

Whitewater Crossing

A Casey Jones Columbia River Adventure

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Cleo

(catsala)

My thanks to Jerome Buckmier for reading the first Casey Jones Adventure, Cry Of The Goshawk, to his students, and for his encouragement during the writing of this sequel.

To the students and staff of The School for the Blind, Vancouver, Washington.

one

## ON THE TRAIL

I rode out in the dark of early morning leaving the K2 Ranch behind, looked up and thrilled to the bright November constellations. With Signus the Swan overhead, and Polaris over my shoulder I headed across the Serpentine at the wood bridge and up the bluff. Within minutes, my fine cowpony, Jasper, and I began to cross a wide expanse of lush grass that famously came up to a horse's belly.

I leaned down and patted Jasper on the neck. "Hey fella, with grass like this, I can see why they call this area the Horse Heaven Hills."

As we loped along I thought, "How strange life can be. Here I am, Casey Jones, a New York City kid who has landed way out here in the state of Washington to live on the legendary K2 Ranch."

On this beautiful morning with winter on the way, my head filled with images thick as snowflakes . . . thoughts of the old neighborhood swirled in my head, football at school, the fights and the friendships.

There was the small apartment in Brooklyn where Mom, Dad and I had lived our happy lives together. I'd never asked them if they'd named me after the famous railroad engineer who'd died trying to avoid a train wreck, but when asked about being related to him, I just answer, "No, Jones is a common name."

Jasper seemed to love being out here. His smooth gait allowed me to revive memories of the fine folks who lived in our tenement house, especially the kindly Mr. Lambrusco, who taught me to love history and music. But mostly I remembered my loving Dad. Back then he worked long, hard hours but still had time for me. Boy! Did I ever love those Saturday afternoons as we washed down hot dogs with big cups of frothy cola and cheered on our winning team, the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Now in the year 1921, I don't often look back to when Dad died on the job following an operation, and the difficult days that followed. I had to leave Mom and head west to live with relatives, so scared I felt like jumping off the train and running back.

I'd ridden the train through Chicago, across the plains, over the Rocky Mountains, and down again into the fertile valley drained by the Serpentine where I'd been warmly welcomed by my new family.

My life in Brooklyn had its good points, but out here . . . well, there's adventure! That began when I met Kinsman family . . . my three lively girl cousins and their parents. I got swept up in their lifestyle. At first I was bowled over by their huge manor house in Arborville. Then, I was so amazed by their huge K2 Ranch I fell into an irrigation ditch my first day there.

Now Mom has followed me here and I think this new life in central Washington is everything Dad would have wanted for us.

I'm 17 and feel like a real cowhand. I'm being trained by my Uncle Harry to take on more responsibility. Like right now he's sending me to see a man down in Oregon. I have instructions to buy twenty bales of wool and get them shipped by barge down the Columbia River to a customer of ours in Portland.

Last night rain had soaked these broad Horse Heaven Hills and I breathed deeply, loving the odor of damp grass and moist earth. On this part of the journey, Jasper's smooth canter continued for over two hours before he slowed up to a nervous trot.

"Hey! What is it, fella? Do you sense something I don't?"

Then I heard the eerie thunder of many hooves. Jasper moved from side to side and bobbed his head.

"Whoa Jasper! Whoa boy!" I patted Jasper's neck to soothe him and tingled all over as I realized that a herd of wild horses was crossing the trail just ahead.

"Skidoo! Sure wish I could see those beautiful animals . . . running wild and free. Maybe on the return trip in full daylight we will."

Reaching a highpoint overlooking the gorge that separates Washington and Oregon, Mt. Hood appeared in the distance . . . its peak, like a carnival small Snow cone, glistened pale rose in the rays of the rising sun.

I caught my breath as the mighty Columbia River appeared below, a shimmering silver ribbon, wide and full, flowing west to a waiting Pacific Ocean. The vapor of my breath rose in the chill air and I paused to savor the extraordinary view before urging Jasper to a cautious, hour-long trot down to the riverbank where we faced a ferry ride to the Oregon side. A bit farther on we would meet the man who raised sheep.

My ranch hand friend, Cal Paluskin, had told me about the crossing of this river named for Columbus. "You and the horse will be standing on the water while seagulls fly overhead," he'd said.

