



# PAPA'S GOLD



Ellen Gray Massey

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“Ellen Gray Massey is a Missouri treasure. She has spent a large part of her life writing about life, teaching about life, speaking about life.”

~ Bob Priddy, author, historian, news editor at MissouriNet radio

"Ellen Gray Massey can tell a story. Transformers, vampires, and X-men have nothing on her suspenseful tale of a pacifist family fleeing Tennessee for Missouri in 1861. Massey's spunky heroes, 11-year-old twins, George and Sarah, outwit enemy soldiers, scare off outlaws and guard their farm as the Civil War closes in around them."

~ Vicki Cox, teacher and author of *Rising Stars and Ozark Constellations: Profiles of Courage, Ingenuity, and Success*

"Massey is a master at creating settings. Her love of nature, and particularly the Ozarks, shines through in her writing. In this exciting Civil War adventure, twins Sarah and George are as at home among the Tennessee briars and lanes as they become in the Ozark woods and hills. This tension-filled story will quicken the hearts of the readers and lead them to a better understanding of the great divide that was the Civil War."

~Veda Boyd Jones, instructor at the Institute of Children's Literature for over 20 years, author of *Betsy's River Adventure*

# **PAPA'S GOLD**

**BY ELLEN GRAY MASSEY**



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## INTRODUCTION

I have always loved to read. As a child my favorite reading was about the settlement of the west. I was fortunate to live on a farm in the Missouri Ozarks and experience some of the hardships and joys of being in this unique area before there were computers, TV, and smart phones. I am also fortunate to have taught all grades and many subjects from first grade to graduate school, but my favorite classes were those with middle school students.

I also love to write. I have encouraged my students to read and to express themselves in their own writing. So when one of my students told me that during the Civil War in 1861 one of her ancestors fled Tennessee to come to Missouri to avoid fighting for the Confederacy, I knew I had to write it in a novel. Her ancestor did travel hidden in the woods to avoid Confederate soldiers while his family drove their covered wagon on the road across Tennessee to reach the Missouri Ozarks. But that's all I knew. I used what I know about the times and places and filled in the rest with my imagination.

Meet young George and Sarah Patterson, as they help their parents survive and overcome many dangers during that difficult time in American history.

Ellen Gray Massey





# CHAPTER 1

## THE CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS

### Summer 1861

“Keep your head down,” Sarah whispered to her twin brother. She didn’t need to whisper because all the noise and commotion from the angry farmers inside the building drowned out her words.

When George didn’t move, she grabbed his shirt and pulled him back from the meeting house window where they were crouched.

Just as his head ducked below the window sill, a bullet fired from inside splattered the glass. Suddenly, the room full of men was quiet. The tinkling of the shards of glass falling on the rocky ground beneath the window of the log building was the only sound. His eyes wide open in surprise and fear, George looked at the jagged hole in the window pane right beside where his head was a second ago.

“The soldier must’ve seen you,” Sarah whispered.

Trembling and ready to run, George nodded. He removed his hat and ran his hand over his unruly mop of blond hair as if amazed his head was still on his shoulders.

“Now that I’ve got your attention . . .” a deep voice from inside bellowed.

“Wait,” Sarah said. She grabbed George’s hand. “He didn’t see you. He wasn’t shooting at you.”

The voice inside continued, “. . . I am seizing this meeting house in the name of the Confederate States of America and

the great state of Tennessee.”

When the voice paused, George raised enough to look over the window sill. A heavy man in a crumpled gray officer’s uniform stood in the aisle, half way to the front of the room. Armed soldiers were scattered about the meeting house and pointed their rifles toward the two dozen farmers seated on the rows of benches made of split logs. As the startled men started to rise, the officer and his soldiers fanned their guns over the group, pausing a second as they aimed at each man’s head.

“Sit down all of you,” the officer shouted. The local men all sat. “Don’t you move.”

Several men held out their hands to show they had no weapons. A few looked helplessly around the one-room building as if searching for a way to escape.

“All you men are now conscripted into the Confederate Army,” the officer said.

Before the soldiers had crashed in, the Patterson twins had been listening to the disorderly meeting of local farmers. The men had been debating whether they should join the other southern states in this War of Secession and pull out of the United States. Most of them were in favor of it. “We are Southern born and bred,” one had yelled.

“Yeah,” another shouted, “We must join the other men of Tennessee to fight for our way of life.”

“But to fight against our relatives in the North? I can’t do that!” another voice had blared out.

In the midst of the heated discussion, the soldiers had entered the door at the back. Facing the front, the arguing farmers hadn’t noticed the intruders, who watched for a few seconds before the officer announced his presence by shooting through the window.

His gun pointed at an angry farmer, the officer continued,

"I said you are all conscripted into the Confederate Army. All men loyal to Tennessee come to the corporal here and take the oath." The heavy-set officer indicated a young soldier beside him who held writing materials.

Several men who had argued for joining the Southern states approached the officer readily, shaking his hand and patting him on the back. "We're with you, Captain," one farmer said.

"Lieutenant," the officer corrected him.

"Yes, sir, Lieutenant."

Six farmers held back, their faces red with anger.

"I ain't taking no oath," one of them yelled. George recognized the voice of their neighbor, Jake Helms.

"Me neither," another said. "I'm a citizen of the United States of America. I didn't come to America to fight agin it."

"I'll tell you this, feller," the lieutenant yelled above the general clamor that erupted again, "you take the oath for the Confederate States of America or I just might shoot you right here."

To demonstrate, he pointed his pistol at each of the six reluctant men in turn, then swung it to his left and shot out another window. In the sudden quiet, George heard the glass of this second window clattering to the rocky ground.

"Let's get out of here," George whispered, pulling Sarah with him.

Sarah nodded vigorously. Hunched over, the twins raced toward the cover of trees surrounding the clearing.

"Wait a minute," Sarah said when they were each hidden behind a big oak tree. "Let's watch them to see what they do."

The soldiers and local men spilled outside to the front of the meeting house.

"Go get your gear and do what you have to do at home," the lieutenant said to the men who took the oath. "Then meet

us in camp down in Bear Holler first thing in the morning.” The men mounted their horses and, spurring them, galloped away.

The lieutenant looked at the six farmers who refused to take the oath. The angry men were pushed together against the outside wall of the building. Two soldiers trained their rifles on them.

“Corporal,” the lieutenant next ordered, “bind these other men and tie them on their horses. We’ll take them with us.”

“You can’t do that,” Jake Helms shouted. “I’ve got —”

“I’ll say what I can do, and you’ll do as I say.” The lieutenant fired his revolver. His bullet struck the ground inches from Jake’s foot. “You will take the oath or I’ll shoot you right now.” He turned to his corporal. “You heard the order, Corporal.” He fondled the pistol, as if pondering whether to use it again. “I’d shoot all six of them dead and leave them for the vultures, but we need all the men we can get. When they see all the vile things the Yankees do, they’ll come around to our way of thinking.”

“Yes, sir,” the corporal said.

“Is everyone in the neighborhood accounted for?”

The corporal studied his list. “No, sir. Sterling Patterson ain’t here. Or his father.”

George gasped. “Papa!” he whispered.

Sarah put her finger to her lips.

“His father is too old,” the lieutenant said. “But Sterling’s not. And I hear he’s an expert shot. A good mountain man. We could use him. Go get him.”

“Yes, sir, as soon as we can after taking these prisoners to camp.” The corporal ordered the six farmers to be put on their horses with their hands tied behind them. Leading five other soldiers, he trotted toward camp. Each soldier held the

reins of a prisoner's horse.

The twins left the trees that were hiding them and started up the narrow path across the valley to warn their father.

"Hey, there, boy," the lieutenant bellowed. "Stop right this minute, boy!"

Remembering the bullets that just missed his head by the window, George stopped short and turned around.

The lieutenant galloped his horse across the clearing to the timber. "What do you think you're doing here, boy?"

Sarah grabbed George's arm and pulled him behind a bush. She pointed to a gully close by. Stooping low, the twins scrambled over a fallen log and slid down into a ditch. George's homemade trousers and tan shirt and Sarah's home-spun brown dress blended with the dried leaves, making them almost invisible. Sarah's golden pigtails hanging below her faded sunbonnet and George's fair, freckled face under his straw hat looked like streaks of sunlight in the bushes.

Sarah held on to her brother. George picked up a rock and drew back his arm, ready to throw. Sarah whispered, "Better not." Still holding the rock, George dropped his arm.

The lieutenant's horse snorted and stopped. Even with repeated spurring, it refused to go through the vines and other thick growth around the gully.

"Boy, come back here," the lieutenant yelled. "Where'd you go?"

"No use hunting for that boy," a new recruit called from the meeting house. "That's the Patterson boy. He knows these woods like his own front yard. He's long gone."

"Well, I'll soon see to his father." The lieutenant reined his horse back to the waiting group, mumbling, "Just a bunch of ignorant hillbillies. Wouldn't fool with them, but

they sure can shoot.”

George heard nothing more as the twins raced up the mountain to their clearing. Nor did they say anything to each other. No need. George knew what they had to do. Find their father and tell him what they saw and heard.

They found him in the barn, milking the cow.

“They’re here!” George gasped as he and Sarah ran in. His tousled blond hair was matted with sweat. “The soldiers are here!” He leaned over to ease the pain in his side.

“We saw them down the mountain at the meeting house,” Sarah said, panting.

“And they took . . .” George had to pause to get his breath.

“ . . . all the men,” Sarah finished for him.

Mama and nine-year-old Lillie ran to the barn. When five-year-old Harry caught up with them, he grabbed his mother’s full skirt. Pushing her long brown hair back into her bun at the base of her neck, she pulled the boy to her.

“All of them?” she said.

“Yes,” Sarah said, “all the neighbor men were there.”

“I counted twenty-two men,” George added. “Then a Confederate soldier shot out a window at the meeting house.”

“Two windows.”

Ignoring Sarah, George continued, “Some of the men joined up right off. They were glad to see the Rebs. Six of them wouldn’t take the oath and got tied on their horses.” He could talk better now that he wasn’t panting so much.

“And the Rebs took off with them,” Sarah said, “with their hands tied behind them. The lieutenant wanted to shoot them, but he said he needed them to fight for the Confederacy.”

“The other fellers, the ones who took the oath,” George



said, "he told them to go home, get their gear, and meet him tomorrow morning first thing at his camp."

Mama and Papa exchanged worried looks. "You were right, Aldeah, in urging me to stay home," Papa said. "It's a good thing that I didn't go to the meeting, or I would have been . . ." He didn't finish his sentence. Instead he picked up his full bucket of milk and released the cow from the stanchion. George pushed her out into the barnyard. "Here, Lillie, take this to the house."

"You would have been what, Papa?" Lillie asked. She struggled to lift the bucket of foaming milk. Part of it splashed on her bare leg.

Papa and Mama glanced at each other. "Sorry," Mama finished Papa's sentence. "He would have been sorry he went."

"He'd a been shot," George said, "that's what would have happened, 'cause Mama wouldn't have let the soldiers get him."

Lillie set the bucket down and ran to her father. Bawling loudly, Harry joined her.

"It's all right, Lillie," Papa said, frowning at George. "I wasn't there, so nothing happened to me. Now take the milk to the house. Harry, you help your sister."

With the bucket of milk between them, Lillie and Harry held the handle as they walked slowly toward the house. They kept looking back. Mama waved them on.

When the children were out of hearing range, Papa turned to the twins. "How do you know all this?"

Sarah said, "We hid under the window and listened in on the meeting. George almost got sh —"

George punched her to leave that part out.

"You know you weren't allowed to go there," Mama said frowning.

“What did the group decide?” Papa asked.

“They talked a lot about whether to join the Rebels or stay in the Union. Everyone was talking and yelling.”

“Then before they voted, the soldiers came in with their rifles,” George said. He glanced at Sarah, his eyebrows lowered to warn her not tell about him almost getting shot and almost getting caught.

“How many soldiers?” Papa asked.

“About a dozen.”

“And they all headed back toward town?” Papa asked.

“Yes,” George said, “they started, but, Papa, the one soldier with a list said that you and Grandpa weren’t there.”

“And he’s going to come after you as soon as he gets the other neighbors to their camp,” Sarah said. “Papa, he called them prisoners.”

“What’ll you do?” George asked, struggling to keep his tears back. Sarah wasn’t crying, so he certainly wouldn’t cry like baby Harry.

Papa glanced quickly at Mama.

“We must leave right away,” Mama said, looking over her shoulder as if expecting soldiers to appear at any moment.

“That’s what we’ll do. All of us. We’ll leave.”

“Yes,” Papa agreed. “I don’t think the soldiers will have time to come up the mountain for me tonight. But tomorrow . . .” He looked around at his house, barn, and other farm buildings. “Tomorrow, early in the morning, we must leave.” He straightened up to his six feet height. He took off his hat, ran his hand through his brown hair and put his hat back on. Then he smiled at the twins. “Don’t look so glum. You did a good thing. You’re good detectives and you may have saved us.”

Mama hugged each child. “Yes, even though you shouldn’t have gone to the meeting. This time, we’ll forgive

you. But from now on, always let us know where you're going."

"Yes, ma'am," the children chorused.

Lillie and Harry, having taken the milk to the house, were back listening.

"Twins," Papa said, "we've got to start now. You two go down the mountain and tell Grandpa and Grandma we'll meet them at the fork there a couple of hours before day-break. You both know that we've been preparing for this."

The twins nodded.

Papa continued, "After you tell them and until dark tonight, go keep watch on our trail for any soldiers coming this way. If you see anyone at all, signal."

"Yeah, we know," George said. "We'll give the bob white call for soldiers coming." He gave a convincing imitation of the call that sounded like, "Bob, bob white," with a twist on the "white."

As the twins ran down the mountain trail, George said, "Papa called us detectives."

"He sure did!" Sarah said, smiling for the first time since the lieutenant crashed the meeting.

George also smiled, knowing that as usual Sarah was thinking like him. Papa was counting on them to keep watch for the family. To keep him out of the grasp of the Confederate Army.

George and Sarah knew what to do. Four months ago in April when the Confederate forces fired upon Fort Sumter in South Carolina and started this War Between the States, their father had told them they could no longer stay in their eastern Tennessee mountains. "We don't believe in fighting," he had said, "and I won't help tear our country apart." The family had made plans and preparations for when they'd have to leave.

Now in the summer of 1861, it was the time to go. The twins' job was to keep watch so they could leave secretly and join Papa's brother in the Missouri Ozarks.

## CHAPTER 2

### SLINGSHOTS AND RATTLESNAKES

As the twins raced down the mountain to their grandparents' farm in the valley, they talked about what they could do to help the family in this emergency.

"I wish I had a gun," George said, "then I could really help."

"Yeah," Sarah agreed. "We can shoot good. But that doesn't help us if we don't have anything to shoot with."

"Grandpa has a shotgun."

"That doesn't help us. He always keeps it with him."

"Yeah."

They jogged down the trail for a few minutes.

"I wish we had something," George said. "We're big enough. Papa ought to get us a gun."

"No money. He's saving it all for when we get to Missouri."

"I know."

"What about slingshots?" Sarah asked. She picked up a fallen limb from a hickory tree that was in her path. The forked stick was the right size for her hand. She held it up pretending to pull back on a strap to shoot through the fork.

George grinned. "We can make one for each of us." He poked around in the fallen limbs beside the trail until he found the right one.

"Look," he said holding it up, "it's perfect."

He pulled his knife from his pocket and began whittling on it.

“First we better tell Grandpa about the soldiers and us leaving in the morning,” Sarah said. “We can make these slingshots later while we’re watching the trail.”

The twins tarried only long enough for George to cut away the excess parts of the sticks they didn’t need so they wouldn’t be cumbersome to carry. George stuck his crude forked stick into his back pocket. Sarah put hers in her apron pocket. Pleased that they would have some weapons for protection, George held Sarah’s hand. They ran the rest of the way to their grandparents’ farm.

When the twins flew up the porch steps, Sarah’s sunbonnet bouncing on her back, and George’s shirt tail partially hanging out, Grandma glanced from them to her husband.

“What is it?” she asked. “Is it time?”

George didn’t have enough breath to speak. He nodded. Sarah gasped out single words, “Soldiers . . . meeting house . . . took all the neighbors.”

“Sterling?” Grandma asked, her voice trembling as she put her hand on her string of pearls around her neck. “Did they take your father?”

“No,” George managed to say. “He didn’t go to the meeting.”

“Praise the Lord.”

“So we’re leaving?” Grandpa asked. He took Grandma’s hand. His eyes were sad as he looked from George to Sarah.

Both twins nodded.

“Papa said for you to meet us a couple of hours before daybreak at the fork here in the valley,” Sarah said, pointing down the road.

“We’ll be ready. Now, Twins, you get straight back home to help your folks,” Grandpa said.

George said, “Papa told us to watch the trail —”

“In case the soldiers come looking for him,” Sarah finished.

"Me and George heard the lieutenant. He gave orders to come looking for Papa."

"Then scat, Twins," Grandpa said.

When the twins didn't move, Grandma said, "Shoo now, young'uns. Get up the mountain to your turn off and keep a good lookout. We'll meet you in the morning."

"Where should we watch from?" George asked Sarah as they ran back up the mountain trail toward their place.

"What about where our lane turns off and the trail goes on up along the ridge to Jake Helm's place?"

George agreed. When they reached their turnoff, he found a fallen log a few feet from the trail. Sarah plopped down on it while George went back down the trail a ways to see if he could see her from the trail.

"Move over just a bit." He walked up and down the trail a few feet. "Good. I can't see you at all now." He joined her.

They were exhausted from twice running up and down the mountain. With relief George sat by his sister in the cool shady spot. A slight breeze through the trees helped dry their damp clothes. George took off his hat to let the breeze ruffle his sweaty hair. Sarah wiped her face with her apron and unfastened the top button on her dress. Though usually moving all the time, George was content to sit for a few minutes doing nothing.

But the inactivity didn't last long. When rested, George remembered the slingshots. He pulled out his pocket knife and the stick he'd picked up. He scraped the bark off the wood and smoothed the jagged ends, cutting the tops of the two prongs to the same height. Sarah borrowed his knife and did the same whittling on her stick. Then she cut notches about an inch down from the tops of the forked prongs to hold the leather strap she'd fasten there later.

The sun cast long shadows across the open space on the



trail. Evening insects started their singing. A rabbit darted out. He watched the twins a few seconds before scurrying away. A bullfrog from the creek serenaded the approaching night.

“How long should we stay here?” George asked. He was getting restless with the forced inactivity.

“At least until it gets dark, in about an hour. Papa said the soldiers wouldn’t come until morning, but we’re here in case they come tonight. They sure won’t come after dark.”

“No,” George said. He looked at the lowering sun. “Better wait a bit more.”

Taking turns with the knife, they smoothed the raw wood of their new slingshots. George studied his. “All we need now is the leather for the strap and the little pouch. At home I know where there’s some.” He admired his creation. “Then we can —”

“Sh-h-h!” Sarah hissed and poked him at the same time.

On the trail below them George heard a few clicks of iron horseshoes striking rocks. A creak of saddle leather, and a soft snort of a horse.

“Two horses?” George whispered. Sarah nodded.

“Neighbors, maybe?”

Sarah shook her head. “The lieutenant took all of them.”

“Soldiers.” George was ready to give the bob white call to warn his father.

“Wait to see for sure who it is,” Sarah whispered.

In less than a minute, George saw two soldiers he recognized from the meeting house riding toward them. One was the young corporal with the list.

“Bob . . . bob white!” George whistled the signal three times, then paused and repeated it once more.

“We gotta keep them from turning on our lane,” Sarah said.

“How?”

Sarah's eyebrows lowered in thought. “Get out your rattlesnake tail.”

George unbuttoned his shirt to get the lucky charm he always wore on a cord around his neck. He lifted the string over his head and held it in his hand.

“I'll stall them,” Sarah said, touching the rattles. “Then you rattle them —”

“And I'll throw a rock at the lead horse just in case,” George finished for her.

Sarah nodded and ran out to the trail. George watched her walk slowly past where their lane turned off, as if she were going on up the mountain toward Jake Helm's place.

“Hey!” said the corporal, halting his horse. “Hey, little girl, what'cha doing out here all by yourself. Don't you know it's gonna be dark soon?”

Sarah didn't answer.

The corporal walked his horse beside her. “What's your name, girlie?”

“My mother said I'm not to talk to strange men.” Sarah didn't stop. She kept her eyes on the trail ahead of her.

“Smart woman, your mother.” The corporal turned to his companion and laughed. “Did your mother give you advice like that, Homer?”

Homer laughed and shook his head.

“You don't happen to be Mrs. Patterson's girl now do you?” the corporal asked.

“I'm not supposed to tell. My mother —”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. Your mother told you. But, if you are the Patterson girl, you tell us which one of these forks in the road to take to his house.”

Sarah continued walking up the main trail. By this time she had passed the turnoff to her farm.

“Not very talkative, is she?” The corporal stood up in his stirrups to look back to his buddy.

“Naw, and, Corporal, I think that turn back there is the one we want,” Homer said, halting his horse and turning it around.

When neither man was looking, Sarah picked up a rock.

From the lane they missed came the sound of a rattlesnake. Both horses stopped. Nervous, they snorted, their eyes wild as they backed a few steps. The rattling noise repeated.

“That’s a rattler!” the corporal yelled, also turning his horse back down the trail. “Let’s get out of here!”

“It’s too late tonight anyway,” Homer said, trying to control his horse. “We couldn’t nab Patterson in the dark.”

George’s rock, coming from the direction of the rattlesnake sounds, struck Homer’s horse. A second later Sarah threw her rock at the corporal’s horse.

Both men let the frightened horses gallop back down the mountain. They passed the Patterson turnoff and headed for the valley.

