

RED RUNS THE PLAINS

W.R. BENTON

Red Runs the Plains by W.R. Benton
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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Joann, who has stood by me and assisted me during the difficult process of putting my tall tale into a book. She knows writing a novel is not anything shy of a total commitment by an author.

I would like to thank Rick Sharpe, a great musician and friend in the U.K., who helped me with the dialogue and thoughts of an English man.

Additionally, I would like to thank Ritch Gaiti, for the use of his art on the cover of this book.

And, finally to all the members of the Armed Forces, both past and present, with the deepest respect, I salute you. I personally know your tasks are always difficult.

PROLOGUE

Major Miles Wilson stood deep in thought before the open door to his residence. *Damn me, I'm soon a dead man*, he thought as a cart rattled by on the dirt street.

His living conditions in the small but growing town were rudimentary. Personal comforts, however, were the least of the major's worries. Tightness grew deep in his gut, but there was little he could do about the situation. His thirty years were up the next morning and by Royal Army regulations and customs he was being forced out of the only life he'd ever known.

Miles was slim, with dark brown hair and a neatly trimmed moustache. He looked the part of a perfect English officer and was, by birth, a gentleman. His father had won recognition, glory, and wealth, married well and eventually attained the rank of major general. Though retired from active service now, he still wielded significant power in merry old England.

Miles had attended the best schools and, upon completion of his studies, been handed his future on a silver platter; his father bought him the commission of a Captain in the infantry. Assigned to his father's regiment, he quickly discovered, as did his superiors, that he had an outstanding mind for tactics and administration. By quickly glancing over a battlefield, Miles could predict where the next enemy attack would be directed, right up to the minute when the attack would occur. At first, the other staff officers had laughed at him, but eventually they came to realize that having the young Captain Wilson along almost assured them of a quick victory under almost any conditions. During his many years of service, not once had he been defeated on the battlefield. His retirement rank was low: not due to his military mind, but for personal reasons. Those were the reasons that scared him at that moment, as he watched the wagons, loaded high with goods, leaving the post for destinations unknown.

Miles had acquitted himself well during the war of 1812 and had received a number of awards for bravery. He'd been sent home

to a hero's welcome and was the guest of honor at many formal dinners. The major, always a vain man, had relished the attention, especially from the women.

The damned women are the cause of my woes, he thought as he leaned in his doorway.

He'd been quickly promoted to major and posted as a military attaché to the embassy in Paris. It was there, while in the performance of his official duties that his problems had started.

"Major Wilson, I will be unable to attend a dinner tonight, and I was wondering if you'd be so kind as to escort my wife," Lieutenant Colonel Applegate, the senior military member at the embassy, had asked him late one afternoon as they finished some paperwork.

"Of course, sir, I'd be honored," Miles replied, fully expecting a boring evening with some middle-aged plump woman. *The things I do for the Crown*, he'd thought.

"Thank you. I'll have my carriage pick you up at, oh, let's say seven this evening."

"Yes, sir, I'll be ready."

Promptly at seven, a shiny black carriage pulled up in front of the hotel where the officers were quartered. Miles opened the door, stepped up and entered the dark confines of the carriage. The lieutenant colonel's wife immediately took him aback. Carol Applegate was much younger than her husband. She had luxurious red hair and a ravishing body. Miles was a bust man and the woman showed enough cleavage to stoke his desire to a blaze. *Here*, he thought, *is a woman who knows her worth*.

He must have been staring when she said, "Is there something wrong, Major Wilson?"

"No, not at all, my lady. I have merely been struck by your beauty. You are a very attractive woman, and I've seen few of those during my career."

"Thank you for the kind words, Major. I can see you're a man who appreciates a simple woman's attempts to look appealing." She met his eyes and then gave him a seductive smile that suggested there might be more to come.

She's either an experienced tease or a very lonely woman. He smiled tenderly and said, "I appreciate only the finer things in life, ma'am."