Though forewarned, when I saw how we were to cross, I was amazed. Midway on the broad span of water, a small steam-powered tugboat labored, urging a barge toward a dock just below us.

The makeshift ferry arrived just as Jasper and I came to the dock. I smelled the smoke from the tugboat as the red-faced ferryman in overalls waited for a wagon and team of horses to clatter off the barge and onto the dock. Then he called out to me with an outstretched hand, black with coal dust. "That'll be five cents for you and a nickel for the horse."

As we trotted onto the barge, Jasper rolled his eyes and clomped his hooves on the deck . . . the clip clop reverberating in the hollowness below.

"Easy there, boy. There's a lot of water down there, but you and I are going to stay dry as a clump of sagebrush."

We were the only passengers, so the ferryman cast off the mooring line. He stepped into the pilothouse, spun the wheel, and threw the tug into reverse before shifting into full speed ahead. The barge, tethered to the tug by heavy hawsers, glided into the swirling waters with a shudder.

After ten minutes of chuffing and churning up a foamy wake, the ferry docked on the Oregon side.

Jasper seemed pleased to be on solid footing once more. He pranced around and tossed his fine head. When I spurred him on, he leaped ahead, pleased to be back on solid ground.

We rode east for several minutes scanning the riverbank for the man who raised sheep.

Then, while still two hundred yards distant, I caught sight of him. We exchanged a high-sign of friendship and greeted each other with a smile.

“Have you come up from the Umatilla?” I asked.

“Umm, I have . . . and you from Arborville?”

I nodded yes. A Native American in his thirties, he wore a beautiful blue and red woolen jacket, a deerskin vest and riding pants. His long raven hair framed a handsome face. He smiled with his eyes as I continued.

“I’m Casey Jones from the K2 ranch. My uncle, Harry Kinsman, sent me.”

“I am Rightfoot.” He turned, pointing at the river’s edge. “Just there you can see the bales on the dock where my brothers left them. If you come to buy the wool from the spring shearing, we can load them on the barge just below.”

I glanced around, looking for a place to make camp.

Rightfoot with the same idea in mind said, “over there,” nodding toward a rocky outcrop, “under the overhang we’ll have shelter from the wind.”

“Yes, we can fix a meal and do the deal.” I noted a scattering of wood for a fire.

Despite damp wood, Rightfoot quickly got a fire going and I placed my small, galvanized coffeepot filled with water by it, then pulled out the cash for the wool purchase. I counted out the amount Uncle Harry had agreed to and handed it over. Rightfoot accepted the greenbacks with a nod. I handed him my pen and smoothed out a Bill of Sale on my saddlebag. He quickly signed on the proper line.

On the loading dock we transferred the large bales of wool to the barge and returned to the fire.

In minutes we prepared a tasty meal of boiled venison and wild onions, seasoned with sage; frybread and cooked greens picked from the roadside.

I remembered it was Thanksgiving Day. With an appetite sharpened by fresh air and time on the trail, I enjoyed the simple meal as we topped it off with several molasses cookies from K2’s kitchen.

As we leaned back and sipped our coffee, I felt happiness and peace . . . so thankful for this life that I had come to live far from my eastern origins. With a sigh of contentment I gazed out across the shimmering water to the beautiful hillside beyond.

“How far to the ocean?” I asked.

“I have traveled there only once . . . as a boy with my father.”

Rightfoot gazed downstream and frowned, seeming to recall a difficult journey. “I think it took us ten days by horse.” Then he smiled. “But we stopped a day or so to fish for salmon at Celilo.”

I’d heard of Celilo, the waterfall that interrupted the mighty river’s flow from one bank to the other and roiled the waters below. Exciting tales of thousands of salmon swimming upstream and jumping the falls during the spawning season had made me curious, but I thought better of pursuing details of native fishing. Instead, I asked, “Will you and your people have more wool to sell?”

Rightfoot stared at the fire for several seconds.

“I think yes.” Then after another pause he continued. “Some of the older ones don’t like us raising sheep. They want the old ways . . . before we began to raise them.”

“How do you feel about it?” I asked.

“I like the sheep . . . watching the dogs work the band. They know every move, even before a sheep makes it. And I like caring for the lambs in the spring.”

He paused and went on. “The older ones know that we need the money from wool, sheepskins and meat, but they won’t say it.”