Sarah joined George. The twins waited until they could no longer hear the sounds of hoof beats on the rocky trail. George gave the whippoorwill signal that meant all clear.

## CHAPTER 3

### DETECTIVES INCORPORATED

“Papa, horseman coming behind us!”

Very early the next morning to help ease the load on the horses, Sarah and George were walking beside the wagon. They were traveling south on the main valley highway, known as the Great Road. Their parents sat on the spring seat in front of the arched opening in the canvas covering. Lillie and Harry were asleep in the back.

“I hear hoof beats coming fast back behind Grandpa’s wagon.” Sarah said.

“I hear them, too!” The urgency in George’s voice carried above the creaking of the wagons and clopping of the teams’ hooves on the Great Road.

He grabbed Sarah’s trembling hand. He felt its sweaty dampness, even though the air was cool in the darkness before dawn.

“He’s coming fast, Papa!”

“Good girl,” Papa said handing his reins to Mama and jumping down from his high wagon seat. “You two help Mama when that rider gets here. I’m counting on you.”

“We will,” George said with confidence. He then whispered to Sarah, “What can we do?”

“We’ll think of something,” Sarah said.

Papa jumped the drain on the edge of the highway and disappeared in the brush.

To miss most of the traffic on the more heavily-traveled Great Road the Pattersons had started very early, before

anyone else was stirring. George knew that this stretch of their flight, before they could turn west out of their valley over the next mountain range, was the most dangerous. Here, everyone knew them. Here, the Confederate Army had patrols out looking for men like Sterling Patterson.

The two teams never faltered in their pace. The only indication Papa had been there was the slight rocking of the wagon as he dropped off.

As if she drove the lead of a two-wagon caravan every day, Mama sat up straight, urging the team down the valley highway, every step taking them farther away from their home.

“What can we do?” George whispered to Sarah as they walked beside their wagon.

“I don’t know.” She looked around, but could see nothing in the pre-dawn light. “You get in the wagon and watch out from the back. I’ll sit by Mama.”

Since he couldn’t see her face, George squeezed Sarah’s hand. Sarah climbed onto the wagon seat beside their mother. Careful not to waken his little brother and sister, George crawled into the back among their hastily piled belongings. Trying to spot the horseman, he peered out the circular back opening in the canvas covering of the wagon.

He seated himself on a pile of bedding when he caught a glimpse of a dark form catching up to Grandpa’s wagon. “I see him, Mama,” he whispered. By the light of the setting moon, he saw his grandmother in the wagon behind him scoot close to Grandpa and grab his arm.

“Keep quiet, and get back out of sight,” Mama said, her voice tight with worry.

The horseman slowed down alongside Grandpa’s wagon, pacing his horse to Grandpa’s team.

“Howdy,” the man said.

“Good morning to you,” Grandpa said pleasantly.

“Pretty early to be out, ain’t it, Patterson?”

Sticking his head out the back opening, George recognized a merchant from their town in the valley. He pulled his head back out of sight, but not before the man saw him.

“Yeah. Early for you, too, Simpson,” Grandpa said.

They rode on a few yards in silence. Grandpa clicked to the team, as if nothing was unusual about taking his family on a pre-dawn drive.

“Going to be a fine day,” Grandpa said when Simpson continued to keep pace with him.

“Pears like it.” Simpson leaned over in his saddle toward the wagon. “Good morning to you, ma’am,” he said to Grandma as he put his hand up to his hat brim.

Grandma merely nodded. She fingered her string of pearls, hugged her shawl tighter around her thin shoulders hunched from weariness, and continued to stare straight ahead to the back of Mama’s wagon. Grandma motioned to George whose head was again sticking out of the canvas opening. George ducked back out of sight.

Simpson peered into the jumble of belongings in Grandpa’s wagon. In the dim light George could see his puzzled expression. Simpson glanced forward to Mama’s wagon.

“Where’s your son? Where’s Sterling?” the man asked. This time his voice was not so friendly.

George had to do something to distract his attention and keep Grandpa from answering. Since Grandpa never lied, his hesitating would warn the man something was wrong.

“What’ll we do?” Sarah whispered as she crawled back in the wagon beside him.

“Let’s interrupt them so Grandpa won’t have to answer.”

When Sarah started to jump out, George held her back. “Wait,” he said.

Since Grandpa remained silent, Simpson said with even more hostility, "Mighty strange goings-on. Where're you going?"

"Now," George whispered.

The twins jumped out the back. In step they jogged between the man's horse and Grandpa's wagon as the group continued down the road.

Surprised at the twins' sudden appearance at his side, the man turned toward them, "Hi, young'uns."

"Hi, Mr. Simpson," they said together.

"Got any candy for us?" George asked. He needed to say something to distract him.

The man laughed. "It's at the store. Come by later and I'll give you and your sister each a stick." The hostility was gone from his voice. His attention was now on the twins walking between him and the elder Patterson's wagon. "Pretty early for young'uns like you to be out, ain't it?"

"No, we're eleven," Sarah said.

"You sure got a fine horse," George said, rubbing the gelding's neck.

"Can I ride him sometime?" Sarah asked.

"No, he's too spirited for a girl."

"I can ride anything," Sarah retorted.

"Yeah, my sister can ride your ole horse." George kept the conversation going to keep Mr. Simpson from noticing his trembling hand. "She rides as good as anyone. You ought to see her, she —"

"Twins, mind your manners," Grandpa interrupted.

"But Grandpa . . ."

Simpson glanced again at both wagons, plainly puzzled about them, but said only, "Well, I gotta be going. Good day to you, Patterson." He spurred his horse, caught up to Mama's wagon, doffed his hat to her, and galloped on down



the Great Road. The turn in the road and the dim light hid him. The sound of his horse's metal shoes striking the rocks soon faded in the distance.

"Good job, Twins," Grandpa said.

Grandma let go his arm and moved a few inches away. "Yes, children," she said, "your little act made him forget about us. You put him in a good humor so he left."

"Go to your mother and tell her to pick up the pace a mite," Grandpa said. "Simpson knows what we're a-doing, and he knows that Sterling is close by. We best reach that turn-off out of the valley afore he meets up with the soldiers and sends them after us."

"But we know him," Sarah said, jogging along beside his wagon. "He gives us candy when we go to his store."

"He's a Confederate and he knows we're not. He'll tell the first soldiers he sees. We gotta get moving."

"But he's a friend," George insisted.

"This is war. Friends on different sides are now enemies. He believes in slavery. We don't. Be sure you understand that."

No one spoke again until the wagons turned west onto the narrow road that climbed the mountain pass from their valley into the next. They were soon swallowed up by the brush and overhanging trees.

Mama let out a long breath as the team labored up the steep road. The twins climbed onto the seat beside her.

"Are we safe now?" George asked. He was still shaking.

"Safer."

Two miles farther along the road, Papa emerged from the brush.

"That was close," he said as he took the reins from Mama and the twins climbed through the opening in the canvass into the back.

“Too close.” Mama held on to her husband’s arm.

“When the soldiers get to our house and find we’re gone, will they come after us?” Sarah asked, hanging over her father’s shoulder.

“Probably, but we’ll be long gone.”

“Will it be like this all the way to Missouri?” George asked. “Where everyone on the road might hurt us?”

“Yes, son.”

“But I don’t understand why we can’t stay home. We’re not bothering anyone,” George said.

“No, we aren’t,” Papa said, “but we cannot stay in Tennessee any longer. Our state joined the Confederacy to fight for slavery. You know we can’t do that. And the Confederacy wants to split up the Union. I can’t fight against our country. We must leave.”

“But how can they make you go fight if you don’t want to?” George asked.

“They’d take me at gun point like they did those men you saw at the meeting yesterday. They need men to fight.”

George remembered their six neighbors who were tied up like prisoners. Running away like this was much better than that happening to his father.

“Our religion forbids fighting,” Mama added. “To keep Papa from having to kill other men in a war, we must go. You know we’d already made plans, selling the place to my uncle. He’ll take care of it and our animals.”

“What if the soldiers find us now?” Sarah asked.

“We won’t think about that,” Mama said. “It is George’s and your job to keep watch and warn Papa so he won’t get caught.”

“Like you two did back there on the Great Road,” Papa said, smiling at each of them.

“But what if they do catch you?” Sarah insisted.

Papa turned to Mama. "They need to know, Aldeah." Then to Sarah, "They will tie me up and take me to their camp. If I try to escape, they will shoot me. They can't risk letting me free to go to the Union side."

"When we get to Missouri, you'll be safe?" George asked.

"Yes. Missouri didn't leave the Union. Your Uncle Elwood is there. He wrote that it's still a frontier. He has been urging us and Grandpa and Grandma to come for some time. There is good cheap land for us next to his place."

Mama said, "It will be exciting. We'll be pioneers there like my grandma and grandpa were years ago in these mountains."

The twins looked at each other. Frontier? Pioneers? Visions of wild animals and all kinds of adventures swam into George's mind as he grinned at Sarah. She grinned back.

Papa clicked to the team to go faster. "Keep a sharp eye out, Twins. We're counting on you to spot anyone on the road."

"We'll do it," George said. Followed closely by Sarah, he crawled to the rear of the covered wagon beside Lillie and little Harry, who were still asleep.

"Were you scared?" Sarah asked.

"Naw." George squirmed for he knew Sarah wouldn't believe him. "Well, a little. Were you?"

"Yeah, but we made him leave, didn't we?"

"Now I know that we really can be Papa's detectives," George said.

"Yeah. This time we needed to be seen. But we gotta work on keeping out of sight."

George knew she was remembering the lieutenant seeing him at the meeting house. "You're a pretty good actor," he said. "You confused Mr. Simpson so he left."

"You, too."

They sat in silence for a few minutes as the wagon rumbled over the rough road.

"Let's form a secret organization." When George got an idea he always squirmed. He was moving so much the wagon rocked.

"Steady back there, George," Papa said. "Your fidgeting is hard on the horses."

"Sorry." He giggled.

Sarah was also excited, though she didn't jump around like George did. "We can spy on people like we did at the meeting house."

"We can be lookouts like Papa asked us to be anyway." George grinned. "Say, if we're detectives we can put on acts, like we did just now."

"We can even tell lies to save people or find out information," Sarah said grinning. "But Grandpa wouldn't like that."

"He won't know. We'll be sort of a secret . . ." George didn't know what to call what they were planning. "A secret club?"

George thought about their idea as the teams labored to pull the wagons up the mountain road. He listened to the creak of the springs and the wheels crunching on the rocks. He smelled the skiff of dust kicked up behind them.

Sarah broke the silence, "We could be Twins Incorporated. Just you and me."

George grinned. "Yeah, I like that."

The twins talking awakened Lillie and Harry. The little children lay quietly on their sleeping pads.

"Can I be a detective?" Lillie asked, startling George who thought she was asleep.

"Me, too," Harry piped up.

"Well," Sarah turned to George, "what do you think, partner?"

"Sure," George said. "We may need them. Who ever heard of a detective agency with only two people?"

"Then we'll need a better name," Sarah said. "We can't use twins in the name if it is all four of us."

"Mama said we're going to be pioneers," Lillie said. "What about Pioneer Partners?"

George started jiggling again. "That's it. Pioneer Partners, Incorporated." He repeated the name, emphasizing each word. "I like that." He clapped Lillie on her shoulder. "You are part of it."

"Me too?" Harry asked, showing the gap in his front teeth.

"You too, partner." George ruffled his brother's brown hair.

Sarah hugged both children. "You can both help."

"What does incur . . . , incorpated mean?" Harry asked.

"In-cor-por-ated." Sarah pronounced the word slowly and carefully. "That means we are a real business."

"We have laws that we follow in our organization," George added, "and no one else can take our name."

"We've already got our first job," Sarah said. "Papa's contracted us to watch out for the Rebel soldiers. All of us can do that."

The children were smiling. Leaving their home wasn't so bad after all, now that they were honest-to-goodness "incorporated" detectives. They spoke softly among themselves, planning different strategies they could use.

For another hour Papa's team felt its way in the pre-dawn glow. Grandpa's wagon followed closely. When light began to show in the east, the wagons crested the mountain ridge. Only when they started down the mountain ridge into the neighboring valley did Papa give the teams a short rest.

The wagons stopped. Papa handed the reins to Mama. Quickly he put his masculine belongings into Grandpa's

wagon as if they belonged there.

"It'll look like Grandpa is the only man traveling with the women and you young'uns," Papa told the twins.

He checked the wagons to see if everything was in order. He oiled a wheel that was beginning to squeak. He showed the twins where he had built secret compartments in the beds of the wagons to hide their food.

"This is in case soldiers stop you and search the wagons," he said. "The idea is to keep most of the food hidden in the secret places, but not all of it."

"Why not all of it?" Sarah asked.

"Because," Papa said, "if the soldiers can't find any at all, they'll know we've got it hidden and will look until they find it. Always leave out some to satisfy them, but not enough to hurt us if they take it."

Mama added, "And they probably will take what they find."

"Yes," Papa continued. "Don't try to stop them. Let them have that as we'll save enough to get us to Missouri."

Papa held his rifle, his ammunition, and a knapsack of food and supplies. Before leaving, he spoke to Lillie and Harry.

"Now children, be brave today and do what Mama and the twins tell you."

"Where're you going?" Harry cried clinging to him. "Don't leave us."

"Remember, I told you last night that during the day I can't ride with you? I'll be close by, but I can't travel with you on the road in the daytime. The soldiers might see me and take me away to be in the army. I'll be in the woods. I'll see you in camp tonight. Be a big boy."

"I remember, Papa," Lillie said.

Papa hugged both children, kissed his wife, and turned

to the twins. "I'm depending on you."

"We remember the bird calls in case we need you," Sarah said. "The bob white call means soldiers are coming, and the whippoorwill call means all clear."

"Yes," George said, "the hoot of an owl means warning or danger. The turkey hen call means someone is coming."

"George and me's been practicing. We can do them," Sarah said. To prove her point she gave the soft whippoorwill's call and George imitated the turkey hen call.

"Good. Now your job is to help your mother as much as you can, but your special job is to be the lookout. Mama and Grandpa have to drive. It's up to you two. You're the oldest."

"We'll do it, Papa."

With a wave, Papa faded into the woods.

"How can we watch out for Papa if he's not here?" Harry asked the twins.

"He needs us just as much," Sarah answered. "He'll travel out there in the woods, away from us, where he can hide if we give the bob white call that soldiers are near."

Grandpa pulled his wagon to the front. Mama's followed.

Lillie kept staring at the spot where her father disappeared. "We're Pioneer Partners now for sure, ain't we?"

"Yes," Sarah said.

"And we've got to be on duty every minute," George added. "Can you kids handle that?"

"I can," Lillie said.

"Me too," little Harry agreed. "We're in-cor-por-ated."

"Good. We are now officially on duty," George said.

At dawn in the summer of 1861, the two wagons of the Patterson family began their long journey to the wilderness of the Missouri Ozarks. Until they crossed the Mississippi River, leaving Tennessee for Missouri, Papa would travel like an escaped prisoner.



## CHAPTER 4

### GUARDIANS OF THE TRAIL

As Sarah and George rode in the wagon beside their mother, the monotony of the ride and the comparative safety of being on the other side of the mountain from their valley made them sleepy. George knew they needed to keep alert to help watch.

“Mama, tell us again why we are going to Missouri,” he asked. Though he had heard it before, he only half understood. Now that they were on their way, he’d concentrate.

“The mood of the whole countryside is ugly,” Mama said. She was yawning and seemed to welcome the twins’ questions to keep her alert. “The war has come to our valley, and it is not safe there for people who do not believe in fighting and slavery.”

“That’s why we had to leave in secret?” Sarah asked.

Mama nodded. “We may have waited too long. We’ll have to be very careful until we cross the Mississippi River into Missouri.”

“How far is that?” George asked.

“About four hundred miles to Missouri and then two hundred more to where we’re going.”

“How long will that take?”

“About forty days if we can travel fifteen miles each day. We need to get there by September to build our house before winter.”

George talked with Sarah about their move. He tried to picture this new house. The adventures on this journey and

the excitement of a home in the wilderness thrilled him.

"We're leaving lots of relatives behind. It will seem funny not having other people around," George said.

"But we've got Grandpa and Grandma," Sarah said.

"And your Uncle Elwood and Aunt Lucy already in Missouri," Mama added.

"And our cousins. They've been gone so long, I've almost forgotten them," Sarah said.

"There's a girl just younger than you and two boys about Lillie's and Harry's ages," Mama said.

The group traveled without further incident until five o'clock when Grandpa pulled the team off the road into an open glen. The long day finally ended.

"The horses are too tired to go farther," he said. His face was white and drawn with exhaustion. He took off his hat and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. His thin white hair was damp with perspiration.

"Everyone's tired," Mama said. "None of us slept much last night."

After dark, Papa joined them.

The Pattersons soon developed a routine. Every member, down to little Harry, had specific jobs and responsibilities. Each morning before daylight, Mama and Grandma, assisted by the younger children, fixed breakfast. Papa ate hurriedly while the twins kept watch – one up the road, the other down – to notify the family with their bird calls if anyone came by. If anyone did come, Papa melted into the woods.

After breakfast, Mama fixed biscuits and meat for Papa's noon meal. Stashing the food in his knapsack, strapping on his powder horns, priming horns, and leather bags filled with ammunition, and grabbing his gun, he disappeared into the trees. All day he traveled near the wagons, within earshot if possible, but out of sight. He joined them again after dark.

Sometimes he brought in some game he'd bagged during the day, but he seldom shot his gun because it might draw attention to him.

"Papa," George said, "let me go with you. It's too lonesome for you by yourself all day long."

Sarah added, "Yes, Papa, let him. He can help you."

Papa patted George's shoulder. "Thanks, son, but Grandpa needs you to stay with the women and children." Then he turned to Sarah. "I can watch out for myself, Sarah. That's all I'll have to do. George needs to be with you. You two keep on working together as always. Take my place when I'm gone."

Throughout the day the two wagons traveled the road west. The children usually walked to ease the load on the teams. One twin with Lillie or Harry was in the lead in front of Grandpa's wagon, the other brought up the rear behind Mama's wagon.

Though they never forgot about the danger, the children had good times. They loved the smells of the pines and the moist, mossy scent that blew against their faces in the fresh air. They played games as they traveled, seeing who could first spot a squirrel or badger or some other animal. Or who could first find some lamb's quarter or another one of Grandma's greens they could cook for supper. They'd see who came closest to guessing how long it would take them to get to the next stream they had to ford. They kept a running tab on who had the most points at the end of the day. Grandma usually won.

The games passed the time pleasantly. They also kept the children alert, especially Harry, who wanted to sleep a lot.

They grew strong with the outdoor exercise and good food.

In the evening the women built fires and cooked wonder-

ful meals. While the others made camp, the twins hunted with Grandpa's shotgun or they fished, usually bringing in fresh meat, mostly rabbits and squirrels. The smaller children gathered nuts and fruits. Grandma knew lots of roots to dig.

At night the men and boys slept under the wagons. Though Sarah begged to join them, Mama wouldn't allow it. Sarah had to sleep with her mother and Lillie in the wagon.

George was amazed at the amount of traffic on the road west. In addition to the businessmen and soldiers, there were others like them moving – some east, some west.

Confederate soldiers were the ones to fear. Barely missing being shot at the meeting house back in the mountains, George had frequent nightmares of gray-clad soldiers swooping down on them and shooting everyone. But he knew that only the men were in danger from the soldiers. And at eleven years of age, he was not a man yet.

Every army patrol they met stopped them. They were looking for men to take with them to serve in their army. Or they wanted food or any supply they could use.

"Halt," a sergeant called out to Grandpa. He obediently pulled up, as did Mama's wagon behind him. The children gathered around their mother. The twins climbed to the seat beside Mama. Lillie and Harry peered through the canvas opening behind her.

"Where you going, old man?"

"To my son in Missouri," Grandpa said.

"Where you from?"

"Roane County," Grandpa replied calmly.

"Any men?"

"Just me."

The soldiers didn't take Grandpa's word for it. They searched the wagons. Sometimes the soldiers were kind and

easy in their search, even teasing the children. One time a private gave Sarah a penny and patted Harry on the head.

Other times the soldiers were mean. Grandpa cautioned the children. "Don't resist, or fight back no matter what they do. That will make it worse. We need to satisfy them that we are alone, and then get on our way."

It was hard to follow Grandpa's orders with the mean ones.

"I know you've got more menfolks here somewheres," a rough-looking corporal said to Grandpa when they had been on the road for a week. "One old man can't take these women and young'uns all the way to Missouri by hisself."

Grandpa never told a lie. He didn't say, "My sons got killed," or "My sons are soldiers fighting with the Tennessee militia." He said, "There's no menfolks here but me."

That was the truth. Papa was not there. The soldiers found men's clothing, shaving equipment, and other masculine items only in Grandpa's wagon. No soldier ever suspected that another man traveled with them.

The mean soldiers often messed up the bedclothes and trunks looking for men inside the wagons. They took whatever food they found, especially bread or dried meat they could carry with them. If there'd been any money, they'd have taken that, but Papa carried the money with him. The soldiers didn't find Papa's hidden places where the family stored the bulk of their supplies.

The worst times for George were when soldiers collared him. Lifting him off the ground by his suspenders, one big soldier demanded, "Where's your pa?"

"I don't know."

"I bet you do know."

It didn't bother George to lie, especially to save his father. "I ain't seen him since we left home two weeks ago."

Putting George down, the soldier turned to Sarah. "Here, girlie, come here. Where's your father?"

Sarah simply cried. If she bawled loudly enough, she didn't have to say anything. Men backed off from girls and women crying.

Most of the soldiers weren't bad. They were obeying orders to increase their regiments. They couldn't win the war without a strong force and plenty of supplies.

Twice soldiers struck Grandpa. The first time Grandpa remained sitting on the wagon seat unresisting while a corporal hit him with his riding whip. Grandma cried out only once. Mama clasped the reins hard and stared straight ahead.

