



**BOOMER**

ROBERT HATTING

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## **FIVE REVIEWS, ALL FIVE STARS!**

\*\*\*\*\* BOOMER

Great Western Novel, January 6, 2012

[Raymond Samek](#)

Boomer (Kindle Edition)

When the hero, Sheriff Boomer, looks after a local orphaned teen, little does he realize that he will end up dealing with rustlers and unsavory characters attempting to hunt down the missing \$60,000 of \$20 Gold Eagle proceeds from their 4 year old bank heist and massacre which was planted on the teen's ranch. The author's knowledge of the old west, ranching and livestock provides so much detail that you really live each minute of action and feel a need to unsaddle your horse and rub it down when it is all said and done. This is one great reading book.

\*\*\*\*\*"Boomer is a hit!", December 7, 2011

[S. M. Ballard "writer"](#) (Cochise County, AZ)

Boomer (Kindle Edition)

Something about Robert Hatting's Boomer, set in the Arizona Territory of the late 1870s, reminds me of the classic tales of Will James. I think it's the way Mr. Hatting knows his way so very well around ranch life, horses and the ways of the old west including its people.

Then there's the storytelling. Boomer is chock full of adventure, robbery, intrigue, and lest I forget...interesting characters. My favorite, besides Sheriff Henry Boomer, is Wolf, another is Milly, a strong-willed, determined young woman. She'd have to be to survive in this time and in this place. All, even the most trivial characters, are vividly brought to life; no one rings phony. This is a writer who's seen his share of life and living and understands how to communicate that in his novel. Five stars to Boomer.

Not a fan of Westerns. Read this book anyhow. You'll enjoy it., August 30, 2011.

[CW - See all my reviews](#)

\*\*\*\*\*Boomer (Kindle Edition)

This is my third book by this author. I was given a gift of Alaska Be Damned and enjoyed it so much I read another of his books after sampling it. It was not a genre I normally read. (Romantic comedy.) Sooo, I thought I would try another, westerns, which I never read by choice. I thoroughly enjoyed it too. Took me back to the days when I watched westerns on black and white TV. The book is more realistic than the westerns

we used to watch. The characters, plot etc. all good reading. Forget its a western and read a good story!

Boomer, June 17, 2011

[Bette](#)

\*\*\*\*\*Boomer (Kindle Edition)

I have just finished reading Boomer by Bob Hatting. It is a wonderful book for both young and old and holds your interest throughout the entire book. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it and think the author has a terrific feel for the old west. I highly recommend this book to all your readers.

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## TUCSON, ARIZONA TERRITORY 1878

My friend, Henry Boomer, is a tactful man. His mild tact is evident even with critters. Once, bitten by a fractious rattler, Henry replied just before he shot the varmint, "Your misspent aggression has earned you immortality as a hat-band, pard."

It's Boomer's way. A lot of folks, mostly bad men, are fooled by his soft nature. He gives no quarter with his lightning fast draw, but he never raises his voice in anger, neither. I guess that's why he keeps getting re-elected. Folks will vote for a polite lawman even if he detained them for being drunk and rowdy, inconsiderate to their mules, or remiss in paying their taxes. They always vote for Henry Boomer come election time, complaints aside.

Being Sheriff here in Arizona Territory is no small job. Not in these times, anyhow. Sheriff Boomer and his two deputies, Homer Kearns and Billy Blackwater, hafta deal with Mexican bandits, train robbers, rustling, stage hold-ups, Apache raids, and numerous crimes of passion. Although his office is in Tucson, Henry Boomer spends a lot of his time in Pantano: a railroad town a half-day's ride east. Homer Kearns, chief deputy, resides in San Felipe, a full day's ride to the West. Billy Blackwater roams the entire district. Sheriff Boomer seldom knows where Billy will turn up--or when.

Tucson Town Marshal, Clyde Owen, often has to telegraph Sheriff Boomer if there is pressing business. Like the time Warren Hubbard, the famous bounty hunter, brought in James Walcott to collect a five hundred dollar reward. One doesn't keep a man like Warren Hubbard waiting, so Marshal Owen telegraphed Sheriff Boomer who took the afternoon westbound train and had Warren Hubbard riding out of town the next morning.

Sheriff Boomer seldom misses Sunday services at our community Protestant church. As regular as the stage, he arrives on the westbound train every Saturday evening, spends a few minutes with Marshal Owen, and takes his supper at Missus Hayden's Boarding House. After supper he sits on the porch and confabs with the drummers and other visitors who are usually passing through town, and at the strike of nine he leaves for the Territorial Hotel and Saloon. Some think it's because he's smitten with Heddy O'Bryan, owner of the Territorial. They're good friends, but it's the Saturday night poker game that draws Sheriff Boomer.

There's usually a poker game at the Territorial at any time of any day. Saturday night, however, is when our banker, Martin Jeffers, plays. No one knows why he continues to play. Mister Jeffers is known throughout the territory as the worst poker player in the west. He's greedy and wants to win every pot; drawing to inside straights, flushes, and hoping for the big hand that will get him even. That won't happen. Martin Jeffers, ordinarily as tight as the bark on a tree, thinks he can bluff everyone at the table like he does during the week.

Jeffers owns half the small ranches in the territory and has mortgages on most of the others. He even holds a mortgage on the town hall. Because of his caustic personality and

his roughshod manner, Jeffers has no friends. The only person that seems to get along with him is Walter Bishop. Walter runs all of Jeffers' ranches. He's seldom in town. He stays out at Jeffers' biggest ranch, the Diamond B.