The evening had passed too quickly as far as he was concerned, but over the next few weeks he'd seen a lot of Carol Applegate, as her husband's hectic schedule kept him too busy. One day, Lieutenant Colonel Applegate had been recalled to England. That evening, after attending the theatre with Carol, Miles spent the night. They were not discovered, nor were they brought out the many nights they'd shared together, or so they had thought.

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When he'd begun escorting Carol Applegate, Miles had started living well above his means. He'd gambled a great deal and lost most of his money, forcing him to borrow in order to continue his extravagance. At first, it had only been a few pounds, which he'd paid back quickly, but then it grew until he owed several thousand. Anxiety sent him to the bottle and, in less than three months, young Miles D. Wilson was known throughout the regiment as a drunk. This had resulted in more than one heated correspondence with his father, until the older Wilson had had enough.

In January of 1815, Miles was abruptly reassigned to North America with the warning that his career would go no further. The brigadier had stated that he'd never reassigned a man more deserving of a court-martial.

Well, thought Miles, the old bastard was bloody on the dot, because I've not had another assignment or promotion since. I suspect father was behind it all. God knows he warned me often enough.

A portly sea captain walked toward him. It was James Ruff and he'd been at sea longer than the major had been alive. Ruff was short and fat, well over two-hundred-and-fifty pounds. What little hair the man had left was white and he wore it long, as if to make up for what was missing from the top. Ruff was a strange man and Miles often wondered if it might be the result of his father being English, while his mother was a Yankee from Boston.

"Good day, Miles. I trust you're well prepared to retire come the morning?" Ruff asked, removing his hat.

"Actually, I face a bit of an uncertain future." He turned toward the inside of his quarters. "Come inside. Let's have a drink and talk."

They entered the building and, as Miles took a seat behind his desk, he motioned to an empty chair off to the right. He then opened the bottom right drawer, removed a bottle of Scotch whiskey, pulled the cork, and placed it on his desk. He reached into the same drawer and took out two crystal glasses, into which he poured three fingers of the amber liquid.

He handed a glass to Ruff, saying, "So, James, I think you may have a letter for me from England?"

The fat man chuckled, took a sip of his whiskey, and then replied, "Aye, lad, I have your letter. It is a nice fat one as well."

"Is it word from home?" Miles asked with forced nonchalance.

Ruff sipped his drink once more before saying, "Aye, there is word." He removed a thick letter from his coat and handed it over. "I think it would be best if you didn't return for a while. Important people want to see you."

Miles was about to open his letter, but instead dropped the correspondence in the desk's top drawer. He leaned forward and

met Ruff's eyes. "What kind of important people and why would they want to see me? I am but a simple member of the King's army coming home to my retirement."

Ruff laughed loudly, gulped down the remainder of his Scotch and placed the empty glass on the edge of the desk. His eyes sparkled. "Miles, my lad, you're full of shit. You know who wants to see your arse and why. You owe too much money. The day you arrive home may be the day you die. Or, at best, you'll end up in a debtors' prison boat, and you don't want that either."

The major's stomach roiled. *I can't stay here, but to return home is the same as suicide.* He poured more whiskey into the glasses.

"Easy, Miles, my lad, you're spilling the drink and good Scotch is hard to come by in this damned place."

"Sorry. I was thinking of my future."

"Well, if you return home with me, the best I can do is get you to shore safely. After that, you'll be own your own." Ruff paused. "You might want to stay here for a while. You're an intelligent young man and I think you might be able to figure out a way to come up with the money. How much do you owe, if I might ask?"

Miles looked at Ruff over the rim of his glass. "How much I owe is none of your bloody business. And," he raised his drink, "I have decided not to retire back in England, but rather to stay in this Goddamned remote wilderness and find my fortune."

"Fortune? Aye, it can be made here, but only by trading with the Indians for their furs. I know of no other riches found here."

Miles lowered his glass to his desktop, leaned back and closed his eyes. There must be a way, he thought as he started to rock gently.

Many long and silent minutes passed.

Why is it that the smartest people make the dumbest mistakes? wondered Ruff as he reached for the whiskey.