Trembling with fury that anyone would strike his grandfather, George took a step toward the soldiers. His grandfather's stern look stopped him. "Grandpa!" George cried forcing himself to stay back.

Grandpa was not hurt badly, just whip marks, slaps, and roughing up. The second time George couldn't stand it. Grandpa's stern looks weren't strong enough to stop him. He ran to Grandpa's wagon when they knocked him off onto the road. There was his grandfather lying still, not resisting the soldiers' kicks. His white hair was covered with dirt, his lip bleeding. George's face was red and his fists were tightly closed ready to pound the soldiers as he ran toward him.

Running right behind George, Sarah put her arms around him. She had to hold with all her strength. She whispered, "No, George. Grandpa said not to fight back."

"But —" George sputtered as he tried to break Sarah's grasp on him.

"No!" Sarah ordered. George knew that it was useless to struggle when Sarah spoke like that. Besides, she was as strong as he was, and Grandpa had told him to do nothing.

George stopped, helpless to defend his grandfather. Instead of going after the soldiers, he helped Grandpa get up. Sarah wiped Grandpa's bloody lip with her apron and brushed the dirt from his hair. George picked up his hat.

"You hurt?" George asked, fingering the rip in Grandpa's jacket sleeve.

"No," Grandpa whispered back. "Good boy. They'll soon leave."

Just as Grandpa said, nothing more serious happened. Giving more threats, the soldiers left, allowing the wagons to continue. George gave the whippoorwill all clear signal in case Papa saw what was happening.

Soldiers stopped the wagons two or three times a week. After they left the mountains and foot hills, the road had long open stretches. Sometimes the twins spotted the soldiers ahead of them or behind them. At those times they prepared themselves. One of the twins gave the bob white call to warn their father that soldiers were near. On other occasions, the two wagons might make a turn or come up over a hill to meet soldiers face to face.

Uniformed men appearing unexpectedly was what caused George's nightmares. He was afraid that taken unprepared, he or one of the children might say something to cause the soldiers to follow them or send search parties into the woods and find his father.

George called a meeting of Pioneer Partners to handle that possibility.

"I won't say anything," Lillie promised, "and I'll practice with Harry so he'll not give Papa away."

"Good," George said, "but that's not enough."

"We're on pretty level ground now," Sarah said. "But when we get where we can't see ahead, maybe one of us should run up the road to see what's coming toward us."

"I'll do that." George told Grandpa their plans.

"I'll call you to let you know when I can't see the road ahead," Grandpa said. "George'll be our advance scout."

George's nightmares of soldiers stopped.

But the war brought on still another danger. Outlaws. Grandma had lived all her life in the mountains in Tennessee where everyone knew everyone else. She said, "I keep forgetting that every stranger might be dangerous. Not just the soldiers."

One night as they were making camp, two riders stopped. They were dressed in homemade butternut-colored pants and dirty tan shirts. Each man had a Colt pistol in a holster on his belt.

While George and Sarah were wiping down the horses, wet from their hard day's work, he saw Grandma step toward them to invite them to share their supper. Mama put her hand on her arm. Grandma stepped back. With her other hand, Mama motioned for Harry and Lillie to keep back out of sight. She sent a warning look to the twins. George ducked behind the wagon.

"Just a bunch of hillbillies," one of the men said in disgust. "They ain't got nothing. Let's go, Bob."

"Hold on a minute," Bob said, "Old grandma here has a fine-looking string of beads. I bet it'll bring in a pretty penny. Let's get it."

Sarah slipped beside George.

The two men reined their horses beside Grandma. She was by the fire stirring a pot of rabbit stew. She quickly put her hand on her pearls, her face stricken in horror.

"That's a mighty fine neckpiece," Bob's companion agreed. He looked around, probably to spot any men. Grandpa had gone into the woods before the men showed up. "Let's have some fun with the old woman." Neither man



made any move toward their pistols, but, laughing, they edged their mounts closer to Grandma.

George pulled his slingshot from his back pocket. Sarah took hers from her apron pocket.

They each picked up a small rock and placed it carefully in the leather pouch that was attached with bands to the forked stick. They aimed and pulled back as the outlaws were preparing to dismount.

The twins made eye contact. George cocked his head to indicate he meant the man called Bob. Sarah nodded. George whispered, "One, two, three."

His rock struck Bob's horse right above its tail. At the same time Sarah's hit the flank of the second man's horse. The horses neighed loudly. They reared. Both men dropped their reins to grab the saddle horn. With the men bouncing and the reins flying in the air, the horses galloped uncontrollably down the road and around the bend.

Grandpa appeared with his shotgun. Papa arrived with his rifle ready. With two armed mountain men protecting the Patterson camp, the outlaws didn't return.

"We must watch everyone," Papa said.

After that Grandma wore her pearls under her blouse, completely out of sight. "These are all I have that my mother brought over from the old country," she said.

## CHAPTER 5

### WHAT HAPPENED TO PAPA?

#### A Month Later

When the Pattersons had crossed most of Tennessee and were just few days from the Mississippi River, a patrol of nine Tennessee regulars followed them for two days. George didn't know whether the soldiers stayed behind them intentionally or whether they happened to be traveling the same speed in the same direction. As the twins always did when anyone approached them from the rear, they stayed near the wagons. They were careful not to draw attention to themselves.

Papa stayed away from the wagons for two nights. The first night the family knew he was all right, because he gave the whippoorwill, all clear, call. George returned it. On the second night the weary group made camp as usual.

"Grandpa," George said, "the soldiers aren't behind us anymore."

"When did you last see them?"

"About five miles back."

"Have you seen them since?"

"No, and I've been looking."

"Me too," Sarah said. "They're gone."

"Did you see which way they went?" Grandpa asked.

"No."

"Well, it's good they are gone. It worried me, them on our tail. They must be heading north to join the main army." Grandpa looked both ways up and down the road and to the

fields on both sides as if expecting soldiers. Seemingly satisfied, he said, "George, signal your father to come in. It'll soon be dark."

"Do you think he's all right? He ain't had no food in three days."

Grandpa laughed. "Don't you worry none about that son of mine. He can live off the wild right enough. He's born and bred in the mountains. No flat country militia like them soldiers behind us gonna find him. He's out there, sure enough. Let him know it's safe to come in."

George gave the whippoorwill signal. Waiting a few minutes he repeated it. Nothing.

George reasoned that his father couldn't hear it. He was farther away than usual because of the soldiers and no nearby cover.

While he was chopping some firewood, Sarah voiced his fears, "I'm worried about Papa."

"Me too. I'll give the whippoorwill call again."

No answering call.

That night only the little children slept well. The twins and the adults expected Papa's return any minute. The moon had set, and it was just before dawn when Sarah crawled under the wagon to George. He was also awake, but the adults were all finally asleep. The twins huddled together on the other side of the wagon so they wouldn't disturb the sleeping family.

Sarah said, "We've got to find Papa."

"Yeah. Something's wrong or he'd have come in. Let's tell Mama we're going to look for him."

"No, she won't let us go. Grandpa won't either. He'd think he's the one that ought to go."

"But we can't just take off," George said. "They'd worry even more. Remember, we promised Mama we'll tell whenever

we left?"

"Then let's tell Lillie. She's a detective, too. She'll handle Mama and Grandpa when they wake up."

Since all they had to do was put on their shoes, they were soon ready. George grabbed his hat and Sarah tied on her sunbonnet.

Quietly, Sarah reached into the back of the wagon and touched Lillie lightly. "Sh-h-h," she cautioned.

Lillie woke up quickly. "What —"

"Sh-h-h. Don't wake Mama. We're going to look for Papa," George whispered. "No one else knows. As a Pioneer Partner, can you handle things here?"

Lillie sat upright. "Sure. What'll I tell Mama and Grandpa?"

"You're the detective. You figure it out. We've got to go. We're sure Papa is in trouble or he'd be here by now."

Lillie nodded her head vigorously.

"We'll be back by noon at the latest," Sarah whispered. "Even if we don't find him." Lillie started to cry. "Hush, Lillie, we'll find him."

George reassured her. "We'll be careful. You see to things here."

Mama stirred and said sleepily, "Sarah, you girls hush your whisperings now and go on back to sleep."

"Yes, Mama," Lillie said. She punched Sarah and giggled.

In the early light as the twins left, George looked back. Lillie was staring at her brother and sister. Just before he and Sarah got out of sight in the tall grass and brush beside their wagon, he saw her frown change into a smile. George felt better, for he knew she had a plan.

When the twins were far enough away from the wagon no one could hear them, George asked, "How are we going to find Papa?"

"I don't know."

"Every night when he comes back to the wagons, he comes from the north side of the road."

"That's where we are," Sarah said. "He nearly always travels on this side if there's enough trees or bushes to hide him. Let's look on this side."

George agreed.

"But we know he was okay the first night as he answered us, so we've just got to check where we went yesterday," Sarah said.

"Right."

"How far did we come yesterday?"

"Fifteen miles, maybe." George hesitated. "That's a lot of miles to look. We can't do that and get back before noon."

"We can look as far as we can." Sarah also was getting discouraged. It was just too much country to cover.

"No use looking in the open spaces," George said.

"No, he'd not travel there. He'd go in the woods whenever he could. Or in hollows where no one could see him from the road."

Though the sun hadn't risen, they could see across the open flat land to some trees about a couple of miles back east the way they'd come the day before.

"Let's head over there," Sarah said, pointing toward the trees. "We'll look where we think he'd have gone."

"I'll go through the tall grass here and you follow along the road. See that biggest tree standing apart from the others? The one with all those dead limbs on top?" Sarah nodded. "We'll meet there."

Sarah nodded again. "We shouldn't separate, should we?"

"We'll cover more ground that way. Most of the time we can see each other. When we can't, we'll signal with the

whippoorwill call.”

“Remember to give the jay call for help if you see anything, or if we need to get back together,” Sarah said as George dashed off into the tall grass. He was short enough that Sarah soon lost sight of him in the tall prairie grass. However if her father walked there, his height would give him away.

The road was free of traffic this early. As they walked, George jumped up a couple of times to look over the grass. He waved at Sarah, who was about an eighth of a mile away on the north shoulder of the road where she was searching.

Sarah slipped into a small hollow beside the road when a horseman trotted toward her. When he passed, she cut across the open land to George.

George's mouth was turned down with discouragement. “He's not here.”

“Of course not, dummy. We've not come far enough. If Papa was this close, he'd have heard us or signaled in some way. Now let's look real hard in this stretch of trees. I remember yesterday that we traveled beside them for a long time.”

“I noticed them, too,” George said in a more cheerful voice. “I remember thinking that Papa wouldn't have much trouble keeping out of sight in them.”

“These woods aren't very wide. Let's spread out and look. But don't get where you can't hear me.”

“We'll call every few minutes. If Papa's here, he will hear us. So keep listening.”

“What'll we look for?” Sarah asked.

“Footprints in the dirt, mashed leaves, bushes broken off, anything to show he's been here.”

“George, you know Papa wouldn't leave any tracks.”

“He couldn't erase everything. Take too much time. He

couldn't keep up with us if he did that."

"He wouldn't erase the footprints, he'd just be careful where he stepped so he wouldn't leave any."

"Then how can we find him?" George asked.

"If he's in trouble, he'll leave us something that we'll recognize."

"But we won't know what it is until we see it. So we need to keep looking."

The twins carefully crisscrossed the wooded area. The trees lasted for about three miles along the road. Since the woods were only about a quarter of a mile wide, it was easy for them to cover the area. They didn't see anything that indicated anyone had been in the woods recently. Every few minutes one or the other would give the whippoorwill call. Though they listened carefully, among all the natural forest sounds, they didn't hear a return call.

"Up here a ways is about where I noticed the soldiers weren't following us any more," George said. He became excited. "And Sarah, I just remembered. I think I heard horses north of the main highway, but I didn't pay much attention to it. That could have been the soldiers."

"That's this side of the road. If it was the soldiers, maybe they saw . . ." Sarah paused. "Maybe they saw Papa, and . . ." She didn't finish. George knew what might have happened.

At the edge of the woods they came to a narrow dirt trail.

"I bet this is where the soldiers turned off," George said.

Both twins ran to the trail to search for footprints. There were many prints in the narrow trail, but none were distinct. The marks George could make out were of shod horses traveling north.

"Soldiers!" George said. "I was right."

The prints showed that the riders were traveling two abreast, or sometimes single file as some tracks covered others.

The twins followed the trail for a few minutes.

"Hey," Sarah said. She stooped to look more closely at the ground. "Look here." She pointed to two or three boot prints pointing south along the side of the road. George looked at them closely. "Do you think they are Papa's?" he asked.

"I don't know. Would you recognize his tracks?"

"Only that they would be big. These here aren't big enough. And the tread is from new boots. Papa's boots are pretty worn out."

"Yeah, Mama is worried that his boots may not last the whole trip."

Sarah squatted to examine the tracks more closely, "I think these tracks were made longer ago than yesterday." She pointed to one print that was blotted over. "You can see where it has rained a little on them."

George crossed to the other side of the trail. "Here's a fresh print on this side," he said. "It's going north."

The twins studied the print in the dust carefully. George put his foot beside it. "It's big enough for Papa's. And look, see this?" He was excited as he pointed to the heel. "Look, part of the heel on this print is missing. It looks like it is worn down."

"Here's another print like it." Sarah followed the line of signs. "Someone walked out of the woods here on the east side." She was so excited she was almost dancing.

"Yes, and he turned north."

"Let's follow them. I think they are Papa's."

"But that doesn't make sense," George said. "Papa wouldn't turn north away from the road. He'd cut across the trail into all that good timber we just came through."

"You're right," Sarah said. Her mouth turned down in disappointment. "He wouldn't leave the main road." She



walked out into the field a few feet on the east side of the trail where the prints entered the roadway. "But someone has been through here recently." She saw not only prints in the ground, but noticed that some of the grass was bent over where a foot stepped on it.

"We never saw any prints like these in the woods across the trail," George said. "If that is Papa's print, then he went north from here, not on west like we did."

"I think they're Papa's," Sarah said. "Let's follow them."

Encouraged that they were following their father's path, the twins headed north up the narrow road. They moved slowly when they came to some long stretches with no prints. Several times they thought they had lost his trail completely, when one of them would find a trace of another print.

"Maybe he walked in the weeds so there would be no prints," Sarah said.

"Look here," George exclaimed. He pointed to the toe of a print. The rest was covered by the print of a horse's hoof. Then they found two more prints partially covered by hoof prints.

"If that is Papa's print under there, then the soldiers are behind him," George said.

"And it doesn't look like he was worried. He didn't turn off or start running." Sarah looked up the narrow lane.

"George, he didn't know the soldiers were behind him."

"It sure looks that way. But why would he keep going north away from us?"

Sarah had no answer.

Alarmed, they followed the trail around a sharp bend. The ground that had been level up to this point dropped down rapidly into a creek bottom. The boot prints disappeared under a jumble of hoof prints.

"Looks like the horses stopped and stomped around

here," George said.

The hoof prints continued, but the twins couldn't make sense of them. The only thing they knew was that the boot track was gone, or completely obliterated. As they debated what to do, they spoke softer and softer, until they were whispering. Perhaps the soldiers they were following were ahead of them and might hear them.

George spotted a blackberry vine loaded with plump, shiny berries. He stuffed a handful into his mouth. The sweet juice soothed his dry throat. Then he noticed something out of place.

"Sarah!" he whispered and pointed to a bit of red caught in the briars. "Look, a ragged piece of a bandana!"

"Probably one of the soldiers came too close and the stickers tore it out of his pocket."

George studied the bush. "It's too low to the ground to come from a soldier riding a horse. This had to come from someone walking."

Sarah pulled the scrap from the bush. "Looks like it's a piece torn off on purpose and stuck there. See it even has some blackberry juice on it. Someone ate some berries, and wiped the juice off their hands."

"But why only a scrap is here?" George asked.

Then both said together, "Papa's sign."

"He left it for us, Sarah."

"And he expected us to come looking for him."

George had been so intent on following the boot tracks and glorying in the evidence they found that he forgot about giving the signal. Obviously, so had Sarah. As if the soldiers they were tracking were beside them, the twins quickly hid behind a tree.

Sarah gave the call. The family practiced so that their calls wouldn't be mistaken for a real bird. She whistled it

three times, counted to fifty, and gave it one more time.

All morning when they had given the signal, they had no reply. Though they didn't expect one now, from up ahead on the left side of the trail came the faint hoot of the owl. Danger! It came distinctly three times. Surprised, George held his breath as he looked at Sarah and counted silently. At fifty there was one final call.

"Papa!" Sarah whispered though there was no one in sight and the signal had come from a distance. "It's Papa for sure."

George nodded. They ran down the hill. The trees soon gave way to open grassland. Below them in the valley was a detail of soldiers breaking camp. The twins stopped their headlong dash. Some of the soldiers had already forded the creek and were quickly swallowed by the dense line of trees on the other side.

George grabbed Sarah and pointed. At the edge of the group, with his hands tied behind him was their father. He was sitting on a draft horse tethered to a tree.

Sarah pushed George into a bush. "I'll go down and do something to get their attention. Then you cut Papa loose."

Crouching low in the roadside brush, George nodded. He waved her on. He could watch from there for the right time for him to help.

Sarah shoved her bonnet off her head to hang down her back. She loosened the end of one braid, smeared dirt on her apron and dress, and tore her sleeve. Then in plain sight, down the center of the trail, she ran screaming toward the mounted men who hadn't yet crossed the creek.

"Hey, there, girlie, what's the matter?" a redheaded soldier asked, halting his horse.

Another turned his horse toward her. "What're you doing out here?"

"Oh, please, mister. Please come! There's a big bear after my ma."

"What?" The soldier started to laugh.

Sarah screamed, "A bear." She sobbed so that she couldn't say anything more. The soldier's smile disappeared. The other men crowded around them. Sarah pulled on his sleeve, "When my ma went to the barn, a bear got after her . . . . She climbed up a tree." Gasping for breath, she continued, "I seen you camped down here and come after you." She pulled some more on the soldier's sleeve, speaking rapidly, "I live over there." She pointed east up the valley. "Quick before the bear gets her. He was shaking the tree. Quick! Go on down the creek a little ways, you'll see our clearing."

"Here, girlie, slow down. Come ride with me," the red-headed soldier said, holding out his hand to pull her up behind him on his horse.

"No, no," Sarah sobbed. "There's a bear there. I'm scared. I'll come home after you kill it."

While Sarah was putting on her scene, George crept down to the creek bank.

The redheaded soldier and three more spurred their horses down the valley, following the winding creek in an easterly direction. As soon as they were out of sight, Sarah slipped behind a tree. The two mounted soldiers who stayed in camp paid no attention to her as they watched the others gallop off through the grasses of the creek meadow.

"Sergeant won't like them tearing off like this," one of them said. He looked across the ford in the creek where their sergeant and three other men were already out of sight. "He expected us to follow right after him, not go off traipsing after bears and a woman up a tree."

"He won't care. Getting a bear skin will be worth the delay," said his buddy.

“Yeah, the sergeant ain’t in no hurry to get to Union City and join up with the main army. This moseying around the country suits him.”

Sarah left her tree to sprint up the hill.

Now that she’d gotten the soldiers’ attention away from Papa, George knew the rest was up to him. He rose from his prone position behind a log on the creek bank. Hidden behind the horse his father was on, he cut the ropes binding his father’s hands behind him. He darted behind a tree.

Papa rolled off the mare and continued rolling until he reached the fallen log George just left. Since the soldiers were all either gone, or were busy watching the departing men, Papa dropped off the creek bank onto the gravel bar under him. He was crouching to keep his tall figure from showing above the bank.

Now that he had freed his father, George headed southwest, in a diagonal line through the brush toward the highway. He didn’t pause until he scaled the hill, using vines and saplings growing out of the cliff-like hill to pull himself up. At the crest, he glanced back. From his height he had a view of the creek valley. His father was crouched in the creek bed. Since in his last view of Sarah she was on the trail disappearing from sight at the bend, he figured she would run back to the highway. He would intersect it farther west and wait for her.

Before he entered the stretch of woods he and Sarah had searched, he looked back at the camp. The two soldiers were sitting on their horses, chatting, obviously still unaware that the pack mare tied to a tree had no rider. Or that their prisoner had escaped.

George took several deep breaths to ease his panting and entered the protection of the strip of woods. He didn’t stop until he reached the main road. Arriving there, he sat on a

log to wait for Sarah. Exhilarated, he felt like shouting.

Time passed. A cloud covered the sun, which was now high in the sky. The cloud covered his spirit, also. Sarah wasn't yet in sight. He wasn't sure his father had made a complete escape. Maybe he hurt himself when he fell from the mare? Maybe when the soldiers discovered he escaped, they chased after him again? And this time shot him dead, not just tied his hands behind him. George listened hard, expecting to hear a gunshot.

It was just too hard to live with this war going on. It wasn't fair. They were happy in their mountain home. All of this trouble they'd gone through, and Papa still might be taken into the Confederate Army. Or killed. It wasn't fair. George slumped over in worry.

The first drops of rain started falling when he saw someone coming down the highway from the east. Sarah? Then he heard the most beautiful sound in the world to him. The call of the whippoorwill came from behind him in the woods. From where his father should be. There were three bright calls, "Whip, whip-poor-will." A pause. George counted to fifty. "Whip, whip-poor-will."

The hoof beats coming toward him were much closer. He was about to hide in the grass until he heard the whip-poor-will call again, only this time from up the road.

He saw Sarah and Lillie on one horse and Grandpa on the other loping toward him. Sarah whooped and called out, "Pioneer Partners did it again."

"Whip, whip-poor-will," came a faint call from the strip of timber behind George.