Sheriff Boomer has little to do with Jeffers except on poker night. They appear cordial, but Jeffers still holds a grudge against the Sheriff for not catching the bandits who robbed the Butterfield stage seven years ago. They stole sixty thousand dollars in gold coin, an amount Banker Jeffers could afford, but being tight, begrudges the loss of even a dime.

The fact that Banker Jeffers was aboard the stage when it was held up made matters worse. Other passengers recited that the banker cried and wet himself when one of the masked robbers jabbed a pistol in his face. When questioned by the Sheriff, Jeffers couldn't describe his assailants, their horses, or any other details.

Sheriff Boomer lit out after the bandits with a big posse. Gone almost a week, they cut some sign that made them think the robbers had gone east toward Pantano. After the first week most of the posse returned, dribbling in by ones and twos. Sheriff Boomer, Homer Kearns, and Billy Blackwater stayed on the trail of the bandits. Another week went by and Sheriff Boomer finally returned--riding in from the west. He said they trailed the robbers in a big circle and finally lost all sign of them after one of our summer rainstorms washed away all the tracks. Homer Kearns went home but Billy Blackwater stayed out. He was never one for town life, being part Indian and all.

Sheriff Boomer wanted to go back out and resume his search, but Town Marshal Owen begged him to stay in town and officiate at a scheduled hanging. Marshal Owen, wanting to be anywhere but Tucson on that dreadful day, was squeamish about such matters.

Daryl Pusser had been convicted of beating his wife, Edith, to death with a rusty crowbar. He was triple mean when he was sober but worse than the devil himself when he had a tippie or two.

Marshal Owen arrested him the same day Judge Reinholt arrived on his circuit rounds. Daryl admitted he'd done the dirty deed so there weren't no trial to speak of. Just the sentence; *execution by hangin'*. The judge thought it to be proper to delay the hangin' until Edith was consigned to the soil, so he issued an order to have the necktie party after the funeral.

Marshal Owen was mighty glad when Sheriff Boomer came back to town. He attended the funeral--it was fitting and right, but rode out of town a minute or two after Edith was laid to rest. I heard tell he didn't even look back. All this happened afore I came into Tucson.

I guess it's time I tell you who I am and how I fit into this danged story. My name is Wolf-Boy Peters. Well, not really Wolf-Boy. My ma'am named me Jessup when I was borned. When she passed, I stayed out at the ranch by my lonesome for a long spell. When I came in to town, there was a passel of whispers about me, and the town folks began callin' me Wolf-Boy. I can't figure why. Jest 'cause I was alone for nigh on two years and haired out more than most folks don't mean I deserved a mean name. Now, though, most everbody jest calls me Wolf, and they don't mean nothin' bad by it. Fact is,

most folks don't remember my real name, and I'm kinda likin' jest the Wolf part. Sounds more growed up than Jessup.

I guess to tell it right, I gotta 'xplain how I come to be Sheriff Boomer's sub-deputy. That's what he calls me. "Wolf-Boy, you're my sub-deputy. Your job is to keep the territory-lock-up spic 'n span and run errands for townsfolk's in need."

I got that job the day after Sheriff Boomer come out to my ma'am's ranch to remind her to pay her taxes...they was kinda late 'cause she were two years in the ground, and I weren't knowin' nothin' about taxes and the like. Anyhow, I got that job after he moved me into the jail and given' me a room. Said the pay was more than enough to cover the taxes on my ranch and some left over. I got bed 'n board plus ten dollars every month. 'An I got two days off in the middle of the week so I could ride out to my ranch 'an attend to chores.

Liveryman Grant allows me to ride his old jenny mule if'n I stop at the salt bog 'an fetch him a bag of salty silt. He mixes it with his critter feed...says it helps keep the parasites outta their innards.

I come to town when I was jest fifteen. I been here a shade over two years so I be seventeen now. Ma'am used to learn me my sums and letters, but I wasn't really good at sums until I moved into the jailhouse. Sheriff Boomer gave me McGruffy's Reader and a book on sums. He said I had to get educated if I was wantin' to advance. I wasn't sure whatsoever an advance was...not really, but I played along to please Sheriff Boomer. Onc't I got into the sum book, I found a series of games played with numbers. T'weren't long until I had them all ciphared out. Doc Grady says I'm a natural mathmortician or somethin' like that. He also says I need to spend a lot of time with the Reader. Says I ain't sayin' my words right. I'll get ta goin' on that reader jest as soon as I finish tellin' this here story.

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## CHAPTER 1

Tethering the old mule in the salt marsh, Wolf Peters loosened the cinch and walked back to the pond; careful not to step in quicksand. Squatting at the edge of the pond, scraping silt with a short handled hoe, a noise from behind caught his attention. The jenny mule came alert. The sound came from an arroyo that angled away from the salt pond. Wolf listened for a moment and then went back to filling his sack with the salt silt. He glanced over his shoulder and saw that the mule was still alert; her ears pricked forward, standing dead still, not even chewing a mouthful of marsh grass.

