then, again, he thought, how many folks did the Indians mutilate last summer?

"Stephen, hold the gun on him in case he wakes up. Robert, fetch some rope from the barn. Charlie, run down to the house and tell your mother to hold breakfast for a spell."

Edwin Smith examined the long-haired boy closely. The mouth was slack and the brown eyes were filmy with the sign of death. Between the blanket and black hair was a five-strand necklace of beads and porcupine quills. He jerked it off the boy's neck and put it in his pocket. "This one's Indian, for sure," he muttered.

Charlie came back, trailing Scratch by a step and panting just as hard. Robert returned with rope coiled over his shoulder, red-faced with effort and excitement.

"Stephen, take Robert and Charlie back to the house. They can start breakfast," said Edwin Smith. "Then you bring me back a skinning knife."

"Oh, Pa!" complained Robert and Charlie in unison.

"Now!" Edwin Smith barked. "Git!"

The boys left, reluctantly, sensing they might miss something horribly fascinating. When their voices faded in the distance, Edwin Smith was alone in the woods, surrounded by unnatural silence. The yellow-bellied sapsucker had fled at the sound of the shotgun, abandoning its rows of neat holes. Gone, too, were the chickadees, the nuthatches and the squirrels. But deep in the underbrush, a lone wren hopped from twig to twig, singing a stuttering melody that

rose and fell in a cascade of staccato notes.

Edwin Smith tossed the coil of rope over the lowest limb of The Giant and knotted the free end in a large loop. He hefted the unconscious boy's head by the hair and slipped the loop around the neck. Then he shouldered the rope and hauled it away from The Giant, hoisting the boy in the air. He tied the rope around an axle-sized ironwood and stared up into the budding branches of the Giant. The boy twisted clockwise in the noose, his arms and legs jerking.

Edwin Smith examined the boys' effects. The necklace was colorful and delicate. He'd give it Charlie. The heavy paper was a map of some kind, with Indian writing on it. He figured it probably marked a food cache. Indians were great ones for burying meat or corn. Inside the clasp-book was a photograph of a woman with dark hair. He tossed it into the underbrush, along with the map. The letter aroused his curiosity:

Dear Mother.

When you see me next I will be your loving son again. Don't worry about me. I can take care of myself. I am doing something that will help us have a future somewhere away from here. I will be home in a couple days. Then we can plan our new life together.

I have forgiven you. dearest Mother. Can you forgive me? I love you. I always have and I always will.

Your Loving Son,
David

P. S. Get your bread pans out.

Edwin Smith crumpled the letter in his hands and threw it into the bushes. The ball of paper sailed into the arms of a hawthorn, where it lay cradled between spiny branches, protected alongside the shriveled berries that still clung to it.

Stephen bounded into view with the skinning knife in his hand and a handful of hot biscuits.

"Ready, Pa?"

Edwin Smith nodded.

High up in the Giant, the wren sang on, scolding the man and his son as they went to work.

EPILOGUE

In April 1863, the Dakota men in Mankato were shipped down the Mississippi River to a prison at Camp McClellan, near Davenport, Iowa. About 120 died in poorly heated barracks there.

In May, the families below Fort Snelling were sent to a barren reservation in present-day South Dakota, where many died of starvation and exposure.

That summer, the State of Minnesota, following the lead of private entrepreneurs, began offering cash bounties for Dakota scalps.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Glossary

GLOSSARY

Dakota Words

Dakota Eastern Sioux Indians; literally "friends"

Maya mazazi hapi the hill where they buried the gold

Mazasa Red Iron, chief of a Sissetonwan Dakota band

Mdemayato the lake with blue banks; Prior Lake, Minnesota

Mdewakantonwan the eastern-most division of the Dakota

petutupa slippery elm tree

pilamayaya you make me thankful

sayaahinapapi measles

sunka dog

Tantanyandowan Good Singer

Wakpaminisota Minnesota River

Wakute Shooter, chief of a Mdewakantonwan Dakota band

wasicun white person

waste good

Other Words

Ojibway Chippewa Indians; also called Anishnabe

faux pas French phrase that means social blunder or mistake

sifre torah Hebrew for "scrolls of the Torah;" the first five books of the Old Testament, which are written on scrolls, are held in an ark in each Jewish synagogue

Yanktonais a Sioux division; speakers of the Nakota dialect

APPENDIX B

Critique by Rhonda Wilson

July 14, 1995

Hi Jeff,

I just finished reading the draft of your creative project "The Gold in the Hill." It is an excellent piece of work. Be proud of it!

The depiction of the hanging of the 38 Dakota men seemed very real and as close to factual history told, or even found in research.

The realism of the characters, David and Good Singer's lifes all through your story brings out tragedies in each and both cultures. Also, ~~to~~ the uniqueness of each of the boy's lifes tells that there is not much differences between them.

The usage of the Dakota words seemed very appropriate, and fit in well with your sentences.

Placing your story theme around Minnesota Towns and counties, made the story more easily followed, because you could identify the areas you chose on a ~~[illegible]~~ Minnesota map, and not only that, it is where this actually took place in 1862. It also enhanced your creative project enormously.

My hopes are that your committee accepts this project, I, being of Dakota and Omaha descent, recommend to your committee that your piece of work is an excellent portrayal of Dakota life in the encampments, because it

states realism in the story. It also tells of the White-Indian relationship back in 1862, which there was no bridges being gapped between cultures, each being kept separate and apart.