## CHAPTER 6

### LILLIE'S AND PAPA'S STORIES

That night in the darkness beside Grandpa's wagon, the Pattersons celebrated Papa's return. Knowing he was safe and, traveling near them out of sight as usual, the group had broken camp about noon and traveled several miles that day before stopping for the night. The gentle rain that lasted all afternoon cooled the air. Mama wasn't the least bit mad at Sarah for tearing her dress. She said she could easily patch it later.

"So near Missouri and Sterling still in such danger," Grandma said, hugging her son again. She wiped her tears away with her handkerchief.

"That shows us that we can't relax even a minute," Grandpa said. He reached over to pat Papa's knee.

"Yes," Papa said, "we must still keep watch. Since we are so close to Missouri, yesterday I wasn't as alert as I should have been. I should never have left the timber for that public road, even if it was only a trail."

Rarely did anyone stop at their camp late at night. The traffic slowed to almost nothing at all after sunset. Even with that less danger, the Pattersons always camped off the road in some secluded spot. But this night Grandpa took extra precautions, driving the wagons at least half a mile off the road into the tall grass. The twins and Grandpa hobbled the horses even farther off. The women didn't build a fire, but ate what leftovers they had.

George stationed himself a little apart from the family on

one side of the camp, while Sarah did the same on the other. While they were part of the group and entered in the talk, they also listened for sounds of horses or other activity on the highway. The two wagons were merely big gray hulks against the starry sky. Since George could see only blacker bumps where the others were, he felt fairly safe from intruders, either soldiers or outlaws.

Before they separated, Sarah asked George, "Do you think the soldiers will come looking for us?"

"Naw. They'll keep on going to Union City. I heard them talking that they were already late."

"Do you think when that bunch got back without finding any bear, they were mad?"

"They probably thought that you was Papa's girl and did that trick just so he could get free."

Sarah giggled. "That's what I did."

"Yeah, but they probably thought you lived near them. They don't know we're out here on the road. They won't come looking. Don't worry so much."

"Okay. You're right."

"Feel better?" George asked.

"Yes, but there still may be some late travelers or other soldiers on the highway. We better keep on watching."

"Yeah, we're still on duty."

Everyone in camp was silent for a few minutes until Mama said, "We've had a hard day. We all need to get some sleep."

"But Mama," Lillie said, "Papa and the twins haven't told their stories."

"All right," Mama said. "Let's hear everyone's story. Lillie, you go first."

"Yeah, Lillie," George said. "Tell us."

Smiling in obvious pride that she had the spotlight, Lillie



thought for a moment and then said, "You all know about the twins telling me that they were leaving to find Papa."

She turned to Mama. "They didn't disobey you, Mama, when you told them to tell where they were at all times. They told me."

Mama laughed. "Yes, of course."

Lillie sat up straighter and threw her shoulders back. "When the twins came to me, we talked real quiet-like, Mama, so we wouldn't wake you."

"But you did," Mama said. "I remember I told you girls to get back to sleep."

"Yes, but the twins had just left then and you didn't notice. You were asleep. Anyway, after they left, I sat there in the back of the wagon thinking what I could do. I am part of Pioneer Partners. George told me to handle telling you and Grandpa and Grandma. I figured it would take the twins two or three hours to find Papa. They would walk or run the whole time and would be tired. To get back to the wagons, they'd head to the highway. So my plan was to have Grandpa and me ride his horses back up the road to see if we could find the twins and bring them back. That way, Mama wouldn't be so worried if she knew Grandpa was out getting the twins."

"And your plan worked," Mama said.

"The worst part was waiting in camp not doing anything this morning," Lillie said. "Grandpa and I waited about two hours, maybe three. When we got to that little trail turning off the highway, Grandpa saw the soldiers' tracks —"

Grandpa interrupted, "And I figured the twins went north on that road."

"So we turned on it," Lillie continued. "George and Sarah's tracks were all over the place. We soon saw the tracks where Papa came on it from the field. So we kept on riding

and met Sarah all by herself walking up the trail toward us.”

Sarah left her post to join the group. Mama hugged her as she dropped down in front of her father.

“And then they rode back to the main road and found me,” George said. He was so interested in Lillie’s story, that like Sarah, he had moved closer to the group. “Gee, was I glad that I didn’t have to walk the rest of the way back to the wagons.”

Everyone laughed.

“You weren’t glad to see Sarah?” Grandma asked.

“Oh, I knew she’d be all right.”

After the twins told their part of the story it was Papa’s turn.

With Harry on his lap, Lillie hanging on one side and the twins at his feet, Papa began.

“Of course, I saw the detail of Confederate soldiers following your wagons for a couple of days. I was careful they wouldn’t spot me. But I was more worried about the rest of you. After two days, when I saw that they didn’t overtake you or didn’t seem to be interested in you at all, I wasn’t so concerned. But I kept close watch on them.

“Now I’d spent two days in the wilds without restocking my food supply or getting any fresh water. In this heat, I needed water pretty bad. I decided it was safe to look for some and maybe catch a fish. Because of the lay of the land, I figured there was a creek north of me. So when I came to that road through the woods, I took it. It wasn’t hardly a road, just a trail. So I walked out on the trail to get to the creek faster. It never crossed my mind that the soldiers would turn there. The last I watched them, they were keeping the same pace headed west down the main road.”

“We found your tracks,” Sarah said.

Papa said, “You two are really good. I didn’t see any reason

to hide my tracks, though sometimes I did walk in the weeds on the edge of the trail. I saw the creek in the distance. I was so glad, thinking of all that cool water, that I started for it. I walked right in the middle of the trail.”

“Is that when the soldiers found you?” George asked.

“Yes, just a bit later. You twins saw that blind turn in the trail, where the land drops off into the creek bottom?”

“Yes.”

“I was thinking only of getting a drink of the water. After I turned the corner, the cicadas were making a racket in the trees, the wind was blowing through the leaves and whistling round the bluff so that I didn’t notice what was behind me. It was like I was in a little paradise, all by myself with cool, running water just ahead. I saw a bush loaded with ripe blackberries. I grabbed a handful and ate them all in one gulp. I pulled my old ragged bandana out of my pocket to wipe the juice off my hands.

“When the soldiers made that turn and saw me, I did a dumb thing. I ran. But before I ran, I had enough sense to tear off a corner of my bandana and stick it on that briar right there where I ran off the trail.”

“We found it,” George said. “We knew it was yours.”

“We even saw the juice stains on it,” Sarah said.

“I hoped someone would see it. I figured you twins or Grandpa would come looking for me after I didn’t show up, and I wanted you to know I was there. Then maybe you could pick up my trail or figure out what happened to me.”

“We did,” Sarah said.

“I might have been able to bluff my way out with the soldiers, but since I ran, they chased me and captured me down there in the open valley.”

“Did they hurt you?” Harry asked, pulling his father’s arm tighter about him.

“No. When they caught up with me and ordered me to halt, I did. I didn’t fight back. Resisting was useless with a dozen men pointing guns at me. They assumed I was a local man, hiding out to escape the army, so they didn’t ask me much. When I saw they weren’t going to shoot me, but would take me to their main unit, I didn’t struggle when they tied my hands behind me. They fed me some supper and weren’t too hard on me. I’ll admit though, last night wasn’t too comfortable, trying to sleep tied to a tree. I did manage to get some rest.”

“That was more than we got,” Mama said, “us worrying about you all night. What happened this morning?”

“The soldiers weren’t in any hurry to break camp and leave. Their orders were to report to Union City where they would be sent with their division to Virginia to the big fighting there. So they moseyed along slow on purpose, thinking maybe they would be too late. They were all Tennessee men and didn’t relish being sent east. Besides, they were enjoying the creek.

“They fixed breakfast and slowly loaded their pack horses and saddled their own horses. The sergeant and about half of the men mounted and were crossing the creek when I heard a whippoorwill call. A whippoorwill this early in the morning? I wondered why. Then the call was repeated two more times. I counted to fifty and there it was again. I tell you, Sarah, that was the sweetest sound I ever heard.”

“Not better than us hearing your hoot owl call telling us you were close and in danger,” Sarah said.

“Well, both calls were beautiful,” Papa continued. “But the end of my story is even better. Sarah, you should go on a stage. Your play acting about the bear running a mother up a tree almost convinced me. George, your quick actions and perfect timing in cutting the ropes on my wrists was masterful.”

“Whatever made you think of the bear and your mother up a tree?” Grandpa asked.

“I don’t know. It just came to me. I had to think of something to make the soldiers leave camp. I thought of the wildest animal that lived in these woods. Remember, Grandpa, you showed us the bear tracks a couple of days ago?”

“The bear idea was a perfect one,” Grandpa said.

“Papa, what did you do after George cut you loose?” Harry asked.

“I slid off the horse and rolled over the little creek bank where the two men left in camp couldn’t see me. They were talking and watching the others ride off after the bear. Since we were ready to ride, I had my knapsack on, but I wanted to get my rifle that was on the other pack mare. George was disappearing up the hill, so I took the chance to get my gun. I reckoned that even if the two soldiers did notice I’d got free, I could outrun them in the rough land. Their horses couldn’t go down the creek bank or follow the creek.

“As it turned out, it was easy. I came up on the blind side of the mare, pulled my rifle out of the other supplies packed on her back, and again slid under the creek bank. This time I didn’t look back. I followed the creek about a quarter of a mile before climbing out. By then I was out of sight of the soldiers. I ran about a mile, then settled down to a steady, fast walk to catch up to our wagons. I saw you, George, waiting by the road for Sarah, and then saw that Grandpa and Lillie had found Sarah. That’s when I gave you the all clear call to let you know I was safe. For the rest of today I traveled as always, watching you from a distance.”

He paused before continuing, “What you did, George, when you freed me was to let all of us escape unseen, you, Sarah, and me. When the soldiers finally realized there was no bear or treed woman and returned to camp, we were all

three gone. Only the pack mare was there still tied to a hickory tree with the severed rope that tied my hands lying on the ground.”

“Good work, Twins,” Grandpa said.

“Amen,” Grandma and Mama said together.

“And good work, Lillie,” Grandpa said. “We all returned safely to camp.”

“I helped,” Harry said. He pulled on his father’s arm to get his attention. “I helped, too, Papa. I stayed with Mama and Grandma to keep them from worrying. And now we’re all together. We did it, didn’t we George? Sarah, Lillie, and me. Pioneer Partners did it.”

“Yes, Harry,” George agreed. “Another case closed.”

“Tomorrow we’ll reach the river and cross over into Missouri,” Papa said. “There I won’t have to hide from the Confederate soldiers. Missouri stayed in the Union.”

Even though he said this, there was an edge of worry in his voice.

“Everything will be all right there, won’t it?” Sarah asked.

“I hope so,” Papa said, “but I heard the soldiers back there talking. There are rumors of unrest in Missouri. Units of both armies are in the state and outlaws are taking advantage of it all.”

“Then why are we —” Grandma started to ask.

“Don’t worry, Mother,” Papa said, “where we’re going is largely unpopulated. We’ll be safe there.”

Before bedding down, Sarah and George talked about their new home. “Papa seems worried, even though he said we’d be safe,” Sarah said.

“Yeah. We’ll still need our detective agency. He’s worried we might still be in danger.”

“Even if not that, in that wild country there might be Indian mysteries. And wild animals and secret, unknown

caves and springs.”

“Yeah,” George said happily. “Pioneer Partners will have a lot to do there.”

## CHAPTER 7

### NEW HOME IN MISSOURI

#### Late November 1862

“Thanksgiving tomorrow will be the best ever,” Sarah said.

George nodded. The twins agreed on most things, but the happy thought about this Thanksgiving came to each of them without discussing it.

A year after arriving at their new home in the Missouri Ozarks, they were busy getting ready for Thanksgiving dinner. Sarah and Lillie would help bake the bread, cakes, and pies. George would leave early with Papa to hunt for a wild turkey. Though they usually worked together, this day the twins split up to help their family prepare.

“I wish I had some nuts for this cake,” Mama said at breakfast.

Sarah said, “I know where there’s a tree full of black walnuts. Lillie and I’ll go get some.”

The girls grabbed a bucket and ran to the walnut tree just outside their clearing. George and Papa went beyond that to an open glade where Papa had seen some wild turkeys.

On their way home after bagging their turkey, George examined with pride their new log cabin and barn in a clearing in the forest that was spotted with recently cut stumps. Through the bare branches of the trees, he saw smoke from the fireplace curl up into the quiet November sky.

George loved their new home. And how good it was to



laugh and yell without fearing soldiers. On their journey here last year they had all breathed easier after crossing into Missouri. Traveling the hilly eastern Missouri land before finding Uncle Elwood's place was almost a picnic compared to their journey across Tennessee. In Missouri, Papa rode boldly with them.

It was like a special Christmas present to pick out the land they wanted and after such a long time to see Uncle Elwood's family. George barely remembered his cousin Catherine, a couple of years younger than he and Sarah. Ray was nine years old, and Willy was Harry's age.

Even Mama is happy now, George thought. Each day their cabin became more homelike and more beautiful. Though not yet as big or as nice as their old one, it was home. He liked the loft bedroom for the children over the one big room downstairs. He could look down to see the kitchen, living room, and his parents' bedroom all rolled into one big room.

Papa said this winter he would cut enough logs to build on another room. Then the house would be nicer than their old one in Tennessee.

Everyone had worked as hard as they could this past spring and summer. They all pitched in to plant a garden. The lean-to shed Papa built onto the back of the house was full of vegetables packed in straw and dirt to keep them from freezing. Uncle Elwood gave them one of his sows. Papa just finished butchering her pigs, providing enough meat for the family all winter. The hams and bacon were salted down, some hanging in the lean-to and some soaking in salted brine in barrels to keep the meat from spoiling.

The wild game in the woods was more abundant than they thought possible. In Tennessee the game had been hunted for so many years, it was often hard to find. But here,

only trappers had been through before them. They were the first settlers. The deer and turkey were plentiful, the fishing great. No worry about food this winter.

Papa said he'd seen signs everywhere along the river and creek of beaver, muskrat, and mink. He'd seen their holes, their tracks in the mud banks, and many beaver dams. With cold weather coming, the men would soon start trapping. Come spring they should be able to sell the pelts for cash – probably enough to buy seed and supplies next spring.

George looked around happily. They'd done all this without having to use all the money from selling their place in Tennessee. Even after buying this farm and getting the supplies and stock they needed here, Papa had money left. He hid the gold coins because, with the war, he didn't think a bank would be safe. Besides, they lived twelve miles from the nearest village.

Papa didn't tell anyone where the money was. He said that was safer, because there was a lot of riffraff roaming the country from one army or the other. If none of the family knew where the money was, they couldn't be forced to tell where it was hidden. George and Sarah often talked about it, wondering where he hid it. Sometimes they even searched for it, but they were so busy building their new home, they had very little spare time. They almost forgot about being detectives.

At night before going to sleep, the twins sometimes talked about possible hiding places. They agreed that they needed their detective agency in order to find the money. But they didn't need a reason, other than their curiosity, to figure it out. Papa knew where it was. So there was really no real mystery.

George sighed. In some ways the Missouri Ozarks was better than expected, like with the good crops and hunting

and fishing. But in other ways, it was as bad as Tennessee. There were almost as many problems for the men in Missouri as in Tennessee. Mama said that was because of the war. People all over the entire United States and the Confederacy were having bad times now.

She explained that though Missouri stayed with the Union, the people were divided in their sympathies. Papa and Uncle Elwood had to be careful not to attract notice to themselves. Two strong mountain men and Grandpa, who were all experts at sighting and hitting a squirrel a hundred feet away, would be a prize for either army.

Occasionally, army patrols from both Union and Confederate Army units would come through the country taking any men they came across, just like in Tennessee. So far, since the Patterson clan lived in such an isolated area, they hadn't been bothered. But they lived under the threat.

George shook these unpleasant thoughts from his mind as he and Papa hurried home with the big tom turkey. He replaced his worry by remembering the good things, like what Sarah said last night before they went to bed.

"This Thanksgiving will be the best. We're like the Pilgrims settling in a new land, and like them, we moved here because of our beliefs."

George thought about their Thanksgiving last year soon after they arrived safely in Missouri. Grandpa was living with them because they had time to build only one cabin. At that time he gave the blessing, as usual, thanking the Lord for their safe journey and their haven in Missouri. Until bedtime, no one even thought about it being their usual day for giving thanks. Sarah mentioned it to George. They both became thoughtful.

"Next Thanksgiving will be better," George had said.

"Yeah," Sarah agreed.

And here it was. This Thanksgiving was going to be special. The past year had been a good one, and there was much to celebrate. Tomorrow would be the big day when their grandparents, uncle, aunt, and cousins would all meet at their house.

Coming in sight of their cabin, George saw his laughing sisters skipping toward the house, carrying the bucket of nuts between them. Lillie's face was smeared with juice from walnut hulls. George smiled at the happy picture. Lillie was always playing Indian. She and Sarah were probably acting out as Indians while they gathered the nuts for the cake Mama was making for the special dinner. Now the family would have Indians at their Thanksgiving just as the pilgrims did, even though they were pretend Indians.

Chatting happily, neither girl looked up when a scream came from the tree in front of them. George knew instantly what it was. But Sarah, usually alert to any wild sound, apparently didn't hear the scream. She and Lillie continued talking.

"Papa," George cried, dropping the turkey. He grabbed his father's arm and pointed to the dark form on a tree branch above his sisters.

"I see it, son." Papa and George both took aim with their rifles.

Sarah laughed aloud and pointed to Lillie's streaked face and brown hands. The scream ahead of them sounded again at almost the same time Lillie gave another playful squeal. The girls were walking together, giggling and chatting and trampling noisily on the crisp leaves on the forest floor.

Sarah stopped abruptly at the second scream. "Hush, Lillie," she said as she grabbed her sister. Holding the bucket of nuts in front of her, she looked up into the trees. Just ahead of them on the first branch of a huge hickory tree, crouched

ready to spring, was a big black panther. Its tail was flicking back and forth as it eyed the girls.

Though Sarah made no sound, Lillie let out a muffled cry.

Sarah glanced quickly around her, probably looking for a weapon or some cover. The thought flashed through George's mind that the panther's attack would ruin this perfect Thanksgiving.

Strangely, George felt no fear. Or maybe he didn't have time to worry. In that brief second as he sighted down his gun, he wondered if the Pilgrims had panthers in their forests.

Sarah looked straight into the big cat's eyes as it jumped at her. Its snarl revealed sharp teeth. She pushed Lillie behind a tree and threw the bucket of nuts at it. At the same instant both George and Papa fired. The panther's body hit Sarah, knocking her to the ground.

The quiet of the morning was shattered. From behind the tree Lillie screamed hysterically. George bounded up shouting, "Sarah! Sarah!"

At the sound of the gunshot, the dog at the cabin howled. Mama and Harry ran out. Harry bawled loudly while Mama yelled, "Girls, oh, girls!"

It seemed to George as if the whole world went crazy. He saw the panther double up from the shot and knew it was dead when it hit Sarah. She pushed the body off and raised her head cautiously. By the time the rest of the family reached her, she was standing. Not hurt, she put her arms around Lillie to comfort her and said to George who first reached her, "No dumb old pain'ter is going to ruin this Thanksgiving."

George was shaking. "Papa and I both shot. Papa hit it. I was too scared to shoot straight."

“But you also hit it,” Papa said, showing George two bloody spots on the panther’s body.

Everyone hugged Sarah and Lillie, rejoicing in their narrow escape and Papa’s and George’s expert shooting. They all trooped into the cabin, even retrieving the bucket and its nuts scattered on the ground.

“Well, what are we sitting here for?” Mama said after everyone talked over the experience. “We’ve got a dinner to prepare.”

“And a pain’ter to skin. How’d you like a cat rug by your bed, girls?” Papa asked.

Their enthusiastic response was all Papa needed. He and George went outside to get the big cat, leaving Mama and the girls to dress the turkey.

During the rest of the day the twins helped their parents around the cabin. George and Sarah talked about how lucky she was to escape the panther’s attack. Though the family had overcome many dangers and had this new beginning in the Ozarks, the twins agreed that they must not become careless. If Sarah had been alert to the first scream, she could have found cover. What if George hadn’t spotted the cat in time? They still needed their Pioneer Partners, Inc. not only for their father’s safety from the armies, but for all of them. Though George didn’t want to admit it, he knew they should resume watching for soldiers.

Not yet. Not for awhile.

Tomorrow was Thanksgiving.

## CHAPTER 8

### PREPARING FOR TROUBLE

After the chores were finished and everything possible done for the big Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow, the family sat down to supper.

"I've been thinking," Papa said, "about things here this winter. George and Sarah, do you think you and Mama could manage here if I was gone?"

Sarah cried, "Where are you going?"

"Your Uncle Elwood and I believe that in many ways you'd all be safer with us gone."

When everyone began to protest, Papa held up his hand to quiet them. "Hear me out. There's not many settlers near us, and this past few months folks were working so hard they gave us no mind. Now that winter's coming, people are not so busy. Somebody might get curious about three men here and cause us some trouble. We're the only able-bodied men between sixteen and sixty left within fifty miles."

George's worries of the morning had been spoken out loud by his father. "It's not fair. We left Tennessee to get away from that."

"We might as well have stayed home," Sarah complained.

"This is our home now," Papa said. "The war is all over the country. We can't escape it. And we can't pretend there is no danger."

Sarah and George looked at each other. Papa confirmed George's secret fears.

"Elwood met up with an old trapper yesterday," Papa continued. "The trapper said we've been lucky so far some soldiers haven't noticed us. He said the Confederates often raid across the Arkansas border for recruits."

"But we can hide you like on the trail," George said.

"It's different here. Then we were continually moving and always on guard. Here we are settled. People know we're here. We'd have to keep a twenty-four hour watch. We'd need two or three lookouts at each house."