Wolf decided to investigate. Placing his hoe and the sack on high ground, he stayed hunkered down and turned ever so slowly in case he was being watched. Wolf looked in the direction 'ole jenny was starin' and began to creep toward the arroyo. At the edge he cautiously peeked over, not wanting to skyline himself to whoever or whatever was in the wash. At first he couldn't see anything or anyone. Wolf removed his floppy hat, scooted further over the edge, and looked down directly into the eyes of an old man. Instant relief flooded the panicked look in the man's face.

"Help me, son. I be gut shot. Gotta get to a doc or I'm a goner." He said in a weak tone.

Wolf stood up and scrambled down the bank to attend the man.

"Can ya sit up, mista? I can get ya some water." Wolf asked.

"Can't take no water. Jest get me to town." He gasped.

Wolf put a smooth rock under the old man's head to prop him up.

"I'll get the mule and be back directly." Wolf said as he jogged though the salt marsh, twice stepping in the edges of quicksand.

Wolf made a mental note to take it easy going back with the mule. One false step and the jenny would be lost to them and the old man would probably die. He couldn't imagine the trouble he'd be in if he lost the mule. Liveryman Grant was soft with animals but a real hellfire with people.

"Hold this here mule whilst I fetch some branches for a travois." Wolf instructed as he let the lead rope drop into the old man's outstretched hand.

Wolf struggled with his makeshift travois. The dead ribs from the saguaro cactus were brittle and pithy. Finally able to weave enough mesquite limbs into the ribs to hold weight, he started back to the wounded old man. Jenny looked up as he clambered over the rim of the arroyo. The old man was asleep, the lead rope still in his paw. Wolf rigged the travois before he woke the man.

"Mister, I got the travois ready. Can you stand with my help?"

The old man squirmed into a sitting position. Wolf bent at the waist and brought the man to his feet. He kept the weight off the wobbly legs and began the slow process of putting the man down gently. Wolf could see the pain in the man's eyes.

“Who shot you, mister?” Wolf asked as he tied the man into the travois with part of the lead rope.

“That low down brother of mine, Brock Peters. He won't be shootin' anybody else for a while. I drilled him right through his gun hand! Knocked half that meat hook to perdition. I'm a feared he mighta killed me, though. He was awful damn fast—never hit nothin' with his first shot except'n this one time. Got me twict afore I hit him.”

Wolf was standing stock-still. The old man opened his eyes and stared at the kid.

“Whassa matter, boy? You look like you seen a ghost.”

“M'my p'pap's n' name was Brock Peters. He died afore I was borned.” Wolf stammered.

“Are you Jessup? Is Susan Peters yore ma?” The old man asked as he reached out and took the boy's hand.

“Y'yes sir. Yore my pap's brother?” Wolf asked.

The hand dropped away and the old man closed his eyes. A look of relief came over him as he reached to his breast pocket and pulled out his tobacco pouch.

“Take this to your ma. It's got somethin' inside she needs...I ain't gonna make it, son. You take it to her...promise!” He said weekly.

Wolf started the mule forward, skirting the quicksand. Jenny balked a bit but soon settled into a rapid walk once out of the salt marsh. She knew she was going home. Wolf slipped the leather pouch into his shirt as the old man slipped into a deep sleep.

Wolf, with his man in tow, was two miles from town when the old man awoke. He was bright and alert, wanting to talk.

“I'm yore uncle Arlis. Brock is my half brother. He was a wild young stallion when he met yore ma. She took to him like flies to honey. Son, yore pap is no good. He was an outlaw before he growed hair outta his face. He done yore ma wrong. A bad wrong.”

“Ma'am is passed on. I buried her jest past two years ago, Mister Arlis.” Wolf said in a sad tone.

“Whoa up, son. Yore ma is passed?”

Wolf held the mule still and turned to look at his uncle.

“Yessir, she died of consumption. Was sickly for a long time.”

Arlis drifted into a different world—a sad world of remembrance.

“I seen Susan about seven years ago. Jest for a bit in the middle of the night. She still looked mighty fine. She were a fine woman.” He said in recollection. “Did you know I bought that ranch for her?” Arlis said as his voice tailed off.

Wolf shook his head no and started the mule toward town.

“Yep, bought her that place to make things right. You was jest borned when I moved her on to the place. Had to do somethin' to make up for what Brock done to her. You keep that pouch but don't look inside unless'n I pass. Promise?”

Wolf turned and looked at his failing uncle. He was shuddering...kinda looking more pale. Wolf stepped up the pace—Jenny was happy to oblige.

\* \* \* \* \*

Doc Grady done what he could. My uncle Arlis had been too long without care since he was drilled. Arlis died six hours after I fetched him to town. Afore he passed he had a long talk with Doc Grady and Sheriff Boomer. I guess he made a last willer or somethin'. Doc Grady wrote it down; Arlis signed it 'an so did Doc Grady and Sheriff Boomer. Doc gave it to me later. I had sorrows, but I was more curiosity about my kin. I was told by my ma'am that my pap died afore I was borned. Arlis says he's a no account bad man and is still alive. Alive enough to shoot and kill Uncle Arlis. He also says he seen my ma'am seven years ago. She didn't say nothin' to me about any family. I still am wonderin' ifn my pap did my ma'am wrong like his brother Arlis said. She never tole me nuthin' 'cept pap died 'an left her our ranch.

I fingered the paper that Doc wrote and then the pouch. It's been two days since he was laid to rest. I figured to take a ride out toward my ranch 'an scout around for Uncle horse. Doc's paper says he willered it to me along with his guns and tack 'an whatever more he owned. Doc also wrote down directions to a high meadow ranch over in New Mexico. That's mine, too. I ain't too anxious to leave Tucson but Sheriff Boomer says one day he 'n me will go a huntin' that other ranch.