After the last swallow of coffee, Rightfoot put down his cup. Shading his eyes with his hand, he squinted upstream. "I think our boat comes," he observed. "Soon the wool will float down to Portland."

"Yes, the tugboat will guide the barge downstream, all the way to the warehouse of the Johnsen Company. They will make it into fine blankets, and sweaters and jackets, like the one you're wearing."

Rightfoot carefully tightened the drawstrings on the deerskin money pouch slung around his neck. A man of few words, he nodded farewell and mounted his appaloosa. I watched horse and rider move up the bluff toward the high rim of the gorge. I imagined him setting his horse to a canter as he made his way back to the village on the banks of the Umatilla.

On the far side he might cross a branch of the old Oregon Trail, the route that had been traversed by uncounted thousands of pioneers moving west.

No more daydreaming now. I swung into the saddle for the return trip to K2. The business part of this trip now behind us, Jasper smoothly set a lively pace, quickening to the old Lewis and Clark Trail.

But just then, as we sped downstream, I noticed a hunched-over rider on a large dark horse swiftly moving down the hill to the ferry landing on the other side.

I wondered, "What kind of person would ride all bent over like that, wearing a black hat and long leather cape?"

Despite the warming rays of the mid-day sun, something about the mysterious horseman gave me a chill.

Eager to divert my mind away from the sinister figure, I thought of Lewis and Clark.

I felt a tingle of excitement as we traveled the route of the Corps of Discovery, commissioned by President Jefferson to explore the Louisiana Purchase.

Mr. Lambrusco had loaned me a book that showed the route they'd taken. In 1802 they'd made their way from St. Louis, through the wilderness of what is now Missouri, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon to the Pacific Ocean.

For hours at a time, I'd pored over the photos of the actual maps, sketches of plants and Merriweather Lewis's many drawings of animals and birds they'd seen.

Included were exact descriptions of the Native Americans they'd met along the way. At the time I read about all of this, I hadn't had any idea that I'd actually come to be here, traveling the early explorers' route on the Columbia.

I looked out at the river and I wondered just how I would go about making a boat from trees along the shore as they had done. I'd read that they had to carry their boats overland around Celilo Falls on their way to the Pacific. What sturdy men they must have been! And how determined they were to successfully complete their mission.

two

## AMBUSHED

I prided myself for doing a man's job and my heart sang with satisfaction. Buying the wool for shipment had been easy. Now I looked forward to the journey home.

Jasper and I were making good time, but with the sun showing mid-afternoon, I knew we would be spending the night in the open . . . somewhere back up and beyond the river. No problem, I was prepared. I had a bedroll and food for another warm meal.

I smiled at the clouds forming up in the west, pleased that I'd packed my oilskin poncho. Camping out overnight would be part of the overall adventure.

I thought of the dark rider I'd seen after the meeting with Rightfoot. We'd not met on the trail, so I assumed that this traveler had journeyed downstream after taking the ferry.

Suddenly, as we came around a twist in the trail, a large rock tumbled down and bounced in front of us. It didn't block the trail, but Jasper reared and I calmed him as best I could.

“Whoa Jasper! Settle down boy. We need to check this out.”

At that moment a dark figure loomed on my left, fiercely ramming my shoulder with a rifle butt, knocking me off Jasper.

My right arm hit first and I felt a bone snap an instant before my head slammed back.

My attacker took two giant strides, mounted Jasper, brought him around, and spurred him to a full gallop.

Jasper might have resisted the rider if I'd been able to shout to him, but when I struggled to call him back, no breath would come.

I managed to turn my head a bit. “Jasper! JASPER!” I croaked. In total agony, I watched horse and rider gallop up a slight rise and then disappear from sight down the far side, heading upstream.

What misery! Straining to get my breath, the searing pain in my arm was more than I could bear.

I fell back, gasping as a chill breeze picked up. On bare ground, stabs of cold began to penetrate my coat as the awful truth sank in. I'D LOST JASPER, MY WONDERFUL HORSE! STOLEN!

Once back in Brooklyn, while getting up on a pair of homemade stilts, I'd fallen backward and had the breath knocked out of me. Now I re-lived those agonizing moments when I thought I would never breathe again. But at last, my racking gasps stopped as air returned to my deflated lungs.