George started to speak. "No, George," Papa continued. "It's impossible and not worth the risk. Because if we got caught, the army would be hard on the families."

Papa was silent for a few seconds to let the twins think about that. "Now Elwood and I think it best for us to leave for a spell until it's safer here."

"But when will that be?" George asked.

"When the war is over. But don't be so glum. I'll go to the Federal garrison at Fort Scott in Kansas and volunteer."

"But it's a sin to kill people," Sarah said.

"I didn't say I'd fight. I'd be a guard at the garrison. They might need a mountain man, a tracker, or a scout, or have some job where I wouldn't have to fight. At least I'd be with the Union, and only two hundred miles away."

"What about Uncle Elwood?" George asked.

"He plans to go to California or maybe just to the Rockies. There he can work, trap, or mine and save his earnings. When the war's over, he'll come back with a money stake. But I don't want to go that far away."

"Mama, what do you think?" George asked.

"Whatever it takes to keep him safe. After Elwood's news, I can't rest easy here a single day. I'll be fearing some soldiers will get Papa and force him to fight, or shoot him for not fighting."



“Yes, Twins,” Papa continued, “that’s the biggest risk. I could manage all right if they took me. I wouldn’t like it, but I’d survive.”

There was no other choice. “Just when everything seemed so good,” George complained.

“This was to be our Thanksgiving celebration,” Sarah moaned.

“And so it will be,” Papa said cheerfully. “I know how much you were looking forward to it. I won’t leave until the day after tomorrow. Elwood will leave next week. So quit the long faces. Moving here was a good move. It’ll just take a mite longer to get things like we want them, that’s all. Now, eat your suppers.”

That night up in the loft after Lillie and Harry were asleep, George pulled back the quilt that formed the partition between the boys’ and girls’ half of the space.

“You asleep, Sarah?” George whispered.

“No.”

“I’ve been thinking. With Papa gone for a year or maybe more, you know what that will mean, don’t you?”

“Yes. We’ll have to take his place.”

“Right.”

“Mama already has as much as she can do. Lillie is big enough to help her now. George, do you think you and me together can do what Papa does?”

“No, but we can do some. The rest’ll have to go.”

“We can plow and plant,” Sarah said.

“Sure. And we can feed the horses and pigs and milk the cow.”

“We can cut wood.”

“And fish and hunt. Not as good, but we can learn. Grandpa will help.”

“What can’t we do?” Sarah asked.

"Build another room on the cabin."

"That'll have to wait."

"Fight off Indians," George said.

"Oh, silly, there's no Indians here. But there may be robbers. Bad men may try to rob us."

"We can't do much about that," George admitted.

"We'd have to."

"I guess so. It's up to us."

Sarah thought for a minute. "Mama's good with a gun. She'll know what to do."

"Sure. We can do it with her here." George's face brightened.

"We better go to sleep. Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

Next morning, before light, Papa climbed to the loft, shook George and Sarah gently and whispered, "Don't wake Harry or Lillie, but get dressed. Come to the lean-to. I've got lots to tell you."

When the twins walked out in the half light of the cold November morning, their father was already there. He explained that after he was gone, it would be as dangerous as it was on the journey to have all their winter's food in one place. They walked to a natural clearing in the meadow down in the hollow. He told them how to dig a trench and line it with straw to store the root vegetables.

"Keep it hidden, be cautious, and don't leave any trail to it," he said.

The cured meat posed another problem. They needed to hide it in a place where the mice and wild animals couldn't get to it.

"For now," Papa said, "hang it in various places in the house and barn. Cover it or disguise it the best you can."

Then he took them to the barn. "The horses are the most

valuable. Without them we couldn't raise a crop. The armies need horses, so you must always keep them hidden good, and get rid of any signs like fresh manure or tracks. Hobble them in the woods, a different place each time. They can graze, but won't leave much sign."

To show them how, he took the team a quarter of a mile away. He put loose chains on their legs so they could move around, but couldn't run. "Let's leave them here today. Tonight we'll come get them."

Back at the barn he studied the problem of the sow and milk cow.

"Why don't we turn the sow loose?" Sarah suggested. "She can live on acorns."

"Yeah," George said, "and we could find her every so often and feed her corn so she'll stay gentle. Then when she has her pigs, we can see to them."

"That's a fine idea," Papa said. "I know now I've got real helpers here. Okay, turn her out."

Sarah opened the pen gate while George urged out the sow. Grunting and circling the pen, the sow ran to the open gate and fled, looking back at them as if she'd outwitted them.

"Now, what about the cow?" Papa asked.

"We could turn her out, too, and find her at night and morning to milk her," George said.

"She'd be hard to find that often," Sarah said.

"Put a bell on her," George suggested.

"Silly, that would lead the soldiers right to her."

"Uh, yes." George grinned. "We could build her a pen back in the woods. It wouldn't be quite so obvious as here at the barn."

Papa smiled. "That's probably the best answer. All right, now milk her and for today take her out in the woods and

turn her loose. We'll see how hard she is to find tonight. After you do that, look carefully in and around the barn. Shovel up any fresh manure from the animals. Just be concerned about the fresh stuff in the last few days. Put it in a pile and spread leaves on top. Erase all the tracks they've made in the dust."

At breakfast the family went over these and other plans and details for when Papa would be away.

"Hey, this is the day we celebrate Thanksgiving," Mama said. "Let's get ready for company."

Their cabin was small, but they pushed back furniture and used extra boards to enlarge the table. The fireplace and Dutch oven were steaming with aromas of roast turkey, potatoes, new baked bread, and onions.

Just before noon the grandparents' wagon pulled in. A few minutes later Uncle Elwood, Aunt Lucy, and their three children joined them. Each family brought steaming dishes which they added to the loaded table.

The children ran outside to play. The women chatted excitedly as they put the finishing touches to the meal. The men gathered outside near Grandpa's wagon.

Elwood spoke first. "We're in real danger. My neighbor down the creek warned me last night that some Confederate cavalymen crossed the border from Arkansas and are raiding the region. I think we should hide these teams and wagons."

"Good idea. I already hobbled my horses out in the woods," Papa said. "Elwood, you take yours north behind the barn through that gap. I'll take Grandpa's out into the heavy timber."

In three minutes the only sign of the wagons was the dust settling. Grandpa looked at the dusty road a second. Then, calling to George and Sarah, he told them to each cut a

branch. When the twins returned with their branches, followed by the younger children, Grandpa showed them how to blot out the tracks.

"You little'uns come here," he said. Catherine, Ray, and Willy joined them. "You can help, too. Girls, jump rope along here," he pointed to Uncle Elwood's route, "and, Harry, you boys run up and down here," he pointed to Papa's tracks. "That's the ticket. Fix it so's nobody suspects any teams and wagons pulled in here."

The children followed Grandpa's directions as if it were a new game he invented. In no time, not even an expert tracker could find any signs.

"Now children, come here," Grandpa called to them. "Do the same thing every time anyone uses your horses or drives a wagon on your place. Don't let anyone know we have horses. Keep them hidden and wipe out any tracks."

Remembering the weeks of caution on the trail to Missouri, George understood the danger. Sarah, Lillie, and Harry nodded that they knew, too.

Mama called out that dinner was ready. Followed by Grandpa, Sarah and the younger children trooped in noisily. Papa returned from hiding Grandpa's team.

"Elwood will be back in a few minutes," Papa said. "It'll take him longer to get back. Come on in, men," he said including George. "Let's start without him."

With that one gesture, George realized his father no longer considered him a child. He and Sarah now had adult responsibilities. Both glad and sad, he sat beside Sarah at the long improvised table.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS

Grandpa paused before saying the blessing. The whole family around the table closed their eyes and bowed their heads.

George felt guilty that he couldn't concentrate on the prayer. He was thinking about the pilgrims and what it must have been like for them. Were they afraid that the Indians might raid them at their dinner? Then he smiled as he remembered that the Indians were friendly. The Pilgrims were grateful for their help and invited them to dinner. Of course they didn't worry about Indians raiding them.

"Thank you, oh Lord, for your bounty and this happy day of Thanksgiving," Grandpa began his blessing.

Though not listening to Grandpa's words, George was surprised that apparently Sarah wasn't listening either, for she kicked him under the table. With his head still bent down, he glanced sideways at her, his brows lowered. No one ever interrupted Grandpa's prayers. She motioned toward the door. Then he heard a sound outside like a horseshoe striking a rock. He lifted his head. The others didn't seem to hear it, as they were nodding along with Grandpa's words.

George heard a click, like a gun being cocked. He must be imagining things. But Sarah's upright head was directed toward the door showing that she, too, heard it. Then she scrunched down. George heard another sound like a foot-step. He glanced quickly around the table. Everyone was there. With his head still bowed, he turned it toward Sarah,

frowned, and shook his head.

“Be quiet,” his frown seemed to say.

“Someone’s outside,” she whispered.

Sarah eased off the bench. Bent over, she crept toward the back door. George could barely see her as she was hidden behind the family members seated on their side of the table. Mama’s eyes were still closed.

With his head still bowed, George watched Sarah, expecting Mama to scold her.

Sarah reached the end of the table. She and George looked up at the same time. Standing in the doorway were two dusty Confederate soldiers each holding a rifle, one pointed at Papa, the other at Grandpa. They stood there quietly with satisfied grins on their faces. Behind the two were other soldiers, some beginning to surround the house.

George gave a quick motion for Sarah to run. He scooted over on the bench to fill the empty space as Sarah darted out the back door.

Through the window George saw her run toward the barn. He guessed she was going there to warn Uncle Elwood. Since he went north of the barn to hide the wagons, she could keep out of sight by the barn and give the warning call.

Before Sarah reached the barn, a soldier came around the house. She squatted behind a pile of wood. Heart thumping, George held his breath. The soldier didn’t see her. When he walked slowly back to the front of the house, Sarah ran behind the barn.

Meanwhile Grandpa concluded his long blessing. “Dear God, You have brought us to this beautiful land through enemies who would have injured us or taken us captive. You have led us to a place of peace and promise. Bless us and guide us and keep us. Amen.”

“Amen,” echoed every voice at the table except George’s.

He was looking out the back window. He didn't see Sarah.

"Now ain't that a touching scene, Lieutenant?" a deep voice said.

Taken by surprise, everyone looked up and upsetting chairs stood up with varying cries of fear and surprise.

"It just about breaks my heart, Sergeant," a dusty Confederate officer answered. George saw grim determined eyes looking through the sights of his rifle pointed at his father.

Elwood's oldest boy, Ray, began to whimper. Lillie gave one gasp. Catherine caught her breath. The other children were too terrified to move. Grandma made a sound like a strangled, "Oh!" Mama took a step toward Papa.

With complete composure, quickly regained after his initial surprise, Papa put out his hand toward Mama and said, "It's all right, Aldeah, we've got company. Set a couple more plates, Grandma."

Papa turned to the lieutenant, ignoring the rifle pointed at him. "Lieutenant, won't you and the sergeant join my family in our dinner? We'll send some out to your men, too. Lucy," he turned to his sister-in-law, "would you be so good as to fix each of the soldiers outside a plate? I'm sure they are hungry and thirsty after their long ride."

The women moved mechanically to do what he asked. Grandma made room for two more places at the table.

Papa continued, "Please, Lieutenant, do join us. Sit down everyone. We have guests."

When no one moved, he looked at George and said more sternly, "Sit down."

George sat down and pulled Ray down beside him. The other children followed his example. George shook his head at Catherine. With tears in her eyes, Catherine was looking out the window toward the barn. He knew she was worried about her father. When he caught Catherine's eyes, he shook



it again very slightly. Catherine dropped her eyes.

However, George couldn't keep from sneaking a glance out the window. He saw Sarah darting inside the barn. His stomach cramped. Forcing his attention from Sarah, he stared at the officers and their rifles. This was like the meeting house in Tennessee, though now he was inside facing the intruders, not outside looking in and Sarah wasn't beside him. The lieutenant and sergeant didn't move, their guns still aimed at Papa and Grandpa.

In a natural voice, as if being threatened with a gun in his house was an everyday happening, Papa continued talking. "It's fortunate you came today, Lieutenant. Just recently my family and I decided, being as the crops are in and I've got the place fixed up since we moved in from Tennessee, that I should now join the army. Didn't we, George?"

The soft call of a bob white warning of soldiers came from the barn. Papa's eyes flicked to Sarah's empty place beside George.

"Eh, George?"

"Sure, Papa. That's right," George managed to say. His father was smarter than those men in Tennessee. He'd fool them. Then to help out his father's act, he added. "You're planning to leave tomorrow, and you told me and Sa —" He heard the second call of the bob white. He cocked his head toward the barn. Papa nodded. George continued, "And you told me and Mama what to do about the crops and getting wood and stuff."

Mama agreed, "That's right. He said as how the young'uns and I are all fixed up here now, and since his old father is nearby to help us, that he felt it was his duty to join the army. It is providential that you came."

George understood his father's tactics. He intended to welcome the soldiers and make them think the family really

was glad they came. George no longer feared the lieutenant would shoot his father, and Sarah had just warned his uncle with her bob white call. He, Papa, Mama, and Sarah could outwit these soldiers.

"Well, now, ain't that a coincidence? Here's the army, ready for you to join," the sergeant jeered.

"Yes, Sergeant. It's very convenient. I'll change my plans and go with you today instead of leaving tomorrow. But come, let us eat first. Did you ever see such food?"

By this time the women had several plates heaped with food for the soldiers outside.

"How many plates do we need, Lieutenant?" Mama asked.

The lieutenant had not moved since he first entered. He did not answer her, but looked at the sergeant. "Go see what the men have found."

At that moment a soldier's voice from outside commanded, "Stop! Where're you going?"

Sarah's voice answered timidly, "I'm going to the house. I went to the barn to get an egg for my grandmother."

The lieutenant stiffened and asked Papa, "Who's that?"

"Oh, that's my daughter, Sarah." He motioned to Sarah's empty plate. "Grandma likes to put an egg in the coffee grounds, so Sarah went hunting for one."

A soldier pushed Sarah roughly through the back door.

"Thanks, Sarah," Papa said, "I see you got Grandma's egg."

Sarah gave the egg to Grandma.

"That's all right, soldier. The girl's harmless," the lieutenant said.

Sarah slipped onto the bench beside George. Under the table, he grabbed her trembling hand. His was sweaty.

Still pointing his rifle at Papa, the lieutenant asked the

soldier, "Did you find anyone else?"

"No, sir. Everybody's in here. No horses or stock nor any recent sign of any, except a few hens. There's lots of meat in the lean-to out here. I reckon they butchered everything in the past few days."

"That's right, Lieutenant." Papa said pleasantly. "Didn't have feed to winter them, and the women and young'uns couldn't handle them alone. Traded our horses for supplies they'd need while I was away. Butchered the rest of the stock. C'mon, Lieutenant, eat up and give your men a treat. After we eat, I'll get my gear and join you."

Papa's relaxed manner eased the tension. People started eating. The lieutenant gave permission for the soldiers to eat. He sat down himself, keeping the sergeant on guard inside and one soldier outside.

During the meal Papa kept the conversation going.

"It's really quite lucky you came by. I was worried about how I'd get to the army through the Union lines, and I didn't know where to find you. You coming in so sudden-like startled us. If we seemed frightened, it was because we're not used to strangers and guns. Here, have some more turkey. My boy here and me, we shot it yesterday."

As he chatted, he ate and passed food, even putting an extra helping of potatoes on Harry's plate.

"My father wants to join up with me," he continued, "but I convinced him he'd be a hindrance. His other son is gone now. This is his wife." He motioned to Lucy. He's almost sixty-five and has a bad heart. But if you'll take him, he'd be delighted. Make him feel young again, eh, Pa?"

Grandpa nodded.

The lieutenant looked up at Grandpa and shook his head. "Can't use you."

Grandpa lowered his head.

Papa continued as naturally as if he were chatting with a neighbor who dropped in. "Yes, you're probably right. He'd slow us down. Here, have another helping of gravy. That's my wife's specialty. She cuts up some giblets to put in. And you haven't eaten until you taste her dressing. She put some black walnuts in it this year. It's purely delicious. Aldeah, why don't you fix up a basket of things we can take with us? I'm sure the lieutenant and his men would appreciate it around supper time." Papa smiled at the sergeant.

Papa talked on, answered with a few grunt-like words from the lieutenant who ate several helpings of everything.

After Papa finished eating, he started collecting his clothes, hunting knife, gun, and other gear. Since everything was in the one room, the lieutenant watched every movement. Papa had the lieutenant so at ease that even when he lifted his gun down from the pegs stuck between the logs in the wall, the lieutenant only casually looked to see if it was loaded. He did, however, take and keep Papa's leather bag full of ammunition.

George knew his father was in a hurry to leave. Out in the woods was his brother. A skilled woodsman, Uncle Elwood might have seen or heard the soldiers even before Sarah's warning. But the longer the soldiers stayed in the area, the more the danger. Papa was caught. George knew he would make the best of it. Having convinced the soldiers he was anxious to go, they wouldn't harm him.

Papa kissed Harry and Lillie goodbye and shook hands with his father. "Sorry you can't go, old man, but see after them."

"I will."

He held Mama close for a minute, whispering something quickly in her ear. He then said out loud, "Well, woman, it's all yours now. Make the young'uns mind." Mama hugged

him until he pulled away.

He kissed his mother and said goodbye to Lucy and her children. He turned last to the twins. He spoke slowly and distinctly looking hard at first Sarah and then George. The twins were standing close together.

“Now Twins, remember all the things I told you to do to help your mother. You can especially help her if you do a lot of hunting. Hunting is good in the meadow in the hollow where we were this morning. Male deer sometimes are found at the rock in the big sink hole in the timber on the south end, so you might check there if you run short on supplies. Always keep on the lookout for quail and turkeys.”

He paused and started to leave. Turning back, speaking even more slowly he said, “And Sarah, don’t be backward about offering blessings next year at this time when the night bird sings, if, God willing, all six are together.”

Then including George again he said, “See to it, now, and remember.”

“Yes Papa, we will.”

Papa shook hands with George and as he hugged Sarah, he whispered, “Well done, my little bob white.”

With that he turned to the lieutenant. “I’m ready, sir. Let’s go.”

The soldiers went to their horses. When the lieutenant was astride his horse, he spoke to his sergeant. “Get some of that meat hanging in the lean-to to feed the glorious Army of the Confederacy.”

“Yes, sir, Lieutenant.” The sergeant smiled and motioned two soldiers to follow him. They returned with five big joints of ham meat.

George noticed Papa’s look of relief that they didn’t take more. There was still enough left to winter the family. Papa mounted the pack horse held for him. Flanked by a soldier

on each side, he galloped with the detail down the dusty road. At the bend he turned to wave.

The Pattersons stood out in the cold air by the cabin without moving, even after the horses were out of sight. Aunt Lucy kept looking back north behind the barn where her husband would come from hiding his horses. Her wild-eyed boys and Catherine hung on to her. Harry and Lillie clung to their mother's skirt, while Grandpa stood perfectly still, straight, and determined-looking. George thought that Grandma suddenly looked ten years older.

Grandpa was the first to speak. "Sarah, give the all clear signal. You deserve to do it. Your quick thinking probably saved the lives of your uncle and your father. The soldiers believed your pa's story, but if two military age men had been here, he couldn't have told a believable story. They'd have killed them both, and me, too, more'n likely."

Sarah gave the whippoorwill call three times. The group entered the house where their ruined Thanksgiving dinner awaited them. Lillie, Harry, and Willy started crying. At the sight of the table and the reminder of what they planned for and what actually happened, George wanted to cry, also. But he held back his tears. His father had given him and Sarah adult responsibility.

Ever since Papa walked out of the house, surrounded by soldiers, Mama had remained dry-eyed. She stood tall and addressed the children. "Now stop that crying. Hush, Harry. Hush, Lillie. We need to understand what's happened and figure out what we've got to do." She picked up Harry and put him on her lap. Everyone in the room waited for her to continue.

"Oh, I was so proud of you all. How brave you children were! Sarah saved us, but so did each of you by going along with Papa. Caught unawares, Sterling did the only thing

possible to save us. My, wasn't he grand?"

"Quickest thinking man I ever seen," Grandpa bragged. Aunt Lucy was so thankful she couldn't speak. She only nodded her head vigorously and hugged Willy to her. Catherine and Ray stood close to her.

"What will happen to Papa?" George asked.

"When he kissed me goodbye he whispered 'I'll get away, but don't worry if you don't hear from me.'"

"He'll get away," Sarah said.

"Yes, I'm sure he will," Mama agreed, "but my guess is he won't come back here, for this would be the first place they'd look. It'd be too dangerous for all of us. Don't worry about him. The soldiers won't shoot him, for he's convinced them he is one of them. He can take care of himself. He'll be a model soldier until he finds a way to escape and get to the Union Army. We must resign ourselves that we will have to do without him until the war's over."

Just then Uncle Elwood entered. Everyone surrounded him, hugging, kissing, and talking all at once.

"Whoa, here," Uncle Elwood said. "Don't all talk at once."

The women and Grandpa, with the children interrupting frequently, took turns telling him what happened. Elwood shook his head in amazement.

"Sterling did the best thing possible."

When Grandpa asked Sarah to tell her story, she spoke confidently. When she got to the part where she warned her uncle, she said to him, "I didn't know if you knew what the bob white call meant or even if you could hear it."

"I did." Uncle Elwood said, "I'd finished hiding the team and was fixing to come back to the house when I heard it. I hadn't noticed the soldiers before, but after your call, I spotted them. I hid and waited. It seemed a long time. Every

single member of my family was in the house with armed Confederate soldiers, and us all Union supporters. I didn't dare get too close lest the soldiers would see me, yet I couldn't get out of earshot. If they killed you all and burned the house, I couldn't have done a thing. I didn't even have my gun with me. I tell you, Sarah, that whippoorwill call for all clear was the sweetest sound I ever heard." He looked around the cabin as if amazed it was still standing. "I better leave these hills quick."