I still ain't looked at what's in the 'baccy pouch. Out of respect for my dyin' kin I jest kinda kept puttin' it off. I 'spect I'll take a peek after I get past the salt bog--away from town 'an pryin' eyes.

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## CHAPTER 2

Wolf backtracked his uncle from the salt marsh. Arlis had crawled about a mile from where he'd been shot off his horse. Wolf scouted the ground and found a pistol; a

Colt revolver, caliber 44. Wolf picked it up, opened the cylinder gate, and pushed the five cartridges into his hand. There were three live shells. Two shots had been fired from the bloody pistol. Blood was all over the ground. Sign showed blood and hoof prints of a shod horse, not the one Arlis was riding, close to where Arlis had fallen. Southeast toward Pantano, the tracks and blood trail circled and then angled away. Wolf found the horse tracks made after his uncle was on the ground. His horse had spooked, ran through a mesquite thicket, and then came back to Arlis. The horse drifted again, leading Wolf in the direction of his neighbor's ranch, the Kandler's Rocking K.

Wolf followed the tracks for a while and then rode directly to the ranch headquarters. He'd never been there before. As he rode through the gate, Milly Kandler walked out onto the porch. Wolf had seen her in town with her folks. Each time his hands began to sweat

and his throat constricted. He'd never said a word to the girl but had rehearsed a hundred speeches he was going say to her once he had her alone.

Milly was alone but none of his high toned speeches would come to mind. He suffered from paralyzing shyness with most strangers but with Milly he got the stammers and twitches. His first impression didn't bode well.

"M'm'miss, did y'you folks find a saddled horse hereabouts?"

Milly walked to the edge of the porch and smiled at Wolf.

"I seen you in town. Is your name really Wolf?" She asked.

"W'well, that's w'what folks call me. My real name is Jessup," Wolf stammered.

Milly swished her skirt and petticoats as she walked to the stairs.

"I like Jessup better than Wolf. Milly and Jessup is better than Milly and Wolf," she giggled. "Pa found a horse yesterday. It's in the barn. Follow me."

Wolf dismounted and led the jenny toward the barn. He tied the mule to the hitch rail and followed Milly into the dark maw of the huge old barn. He was still pondering the Milly and Jessup remark...wondering if it was bold or just girl play. His eyes didn't adjust in time and his mind was still spavined by Milly's audacious remark. Wolf walked headlong into a post. It set his ears ringing and almost knocked him down.

"Dang, I walked right into this here post. Almost rung my bell," Wolf announced.

"Be more careful, silly," Milly scolded. "The wandering horse is right over here. She's a fine mare."

Wolf let his teary eyes adjust to the darkness before he took another step. Milly was leaning into a stall petting the horse. He was curious about the horse but also liking the shape of this redheaded lass. On the porch her brown eyes bore into his soul, and he knew she was reading his mind even at this moment.

"Pa says this horse must have some mustang in her. She's tall like a thoroughbred but has that line down her back like most dun mustangs. Pa thinks she's in foal."

Wolf looked into the stall. Uncle Arlis' dun mare stood a shade under sixteen hands. She had breadth to her chest, a strong rump, and straight legs. Her hooves were black and she had four black socks. She was nuzzling Milly who was scratching her ears.

"I'd love to ride this horse. I'll bet she has a smooth gait. Who does she belong to?" Milly uttered.

Wolf wanted to take the mare out of the stall and move her around, but he had to answer Milly's question first. He reached across the stall, removed a halter off the back wall, stepped back, and tripped on a feed bucket. He landed on his back in a pile of dried horse manure.

"I guess she be mine now. My uncle Arlis willered her to me," he said as he got off his back. "He were gut shot over by the salt bog. I foun' him an hauled him to town. Doc Grady couldn't save him. Arlis were too far along to dyin'."

Milly giggled at his clumsiness but listened intently to Wolf's story. She's seen him around town, knew he was a pet of Sheriff Boomer and did odd chores for some of the town folks in addition to his job at the jail. He was a strange boy. He seemed to be more interested in the mare than he was in her. It was perplexing. She'd seen the lonesome gazes he'd given her in town. The woebegone look on his face as he rode toward the

porch telegraphed his arduous desire. Now, he almost ignored her, focusing his attention on his new horse.

Wolf halted the mare and led her out of the barn. He tied her to the hitch rail and walked around; picking up her feet and stroking her rump and withers.

“Where's the rest of Uncle Arlis' tack?” Wolf asked gently.

“It's in the barn...the tack room. I'll show it to you, but I can't let you take the mare until Pa comes home.”

“Why not? Doc Grady writ a paper that says Uncle Arlis willered her to me,” Wolf argued.

“I know, Jessup, but Pa is the one to give her to you...he found her. He'll be back directly. Want some buttermilk?”

Wolf pondered the situation and felt he had nothing to lose by waiting for her pa. He'd always wanted to be with Milly and now he had the chance. Still, it would be nice to see what else Arlis had.

“Show me the tack and then I'd love to have some buttermilk. I ain't had none since our milk cow died. That was two years afore Ma'am passed,” Wolf said.

Milly showed the way back into the barn.

“Watch the pole, Jessup.” She teased.