I would also like to say "Thank You" for the book "Messenges of the Wind" by Jane Katz, your generosity has overwhelmed me.

Please excuse the messy handwriting and spelling, because I'm doing this in a hurry.

Thank you for the opportunity for me being able to share in such a beautiful project.

In friendship,

Rhonda Wilson

P.S. If you need something more written or read please let me know, I'd be more than happy to help you!

APPENDIX C

Critique by Dr. Roy Meyer

July 7, 1995

Jeff Wood
2407 Marquette Drive
St. Cloud, MN 56301

Dear Mr. Wood:

I have read "The Gold in the Hill" with much interest. On the whole, it is a good piece of work. You do a good job of recreating the atmosphere of the times, the characters are credible, and the plot—up to a point—is convincing. I do have problems with the last eight chapters, though I don't know what could be done about them at this stage.

First, however, let me dispose of a number of points, mostly of a nit-picking sort, that bothered me in reading the manuscript. As an English teacher I can perhaps be pardoned for noticing such matters as your use of a comma after "but" and other coordinating conjunctions, where it serves no useful purpose. I have circled these, as well as other mechanical errors and obvious typos.

On p. 27, ll. 11-13, I find an awkward sentence. It would be better to say, "He would need to look strong and capable or he wouldn't get attention, much less information." A "much less" phrase usually follows a negative clause.

The second map shows Camp Release on the <u>north</u> side of the Minnesota River, whereas it is actually <u>south</u> of the river, in the eastern tip of Lac qui Parle County.

Moby Dick is mentioned on p. 7. Would these boys have heard of him? The novel didn't get much attention when it came out in 1851, and I doubt that young boys a decade later would even have heard of it or its title character. (On the other hand, it's appropriate for David, a bookish lad, to be familiar with the novels of James Fenimore Cooper.)

When I read of David's visit to Fort Snelling, I wondered whether it might not be better to name the commanding officer instead of only referring to "the colonel." But then I tried to discover who was in charge of the fort in December 1862 and had no luck. Both Marcus Hansen and Evan Jones end their histories with 1858. Most of the commanding officers listed by Hansen were captains. Unless you can somehow find out who commanded the fort in 1862, I guess you might as well leave it as "the colonel."

I'm slightly troubled by the toys David has (p. 76). Would a fourteen-year-old boy play with such things? Remember that you're writing for a juvenile audience.

Anyone writing about a bygone era has to be careful with the use of slang and other vernacular expressions that may have come into use much later. I have no way of knowing for sure, but I doubt that expressions like "second-guess" (p. 69, l. 4) and "antsy" (p. 137, l. 2) were in use in 1862-63.

David probably has a larger vocabulary than the average fourteen-year-old, but do you think he would use words like "pragmatic" and "accommodate" (both on p. 132)? You cover his knowledge of the first one pretty well, and he would undoubtedly have seen "accommodations" in advertisements of hotels, but his use of "accommodate" in this context is a different matter.

In general, I approve of your occasional use of Dakota words, including "waste" on p. 86, ll. 17-18. But isn't there danger of confusion with the English word "waste"? Might it not be better to spell it phonetically here: "wash-tay"? I know that "waste" is the accepted spelling, but an exception

might be justified here.

Any author whose characters speak languages other than English has to decide how to render their speech. You handle the problem competently most of the time, but I'm bothered by Long Walker's story about the gold on pp. 50-52. He's obviously speaking English, because he's talking to David. Where has he learned such good English? Good Singer has learned what he knows in Dr. Williamson's school, but Long Walker is an old man, and there is no indication that he has lived with whites or otherwise had long exposure to English.

I don't have any solution to this problem, unless you were to have Good Singer translate and give the substance of the old man's story. Maybe young readers don't notice such things. Adults are amused by Cooper's handling of the problem, however, and writers nowadays ought to do better.

The question of what young readers--and their elders--will tolerate arises also in connection with the plot toward the end of the novel. The treatment accorded David and his mother in Chapter 19 strikes me as pretty improbable. There was plenty of anti-Indian feeling abroad in 1863, but that this feeling would have extended to a woman who had earlier been married to a part-Indian man, and that she and her son would have been expelled from the community and stoned as they were trying to leave, strains my credulity.

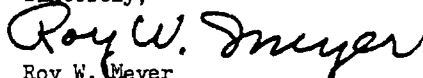
I have the same difficulty with the final chapter. David's ready command of English should have been enough to make the farmer hesitate about killing him. The episode is presumably modeled on the Lamsons' killing of Little Crow, but I don't think the situations are quite parallel. Moreover, there is the matter of timing. In your "Epilogue" you say that the state began paying a bounty on scalps "that summer," yet in late April Edwin Smith recalls an ad in a St. Paul newspaper "that promised cash for Sioux scalps."

Maybe these objections are also nit-picking. Perhaps what I see as flaws won't be noticed by the audience you are writing for. In any event, your immediate task is to satisfy your committee; if they find the manuscript acceptable, that's all that counts. Satisfying a publisher may be more difficult, but that's a more distant hurdle.

Thanks for running this thesis by me. In spite of my criticisms, my overall opinion is that it is a creditable performance. I enjoyed reading it.

Good luck from here on.

Sincerely,



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