"Right away," Grandpa said.

Mama agreed. "We all must move quickly. Elwood and Grandpa, you better all go home and hide your animals and food. Oh, how lucky Sterling and the twins did that this morning. The soldiers didn't find anything except the hams."

"You're right," Uncle Elwood said. "I won't take time to eat now. I'll get the wagon."

Though they said nothing about it, George knew they wouldn't see his father or Uncle Elwood again for a long time. Yesterday Papa had treated him as a man. After today, he had to be one. He and Sarah were no longer children.



## CHAPTER 10

### PAPA'S MESSAGE

After everyone had left, Mama sat at the table cluttered with remnants from the meal. In spite of their fear, everyone except Mama and Aunt Lucy had eaten. Most of the dishes were empty. The table was a mess. The area around the fireplace was strewn with pans and skillets crusted with dried-on food. The big kettle hanging over the fire was scorched.

The four children sat at the table. Now that the danger was over, Sarah couldn't stop the tears that were dropping off her cheeks. Harry pressed himself flat against his mother on one side, Lillie on the other. George trembled, waiting for their mother to lead them out of this disastrous day.

The day seemed to George to be the end of the world. Sarah couldn't use another bear story to free Papa this time. He knew that Lillie and Harry were still frightened and too little to be much help. It was up to Mama and Sarah and him. But Harry, now six years old, showed he understood when he said, "Papa'll be gone for a real long time, won't he?"

Slowly Mama began to speak. "Yes, Harry, he will." She paused before continuing. "We got up this morning expecting today to be one of the happiest of our lives. One of great thanksgiving, being grateful we were all together and that we were well and prospering here. The day didn't turn out as we expected. You'll find out, children, that in life things often do not turn out as planned. But if you look at today in another way, it still can be a day of great thanksgiving."

The children looked at her. "How can that be?" Lillie

asked, brushing aside her tears.

Mama continued, "Think what could have happened – what probably would have happened – if Sarah hadn't acted so quickly. Or if Papa hadn't handled the soldiers like he did. And if we hadn't followed Papa's lead. Or if this morning you twins hadn't hidden the horses and stock. Or even if Uncle Elwood hadn't hidden his wagon exactly when he did."

Lillie said, "The soldiers would have got everything."

"That's right," Mama said. "Now the way I see it, what happened today was a warning for what's in store for us. This warning cost us your father —" When George gasped, she added, "but just temporarily, son, just for a time. Remember that. He's all right and he'll be back. You can count on that. Can't we?"

"Yes, Mama," George forced himself to say. "Papa can take care of himself."

"Good." Mama continued. "Now, you know he was planning to leave anyway. What happened today just changed his plans. Caused him to leave a bit earlier and made him take a detour down into Arkansas first. But he'll be all right."

"He wouldn't want us worrying about him," George said, his gloomy mood lifting with his mother's clear thinking.

"No, he wouldn't. I bet right now he's congratulating himself on how well he handled everything. I bet he is proud as he can be of all of us for our parts in preventing a complete massacre. He's probably studying his captors to see how he can slip away. He'll wait until they get far enough away from here that the soldiers won't come back looking for him."

"What's a massacre," Harry asked.

"Everybody getting killed," Sarah said quietly. "I bet Papa really fools the soldiers. He'll get away."

"Course he will," Mama said. "Now, besides Papa being

gone, what else did today cost us? Only five hams! That won't hurt us much. We have plenty. And Papa will help eat those hams, anyway. Besides, there's still some hams, shoulder meat, and sides of bacon left. We'll make out this winter if we can save what's left."

"Me and Sarah can catch enough rabbits to make that up," George said. "The old sow's going to have more pigs soon, anyway."

"Right. Now, children, our big family dinner with all the fun you'd been looking forward to so much was ruined. But that doesn't count for too much in the long run, if we can all of us come through it. That includes Grandpa and Grandma and Uncle Elwood's family."

"There will always be another Thanksgiving," Sarah admitted.

"I knew you'd see it as it really is." Mama smiled as she continued. "Now, we all must get busy right away. Lillie, I want you to see what you can do about clearing up the mess on the table. Harry, from now on, you're Lillie's partner just as the twins are partners. You help Lillie all you can. Lillie, be patient with him, and he'll be a good help."

"I'll try, Ma," Lillie said.

"Me too," Harry piped in.

"We're going to divide the work," Mama said. "I'll oversee everything inside and out, but the way we'll work it is that the twins will take care of the farm and Lillie and Harry the house. Of course, we'll all lend a hand wherever we can, but that is your special responsibility."

Harry puffed out his chest. The twins looked at each other and nodded. Lillie stood up, grabbed Harry's hand and said, "We're big now. We'll help."

"Good," Mama said. "Lillie and Harry, you start on the dishes. Do what you can with them, and I'll be with you as

soon as I can, but I must help the twins first.”

As Lillie and Harry scraped the plates, the twins jumped up to get their coats, expecting to go outside. But Mama had other ideas.

“No,” she said, “we’ll get to the chores a bit later. They can wait. There’s something much more important. First, Twins, go find a slate.”

George looked at her as if she’d gone crazy. Lessons? When their future was at stake?

“Go on, one of you, get a slate.” There was no mistaking Mama’s tone. Sarah climbed into the loft, got her school slate, and returned to the table.

“Now, twins, try to remember exactly what Papa said to you just before he left. Sarah, I want you to write it down. He told us something that he didn’t want the soldiers to understand. He glanced at me as he said it, sort of begging me to listen and remember. Now what did he say?”

“He just said for us to help you and go hunting,” George said.

“It didn’t sound like him,” Sarah said. “Especially what he said to me at the last about asking blessings.”

“Let’s remember his exact words if we can before we forget,” Mama said. “If we can’t remember, then one of you can run over to Grandpa’s to see if he or Grandma can remember.”

For fifteen minutes the three of them tried to remember the words as Sarah wrote them down. Several times she’d erase a word or phrase as one or the other of them disagreed. When they had it as well as they could remember, Sarah read it out loud.

“Remember all the things I told you to help Mama. You can really help her if you hunt a lot. There’s good hunting in the hollow meadow. Deer sometimes are seen at the rock in

the big hole in the trees on the south. Check there if you need supplies. And look out for quail and turkeys.”

Lillie said, “I remember he said ‘male deer’ instead of just ‘deer.’ I thought that was funny. I never heard anyone say ‘male deer’ before.”

“That’s right, he did,” George exclaimed and Sarah wrote it in. “That must mean something. Anything else you can remember, Lillie, or Harry?”

Harry was no longer the baby. Twice today, his family showed that. Mama made him Lillie’s partner and now big brother George asked his advice. “Well,” Harry began, “he didn’t just say a big hole. He said something like a ‘seek’ hole. What’s a seek hole, Mama?”

They discussed it awhile, but none of them could figure out what Papa meant. “We’ll write down ‘seek hole’ for now, Sarah,” Mama said. “Now read it back. I think we’ve got it.”

Sarah read, “Remember all the things I told you to help Mama. You can really help her if you hunt a lot. There’s good hunting in the hollow meadow. Male deer sometimes are seen at the rock in the big seek hole in the trees on the south. Check there if you need supplies. And look out for quail and turkeys.”

“That’s it,” George said.

“I think what he said to me at the end was important, too,” Sarah said.

“Okay,” Mama said. “Write it down.”

When they agreed on the wording, Sarah read it back.

“Sarah, don’t be backward about offering blessings next year at this time when the bird sings if, God willing, all five are together.”

“Harry, do you remember anything else?” Mama asked.

Once again Harry remembered a detail. “He said ‘six’ instead of ‘five.’ When all six are together.”

"There's only five of us now, silly," George said. "Why would he say 'six'?"

"He said 'six'," Harry insisted.

"That makes no sense," George said.

"He probably didn't think about him not here, being so used to there being six of us," Mama said. "He meant 'five,' I'm sure. Leave it 'five,' Sarah. Lillie, what about you? Anything else?"

"He didn't just say 'bird,'" Lillie said. "He said some kind of bird."

"Yes!" Sarah remembered. "He said night bird."

They studied the message to figure out what Papa meant. Sarah summed up their conclusions. "Papa wants George and me to go hunting to help with the supplies."

"Does that mean food supplies?" George asked. When everyone nodded, he asked, "then why didn't he say food, instead of supplies? Why did he mention deer and quail and turkeys specifically and not say rabbits. Sarah and I catch lots of rabbits in our rabbit gums. Rabbits or squirrels would be the game we can easily catch. And fishing? He didn't even mention fishing. Sarah and I catch lots of fish and frogs."

"Yes," Mama said. "That's how you twins could help supplement the food supplies."

Sarah studied the message. "Saying the hollow meadow doesn't make any sense at all. Too close to the house for deer."

"Yeah," George said, "deer much prefer the bigger meadow down on the creek. And why look out for quail?"

"If we did get one, it'd probably be blown to bits. And one little quail wouldn't have enough meat even for Harry," Sarah added.

The last part of Papa's message about Sarah offering blessings was the hardest to figure out. Only Sarah

considered that part of the message important.

"Papa said that to cover up what he said first," Mama decided, "so the soldiers wouldn't suspect he was tricking them. It would be natural for a father to ask his daughter to pray for the family while he was gone."

"But why did he talk about the bird? Why did he say 'six'?" Sarah asked.

"He said 'five.'" George said.

"Six," Harry said stubbornly.

"And why did Papa ask me? I never give the blessing."

They couldn't understand why Papa made a point of saying such foolish things.

Finally, Mama said, "Let's put it up for now. We'll study on it."

"The whole thing is a mystery to me," George said.

"A mystery for Pioneer Partners to solve," Sarah said intrigued with the idea.

Mama read it over again to herself. "It means something, I'm sure, but I don't think there's any urgency to it, but it is bound to be important. Now Twins, get outside. As quickly as you can, take care of the meat and vegetables in the lean-to and see about better and more permanent hiding places for the stock and horses. There's just about enough time this afternoon to find places to hide the joints of meat before you do the chores. If you need help, let me know. I'll help Lillie in here."

## CHAPTER 11

### PREPARING FOR THE WORST

As expected, Uncle Elwood left soon. He stayed long enough to secure the stock and hide their valuables, all the while keeping a careful lookout to avoid another surprise visit. Then one night he left, traveling the rough ridge land of the Ozark hills to Kansas on his way west. There was no word from him, but no one expected any.

The first two weeks of December were busy ones. The pleasant weather, though cold, allowed the family to work outside all the daylight hours of the short winter days.

Lillie and Harry ran over to Grandpa's a couple of times, and he stopped by to check on Mama and the children. Since Mama had the twins, Grandpa helped Lucy and her children with their heavier work.

Hiding the meat and preparing the new safe place in the meadow for the root vegetables was harder than George thought. It took him and Sarah two weeks to hide the food and erase all traces.

The sow running loose worked fine, though George worried about her. It was about time for her pigs to be born. The horses weren't getting enough exercise, being hobbled all the time and not being worked in this winter season. The cow was obstinate and often wouldn't let anyone catch her to milk her. She even ignored the dog. Mama said they needed to figure out a better plan.

Meanwhile the two younger children learned to keep house, to cook, to dust, and clean. Working as a team, they



made the beds each day, stripping the feather beds and fluffing them up each morning. Washing and drying dishes, though tedious work, was no problem for them.

They carried in wood and kept the fire going. They made several trips a day to the spring for water. Since the bucket filled with water was heavy, they carried it between them.

They had another very important job. They were the lookouts, so the family wouldn't be surprised again. Mama and the twins discussed the problem at great length. The twins' work was away from the house most of the time. Since Mama was everywhere at once, she couldn't keep a continual lookout. It was up to Lillie and Harry.

Anyone approaching their place had to branch off onto their ridge trail from the main road that lead to the little village of Oak Grove. Behind their house on the edge of the clearing was the barn – then nothing but miles of wilderness. The only foot paths in the forest were the two the children made leading to Grandpa's and to Uncle Elwood's.

The ridge trail ended at their house. The direction to watch for strangers was down the trail toward the Oak Grove Road. That was the way they drove the wagons to reach the turn-offs to Grandpa's and Uncle Elwood's – the route the soldiers came and left.

The children in the house would be the first to hear or see anyone coming.

It was decided that Lillie and Harry needed to learn the bird calls. After supper the twins practiced with them until they could imitate a turkey hen, a bob white, whippoorwill, or owl almost as well as the twins. Mama learned to give the calls, also.

"I'm worried about Lillie and Harry being alone in the house if someone did come," Mama said. "They might not have time to run out, and in any case they would surely be seen."

All the hiding places seemed too obvious. Anyone would look under the beds and behind the clothes hanging on pegs along the walls.

“What about a hiding place under the floor,” Mama asked.

Since there were no sawmills to cut the logs into boards, Papa had cut down whole twelve-inch logs which he split lengthwise. The split gave a flat side, which he smoothed down with a broad axe. Laid side by side the logs made a satisfactory floor, especially after Mama chinked the cracks and put rag rugs on the worst places.

Sarah searched the floor until she found a loose log. She and George pried it up. They sawed out a small section the children could lift that was large enough for them to squeeze through to the ground below. Once under the house, they could put the log back in place. Mama whittled out a narrow place so Lillie could stick her hand through from underneath to pull the rug back over it.

The plan worked. The stone foundation under the house hid them. Followed by the twins, Mama walked around the house looking for a spot in the back where the stones would be easy to remove.

“We don’t want them trapped there,” she said.

“This is fun,” Harry said as he crawled through the hole.”

“It’s not any game,” nine-year-old Lillie said. “Don’t you remember all the times soldiers stopped us on our trip here from Tennessee?”

Mama drilled the children, rehearsing what they should do in the event of a surprise visit when alone in the house. The twins played the part of the bad men. Mama went behind the barn to see if she could hear their signal. Until they got it right, they practiced signaling, hiding, and escaping without the twins seeing them.

Next the family tackled the problem of a place to hide the animals. Chasing the animals all through the woods was wearing out the twins and taking too much of their time.

“If only there was a cave,” Sarah said.

“That’s it!” Mama said excitedly. “There’s bound to be one someplace. This country is full of caves.”

The family had been so busy since they arrived that they had no time for exploring. George hadn’t even been all over their own 480 acres. The land was heavily wooded and hilly except for the two natural meadows and the big creek bottom where Papa had cleared a small field.

“I bet if you follow the creek back up a ways, you’ll find something,” Mama said.

George was thrilled. This was a case for Pioneer Partners.

The next day he and Sarah went exploring. Just as Mama had hoped, the twins found a suitable place for an enclosure. In the bluff bordering the creek bottom land, they found, not a cave, but a big rock overhang which could protect the animals from the weather. George figured he and Sarah could build a rail fence to the creek. The stock would have water and enough grass for pasture.

“No one will find them here,” George said.

Sarah agreed. “We’ll come a different way each time so we won’t make a path.”

Building the fence took Mama and the twins until Christmas. Using the rock bluff for one side, they built rail fences to the creek. After cutting down trees, they split the logs, and laid the rails one on top of the other in a zigzag fashion to support themselves without nails. George figured that the steep bank and the rushing waters of the creek would be enough barrier on that side.

They built a smaller pen for the sow. Driving her into it

took them half a day. She wouldn't go in but ran back into the woods many times. Nipped from behind by the dog, and flanked by the twins, she finally went into the pen. The sight of the ears of corn Mama held up to her from the middle of the pen probably enticed her.

The next morning the sow was suckling twelve little piglets when the twins brought her feed.

"How about that?" Sarah rejoiced.

George let out a whoop as he and Sarah joined hands and danced around the pen. Their dance was cut short when Sarah tripped over a stump and fell into a tangle of briars. It was George's turn to laugh at her.

By the end of January the stock was safely secured and hidden. The twins planned the chores so they could do them quickly. During the middle of the day, they had some free time.

"Now for some learning," Mama said. "Out here in the wilderness there's no school closer than Oak Grove, and there probably won't be any until after the war."

She conducted classes each day. Harry learned to read, Lillie learned fractions, and the twins began on percentages and square roots. Mama unpacked the books she brought from Tennessee. They had a primer and a simple and advanced reader, a simple and a complete arithmetic book, a world history book, a geography book, and a speller.

Since they had no paper to use for their studies, George looked for some natural slate-like rocks which he could smooth out for each to write on. That way they didn't have to erase Sarah's slate with Papa's message written on it. Finding chalk was simple. There was plenty of chalky material along the bluff.

The days sped by. No strangers came to their place. Their grandparents and aunt and cousins were all managing as

well as they were. They visited often, and sometimes, the Patterson clan, hidden deep in the hills, almost forgot about the war.

Word from Uncle Elwood came to them through a trapper. He was safely in Kansas, working and waiting until spring to hire out on a wagon train to California or Oregon.

There was no word from Papa.

“He couldn’t get us a letter,” Mama said. “It’d be too risky to send word. He’ll let us know when he can. Remember, he is in enemy territory.” George knew she said that to keep them from worrying during the long weeks.

Sometimes the twins talked about Papa’s last words to them. As he instructed them to, they hunted. Getting quail was impossible for them, so they didn’t try. Though they stalked turkeys and gave the turkey hen call over and over, trying to entice a gobbler to come to them, they never got within shooting distance of one.

When they complained to Grandpa about their poor hunting, he said, “Turkeys have extremely good eyesight and hearing. You let the light hit your gun, and the turkey is gone. Turkey hunting takes a skilled hunter like your father. Besides that, the turkey’s mating season is in the spring. Gobblers ain’t interested in a hen’s call now!”

“Then why did Papa tell us to hunt turkeys?” Sarah wondered.

No matter how much they discussed it, they got no closer to a solution. So they did what they could do. They trapped rabbits in their homemade rabbit gums.

Each time the twins went to the hollow meadow they looked for deer sign. Not once did they see where deer had nibbled on trees or bushes. Though they searched the ground, they never saw the little piles of pellet-like manure that deer leave. Another mystery.

“Why did Papa tell us to hunt deer in this particular meadow?” George asked. They couldn’t figure that out.

Soon after Papa left with the Confederate soldiers, the twins looked for the hole on the south end of the meadow. They figured if they found the hole, they might understand what Papa meant. Did he mean a hole in the trees, like a woodpecker hole, or a hole in the ground surrounded by trees? Since they didn’t know what a “seek” hole was, they didn’t know what to look for. They didn’t find any holes in trees or in the ground. As for the rock that Papa mentioned, the woods were full of rocks, big rocks, small and middle-sized. Which one?

None of the other relatives could help them when Sarah read the message to them. Aunt Lucy said she hadn’t paid any attention at all to what Papa said to the twins. She was worried that at any moment the soldiers would see her husband.

Grandpa remembered what Papa said and agreed with the message as Sarah wrote it. He didn’t remember anything about the hole part except Papa mentioning a big hole. Grandma agreed with Harry. Papa did say something that started with “s” but she didn’t know what it was.

“It could be ‘seek’,” she said. “But that doesn’t make any sense.”

None of the relatives were any help. Grandpa said they were putting too much importance on the words.

“He wanted you twins to help your mother and hunting was a way you could do it,” he said.

Mama and her children didn’t agree. Papa had put too much emphasis to his words, saying them slowly as if he picked each word specially. What he said didn’t sound like him.

“It means something,” Sarah said.

George, Mama, and the smaller children agreed. However they studied only the part about hunting. They ignored what Papa said to Sarah at the end. They decided that it was only talk to fool the soldiers into thinking he was giving his children advice in his absence.

“It all means something,” Sarah insisted.

“But what?” George asked.

No one answered.

## CHAPTER 12

### THE TRIP TO OAK GROVE

#### February 1863

Mama had no money. Without money, the family couldn't get seed to put out a crop. They couldn't buy salt, soda, coffee, nails, horseshoes, and many other things they needed that the farm didn't provide.

Since they had moved to Missouri, Papa and Elwood had made only a couple of trips to the village of Oak Grove, where there was a store and mill. The men had driven Elwood's wagon, taking some crops and fur to trade for supplies for all the families. After his last trip, Papa had put the gold coins he had left with his cache from selling his Tennessee farm. He told Mama and the twins that there was enough to buy their spring supplies, though he still didn't tell them where he hid it.

After the soldiers left with Papa, in their hurry to get their belongings safe, Mama and the twins didn't worry much about the money. They wouldn't need it until spring. George figured they would run across it before then.

During the last days of February, George could almost feel the ground warming up, preparing itself for the growing season. The thousands of naked trees covering the hills showed no signs of leafing out, but sap oozed from the hard maples in the creek hollow. A few birds not seen all winter appeared.

For a couple of days the twins watched northbound



Canada geese fly overhead in an almost continual series of v-shaped waves led by one gander

"It's time to think about the spring planting," Mama said one evening when the children finished their lessons.

"Sarah and me can hitch up the horses and plow the field and the garden," George said. "We helped Papa last year. We're bigger now. We can do it."

"Yes, I'm sure you can. Grandpa will help you get started. Then he's got his to do and help Lucy with hers. With all of us helping, we can get the crops in."

"George and me will start tomorrow to break the ground," Sarah said.

"Yeah," George agreed. "Then we can disk and plant as soon as the weather's right."

Mama wasn't as enthusiastic as the twins. "But we don't have money to buy the seed. And we're almost out of flour, salt and other supplies." She held up a list of a dozen necessities.

"Where could Papa have hidden the money?" George asked.

"We've searched the house, even between the logs and under the floor," Sarah said.

"Yeah, and the barn," George said.

"It just isn't here." Sarah shook her head. "Papa hid it someplace else, where no one could find it."

"But it has to be on the farm," George said, "if we can just find it."

George was about to cry. Seeing her trembling lip, he knew Sarah was too. He thought that after all they'd accomplished, they might fail now without the money.