Wolf stayed close, not trusting his eyesight in such a dim place. It reminded him of the Smitty's shop in town...always dark and dangerous.

“Here's the saddle, blanket, bridle, and breast collar. His bedroll and saddlebags is up on that shelf,” Milly said. “Pa took the rifle and scabbard inside. It's in his den.”

Wolf took the bedroll and saddlebags off the shelf. Both were heavier than he expected. He about dropped the bedroll but finally tied it behind the cantle of the saddle after he attached the saddlebags. He gathered everything into his arms and carried it all out to the hitch rail. Milly followed. He looked back and caught her skipping. Her freckled face blushed at being caught.

First Wolf inspected the blanket. It was a heavy woven wool with a Navajo pattern. He brushed the back of the mare and set the blanket. Then he slung the saddle. It was fine...a fair size seat, A-fork slick swells with a high horn wrapped with rawhide. It had a high back shovel seat worn to a dark mahogany hue. The stirrup leathers were swing-away, had ox bow stirrups, a braided horsehair cinch strap, and long saddle strings. Wolf ran his hand over the saddle, wiping off the dust before he pulled the cinch to three quarter tight.

Milly looked on as Jessup fondled his new treasures. She knew he'd always been on the dirt-poor side of life. His clothes didn't even fit. His shirtsleeves were too short for his long gangly arms and it was stretched tight across his chest. His ratty trousers were also two inches too short. His clothes were homespun except for his scuffed, run-off-the-heel boots. He was a good-looking young man with wide shoulders, a narrow waist, and long arms. Milly guessed he was just shy of six feet tall. His hair hung down like a mop. She resisted the urge to toss his floppy weak brimmed hat away and take the shears to his sandy locks. She also wanted to sew on the missing button in the middle of his shirt. The thought of such intimacy made her blush.

Her pa often wondered how he and his mother made it on their hardscrabble ranch it was beyond comprehension. Her pa knew Missus Peters. He said she was a hard workin' woman but didn't know sheep-dip from barn owls when it come to ranchin'. He'd drive a few head of her stock home on occasion. Most of their cattle were scattered from one end of the valley to the other. Maybe with his new horse, Jessup could herd some of his cattle home.

Milly watched him caress his saddle and then slide his big hand down the leg of the mare and across her chest as he fastened the breast collar. Milly felt a blood rush as she watched his hands caress flesh.

"I'll fetch the buttermilk and meet you on the porch." She said with a fluster.

Wolf just nodded and continued inspecting his new mare. He resisted climbing aboard, snagging Jenny's lead rope, and riding back to his ranch. It would get Milly in trouble with her pa. He turned and watched as Milly entered the house. Wolf realized he was too distracted to pay her a mind; he was being a dunderhead. How many times had he dreamed about her? He remembered her fresh baked bread smell when they first walked into the barn. It reminded him of his ma'am. When she swished her skirt and petticoats, it froze his tongue to his teeth. His overpowering curiosity, however, drew him back to the mare. With a decent horse and tack, he knew he'd be able to make his ranch into something worthwhile. He could gather his cattle, maybe hire a Mexican to help brand, and start making the place pay. He had the best water in the valley. That's what Sheriff Boomer said. He also said Banker Jeffers tried to make loans to his ma'am several times...rode all the way to the ranch to make the offers. He wanted Ma'am's ranch in the worst way. She didn't hold with loans so he never got the ranch.

According to Boomer, Jeffers hadn't tried the straightaway approach; never offered to buy it from Ma'am. She may have sold after the plow mule died. She was mighty sick by then but she never mentioned selling.

Milly walked out on the porch balancing a tray with a pitcher and two glasses. Wolf pulled the saddlebags and bedroll off the mare and strode to the porch. He set the un-inspected items on the plank floor. Milly placed the tray on a small table next to the porch swing. The buttermilk had come from a cool place. Sweat began forming on the pitcher and the glasses as she poured them full.

"You can set on the swing, Jessup," she said sweetly.

Wolf looked at the narrow width of the swing and measured it in his mind. He would be sitting on her petticoats if she sat beside him.

"If it's all the same with you, Ma'am, I'll set on the stoop."

"Jessup Peters, don't you ever call me ma'am again! If you can't remember that my name is Milly, you can jest go shout!" She scolded loudly.

Wolf shrunk away from the castigation and sat on the steps. The front door opened and a middle-aged woman poked her head out.

"Is everything okay, Milly?" Her Mom asked.

Wolf sat his buttermilk on the porch, stood, and removed his hat.

"Everything is fine, Mother. This is Jessup Peters. He came for that stray horse. He's waitin' for Pa. I was just scolding him for calling me Ma'am. Jessup, this is my mother, Harriet Kandler," Milly explained in a tranquil tone.

“How 'do, Missus Kandler. It's nice to meet you. I deserve the scoldin'. I ain't had much learnin' about women. Me 'n my ma'am didn't get to town much.”

“Don't worry about it young man. Milly has a lot to learn about men, too. You were just being polite. Are you the young'un folks called Wolf-Boy?”

Wolf bowed his head in shyness and nodded.

“Yes, Ma'am. Folks used to call me Wolf-Boy. Now, they jest call me Wolf. I answer to it without shame.”

“Milly you be nice to this young man. He's had some trials I wouldn't wish on the devil himself. Jessup, it was nice meeting you,” Missus Kandler said as she left the porch and walked toward the chicken coop.