Last year I'd been injured to the point of death, and that incident had also involved a horse. Now, again in mortal danger, I lay helpless, unable to move. Several times I almost blacked out from the pain in my arm, but was revived by an icy wind in my face.

After what must have been hours I struggled to sit up. I managed to slide over and lean against a log. I found my broad-brimmed western hat within reach. Now I could keep my throbbing head warm and look around. Shivering and miserable, I took stock of my injuries. I knew my arm was broken, but I wasn't bleeding anywhere.

I couldn't predict when I'd be able to walk, and I prayed, “Lord, help me to survive and get Jasper back.”

Shivering now, it helped my spirits some to note that the windstorm was passing by with only a few drops of rain. And then I heard a small whinny, a nickering from behind me.

My heart sang, “Jasper! You've come back to me! Of course you would . . . just as soon as you got the chance.”

How I would love to hug him, smell his horseiness, ride out with him again. But before I could turn to greet him, I slipped into darkness.

I came to, still sitting by the log with a brutally stiff neck and searing pain in arm and head. The last rays of the sun glared off the river. Then, I remembered all that had happened, I thought that Jasper had returned to me. Yes! I would endure anything, now that my horse was back with me! Together, we'd get home somehow.

I twisted my neck and gazed around, eagerly looking for Jasper, and there, off to one side, a horse was peacefully cropping grass. I sobbed as I looked more closely. Instead of my youthful, well-groomed roan, my bleary eyes focused on a scraggly old horse, whose unkempt dark brown flanks were caked with mud. I thought that my feverish mind was playing tricks on me. I closed my eyes to shut out the awful sight and again, darkness took over.

A terrifying rumbling roused me in the black of night. My first thought was of thunder. But the fearful sound went on and on as the ground shook beneath me. My tortured mind imagined a cattle stampede. Then the rumble suddenly stopped.

The moon gleamed down from a clear sky. It seemed a bad omen because now I burned with a fever and felt near death.

In a delirious state, I dreamt that Jasper and I were back on the barge about to go over a waterfall. I saw Jasper pawing the deck, and heard his wild neighing, pleading for me to save him. I awoke with a start and a shiver.

My arm seemed on fire and my throat burned with thirst, but I welcomed the warmth of the morning sun. Amid all of this I wondered about Jasper. Had his return been a dream . . . the scruffy horse a nightmare?

I eagerly looked around but saw no horse. I made an effort to get up, steeling myself against the pain I sat on the log. Then minutes later, I again I heard something behind me and turned to find the brown horse looking at me with sorrowful eyes. He looked as miserable as I felt.

What was happening?

Then it came to me. "Of course! The one who stole Jasper had left this old nag behind."

I had to face reality. "Survive! Then go after the horse thief!"

With new resolve I thought, "Does this old horse have a saddle?"

I painfully turned to look over my shoulder. "Yes! And a canteen too!"

I struggled to my knees as the horse drew near enough for me to grab a stirrup, pull myself up and grab the canteen. Unconcerned about who might have been drinking from it, I took several swallows. The water was brackish and bad tasting . . . no matter. It soothed my fevered throat.

Then I shouted, "Skidoo!" as I discovered a heavy woolen blanket tied behind the saddle. It was warm from the close contact with the horse. I sank down and wrapped it around my shivering shoulders. With protection from the cold, I dozed off.

three

#### A PASSERBY

The brilliant sun raised my spirits. No longer shivering, I had a sense of drifting on a cloud. I gazed up to a blue sky and realized that I might be leaving this painful world. Was there no hope? I prayed for help.

Oh, this journey to Oregon had begun so well. I loved being on the trail. I'd felt so grown-up, transacting K2 business. It was my first chance to show Uncle Harry that I could travel out and close a deal on my own.

When we'd talked about it, he'd suggested that one of the ranch hands come along with me. But I'd protested so he agreed to my going it alone.

So here I am, too weak to walk or mount a horse, with no food. I realized I'd need help to make it. And just then, I looked up to see help on the way.

A large man dressed in an Alaskan-type parka and heavy boots tramped his way up the trail. I joyfully raised my hand. "Hello!"

He shouted, "Hello! Do you need some help?"

"Yes! Yes I do."

The man heard my story as he tended my broken right arm. Ripping his bandana into strips, he fashioned a splint from a piece of wood found nearby. When he pulled on my arm to bring the broken ends of bone together, I screamed with pain.