"James, I wish to be alone. I was serious a minute ago, when I said I would not be returning to England. My father is angry over my debt, refuses to help me, and—"

"I spoke with your father just before leaving port and he said that if you don't get your life in order, he'd have little to do with you in the future. I think he sees all of this as an embarrassment to the family name."

"Family name!" Miles exploded and broke loose from his chair. He stood shaking with anger.

"Lad, keep the ship on a straight course now! Your affairs with married women, your heavy drinking, and your gambling debts have caused all of your problems."

"James, I've done nothing I'm ashamed of and I've brought no dishonor to either my family name or to the Crown. Yes, I like

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women, I gamble, and I do drink too much at times, but hell, those aren't the real problems. All men do these things."

Ruff's eyebrows went up. "Oh, they aren't the real problems, lad, then what is the real problem?"

"Jealousy is the real problem and you damned well know it! Others fear my rise to power once I retire back to England. Those men in London have no desire of the few pence I owe them! They know with my mind and the money that I'll inherit the day my father dies, I'll quickly overshadow all of them. And, once I'm big enough, why...why, I'll squash those arrogant bastards like the little bugs they are."

Ruff stood, placed his cap on his head, and said, "That's not only dangerous talk, lad, it's downright stupid thinking. The men we're speaking of are not little arrogant bugs; they're some of the most influential men in the country, and right now they're all bloody pissed at you. Hell, most of them have the king's ear!"

Still livid, Wilson yelled, "Get out! Get the hell out now!"

Captain James Ruff, the only loyal friend Major Miles D. Wilson had left in the world, walked slowly to the door. Before he stepped outside he turned and said, "Miles, my lad, you take care of yourself. It's not beyond those men in England to reach out for you once they know you're not coming home."

The major picked up the half-empty bottle and threw it at the door as he screamed, "Get the bloody hell away from me!"

Ruff turned and left the cramped quarters. Whiskey ran down the wall near the door, and shards of broken glass glistened the rough plank floor.

CHAPTER 1

The boy was cold, so very cold. The wind, already strong earlier in the day, now blew so much harder. He wasn't sure he could last much longer out in the wind and snow, but he had little choice. If he stopped, he would die. As he stumbled through the blowing snowstorm, he remembered how his day had started, just like all the others he'd experienced in his fifteen years of life.

"Jarel Arley Wade, ya up yet?" the young boy heard his mother yell from downstairs.

"I'm up!" he lied, as he left the warmth of his bed.

He slipped on his bib overalls and boots and made his way down the ladder from the loft. The house was a rough log cabin, with one large room on the ground floor. The upper half of the cabin a sleeping area. While not pretty, the structure kept the family warm during the cold Missouri winters.

"What's fer breakfast, ma?" Jarel asked as he walked to the kitchen table his father had made with his own two hands.

Mrs. Wade gave a loud laugh and handed him a wooden bowl filled with grits. She sat another bowl of grits on the table to Jarel's left. On top of each bowl of grits was a dollop of fresh butter.

"Samethang we had yes'derday an' the day a'fore that-un."

Jarel gave a big crooked smile and sat down. He enjoyed the grits they ate each morning, not that he had much choice. Times were rough on the old dirt farm and there never seemed to be enough good food to go around. They always had plenty of beans, fried taters and cornbread, but not much else.

"Where's Pa? Out in the field already?" Jarel asked between spoonfuls.

"Son, yer daddy done be in them fields fer hours. I wish he'd take a break sometimes. He's always so tired each night. Ya should hep him mo', ya know that, Jarel Arley Wade?"

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Jarel looked down to avoid eye contact. When she used his full name, he was in trouble, or was at least going to get a good talking to. Overall, he was a good boy, but he could do more to help his father. It was just that Jarel didn't want to be a farmer. He wasn't sure what he wanted to be and his choices were limited due to a poor education.

He'd never been to a schoolhouse in his life and the only learning he had, he got from his ma. He could struggle through most parts of the Bible, except for the big names, and he could cipher a bit. Another aspect of life that caused him concern was his size; he was short, and appeared to be much younger than he really was.

He heard his newborn sister crying. His mother walked over to the cradle and picked the baby up to feed her. The noise from the infant had awakened his younger brother, William.