Milly fussed with the pitcher and tray, sat on the swing, and kicked it into motion.

“I'm sorry, Jessup. I know you are a good person. I'll behave.”

Wolf nodded, sat on the stoop, and took a long pull on the buttermilk glass. He set the glass aside and reached up with his arm to wipe the froth from his lip. The strain was too much for his wrist button; it popped and landed square in his glass of buttermilk. Missus Kandler, approaching with her apron full of hens' eggs, began laughing at the sight. Laughing so hard one of the eggs slipped from her apron and smashed on the ground. Milly was giggling, too. Wolf looked at his sleeve and then at the glass. The two women broke into hysteria. Two more eggs dropped from the apron and it started Wolf laughing, too.

“Goodness gracious, I'd better get what's left of these eggs inside. Jessup, why don't you stay for supper? Frank may not be along directly, he and our hand is workin' down toward Andrada. It's a far piece.”

“Thank you, Ma'am, for the invite. I wouldn't want to put you out,” Wolf replied sheepishly.

“We'll be happy to have you. I'm sure Frank will want to talk with you...bein' our neighbor and all,” Missus Kandler said as she reached the door. “Milly, when you finish your buttermilk, come inside and help me! Jessup, you can join us in the kitchen or take a look around.”

“Thank you, Ma'am. I'll jest stay on the porch 'an look at Uncle Arlis' things--might take the mare for a ride around the lots,” Wolf said.

“You have an Uncle Arlis?” Missus Kandler asked.

“Not no more. He passed two days ago,” Wolf stated.

“I'll tell you about it in the kitchen later, Mother,” Milly said in dismissal.

Milly sat on the steps with Wolf. Her skirt and petticoats flared onto his left leg. Wolf needed distraction. He pulled the saddlebags toward him and opened one side. He extracted a pistol, a box of cartridges, a slender dagger in a sheath, a book, a shaving kit, and a leather pouch. Wolf hefted the pistol, opened the gate, and spun the cylinder. It was empty. He opened the box of cartridges and filled the cylinder...leaving one empty.

“Five beans in the wheel,” Wolf muttered as he lowered the hammer over the empty cylinder.

“Did your mother teach you about guns?” Milly asked.

“Nope, not much. Sheriff Boomer been a learnin' me to shoot. We go down to the Rillito and plink. Teachin' me to shoot a rifle, too. Uncle Arlis willered me another pistol

and a gun belt. It's hangin' on a hook at the jail. Uncle Arlis was a wearin' it when I found him."

Wolf slid the pistol back into the saddlebag and picked up the dagger. He slipped the blade out of the sheath and tested the edges on his thumbnail. He slid it back and returned it to the saddlebag, too. Wolf was surprised at the weight of the pouch. He poured the contents on the bottom step of the porch. It was twenty dollar gold coins. Wolf began stacking them in piles of five.

Milly counted the coins and was trying to cipher the total when Wolf blurted out the amount.

"Four hundred and forty dollars," Wolf said excitedly. "Uncle Arlis was rich."

Wolf put the coins back in the pouch and then put the pouch, along with the shaving kit, back into the saddlebag. He turned the book over in his hands...liking the feel of the leather binding. The cover had raised letters, spelling *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, underneath was the name *Harriet Beecher Stowe*.

Milly took the book from Wolf and turned to the first page. It was autographed by the author. On the inside page, a note:

*Arlis,  
Keep yea mind on the straight and writchous. Read these letters onct a while. It  
define justice--Always take the justice road.  
Yore Pap, Leonard*

Milly looked at Jessup. He was somber and reading the hand again. She could see his lips move.

"That was written by your grandfather. You never met him did you?" Milly speculated.

"Didn't know any kin cept'n Ma'am until Uncle Arlis showed the other day," Wolf replied in a doleful tone.

Wolf returned the book to the saddlebag and buckled the flap. He turned the bag over and opened the other compartment. He carefully removed a sack of oats, a horseshoe, some horseshoe nails, a breast wallet, and another heavy pouch.

Wolf opened the rich leather breast wallet first. It contained a tintype, a deed, and banknotes. Wolf picked up the tintype. It was a picture of his ma'am when she was young. He stared at the tintype and then turned it over. *M. Slaughter, photographer. Silver City, New Mexico*. While Wolf fondled the photo, Milly counted the banknotes.

"Jessup, there's eleven hundred and sixty dollars here," Milly gasped. "This is more money than I've ever seen at one time."

Wolf looked at the banknotes and then opened the deed. It was recorded to Arlis Peters, Pinos Altos Ranch, New Mexico Territory.

"Uncle Arlis was belly shot by his brother--my pap, his younger half brother. He didn't shoot him to rob him. I wonder why?" Wolf asked no one in particular.

"I don't know why, Jessup. This is the first time you mentioned it," Milly stated.

Embarrassed at being caught talking to himself, Wolf flushed and shrugged.

"I been so much alone I jest natural cipher out problems aloud. Didn't mean you knew nothin' about my troubles," He explained.

Milly was hefting the other leather pouch.

"This is heavier than the other one." Milly observed.

She opened it and emptied the pouch of golden eagle coins. Wolf began his count; again in stacks of five. He laid out nine stacks. Milly was the first to announce. "Nine hundred dollars. Wolf you're rich. You have..." she paused.

"Two thousand four hundred dollars," Wolf said in a low tone.