He helped me on with my shirt and noticed my left shoulder.

"You have a nasty bruise there."

"I got that when the outlaw knocked me off my horse with his rifle butt."

With my head swimming, he helped me onto the old horse and led me up the embankment to a set of railroad tracks. The railroad! Of course! That accounted for the rumbling in the night.

As we traveled, I gratefully chewed on a hunk of beef jerky from his pack and counted my blessings as he spoke.

“I floated by you in my keelboat a few minutes ago. I’m on a geology trip . . . caught sight of you just below that interesting rock outcrop up above. You looked in a bad way so I put in to shore.”

He stopped to pat the nag on the neck. “Looks like the horse here is strong enough. He was down getting a drink out of the river when I came up, and he’s had grass to eat. The dry grass this time of year is full of nourishment, almost like alfalfa hay. He appears to have been ridden hard . . . probably needed a rest.”

I thought, “Where is this fella taking me?” Then my heart jumped as I saw an outfit car, used by railroad crews who maintained the roadbed and tracks. There would be bunks and a stove in it . . . maybe even some canned goods.

We came alongside. I saw bars over the windows and with a thrill of excitement noticed that the heavy door was secured by a familiar railroad padlock. I thought, “I’ll bet my railroad key will fit that lock!”

Because Uncle Harry is a Northern Pacific Railroad Superintendent, he had been giving me some experience in the Arborville depot. He’d issued me what’s known as a switch key. All of the hand-operated rail switches are locked with a similar padlock and the keys for them are standard.

My kind helper examined the lock. “Hmm. Too heavy to break . . . I’ll have to try some other way to get in. We need to get inside, build a fire and get a hot meal in you.”

I pulled out my key and said, “Try this.”

The lock popped open and the man handed the key back to me. “That’s really astonishing! After we get you fixed up, you must tell me where you got hold of a railroad master key.”

Inside, I stretched out on a bunk and my rescuer busied himself with the stove.

“I’m Lear Bennett, a University of Washington geology professor. I intend to write a report on this section of the river.”

“I’m Casey Jones,” I replied. “I’m from Arborville by way of Brooklyn, New York.”

“Casey Jones, eh. Despite your railroad connection, I’ll bet you are no relation to the famous Casey Jones, the engineer who died trying to avoid a train wreck.”

“No, Jones is a common name.” I said, giving my usual response.

“Well, now that the wood stove has a roaring fire in it, I’ll take your horse, ride to my boat and bring back a can of stew and some sourdough biscuits.”

I heard Lear Bennett gallop off and I thought, “Well, that old horse is better than no horse at all. Thanks to him, we’ll soon have a hot meal.”

Then, snug in my blanket, I made a mental note to think of a name for him. While thinking of names, I realized that the geologist’s name was familiar to me. I had met Lear Bennett before! Later, while wolfing down a plate of delicious stew and biscuits, I remembered where.

“Dr. Bennett, last year, another uncle of mine, Carl Coleman, and I met you on the steamboat Sitka Seafarer.

“You know, Casey, I felt that we’d met before. Yes, we were on our way back to Seattle from Ketchikan.”

“Right. You told us of the huge United States Territory of Alaska and many interesting facts . . . especially about its size and the abundance of natural resources up there.”

“I remember our onboard conversation now. I think I also encouraged you to consider making that land of opportunity part of your future.”

“Yes, Lear. I’ve thought of checking out Alaska with a possibility of settling up there. But I’m still in high school and it appears I have a future in Arborville . . . running a large ranch some day, working on the railroad, or both.”

Lear Bennett smiled. “Hmm, I see. Apparently you are well connected there.”

After our simple meal, Lear Bennett produced a bottle of liniment. “Casey, would you like me to rub some of this on your bruised shoulder?”

“Skidoo! I sure would.” I replied.

Lear gently applied the liniment and it helped take away some of the soreness.

For the next hour, Lear Bennett and I talked of many things. I described how I’d been ambushed and he described his adventures on the upper Columbia.

“Casey, the Columbia is the Northwest’s longest river. It flows 1243 miles from its source, Lake Columbia in Canada to its mouth at Astoria where it is six miles wide. It is the largest West Coast river to empty into the Pacific.”