William—Bill—stretched and then got up off the pallet he'd slept on the night before. The young boy had been sick with a cold and Ma wanted him near her bed during the night. As he approached the table, William gave a hacking cough that sounded more like a bark.

"Ya feelin' stronger, son?" she asked as she opened the top of her dress to feed the baby. "And, ya both say yer prayers a-fore ya eat too."

"I feel a mite better, Ma," Bill replied with watery eyes. Bill, though only thirteen, did his share of work on the farm and Ma said he'd gotten sick from chopping wood during a big rain a few days back. Jarel watched the sick boy as he ate his breakfast and the sight made him ill. Bill's nose was running and occasionally he'd give out another barking cough that sprayed grits in all directions. Or he'd use the palm of his hand to wipe his nose and that just smeared the mess all over his face.

"Bill, do ya have to do that? And, turn yer haid when ya cough!" Jarel yelled as William sprayed grits on the tabletop.

Once his coughing fit was over, Bill looked at Jarel with hate in his eyes and replied, "I'm sick, Arley. Ya leave me 'lone."

Jarel hated to be called by his middle name, but the whole family did it most of the time. He knew his brother was doing it now just to get his goat. Jarel gave his brother a slap on the left side of his head and at the outburst from William, Ma turned to see what was happening.

"Cain't ya two neveh sit beside each other and not fight? I got half a mind to take a hickory switch to yer behinds! Now, both of ya stop fightin' and eat yer grits. Then, go out in the field and hep yer daddy. Ya hear me, Arley? Y too big to be a hittin' on yer brother."

Jarel, feeling anger at this brother and frustration with his ma, merely nodded. He made up his mind to settle things with Bill later in the day, once the younger boy had forgotten about the attack at the breakfast table.

Breakfast was soon eaten and the boys cleared the table and prepared to go help their pa. Ma was cutting fatback to go in the big pot of beans that would slow cook in the fireplace. By the time the day was finished, they'd all sit down to a typical dinner, except this time there'd be venison. The day before Pa had shot a big buck near the cornfield.

As the boys walked out of the cabin and across the barnyard, Jarel noticed the weather was cooling. Dark gray clouds were moving in from the west and it looked like snow was coming. They found their father digging potatoes and placing them in tow sacks.

"Hey boys, come to hep me dig up these heah taters? Ya'll find some extree spades oveh there by the fence." His father welcomed the boys in a cheery enough manner, but that was typical of him.

Bill and Jarel were soon busy digging potatoes from the dark soil that their father loved so much. Jarel wondered how a man could love dirt like Pa did. He remembered how each spring his father would grow so excited with the sprouting of each new crop. How all of them, including Ma, would work from can see to cain't see just to grow enough to survive the winter. No, thought Jarel as he worked, I don't wanna spend the res of my life diggin' in the dirt on no rock-filled farm. As soon as I can, I'm a-leavin'. I thank a-bein' one of them mountain men with Astor would be a great life. Jess think, ya could be free and not have to work hard neither.

Abruptly his father stood up and scanned the hills surrounding the farm. "Son, take Bill and head back to the house. Walk boys, don't run. I don't want ya lollygaggin' neither. Jarel, I thank I spotted Injuns."

"Where? I don't see nothin'," the oldest boy replied.

"Son, I ain't got time to argue with ya. Go now!" His father spoke in a voice barely above a whisper, but with a deep sense of urgency.

Heading slowly back to the cabin, Jarel looked over his shoulder and saw father pick up his Hawken rifle.

As soon as he entered the cabin, his mother looked up and he said one word: "Injuns."

"Oh my God!"

She and her children had prepared for situations like this many times. While building the cabin, Pa had dug a large hole under the structure just before putting down the floor. The hole was accessed through a trapdoor and they kept it covered with a thick rug made of cotton rags.

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Jarel helped his mother drag the rug clear and it took the two of them to pull the heavy trapdoor up and hold it open. Looking down the crude ladder that led into the black, Jarel experienced a deep sense of fear. Except, he knew it might offer him and his siblings the only chance of survival they had. His mother would stay up in the cabin to keep his father's two rifles loaded if need be. They'd practiced the procedure many times. His father would shoot and his mother would hand him another loaded rifle, then she would reload the empty one.