Milly was excited for her new friend. In her exuberance she impulsively threw her arms around Jessup and hugged him hard. She turned him loose immediately but not before her father and hired hand, Fletcher, saw them as they rounded the corner of the barn.

"I'm so happy for you, Jessup," Milly exclaimed. "I really am!"

Wolf saw the riders approaching. He knew by the scowl on the elder man's face they had seen the hug. Wolf had just put the coins in the pouch. He drew the string tight and stowed everything back in the saddlebags. He was fastening the buckle on the saddlebags when Frank Kandler rode up to the porch. Fletcher rode to the hitch rail.

"Who are you and what are you doing with that mare and kit?" Kandler asked in a gruff tone.

Wolf expected to be choused for the hug, not for his belongings. He paused to formulate an answer.

"You deaf? The boss wants to know who you are!" Hollered Fletcher from across the yard.

"Father, this is our neighbor, Jessup Peters," Milly explained sweetly. "He's been here all afternoon waiting to speak with you."

Frank Kandler dismounted and handed his reins to Fletcher who'd walked across the yard. Frank flashed Fletcher a stern look--reminding him to mind his own business.

"I'm Frank Kandler. I see you've gotten to know my daughter, Milly," He said with a wry grin.

Missus Kandler came through on to the porch, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Frank, this young man is here to see you," Missus Kandler explained.

"So I've been told. Looks like young Mister Peters here has charmed you both. Have you hugged him, too, mother?" Frank asked with a snicker.

Milly blushed at his remark. Wolf figured the toe of his boot needed major inspection; he kept looking down.

"Not yet, but I'd like to. We'll see what the evening brings," Missus Kandler replied with laughter in her voice. "Jessup is staying for supper."

Wolf finally mustered enough moxie to voice his business.

"Mister Kandler, that dun mare belonged to my uncle Arlis. He were gut shot two days ago and passed. He willered all his stuff to me. I have a paper here writ by Doc Grady. It says what I'm tellin' you," Wolf said as he handed the paper to Frank Kandler.

Kandler looked at the scribbled will, noted Doc Grady and Sheriff Boomer's signatures, and handed it back to Wolf.

"You're the jailer in town, right?"

“Y’yes, I work for Sheriff Boomer.” Wolf stammered.

“I met your ma a few times. Sorry to hear about her passin' on. You have our sympathy.”

Wolf nodded. He looked toward the barn and watched Fletcher inspect the saddle and tack. He fingered the bridle, let it drop, and walked toward the house.

“Milly I asked you earlier to come help. Bring that tray and two glasses into the kitchen. We need to fish that button out of Wolf's glass,” Missus Kandler instructed.

“His name is Jessup, mother. Jessup, not Wolf. I'll be right in,” Milly said as she collected the glasses, pitcher, and tray.

\* \* \* \* \*

I opened the door for Milly so's she din' have to put the dishes down. She shot me a smile that made my knees weaker 'n milk toast. I jest stood there a gapin' at her walkin' away whilst her pa and Fletcher stood by.

“Boy, you wanted to see me about something?” Kandler asked.

“Yessir, I said earlier, I was here to fetch Uncle Arlis' horse and kit. Milly said I wasn'ta take the mare without yore say so.”

“That all?” Kandler said. “You could have took the horse and stuff. You had the right. Didn't have to wait all afternoon for me.”

“Milly said I otter wait fer you.”

Kandler laughed.

“Milly wanted you here for herself. She's bored bein' out here with jest us grownups.”

Her pa chuckled but Fletcher shot me a look that would pierce a pumpkin'. He opened the door and went inside.

I weren't sure what to say or do, so's I was plumb quiet. I slung them saddlebags over my shoulder, picked up the bedroll, and walked acrost the yard. I heard the door open and close behind my back.

I tied the bedroll behind the cantle and put a lace through the brass eyelets on the saddlebags. I patted the mare's rump, walked to the on-side, and pulled the cinch tight. The stirrups looked a mite long. I was makin' adjustments when Mister Kandler came out of the house. I glanced over my shoulder and saw that he was carryin' Uncle Arlis' rifle 'an scabbard. I was bridlen' up as he sauntered up and handed me the scabbard 'n rifle. It were a nice get-up.

“Here, lace this on to your saddle. I checked it...it's loaded.”

I had the nicest Winchester money could buy without bein' one of them special order guns. It were a forty-four jest like both of them pistols. The scabbard was scuffed from bein' carried through the brush but well oiled 'an in good repair.

“Thank ya kindly for takin' care of my Uncle's things.” I said.

I'd jest bridlin' up that dun. She took the bit like a mouthful of oats. I petted her betwix the eyes and scratched her under the chin. Most horses have a sweet spot...I was lookin' fer hers.

"You gonna ride that hoss or jest stand there admirin' her?" Kandler joshed.

Well, I handed him back the scabbard 'n rifle, turned her around twice, and stepped aboard. She perked her ears 'an seemed to know where my eyes was pointed. She had a light rein and a smooth walk. I sat loose 'an give her a cht cht...she stepped right out. A nice smooth mile-eatin' walk ifn' I ever seen one.

About the time I was ready to swing her into a trot, Milly came out the door. She was lookin' mighty purdy. I reigned the mare back toward the porch 'an then toward the hitch rail.