"Why didn't he tell us where he hid it?" Sarah asked.

"Yes, why didn't he? He knew how important the money was," George said.

"I'm sure he intended to tell us," Mama said, "but he didn't have a chance."

"Yeah," George said, "the soldiers came."

"It's like a treasure hunt," Lillie said.

"Naw, this is no game," Sarah said. "It's whether we can stay here or not."

"But we're looking for our treasure. Doesn't that make it a treasure hunt?" Lillie insisted.

"For a treasure hunt you must have a map or some coded message to figure out like I used to read about in those books in our schoolhouse back in Tennessee," Sarah said.

"That's it!" George almost screamed. "That's what Papa's message is about. Don't you see? He knew we didn't know his hiding place, so he tried to tell us."

"His message was a code?" Lillie asked.

"Yes. Oh, yes! See," George said. In his excitement, he jumped up, his words tumbling out. "He did tell us where he hid it. He told it in a sort of code so the soldiers wouldn't know what he was saying. He knew Sarah and I would hunt for game anyway, so he didn't have to tell us that, but knowing we'd need the money, he told us to help Mama by hunting for our supplies."

"For the money!" Sarah said, hugging George.

"Yes, the money. George has it," Mama said. She, too, hugged George. "Papa meant hunt for the money so we could buy our supplies. How could I have not figured this out earlier?"

"The talk about hunting was to keep the soldiers from knowing what he really was saying," Sarah said. "George, you're a good detective to figure that out."

"Me and Harry are too," Lillie said.

"Yes, of course," Mama said. "Quick, Sarah, get the slate."

Though they knew the words by heart, they crowded around to read the message with new understanding.

"You can really help her if you hunt a lot," Mama read.

"Hunt for the money he hid?" Lillie asked.

"That's bound to be what he meant. Now see what comes next? 'There's good hunting in the hollow meadow,'" Mama read.

"That's where the money is!" George exclaimed. "That's why he said that particular hollow! What's next?"

"Male deer are seen at the rock in the big seek hole in the trees on the south. Check there if you need supplies," Mama read.

"But we couldn't find any hole!" Sarah said. "The money is in a seek hole. We don't even know what that is. There's thousands of rocks. The whole woods at that end is just a big rock pile."

"And the part that says look out for quail and turkeys still doesn't make sense," George said.

"No, it doesn't," Mama agreed. "But we'll just have to look again for a hole of some kind. At least he said on the south. I'm sure this means the south end of the meadow. We'll all go tomorrow and look again."

When they studied the message, Sarah reread the part about the blessings. "If the other is a code," Sarah said, "this part must be in code, too."

"Naw," George said. He wished she'd let up on that part, though he knew she wouldn't. She was stubborn enough to keep worrying about it.

Before they could start searching the next day, Grandpa dropped by. He suggested they take advantage of the good weather to make the trip to Oak Grove right away.

"But we haven't found the money," George said.

"What good will going to town do if we can't buy

anything we need?" Sarah asked.

That was a big problem. "Perhaps I can get your supplies on credit using your team as collateral," Grandpa suggested.

"What's collateral?" Harry asked.

"The storekeeper and I will each sign a paper that if Mama doesn't pay him the money by a certain time, he'll take the team and sell it to get his money," Grandpa explained.

Harry's face showed he still did not understand, but George did. "If we don't find the money, we'll lose our team," he explained. "Having the supplies won't help us without the team. We couldn't raise a crop, or a garden."

"We couldn't live here without the team," Sarah said.

"That's right," Grandpa said, "But there's nothing we can do but try. I think we can get the supplies now. You'll still have a few weeks to find the money and pay the storekeeper. George and Sarah, I need you two to come with me. Let's get everything ready for an early start tomorrow."

After Grandpa left, Mama and the twins hunted for the money that afternoon as long as they could. They found no hole of any kind in the south end of the meadow.

"Maybe the key is in the word 'seek,' or whatever it is," George said. "That may be a kind of hole they have in this country, and Papa thought we knew about it."

"Yes," Mama said. "When you get to the store, ask the storekeeper if he knows what it means."

Mama checked over her list. They would take sacks of corn and wheat to be ground into meal and flour. Besides seed, she had listed salt, baking powder, soda, coffee, spices, sugar, medicines, horseshoes, nails, gun powder and lead, thread, and some dress goods for the girls.

"What about me and George?" Harry asked looking down at his tattered clothes. "We need shirts and pants."

"I'll cut down Papa's clothes for you boys," Mama said.

That was a sensible way of saving money, but it frightened George. It sounded to him as if Mama didn't expect Papa to need his clothes anymore. If he came back, he'd need them. If . . . if meant that he might not. George put that thought out of his mind. When Papa came back he could get new clothes. For now, George and Harry needed them.

Mama figured up how much that order might come to. "If the order is not too much, you twins get some shoes. We'll have to go back to pay for the supplies anyway when we find the money, and we'll get Harry and Lillie shoes then. Be careful what you spend this time."

This was the first time the twins ever did the trading for their family.

"Mama's letting us decide," Sarah said to George.

"Yeah." George said. "Scary."

Early next morning, Mama woke the twins. She told Sarah to wear some of George's clothes. Pinning Sarah's braids on top of her head, she put George's extra cap over them.

"Now mind you, don't take that cap off," she said.

George was amazed. Girls never wore boy's clothes.

"It's too dangerous for a girl to be on the road with all the bad men roaming the country," Mama explained. "Sarah has to make the trip, as Elwood's boys aren't old enough. They can't help like she can."

"Why wear George's clothes?" Sarah asked.

Mama continued, "You are almost a woman. There aren't many women here yet. Out in the wilds with only a boy and an old man with you, some men might take you and hurt you bad, or even take you away with them. It's best you be a boy."

"Oh!" was all she said.

The night before they left, Grandpa had brought over his

and Lucy's grain. He had their corn and wheat to be ground into meal for them and feed for their stock. He and the twins attached the canvas top and loaded the wagon for leaving early. When he walked over the next morning and saw Sarah in boy's clothing, he nodded his understanding and approval.

The twins exchanged looks. As religious as Grandpa was, George expected him to throw a fit seeing Sarah in trousers. Since he approved, he knew that Sarah must stay dressed like a boy until they returned.

George eyed her.

"What'cha think?" Sarah asked. "I don't feel like myself."

"Looks like I have a twin brother now. I like the way you look."

Sarah danced about, moving her legs. "These trousers feel funny brushing against my legs. Loose, not like stockings." She whirled around. "I like it. I feel free."

George laughed.

The smaller children and Mama waved them off. Grandpa drove the team and wagon down the ridge trail to begin the trip to the mill and store at Oak Grove, the only trading center for miles. They would not return for three days.

Reaching Oak Grove safely just before dark, they camped along the stream bed behind the tall wooden mill. Two other wagons were already camped there.

The twins stared at everything. Compared to their town in Tennessee and some of the larger towns they drove through on their way to Missouri, this place was pitifully small. But for more than a year, they had not been out of their own area. To see so many other people and a dozen houses, a blacksmith shop, store, mill, school, and church all together was exciting.

Though exhausted from the long day, George was in no

mood for bed. "Let's join the men," he suggested to Sarah.

As they crept up to Grandpa and the other men talking by the fire, Sarah giggled.

"What's so funny?" George asked.

"I just remembered I am a boy, so I can join the men, instead of having to stay in the wagon the way women are supposed to do."

One old man was talking as the twins crept up beside Grandpa. "The Confederates are getting beat everywhere on this side of the Mississippi. The fighting is fierce in the East, but Missouri and northern Arkansas are now all in Union hands."

"Yes," another said. "There ain't been a Confederate patrol in these parts since December. They've all pulled down farther south where there's fighting."

"Then the roads are safe now?" Grandpa asked.

"Not likely," the old man said. "Safe from Confederates, maybe, but there's outlaws running wild. They're worse than the soldiers."

"There's no law in these here parts to stop 'em," the other added. "Just us old boys the army won't have. And young'uns like your two lads here. That's all the menfolk left. So these outlaws do what they want."

"Any down south where I live?" Grandpa asked.

"They's one bad'un called Alf Bolin," the old-timer said. "Oh, he's a mean 'un. He runs down that-a-way sometimes. Watch out for him and his gang. The Union Army's been after him fer quite a spell now, but growing up in these woods, he can always hide out. Seems this here feller kills Union soldiers on sight and families of Union soldiers. He's a mean 'un."

"He don't care if they're men or babies. He kills 'em all," the other agreed.

The men told some gory tales of his doings, such as killing an old man who was crossing a creek as he carried a sack of cornmeal to some of his neighbors. Then as the old man fell into the creek, and the current carried the body down, Bolin emptied his gun into the floating body until it got out of range.

“He’s had his way all through this country, knowing there ain’t nobody to stand up to him. He goes into houses, stealing anything he wants. If there are children there, he sometimes puts them agin the wall and him and his gang throw knives all around them seeing how clost they can get.”

Grandpa looked at the twins who were listening to every word. He changed the subject. The men talked of the weather, the war, and when things might get back to normal. They all had faith that they had settled in a good area, or it would be good when the war was over.

During a short pause Sarah asked, “What is a seek hole?”

Since neither of the twins had said a word so far, the men looked at her in surprise.

“A seek hole? Well now, sonny, I never heerd tell of a seek hole. Did you, Homer?” the older man asked his companion.

“Not that I recollect, and I was one of the first to settle in here after the government opened it up. I’ve been here forty years. Likely you mean a sink hole?”

“Yes,” George said excitedly.

“That must be it,” Sarah said. “A sink hole. What’s that?”

“Well, in these here hills,” Homer said, “under the ground it’s all limestone. Water eats out holes in it after thousands and thousands of years. That makes all these here caves you see along the rivers and creeks. Well, sonny, sometimes the cave top gets so weak it falls in. That leaves a big sink-like formation on top of the ground.”



George began to understand why they couldn't find any hole. "How big can they be?" he asked.

"Some sink holes are covered with trees and as big as this whole town," Homer said. "Some are small, just deep holes in the ground, sort of like a well. A piece of ground falls in and the underground part leads straight down. Most of the openings are covered by rocks, bushes, or fallen logs.

"Are there many sink holes around here?" George asked.

"Lots of 'em," the old-timer said. "It's a common thing. I'm surprised you ain't seen any. I bet you got one or two on your place."

"I bet we do," George agreed.

The twins crept back to their wagon. "Are we detectives or what?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah. Another piece of the mystery solved," George said happily.

"Now we know what to look for," Sarah said.

"Yes," George answered, very pleased with their new knowledge. "We'll find the money now for sure."

## CHAPTER 13

### ALF BOLIN

The twins and Grandpa were busy the next day. The first thing was to get in line at the mill to get their grain ground. When their turn came, they didn't have to pay anything, for the miller kept a portion of their grain to pay for the grinding. It was noon before they got their sacks back in the wagon, this time filled with soft, yellow cornmeal and off-white powdery flour. Beside those sacks of their own food, they stacked the sacks of bran and shorts for the hogs.

While Grandpa was busy at the mill, the twins explored the village. They looked at everything in the general store, examined the supplies they would need, and figured up the costs.

The storekeeper's children told them more tales of the outlaw, Alf Bolin.

"He killed a twelve-year-old boy crossing a fence with a sack of corn to feed his hogs," the girl said.

"And he shot two Union soldiers in the back while they were home on leave," the boy added. His eyes were wide open as he looked around as if expecting to see the outlaw appear around the corner.

"Everyone's scared of him," the girl said.

When Grandpa joined the twins to do their trading they told him what they had heard.

"The town's full of stories," he said. He paused a few seconds. "George, how many guns does your mother have?"

"Just one 'cause Papa took his."

“You best buy another. That way there’ll be one at the house. And, Twins, at home when any of you go outside, even to the barn, always take one.”

It took Grandpa a long time to get the supplies for each of the families and to keep the cost within the amount of money they had. When he came to Mama’s list, he took the storekeeper outside to show him the team.

The twins watched them from a distance. Mr. Harvey seemed unwilling at first to give any credit. When he finally agreed, Grandpa frowned as if he was unhappy about it. He haggled with the merchant for some time and finally nodded. The men signed the paper which Mr. Harvey put in his strong box.

The twins selected their supplies. Since they bought the gun, they decided not to get shoes this trip.

By three o’clock they were loaded and ready to leave. For company and protection on the road, they drove behind the old-timer who had camped near them at the mill. The two wagons traveled five miles before stopping for the night.

Before going to bed, Grandpa said to the twins. “I didn’t want to say nothing in town, but I fear I made a bad deal with Mr. Harvey.”

“He gave us the credit, didn’t he?” George asked. He was puzzled by Grandpa’s manner, for they got all of their supplies.

“Yes, he did, but because of the war and the outlaws, he wouldn’t give us any credit on the horses. Too risky. He said Alf Bolin or someone like him might steal the team even before we got home, or the army might find them and take them. Then he would be out everything.”

“But we’d pay him anyway,” Sarah said.

“Yes, we know that, but he doesn’t. We’re newcomers here. The paper in his strong box that I signed gives your

Pa's farm as collateral."

"A mortgage?" George said horrified.

"Yes, that's what it amounts to. If your mother cannot pay him back by next fall, he will take the farm." Grandpa seemed very old as he sat by the twins, his head bowed over.

"Oh, no!" George cried.

"You shouldn't have done that," Sarah said.

Grandpa said nothing for a few seconds. "I had no choice. None of us has any money. You'll lose the farm anyway without these supplies. I'm sure that your father would want us to do whatever we can to hang on until he gets back, wouldn't he?" Grandpa put his arm around Sarah.

"Yes, I guess you had to do it."

"The money is there somewhere on the farm," Grandpa said. "You'll find it. Otherwise, I wouldn't have agreed."

The twins then told him about their new knowledge of sink holes. "Don't worry," George said. "I know we'll find the money. Papa told us where and now we've got his message all figured out."

The next morning their fellow traveler turned off about two miles down the road. Grandpa and the twins had half of their journey to go on alone.

As he drove the team, Grandpa showed the twins how to operate the new gun. It wasn't a flintlock gun like their old one, it had the new percussion cap lock. Mr. Harvey said it was the newest improvement in guns. They could load and shoot it faster.

George and Sarah loaded the gun, held it, and sighted it, but did not shoot to avoid attracting any notice. Sarah held Grandpa's gun as she sat beside him on the wagon seat. Beside her George practiced handling the new gun.

"Keep your eyes peeled," Grandpa warned them.

The wagon lumbered on. George aimed the new gun at

an imaginary enemy and pretended he hit a murderous outlaw. "No one's going to bother us or steal our year's supplies," he bragged.

They hadn't met anyone on the Oak Grove Road since the old-timer left them. When they turned on the less traveled ridge trail that led to the three Patterson farms, some of the lines disappeared from Grandpa's face.

George heard a noise. Metal striking a rock behind them!

Grandpa's actions showed he heard it too. He tightened his hold on the reins and abruptly turned the team off the trail into the woods.

The wagon jolted as the wheels hit the rocky, rough ground. Tree branches ripped against the canvas, tearing a hole. The motion was so sudden that George was thrown off the seat onto the sacks of flour behind him, his gun clattering onto the floor of the wagon bed.

"Be quiet," Grandpa hissed. More branches scraped the wagon bed as the team plowed deeper into the woods.

"You and George run on home. I'll hide the wagon," Grandpa whispered to Sarah. "There's horses following us."

Before George had time to right himself in the back of the wagon, Sarah crawled over the sacks to him.

"Some riders turned in behind us from the south," she whispered. "Grandpa will hide the wagon. When he stops we are to run home."

George nodded.

The three farms were located one beside the other up the twisting ridge trail. Their place was last, being the only cabin situated right on the trail. The other cabins were back in the woods with paths leading to them. Without looking carefully, riders could miss the turns to the other two cabins, just as the Confederate soldiers had done at their Thanksgiving celebration.

The wagon bumped to a stop in a low hidden area. Grandpa picked up his gun, crawled down from his seat, and quickly began unhitching the horses. "I'll take the team deeper into the woods and stay with them to keep them quiet," he said. "Even if the riders find the wagon, they might not find the horses. Safer this way. Hurry now and warn everyone. George, take your gun."

The twins raced through the pathless woods to Aunt Lucy's house. Her place was nearest. The Patterson children had cut secret walking paths between the houses, so that cutting through the woods from one to the other was shorter than following the high ridge trail which sometimes swung to the south. By using the footpaths hidden by the dense forest, even on foot, the twins could reach their home quicker than riders on the ridge.

With their lungs almost bursting, they came to Aunt Lucy's cabin. George gave the turkey hen call meaning someone's coming, to alert Aunt Lucy. Sarah also gave the owl's hoot meaning danger.

Aunt Lucy hurried out to them, Catherine, Ray, and Willy right beside her.

"Rider . . . ridge trail," George gasped. "Grandpa okay . . . hid wagon."

"Run on," Aunt Lucy said. "Warn your mother."

"What about Grandma?" Sarah panted. The cabins were not in a straight line. After Aunt Lucy's there were two paths, one going directly to the twin's cabin and the other going north to Grandma's.

"I'm here," Grandma said. She was slower coming out than Aunt Lucy.

George was glad. He wanted to get home.

Aunt Lucy said, "You young'uns head on home. The riders probably won't turn off the trail to us, but they'll

surely go to your place.”

That was exactly what George was thinking. Since he could hear the riders on the trail, laughing and talking, making no effort to be quiet, he knew they hadn’t spotted Grandpa.

“They’re outlaws for sure,” Sarah said. “Soldiers wouldn’t act that way.”

George agreed. He knew that any settler who came by would warn the people they were friendly by calling out, “Hello the house.” The sounds from the trail told George that the riders had passed both turnoffs.

“C’mon, Sarah.” George pulled her with him as they ran along the path to their cabin. His knees were weak and he could scarcely breathe. He had to stop, doubling over to relieve the pain in his side. After getting their breaths, they paused at the edge of the clearing to their house.

Lillie was carrying a load of wood. George gave the warning calls over and over. Lillie stopped, glanced quickly in the twin’s direction, dropped her wood and raced to the house.

The riders were almost there. “What’ll we do?” Sarah asked.

“You stay here,” George said, pushing her behind a bush. “You keep the gun and if this is Alf Bolin’s gang they’ll more likely harm you than me. Even if you’re dressed as a boy, they’d know. I’ll go to the house.”

“No, George!” Sarah tried to grab his arm. “Are you crazy?”

George ran across the clearing.

He didn’t know what Sarah could do by herself, but he knew that one of them must stay hidden. Her location was good as she could see the front of the house and most of the barnyard. Her gun was loaded. If things went bad, she would be ready. But one girl against a gang of ruthless outlaws the

Union Army couldn't catch? George didn't let himself think about that. He had to get to the cabin. When he reached the cabin wall, he crouched down.

Five riders came around the bend out of the woods just as George reached the back of the cabin. His heart skipped a beat. Such evil looking men! Each had a long knife in his belt. The sun glistened on them when they rode into the open clearing. From the brightness of the blades George knew they were kept sharp.

Each rider had a rifle in a leather case strapped to the saddle. They all wore hand guns in holsters on their belts. The guns were in plain view. Most Ozark men carried guns with them but not so brazenly obvious.

The leader was the meanest-looking man George had ever seen. His splotched and almost purple face was bordered by a long filthy beard. His hair streaked out from under a dirty felt hat that was pulled down over his forehead.

His eyes were the worst of all. George trembled just seeing them. They shone out from under the hat brim with hatred. As the outlaw's stare darted rapidly around the cabin, it seemed to pause for an instant where George crouched. He never before felt such terror. Though he didn't pay much attention to Grandpa's talk of the devil, this man could surely pass for that evil one.

The man rode his horse with a confident, carefree, and fearless manner as if he were master of all he saw. The other men of his gang were almost as cocky.

They walked their horses, leisurely now, though the lather on the animals showed that they had been ridden hard. The men laughed coarsely. Ignoring the dog that howled at the noisy intruders, the gang pulled in when they saw the peaceful cabin, smoke curling lazily out of the stone chimney.



Oh, Mama and the kids can't hide, George thought. The smoke shows someone's there.

George then realized his own danger. While the men were dismounting in front of the house, George pulled out the loose stones in the foundation they had prepared for emergencies such as this, crawled under the cabin, and then replaced the stones.

"George!" Lillie cried and flung herself on her brother.

"Sh-h-h," George said. At first he was frightened to find someone there. Then he realized that his warning call was in time for Lillie to hide.

"Where's Harry?" George whispered.

Lillie pointed up. "Mama thought it would seem more natural if Harry stayed." Lillie showed him the gun she held.

George understood Mama's tactics. The men would surely notice the children's clothing and other things. With no children there, they would get suspicious. Also Mama would be safer without a gun inside. Outside in the hands of the twins, it might be of some use.

"Does Mama know I'm here at the house?" George whispered.

Lillie shook her head. "We thought you were hiding in the woods."

"Sarah is."

George started to let Mama know he was there, when he heard Mama put the heavy wooden bolt across the door. George and Lillie could hear everything above them.

"Stay close to me, Harry." Mama's voice was clear. "Now be a big boy. Don't say anything. If they hurt me, don't try to stop them. If I tell you to, run out and hide. Don't try to find the twins. They'll see you and come to you. Hide someplace and stay very quiet. Can you do that?"

George didn't hear Harry answer. He guessed his little

brother was too frightened to speak. George could picture him hanging on to Mama's long shirt.

"I'm depending on you, Harry," Mama said. "Remember how Papa handled the soldiers? We'll try the same thing."

The space under the house was so low that George and Lillie had to slither on their stomachs to move. Motioning Lillie to stay by the escape rocks at the back of the cabin, George crawled to the front where he could see through the spaces between the rocks of the foundation.