The front door swung open. Pa took two steps into the room and then fell flat on his face. Two arrows protruded from his bloody back.

"Get in the cellar NOW!" His mother screamed at her three children while looking at Jarel. As the oldest, he knew he was responsible for taking care of the rest. William went down into the dark hole and lit a small candle.

Once in the cellar, Jarel reminded Bill that they had to remain quiet no matter what happened up stairs. Pa had told them that even if he and their ma were killed during an attack, the children would survive only if they remained absolutely quiet. Jarel wanted to throw up and fought the urge to gag. After looking around at his brother and sister, he knew he had to remain strong for them.

The candle cast eerie flickering shadows on the dirt walls. The children in the cellar heard the loud report of a rifle, followed by silence, then loud crashing sounds come from about where the front door would be. Jarel, frightened nearly out of his mind, pulled his brother and sister close. He was unaware that both he and Bill were trembling. Jarel heard his mother yell. The small cellar was filled once more with the noise of gunfire from above. They could hear people walking and someone screaming until it suddenly became deathly quiet.

As luck would have it, it was at that exact time his baby sister started crying. Jarel and Bill both tried rocking the baby and even singing in low tones to sooth her. Nothing worked and a few seconds later the heavy door to the cellar swung open. As Jarel looked up into the angry eyes of a huge Indian wearing war paint.

The warrior motioned for them to come up. Jarel hesitated for a few seconds until the brave pulled his tomahawk from his belt. He used sign that indicated that if the children did not come up, he was coming down. Choosing the lesser of two evils, Jarel and his siblings climbed up the shaky ladder, right into the gates of hell.

As soon as Jarel had cleared the ladder, a brave struck him on the side of the head with the flat side of a tomahawk. Panic filled him when he realized he had dropped his baby sister as he fell. More than one brave kicked him as he tried to crawl to where she lay crying. He hoped she'd not been seriously hurt from the fall. Just before he could reach her wiggling form, a warrior reached

down and pulled her from her blanket. Then, holding the baby girl by the ankles, he gave a mighty scream and swung the baby's head against the wall. Her head exploded in a mist of gore. The tiny body convulsed as the brave threw it aside.

Jarel closed his eyes, sunk back to the floor, and willed himself to die.

How long he laid there in shock, he had no idea. A bunch of murdering and almost naked Indians had shattered his whole life. They'd killed his pa and his little baby sister! His mother's screams brought him to his senses. Jarel raised his head and looked around. Pa was dead, no doubt about it. He'd been scalped and his entrails were loose links on the floor. Ma was held down as brave after brave raped her. Jarel knew about sex, after all he grew up on a farm, but the pure savagery of the attack stunned him.

Outraged, he stood on weak legs and ran toward the nearest warrior. All of a sudden, he was backhanded and knocked to the floor. This time a brave tied his hands and legs with part of his ma's ripped dress. He heard Bill screaming and looked over to see the little boy pounding on the back of an Indian while the rest of them laughed at the small boy's efforts to protect his mother. Jarel watched as Bill was picked up by one brave, brought to a spot near him and dropped roughly to the floor. The brave then tied Bill up as well. For the next two hours, the young boys listened to their mother's cries as she was assaulted. Jarel knew if he lived to be a hundred, he would never be able to forget the terrible sound.

Finally, there came a scream that was different from the rest. Jarel looked up and saw a warrior holding a bloody knife in his hand. Ma's body quivered a few times then was still. A dark red pool of blood formed under her neck and head.

Jarel watched, entranced by the violence as the brave bent over Ma and ran the blade of a sharp knife around her head. There came a triumphant war cry from the brave, followed by a sucking sound, and the man raised Ma's long blond hair in the air. Jarel leaned over and puked. My God, this must be a dream! This cain't be a-happenin' to me and mine! Ma, Oh, Ma!