"Pa--Jessup. Supper is about ready" she said, lookin' right direct at me. I froze in the saddle when she fired her sweet smile. 'Course she mighta been admirin' my mare.

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### CHAPTER 3

Milly watched Jessup all through supper. It was obvious to all that she was smitten with the backwoods young man. Fletcher sat sullen. He was an irascible man on good days. Tonight he was vitriolic.

Frank Kandler took no notice of his hired hand's surliness. He focused on the fine meal and his teen-age neighbor. It seemed to escape everyone's attention that Wolf wasn't just some orphan kid. He owned one of the best ranches in the valley. His house and barn were ratty, what stock he had was scattered hither and yon, but he had the best water in the county and several sub-irrigated hay meadows.

"Wolf, I rode out to your place a few days ago. Pushed two cows and a heifer back off the Blight trail. The heifer wasn't branded."

"Thank ya kindly, Mister Kandler," Wolf said as he pushed his plate away.

"Jessup, there's plenty more. Help yourself," Milly offered.

"Thanks but no. It was plumb delicious, Missus Kandler," Wolf replied

"There's some other cows a hangin' near Coyote Springs. Now that you got a decent horse, shouldn't be hard to gather most of your stock. Fletch 'n me will help if you'll do me a favor," Kandler stated.

Wolf hadn't considered his position in relation to being a neighbor. He was focused on Milly, his new horse, and having more money than he'd ever dreamed of seeing in his lifetime. Being close neighbors, it was still over nine miles between headquarters.

"Sure. Anythin', Mister Kandler."

"Wolf, I want you to promise me never to go to Banker Jeffers if you need money. I want you to come to me first. Understand?"

"Sure, Mister Kandler. Ifn I ever need money, I'll come to you," Wolf repeated.

“Jeffers hasn't gotten a hold on this end of the valley. I intend to keep it that way,” Kandler stated.

“Jessup won't need to borrow money, he just got twenty-four hundred dollars from his uncle Arlis. It was in the saddlebags.” Milly informed everyone at the table.

Everyone looked across the table at Milly. She became flustered and then defended her divulgence.

“What? It's true. We sat out on the stoop and counted it. Wolf don't need no money...not now, anyhow.”

Missus Kandler cleared her throat. “Milly, it's rude to tell about other folk's money. She scolded in a low tone.

Fletcher squirmed in his seat. The frown on his face deepened. Wolf felt the black mood emanating from the middle-aged ranch hand. He didn't understand why.

“I don't mind none,” Wolf said. “Most folks know I ain't ever had two nickels rubbin' in my pocket. When I go to town with the mare 'an riggin' it'll start tongues a waggin'. I'm fixin' to buy some new clothes. When I toss a gold eagle on the counter at the mercantile, Missus Hawthorn will gasp 'an sputter. She never knowed me to have money,” Wolf replied

“Looks to me like your uncle was an outlaw. Mighty fancy rig and plenty of cash. Everything you got was probably stole,” Fletcher said as he rose to leave the table.

Silence permeated the room as Fletcher took his leave. It wasn't until the screen door slammed shut anyone spoke.

“Wolf, never mind Fletcher. He's a hard one to read--he's always got a burr under his saddle 'bout somethin'.” Kandler stated. He looked toward the window and watched Fletcher stroll toward Wolf's mare and scowled.

“He don't cotton' to me. That's plain as dirt. I ain't set eyes on him until this afternoon. Ain't even seen him in town, and I been there over two years.” Wolf replied.

“I don't think he's been to town more than twice since he's signed on. That's been over five years ago. He goes to roamin' the hills on his time off. He don't say much, but he's a damned good hand.” Kandler stated.

“Maybe he's an outlaw. Maybe there's a poster on him.” Milly stated matter-of-fact.

“Milly! What have I told you about gossip!” Missus Kandler scolded.

“I didn't do no worse than him sayin' Wolf's uncle was an outlaw.” Milly stated.

“I have to admit I've thought the same for a long time,” Kandler confessed in a low tone.

\* \* \* \* \*

I sat there 'n listened to their gossip about Fletcher. One part of my mind was a wantin' to spend the evenin' with these nice folks, especially Milly. The other part of my mind was tellin' me to skeddadle. Get on my mare and ride outta here. I wanted to git my

money hid afore that rascal Fletcher took it upon hisself to rob me. I wasn't a trustin' that man 'an was gonna take my knowin' to Sheriff Boomer jest as soon as I got back 'ter town.

“Wolf, you're welcome to stay over,” Kandler said. “No sense ridin' back to town this late. It'll be dark by the time you get to the salt bog.”

I pondered his offer. It was mighty temptin' knowin' I'd be seein' Milly in the fresh of morn, but somethin' kept gnawin' at me...tellin' me to get gone.

“Preciate the offer. I'm ridin' to my ranch. Have some chores that need attendin'.

Kandler nodded his understanding. Milly, though, put up a fuss.

“What's there to do that can't wait until morning? We set a mighty fine breakfast, Wolf,” She said with a pout that switched to a coy grin.

Her usin' my nickname, Wolf, twice this evenin'...switchin' from Jessup kinda took me back. She was sure bound on havin' others callin' me Jessup and now she was sayin' Wolf. She was a flingin' breakfast as a tease.

“Thanks all the same,” I said. “Gotta get them chores done and back to town tomorrow. Sheriff Boomer given me two days off. I spent one of 'em here, don't give me much time unlessin' I get goin'.”

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