“I’ve lived out west for over a year, but had no idea the Columbia was so grand a waterway.” I said sincerely.

Lear Bennett smiled as he went on. “This gorge we’re in is amazing too. Geologically, it’s one of the most interesting anywhere. Over its 400 mile length, the river drops 4500 feet. As the Columbia cut its way through, it formed many sheer cliffs and 77 waterfalls spill from them.”

I reflected a minute on Dr. Bennett’s astonishing description, then asked, “Lear, do you ever take your students on field trips to this area?”

“I do . . . mostly those students who are in advanced study. But the trip I’m on now is filling the gaps in my knowledge of this part of the river. You see, I’m writing a textbook about the Columbia and its tributaries, the 260,000 square mile watershed.”

“Skidoo!” Would I ever like to go along on one of your field trips . . . and get a copy of your book when it’s done, too.”

“Well, Casey, from what I know about you, I think you would be an asset to any outdoor study group. I’d be pleased to have you sign up for a field trip . . . as soon as you graduate from high school, that is. And as for acquiring a copy of my text, well, I’ll arrange to send you an autographed copy just as soon as it’s published.”

“Well! That’s generous of you, Lear. Thanks in advance.”

Then I added, “Lear, I appreciate all you have done for me, you saved my life. But I’m going to make it O.K. now. I shouldn’t keep you from your work any longer.”

He looked skeptical. So I went on. “My fever seems to be gone and I’m quickly getting my strength back. I know I’ll be able to ride again by tomorrow morning. Then, too, my family in Arborville will be worried. I need to let them know that I’m O.K. so they won’t search for me. My uncle mentioned train station just downstream at The Dalles. If you’re heading there, maybe you could send a telegram to my uncle, Harry Kinsman. You could just address it to the train depot in Arborville, where he works.”

“All right, Casey, I’ll do as you say, but I insist on staying the night first. Then, if you’re enough improved, I’ll be on my way after breakfast. And yes, I’ll be pleased to send that telegram.”

four

## TRACKING JASPER

Lear was as good as his word. Soon after sunup, he stoked up the fire and set out another can of stew for me. After a breakfast of bacon, sourdough biscuits and coffee, he’d saddled the horse and asked, “Are you certain you’ll be able to mount up?”

I stood up and raised my left arm. “Yes. See, thanks to you, I’m on the mend.”

The morning had begun with a cloudless sky and the promise of a warmer day. Impelled by thoughts of tracking down the horse thief, I roused myself two minutes after Lear left. I let the fire burn down and rolled the can of stew and the liniment in the blanket and tied it on in back of the saddle.



I snapped the padlock on the door, and turned to look at my replacement horse. He needed care that I couldn't give him. I thought of brushing the mud off his flanks, but with my right arm in a sling and my left shoulder still sore, I couldn't even do that simple chore.

It was time to move on. Unlike Jasper, when the first time I'd mounted him he had moved just wrong and I'd fallen in the dust, this horse stood still as I struggled to rise up in the stirrup and swing my leg over. Whatever his shortcomings, this horse was steady as a rock for me. We moved smoothly back down to the trail and headed upstream again, to where I'd caught my last glimpse of Jasper.

The horse thief had an eighteen hour head start, but now as I began to track him, I had one thing in my favor. Last month Jasper had thrown the shoe from his right rear hoof. Mr. Tyson, the K2 blacksmith and I had replaced it. I recalled that the new shoe had three diamond marks on it. Now, as we ambled along, doubling back on yesterday's route, I carefully scanned the earth below.

At first I couldn't distinguish Jasper's diamond-marked horseshoe print from all the others, but then I spotted it! And a few feet further on, another and another. I'd picked up Jasper's trail and that of the horse thief as surely as if he'd splashed a yellow paint mark every ten feet.

We were making good time now. Impressed with this big animal, I decided he needed to have a name.

"Say Horse," I said. "We're doubling back on the trail. I think I have a name for you. Hmm . . . doublin' back. Yes, I dub you Dublin."

Maybe Dublin liked his new name and my talking to him. He seemed to be making a conscious effort to make my ride smooth, and I flowed with his rhythm. I loved him for that. My injuries couldn't take any rough bouncing around.

On upstream we came to a fork in the trail. Still following the telltale hoof print, we quickly took the branch that veered off to the southeast.