A few minutes later a warrior wearing black and red stripes on his face, approached the boys and untied their feet. Motioning for the boys to stand, he stood ready with a bloody knife. Both Bill and Jarel were so shocked by the violence that they did exactly as ordered. They were instructed in sign language to follow the brave, and he led them from the cabin.

Jarel walked past his father's mutilated body, his mind was no longer in this world and he saw nothing.

The boys were lifted and placed on the back of a single horse, then their legs were tied under it to keep them from jumping off. One warrior walked up to the mounted boys and taunted them until he realized they wouldn't react. They'd witnessed too much horror

in too short a time and their minds had shut down. The brave gave an evil laugh and walked away.

“Ja-Jar-Jarel, do ya thank they’ll kill...us?” Bill asked.

Jarel had already decided they were both dead; the Indians just hadn’t done the killing yet. “No, I don’t thank they’ll kill us,” he lied. “Ifn they wanted to kill us, now why would they put us on a horse?”

“Maybe they are a-goin’ to torture us!” Bill whispered.

“Hush, they’re coming back now. Keep quiet and fer God’s sakes, don’t cry. Pa told us Injuns respect a brave person, so let’s be brave.”

Five of the war party returned to the horses. The leader of the group, Hawk Talon, looked at Buffalo Charging and spoke. *“Why are they on a horse? We need to kill all the white eyes here, even the children. The children will grow into men one day and they will remember the deeds of the Oto. If we do not kill all of the whites we find, more will come. Soon our land will no longer be our land. It will belong to the white man.”*

Buffalo Charging did not shrink from his duty as the spiritual leader of the group. *“Hawk, Many Dreams said we are to kill the white man. He did not speak of white children. These two fought bravely to save their mother, just like a child of the Sioux or Oto would. They were frightened, but still they fought. I will adopt them to take the place of The-One-Who-Is-No-More.”*

Buffalo Charging had lost a child to the white man’s spotted disease the summer before and held great grief for his dead son. The disease had killed many in the village and Hawk’s cheeks were scarred from the battle he had fought with the illness and won. No, Hawk thought, I have no right to tell him what to do with his captives. He can make them into slaves, adopt them, or he can kill them. But, they belong to him.

Buffalo Charging waited patiently for Hawk’s reponse. Finally the war leader said, *“If they cannot keep up, I will kill them myself.”* He turned and walked back into the cabin to see if he could find anything of value.

The young Missouri boys were led up a hill, down the other side, and finally brought to an even larger group of Oto. Jarel noticed Indian boys not much older than he watching the horse herd.

Bill broke into another coughing fit and Jarel prayed he would remain quiet. He suspected these people would accept no weaknesses from an enemy, even if the enemy was just a child. Luckily, Bill stopped coughing. Jarel leaned back and saw that his brother was silently crying.

“Bill, ya stop that cryin’ right now! It they see ya cry they might kill ya. Ya gotta stay brave! “Member what Pa tolt us about how Injuns respect a brave person.”

His brother quit crying but still sniffled periodically and seemed unable to stop. Finally, a warrior noticed the young boy and walked over. If either white child had expected compassion, they were in for a surprise. The warrior yelled some thing that neither boy understood and slapped Bill hard across the face.

Cheek stinging from the blow, Bill looked at the Indians with hate-filled eyes. The warrior laughed and walked away. Jarel, turning his head slightly, warned, “Bill, quit cryin’. I honestly thank they’ll kill ya if ya don’t.”

“I’ll try, Jarel.”

“Good. Stay strong. Ya know Ma and Pa would want us to live.”

The boys were left tied to the horse for over an hour. The braves finally returned and motioned for the group to get moving. Jarel looked at the hill behind his home and noticed dark clouds of smoke rising toward the gloomy sky. The Oto had just burned a lifetime of back breaking work by his father and mother. The cabin had been the only home the boys had ever known and for the first time in his young life, Jarel felt pure hatred.

It grew colder as they rode north. Wind picked up and small snowflakes began to fall. The boys were without coats and the cold grew numbing. Bill started shivering, but he kept his mouth shut and did not complain. They must have rode five miles before the Oto pulled up. In front of them was another cabin.

The warriors, experienced in attacking cabins, soon realized they faced too much rifle fire from the windows. Jarel figured there must have been a handful of men in the place. It was only minutes after the first shot when a brave threw a burning piece of dirty clothing on the roof of the cabin and within seconds the dry pine shingles were on fire. Long minutes passed before anyone inside or outside moved, but the cabin’s occupants had to eventually run out, or burn to death.

The door to the cabin swung open and two men hightailed it. They were immediately struck and killed by both arrows and bullets. Finally, two women bolted, only to be caught by the warriors. The white women were not killed, but pulled to the side and tied up. Just when Jarel thought no one was still in the flaming cabin, a young boy of about fourteen exited with an old double-barrelled shotgun in his hands. The boy’s light brown hair was smoking. He pointed the old gun at the group of Indians still on horseback and pulled both triggers. Two braves fell from their saddles, one instantly dead and the other screaming in pain as he thrashed on the ground. Two arrows struck the boy in the chest and he fell without a uttering a sound.

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As the braves rushed forward to scalp and mutilate the bodies, a shot echoed from inside the cabin. Someone did not want to be taken alive.

Before the flames had time to collapse the roof, the warriors ran into the cabin and removed anything they considered of value. Jarel watched as flour, beans, weapons, ammunition, guns, and clothing were placed safely away from the fire. Flames spread swiftly across the cabin's seasoned wood. In less than twenty minutes, the roof collapsed.

The Oto loaded extra horses with plunder and shot the pigs and chickens full of arrows. One brave cut the throat of an old milk cow and laughed as the animal convulsed in pain.

"What kind of people have taken me prisoner?" the terrified boy whispered to no one.

As quickly as the fight had started, it was over. The white women were placed on a horse each and tied the same way the two boys were.

Hours later, after the war party had travelled west, the leader of the group called for a stop for a midday meal. Jerked meat and water in buffalo bladders was passed around to all, except for the captives. Neither the boys nor the women received food or water. Jarel thought the break was taken more for the horses than for the humans, and soon they were moving once more.

The weather turned worse with larger snowflakes falling and the temperature dropping even more. The wind had picked up too since they'd entered the open plains and they were no longer protected by the woods and hills. While Jarel was hungry, he was more worried about freezing to death. His body shook from the cold and all that kept him warm was the heat from his smaller brother, and the horse between his legs. I'll die this night, if I don't get no mo' clothes or a blanket.

One of the white women, riding ahead leaned sharply to the right. There came an abrupt cry or perhaps a warning from an Oto guard riding near her. He rode up beside the woman and pulled her upright. Almost instantly she fell to the right again.

The Oto, feeling frustrated, pulled his knife, leaned over, grabbed the woman's hair to raise her head, and cut her throat. Great spurts of blood gushed each time her heart beat, but thanks to the severity of her wound, she didn't suffer long. In less than two minutes, the woman was dead. The brave who'd slashed her throat dismounted and cut the rope tying her legs under the horse. The body fell to the ground, turning the newly fallen snow a copper brown. The brave mounted and promptly moved the rest of the captives forward. The woman's body was left where it had fallen.

Jarel continued to shiver with the cold. The war party persisted in moving west, even after the snow began to fall hard and Jarel

was afraid he and Bill would die soon. An hour later the group rode down into a group of willows near the edge of a small stream. While it was well out of the wind, it was still very cold. Within minutes, the Oto had temporary shelters made from brush and buffalo hides.

Jarel, Bill, and the lone surviving woman were thrown into a shelter and a single old and well-worn wool horse blanket was tossed in behind them. The Oto had cut the ties to each of their hands and feet, but had warned them in sign that to attempt escape meant instant death. The young boy understood that if the warriors did not kill them the weather would. All Jarel cared about was getting warm. The three of them huddled under the thin blanket and for more than an hour, nothing was said.

Finally, the woman looked at the two boys and said, "I'm Nadine Williams. My husband and I own the old Ridgeway farm. Do you think they'll hurt us?"