Just then we came up to a man on horseback. The rider, in a dusty uniform of sorts, jumped off as we approached. A colorful deputy sheriff's patch flashed from his broad-brimmed hat and blue jacket.

I slowed down. "Whoa, Dublin."

On his hip was slung a holster, and with eyes blazing, he suddenly drew his pistol.

"Rein up there!" he shouted while running toward us. "Get yer hands up!"

Sore arm forgotten, I did the best I could to comply.

"Get down offun that horse," he yelled.

"Yes sir . . . right away," I replied as I threw my leg over and slipped to the ground.

"Down on yer knees," he barked as he looked me over.

"Where's yer gun? And where's the stuff ya stole from that settler ya bushwhacked?" he asked as he patted the saddlebag.

"I was ambushed," I cried frantically. "I don't have anything!"

Even with my arm in a sling, I was roughly handcuffed, hands in front, then raised to my feet.

"Yeah, an' I spose ya gonna tell me that this hain't your hoss neither."

"Whoever attacked me, switched horses with me."

The deputy holstered his gun. Still not completely convinced, he asked, "What's yer name and where you from?"

"I'm Casey Jones from the K2 ranch near Arborville." I replied.

"Hmm, just what are you doin' down here on this trail?"

“Tracking the man who stole my horse.”

The deputy spit sideways with a sneer. “Pshaw! Trackin’? How you doin’ that?” he said scornfully. “I spose you get down on all fours and sniff the hoof prints like an ol’ hound dog.”

“No! My horse’s right rear shoe leaves a mark with three diamonds . . . like that one right there by your left foot.” I said boldly.

The deputy looked down with a furrowed brow, saw the hoof mark, but remained unconvinced.

“How do I know you didn’t jus’ make that up?”

“Because I was heading home from buying a shipment of wool. If you’ll take off these handcuffs, I’ll show you the Bill of Sale.”

“The cuffs stay on.” The deputy said still frowning. “Tell me where the Bill of Sale is.”

It was time for me to show some initiative. “I will. But first you tell me who you are and what you’re doing on the trail.”

The deputy blinked, then said, “I’m T. J. Torgeson, Deputy Sheriff of Benton County, on the trail of a cowardly outlaw who came close to killin’ an old settler an’ his wife . . . stole their hard earned stash. He was last seen heading up the gorge on a hoss like the one you came on.”

I had to think fast. “So was it the ferryman who told you that? Maybe he also told you the man on this horse was wearing a dark hat and a long leather cape. I saw a rider like that too, down on the Washington side just after I came across.”

“Well, Jones, you jus’ talked yerself out of this one,” said the deputy.

“Pshaw, when ya rode up, I shoulda set my sights more on you, ‘steda this hoss.”

Deputy Torgeson freed my hands and gave me a nod of apology. “Couлда seen right off you’re not the man I’m after . . . woulda too, ‘cept this big hoss caught my eye first.”

“Well, the man you’re after has my horse; a four year old. He’s a roan with a white blaze and four stockings.” I said, painfully rotating my stiff shoulder.

“White stockin’ roan.” He repeated.

With a twitch of his bushy moustache, and a “let’s git after ‘im!” the deputy leaped on his palomino and galloped off down the road. A nearby sign pointed southeast. The big black letters read: GREAT SALT LAKE -  
- 500 MI.

I rushed over to Dublin and soon we were in pursuit of the man I now thought of as TJ.

five

## OREGON ODESSY

I pushed Dublin to the limit. TJ’s strong palomino seemed tireless. Hour after hour we rode through the rolling brush-covered dry land with small, scattered, farm buildings and few signs of life.

As we sped across this arid land, I noticed TJ looking back at me from time to time. He seemed to know the country, because he suddenly took an unmarked trail and dropped down out of sight.

“Dublin, good thing you’re fast enough to keep up or we’d not have seen TJ take this offshoot.” I said, as I patted his neck.

A minute later, we came to a small, spring-fed stream running through a thicket of cottonwood trees. We found TJ bent over, filling his canteen. Without comment, I rode over, tethered Dublin, and refilled my canteen as well.

Then I noticed Dublin, so thirsty his dry mouth was foaming, waiting patiently. When I slipped his reins, he gave me a kindly look and stoically moved to drink from the stream alongside the palomino.

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