Jarel, unsure how to respond, simply said, "I'm Jarel and this is William. Our last name is Wade."

"Oh, the Wades! I know your ma very well. She's a very good cook."

Bill whimpered.

Jarel, feeling he had to be brave, glanced at Nadine and said, "Our ma and pa was kilt when these Oto attacked us. Even our baby sister was kilt. And, in case ya don't remember, yer husband and the woman that was taken with ya are both dead. There was some other men kilt at yer cabin too, but I ain't shore who they was."

Nadine looked at the boys in disbelief, then with a deeply confused mind she said, "No, Jubal is out hunting. Frank was working in the fields when the attack came. Norma, why I just saw her here, so they must have put her in her own shelter. They wouldn't hurt us. I think they're taking us to the trading post by the river."

The woman's mind had snapped; Jarel rolled over and ignored her. He could hear the wind blowing hard outside the crude structure. While he was no longer freezing, he was nowhere near being comfortable either. He listened to his stomach growl but suspected he wouldn't eat on this night. Jarel could hear the braves laughing as they cooked huge pieces of meat around small campfires. He was not sure how many of them there were, but he suspected more than fifty. Occasionally one of them would give a bloodcurdling scream and hold up a fresh scalp as he danced around the fire. It must have been mid-evening when one of the warriors finally came for the woman. She screamed and protested, but it did no good. The brave grabbed her by her long red hair and dragged her physically from the shelter.

Red Runs the Plains

“They gonna torture her, Jarel?” Bill whispered, as if asking the question in a normal voice would make it happen.

“Uh-huh, ya could say that. Remember, we gotta stay quiet. We don’t need to draw any attention to us. No matter what happens to her, or what ya hear don’t make a sound.”

“I wanna go home.”

Angry at his brother’s childish response, Jarel snapped, “We ain’t got no home no mo’, Bill. These animals done burnt it up. We ain’t even got a ma and pa no mo’. We are jess two little orfeens now and we have to stay strong to survive.”

Bill started crying again. Leaning over, Jarel patted his little brother’s head and said, “Bill, I thank I can get us outta heah, mayhap. Ya jess be ready to run when I say run. Ya make shore ya foller me when we go too. Ya get lost out in this snow storm and ya’ll be daid in short time.”

“Ya really got a plan?” Bill asked, eyes lighting up.

“Shore I do, Bill, ya know me!” He had no plans, no ideas and very little hope.

The night air was filled with laughter from the braves and horrible screams from the woman named Nadine. Jarel suspected the warriors were raping her. He looked from the shelter and noticed all of the braves were in a circle near the fire, their backs to him. Now, he thought, while they’re watching the woman, is the time for us to escape. The heavily falling snow would make tracking difficult, even for an experienced Oto warrior.

Turning to his brother, Jarel whispered, “We’re leavin’ now. Give me the blanket and I want ya to foller me slow like into the trees behind our shelter. Once in the trees we’ll run like wildfire. Ya jess make shore ya stay on my tail as close as ya can. Do ya unnerstand me?”

Bill nodded, but Jarel could see the fear in the younger boy’s eyes. The two of them left the shelter and moved silently toward the trees. Jarel could still hear the braves laughing and taunting the woman, so he suspected the two of them were safe enough for the time being. Suddenly he heard a loud sound like a hand slapping polished leather. Another followed the sound instantly, and he looked back at his younger brother. Bill was still running behind him, but his eyes were wide and blood was running from his wide-open mouth and down his chin. It was then that Jarel heard a loud shout from the Oto camp. Bill ran for almost another hundred feet before he collapsed. Two arrows protruded from the middle of his back.

“Jarel, I hut somethin’ terrible...Don’t let me die, Jarel...I don’t wanna die.” Bill’s voice was so weak.

Jarel knelt beside his brother and in a quaking voice said, “Bill, yer okay. I ain’t gonna leave ya neither,”

W.R. Benton

The snow under Bill bloomed red, then his eyes became fixed and unseeing. William Robert Wade was dead.

Knowing he had to move or die next, Jarel turned and ran into the blizzard.