The leader and two other men sauntered slowly to the door, looking in every direction. One man stayed with the horses, while the fifth man walked to the back of the house, cradling his gun in his arms. He looked in the barn and all around before positioning himself at the back door. The man with the horses casually pulled out his bag of tobacco and rolled a cigarette.

Mama and the children were surrounded.

George watched the leader stride to the door carelessly, as if he knew there were only women and children inside. He held his rifle in his hands as did his two companions.

The leader kicked at the door. It didn't open.

"Open up in there," he ordered.

"I'm coming!" Mama said out loud. Then she whispered to Harry, "Be brave."

George held his breath as he heard Mama's footstep cross the floor to the door. He crawled to the corner where the split logs of the floor above didn't quite meet. He could hear and see into the main room. Through the cracks in the stone foundation he could also see the yard and where Sarah lay hidden.

## CHAPTER 14

### THE OUTLAW'S VISIT

George could hear clearly and followed the action above him. Mama removed the bar and opened the door. The leader pushed her aside roughly and strode into the room followed by his two men.

"Huh!" he said disgustedly. He walked around the room poking in corners, opening boxes and pulling out drawers, their contents thumping on the floor. He upset the bed and shook the quilts, even dragging off all the clothes from the pegs on the wall. He merely grunted disgustedly at each place. One of the men crawled up to the loft and searched the beds and clothing up there.

"Lookee here," he called down, "a side of bacon."

"Good," the leader said. "Anything else up there?"

"Naw, Alf, just some beds and kid stuff."

Though George already suspected that this was the feared outlaw, Alf Bolin, now he knew. He trembled.

"Not a thing down here, neither." Alf swore, then shouted to the man at the back door, "Hey, Lem, find anything?"

"Nothing but a half used shoulder joint and a few lousy taters in this shed. No horses or stock or any sign."

Alf swore again. "They ain't even got no gun, and their cornmeal is 'bout gone. Poor as Job's turkey. How do these people live? The Union Army's got it all. This is the poorest country they is, I reckon."

Bolin thumped about the room some more. "No sign of

any man about. Woman,” he said abruptly turning to Ma, “where’s your man at?”

“With the Confederate Army down in Arkansas.” For the first time George was glad his father was with the southern forces. The stories he heard at the store all said that Alf Bolin’s hatred was for the Union. His usual victims were Union people.

“Well, woman,” Bolin said, “you’ve got some food. Fix us some vittles. We ain’t et since morning. C’mon in, Jim,” he called to the man with the horses.

Bolin plopped down in Mama’s rocking chair. His boots scudded to the floor with two clumps. Pieces of caked mud fell through the cracks onto George and Lillie underneath. George even smelled his stinking feet.

Lem entered through the back door, dumping the shoulder of meat on the table. He and the other man sat on the benches at the table and shed their big coats. George figured they’d take the shoulder meat and the side they found in the loft. He was glad that they didn’t find the other joints he and Sarah had hidden in the barn.

“Well, woman! What you waiting for? Fix us some grub. Hey, kid,” he said gruffly to Harry, “your pappy been gone so long you’ve forgot what a man looks like? What’cha staring at? And get out from behind your mother’s skirt. Well, woman?”

“Sure, of course,” Mama said. “I’ll fix you something right quick. Here drink this coffee.” She poured out a cup for him. “Make yourself comfortable. Harry, get me some taters and onions.”

She put more wood on the fire and began fixing a meal. She banged pans. She walked around more than necessary, making as much noise as possible without the men noticing it. George figured she did that to cover the noise of Lillie getting

away.

George couldn't move from his spot. He was afraid he would make too much noise if he crawled over to the hole, but Lillie was right by it. In the half light under the house he made signs to Lillie to get out and run to Sarah.

Lillie shook her head. She was too frightened to go alone. George's insistent motions convinced her. Expertly, from her many practice sessions, Lillie removed the rocks, slipped out with the gun, replaced the rocks, and stood.

One of the men stepped out the front door and walked toward the horses. An owl's warning call came from the edge of the woods. Sarah! Lillie fell behind the woodpile just as the man reached his horse. He got something from the saddlebags and sauntered back to the house, lighting up his pipe.

Lillie lay still. Her brown dress blended in with the wood, so that she was somewhat camouflaged, but if the man looked, he would see her. George held his breath.

The outlaw didn't look. He went back into the house.

Sarah gave the whippoorwill all clear call. Lillie ran behind the barn. George knew that Sarah would find her. Lillie was safe.

Mama and Harry would also know Lillie was safe from hearing Sarah's calls, but Mama didn't walk to the window or pause in her dinner preparations. Harry stayed as close to her as he could.

George was getting stiff in his cramped position on the dusty ground under the house. Mama wasn't making as much noise now, for she obviously didn't know that George was under the house. There was still enough activity above that George decided he could reach the escape hole without attracting the outlaws' attention. Carefully he pivoted around and slithered on his stomach to the opening. He bruised

himself on the rocks, once drawing blood when he put his hand on the sharp end of a sapling stump Papa had cut to make room for the cabin.

Even in his anxiety, he worried about getting his clothes so dirty. He was grinding in dirt with every movement. Poor Lillie and Harry. They did the washing.

George was not as skillful in getting out as Lillie was. Carefully and slowly, he removed the rocks. As he squeezed out, he heard Sarah's whippoorwill call. Knowing she was watching gave him more confidence. He slipped out and replaced the rocks.

He remembered Mama telling the kids in the practice drills when they didn't want to replace the rocks, "Put them back very carefully. If anything is the least bit out of place, the bad men will notice it and go looking for you."

How right Mama was.

Outside, George crouched in the comparative safety of the back wall where there was no window. The whippoorwill all clear call came again. Before he ran, he heard Mama talking to Harry inside.

"Now, Harry, run to the spring and get us a fresh pail of water. Since that big log fell over the path to the spring, you best take the long way."

Harry started to object. "But, Ma, there's —"

"Run now, hurry and help me," Mama ordered as she scooted him out the door.

Please, Harry, do as Mama says, George prayed. Though Harry didn't understand Mama's reasons, George did. The long way to the spring meant going by the path to Aunt Lucy's. Where Sarah and Lillie were.

Harry started down the usual path to the spring. The men in the house paid no attention to him as he left. When Harry reached the timber line, he stopped, turned abruptly,

and ran. Darting a swift glance back at the house to see if the men were watching him, he slowed down and entered the woods right where Sarah crouched.

Good, George thought.

Then, bending over to make himself less conspicuous, George ran as Lillie had done, first to the woodpile. When Sarah's all-clear call came, he darted behind the barn. He circled around in the woods to the girls and Harry.

"George," Sarah scolded him, though by hugging him, she showed how glad she was to see him back. "What on earth did you think you could do, running to the house like that? That was a crazy thing to do."

"I know. I wasn't thinking, I guess. Mama is doing all right. It is Alf Bolin."

"You sure?" Sarah asked.

"Yes. One of the men called him Alf."

Sarah's voice was strained. "Tell us, Harry. What's going on in the house?"

"Ain't nothing going on," Harry said. "Mama is fixing dinner and the men are just laying around."

"It sounded like they tore the house apart," George said.

"Yes, they messed it up, but they didn't find nothing."

Harry acted very brave now that he was with the twins and everyone was asking him questions.

"Didn't they suspect something with you coming this way to the spring?" George asked.

"Naw. They don't know nothing. Mama's too smart for them. She told me to come this-a-way because there was a log on the other path. There ain't no log on the other path. She said that so I'd come straight to you. And George, I figured that out all my myself, 'cause I'm a detective."

"Yes, you are."

George gave Lillie the bucket to get the water while the

twins quizzed Harry.

When it was time to go back, Harry lost most of his bravery. "I'm scared to go back. One of you go."

"We can't do that," George said. "Those men would know there are others out here hiding. No telling what Bolin would do if he knew we were fooling him."

"Listen, Harry, this is the reason Mama didn't let you hide with Lillie," Sarah said. "She needed you to take messages to us. Be a big boy and go on back."

"We're depending on you now, buddy," George said. "You're a detective and you're the only one that can do this job. Don't do anything to make the outlaws suspect you."

"And don't even tell Mama, 'cause they'll hear you," Sarah added.

"But she'll want to know," Harry objected.

He was right, the others agreed. They needed to think of some way of letting Mama know they are all right.

"Let's hurry up. They'll wonder why Harry is taking so long," Sarah said.

"I know," George said. "Harry, tell Mama that the long way around was fine. She'll know. Now repeat it, Harry." They had him say it until he memorized it, and then sent him back.

He struggled with the full bucket. Water splashed on his pants leg and shoes, but he managed to get to the door without spilling much. The children saw Mama open the door for him and take his bucket. Before she closed the door, and without looking in their direction, she made a waving motion toward them as she put her arm around Harry.

Many minutes passed, perhaps more than an hour. The worried children didn't know what to do. They were cold sitting still. The sun was about to set.

"What do you suppose they're doing?" Lillie asked.



“Eating, more than likely,” Sarah said.

Finally they saw Harry running out again with the bucket. He came straight to the twins this time.

The four children discussed what to do, finally agreeing that George should remain there. Sarah could take Lillie to the safety of Aunt Lucy’s. Then Sarah should try to find Grandpa. Just as the girls were ready to leave, Grandpa crept up.

“Grandpa,” Harry blurted out. “Alf Bolin is in our house!”

“I know, sonny. I’ve been watching the house, but I didn’t see the twins. When you came out with your bucket, I spotted them.” He turned to the twins. “The wagon and team are safe.”

Grandpa agreed that Sarah should take Lillie to Aunt Lucy’s. He would stay with George. They had three loaded guns, though they didn’t know what they could do. At least they would be ready to help Mama and Harry if possible. They would stay close by.

George and Grandpa settled down for a long wait as Harry carried the water back to the cabin. Sarah and Lillie ran down the darkening path to Aunt Lucy’s cabin.

In no time, it seemed to George, Sarah was back with some quilts.

“I couldn’t stay there,” Sarah said. “After I told them what’s going on here, I came back.”

“Nothing’s going on,” George reported. “Harry said they were sleeping.”

“I figure they will want your Mama to feed ‘em again when they wake up,” Grandpa said. “They may stay all night, or they may take off.”

The February night turned colder. George shared a quilt with Sarah as they waited.

About nine o'clock the outlaws stepped out of the house. They seemed content. They stretched, pulled their heavy coats around them, and mounted their horses. More quietly than they came in, they rode back down the trail, never stopping. The sounds of the hoof beats dimmed, and were lost when they turned north on the Oak Grove Road.

## CHAPTER 15

### THE HIDDEN MONEY

#### Springtime

The rest of the winter passed without incident. The three Patterson families were careful and kept constant watch for Alf Bolin's return, or any other trouble makers. They saw only one another and an occasional harmless traveler on the Oak Grove Road.

Their confidence renewed by the supplies, the families made plans for spring plowing when the weather permitted it. They soon fell back into a routine which lulled them into thinking the worst was over.

Explaining to Mama what a sink hole was, the twins wanted to search for the money again. But before they could, the heaviest snow of the winter fell, keeping them close to the cabin for over a week.

The twins had much to tell the others. Harry and Lillie never tired of hearing about Alf Bolin, now that they had almost become his victims.

Though Mama was upset about having to mortgage the farm, she knew Grandpa did the best he could. They had until fall to find the money. "We'll find it, or find some other way to pay back Mr. Harvey," she told the twins.

"I wish we knew how to trap," George said. "This winter Sarah and me could trap enough to pay it out."

"Yes, I know. Papa and Elwood intended to trap all winter. But we'll find another way," Mama said.

Mama and the twins discussed the new meaning to Papa's message since they learned that a sink hole was a caved-in basin. They realized that the sink Papa meant could be a big one, so big they had not even realized it was there.

Or, maybe the sink was a deep narrow one, like a well, with a rock covering the hole. They were sure that they'd have noticed the sink if it was open because they looked so carefully for any kind of hole. Perhaps the reason they didn't find it was because it was covered.

Papa said a big sink hole, but not a big rock. They decided they would turn over rocks which were big enough to cover a hole. The rock couldn't be too big or Papa couldn't move it. They were anxious for the snow to melt so they could search again.

Lillie was listening to their discussion. On the table was Sarah's slate. Lillie read it through again for the hundredth time.

"What is a male deer?" she asked. "A male cow is a bull. A male chicken is a rooster. What is a male deer?"

"A buck," George answered not paying much attention to her.

"Bucks sometimes are seen at the rock in the big sink —" Lillie was reading Papa's message when Sarah interrupted her.

"Wait! Lillie, you found another clue in the mystery," she exclaimed. "Bucks. Dollars! George, he did mean the money!"

"Of course," George said. "He didn't mean deer at all. Dollars are seen at the rock in the big sink. That's for sure where it is!"

"Maybe the part about quail and turkeys means something else, too," Sarah suggested. "Look out for quail and turkeys. What else does quail mean?"

“Just common old bob whites,” George said.

Almost together the twins and Mama said, “Soldiers!”

“Our warning signal for soldiers is the bob white call,” George said.

“Look out for soldiers! And turkeys in the message could be our signal for someone coming,” Sarah said. “He meant for us to be always on guard for soldiers and strangers. He means don’t let anyone see us!”

Proud of themselves, they reread the message. Mama said, “It makes sense now. He said for you to hunt for the money to help me out. The money is at the rock in the big sink hole in the trees on the south end of the hollow meadow. We are to go there if we need the money to get supplies. And we must watch out for soldiers and other strangers.”

“Now all we’ve got to do is find the right rock,” George said.

Sarah was studying the last sentence of Papa’s message, the one that Mama and George ignored. The one about the night bird.

“What is a night bird,” she asked.

“You’re not still harping on that, are you?” George asked.

Sarah ignored him. “Mama, what’s a night bird?”

“One that feeds and sings at night,” Mama said. Then she looked straight at Sarah.

“Like a whippoorwill?” Sarah asked.

“Exactly!” Mama said.

Even George was impressed. “Our all-clear signal?”

“Why not,” Sarah said. “When the whippoorwill sings, or when everything is all right again, if we are together I am to ask the blessing.”

“So what? He wouldn’t make a code of that,” George said.

“No, I guess not,” Sarah admitted, though the pout of her

mouth showed that she was more convinced than before that this part of the message was also important in some way.

“Now we must find the money,” Mama said.

Sarah nodded. “Finding the money is more important. The rest of the mystery can wait.”

Even before the snow melted, the twins tramped to the hollow meadow to see about the overall lay of the land. Looking at the shape of the land as a whole, they saw a big basin-like formation beginning at the timber line of the natural clearing. They tramped around the “rim,” which was level with the meadow, and noticed how the ground slopped gradually down into a sort of flat interior. It was an almost perfect circle, but so large they hadn’t noticed it in the hilly and rocky country. If the ground had been completely bare, they might have seen it, but the tree cover hid the shape of the ground from unobserving eyes.

“There’s a big sink hole, all right,” George said, knowing they were still a long way from finding the money, because the area was about five hundred yards across. There were still hundreds of rocks to look under. But their search narrowed.

The twins studied the area, looking for something that might guide them to the right spot, but decided they must wait. The snow cover hid the rocks.

When the snow melted, Mama and all four children came to the sink determined to hunt all day, or more if necessary, until they found the money. Mama studied the sink formation just as the twins had done. She suggested they divide up the area among the five of them. Then each could step off the area, looking under any rocks big enough to cover a hole, yet small enough to move. It became an almost impossible job, for there were so many rocks. They worked all morning without finding anything.

Lillie and Harry had already given up looking when George cried out, "Hey, everybody. Come here!"

He was standing by a medium-sized rock too heavy for him to move, but probably not too heavy for Papa.

"Look!" he pointed to a narrow strip of rawhide leather circling over the top of the rock and disappearing under it. It was hardly noticeable from the vines and twigs around it.

"That's got to be it!" Mama exclaimed. "What sharp eyes you have, George!" Together she and George, using a fallen tree branch as a lever, pried the rock over gently, exposing a jagged, rock-lined hole going straight down into the ground.

Another piece of rawhide was attached to the one circling the rock. Sarah pulled it up as George and Mama held the rock steady. If they let the branch go, the rock would roll back over the hole. At the end of about three feet of the leather strap, hanging down in the hole, Sarah found a leather pouch.

"Here it is!" she cried as she untied it from the hanging strap.

"A deep sink hole inside a big sink," Mama said. "Isn't that something?" She and George let the rock roll back in place.

The children crowded around while Mama counted the five-dollar gold pieces that were in the bag.

"There are twenty here," she said happily. "One hundred dollars! Our bill at the store is only forty. We've got enough left for another year!"

Mama put the gold back in the pouch, tied it just as before, pried up the rock and put it back on the leather strap circling the rock. The children stared at her.

Is she crazy? George wondered. After all this trouble to find it, and she puts it back where it was?

"Ma," Sarah exclaimed, "what . . . ."

"Can you think of a better hiding place until we need it?" she asked. "After we get our planting done, we'll come back and get out enough money to pay our bill at the store and get all you children new shoes."

"Yippee!" Harry shouted.

"We're good detectives," George bragged, "We've solved the case."

Mama was smiling.

"Not all of it," Sarah said.

"Aw, Sarah," George said, "you and your imagination. We found Papa's gold."

Sarah didn't argue but she said quietly, "The rest of the message is still a mystery to me."

The next trip to Oak Grove that spring was a happy one. This time they had the money, and they were not fearful on the road. Alf Bolin had been caught and killed. That news reached even the isolated Pattersons. Sarah didn't wear George's trousers.

They heard that in the little towns of Ozark and Forsyth west of them there was dancing in the streets when the news of Bolin's death reached them. People had proof the news was true. The soldier who finally managed to trick Bolin and kill him, cut off Bolin's head, bringing it through the country to the federal officers in Springfield.

The little group on Patterson Creek did not dance when they heard the news, but they rejoiced. They had lived in fear of a return visit. Things were better now.

The war continued far away to the south and east of the Missouri border where the twins lived. The people in the Ozarks were not involved as much as they were earlier. If the men were home, life would be almost normal again. The Pattersons relaxed their watch and worked without fear.

The crops were doing well. The garden was growing. The



little pigs would soon be big enough to butcher, and the cow had her calf. Mama said the whole family could make the next trip to the Oak Grove Store, since Aunt Lucy and Catherine offered to do their chores while they were gone.

Since this was an extra trip, taken especially to pay the merchant for their spring supplies, Mama and the children made a holiday excursion of it. Grandpa went with them. He thought they should have a man along as there still might be riffraff along the way.

At Oak Grove Store, Mama settled her business before dark, even fitting the four children and herself with good sturdy shoes. George strutted in front of Sarah in his first real man boots – like those Papa and Grandpa wore.

Mama bought a few more supplies, including six yards of a blue calico print Sarah and Lillie admired to make them new dresses. She got some blue chambray to make shirts for the boys, and yards of unbleached muslin to make underwear and sleep wear for the entire family. The wonders of the day did not stop there. Mama bought each of them a stick of peppermint candy and a long roll of licorice.

Excited about the day's happenings and their new things, they returned to their camp behind the mill. Grandpa had visited with the men, and he told the family all the latest war news. The war in the east was swinging back and forth – first to the Confederate's advantage, then to the Union's. But in the West, the Union Army had control of most of the Mississippi River. The fighting in Missouri seemed to be over. The Union Army was in control over the entire state.

Some of the old men were happy for Union victories. Some with southern sympathies were not. But everyone was glad the fighting was far away from their homes.

Mama made friends with Mrs. Harvey, the storekeeper's wife, sharing talk about raising children and cooking. The

children soon found other children to play with. Harry held the spotlight while he told of his firsthand experience with Alf Bolin.

The Harvey children invited them into their house. George was amazed at the big house and fancy furniture, almost as good as the big houses of the wealthy landowners near his family's old home in Tennessee. He did not know such luxury could also exist on the Missouri frontier.

## CHAPTER 16

### THE LETTER

The Pattersons were at the store early the next morning to load up their purchases and drive back home. As they said goodbye to their new friends and drove off, the monthly stage from Springfield pulled in. Peering through the opening in the back of the wagon, Sarah and George saw the people get out of the stage. Until a curve in the road hid the village from sight, they watched the driver unload the freight.

The twins settled back contentedly for the long drive home. Suddenly they heard rapid hoof beats behind the wagon quickly catching up to them. Alarmed at first, George grabbed the gun. Then he recognized his new friend, the Harvey boy.

“Hey,” the rider hollered. “Wait! Hold up a minute! I’ve got a letter for you.”

He waved the letter above his head as his galloping horse caught up to the wagon. “It just came on the stage. My father said to catch up with you and give it to you. No telling when you’ll be back again.”

Grandpa pulled up. The twins crowded to the front, excited about getting a letter. Since they moved to Missouri, they hadn’t received a single one.

“Who’s it for?” Grandpa asked.

“Mrs. Sterling Patterson,” the boy read as he handed it up to Mama sitting beside Grandpa on the wagon seat.

George peeped over his mother’s shoulder and recognized the handwriting.

"It's from Papa!" he yelled.

"It is! It is! Oh, praise be! He's alive!" Mama hugged the letter.

"Where's it from?" George asked.

"Open it up!" Sarah said.

"What does he say?" Lillie asked.

Harry climbed in Mama's lap. Lillie squeezed between her and Grandpa. The twins hung over her to get a better look.

Grandpa thanked the boy, who rode back to town more slowly.

Mama opened the letter and found several pages covered on both sides with small handwriting.

"It's from Fort Scott in Kansas," she read, "written May fifteen. That was only a month ago!" She clasped the letter to her. "He did it! He escaped from the Confederates and got to the Union Army just as I said he would. Oh, praise be!"

"Read it, Mama," George urged.

Grandpa clicked to the team while she read Papa's letter aloud.

Fort Scott, Kansas  
May the 15th 1863

My dear wife and family,

I take this opportunity of writing to let you know that I am well. I trust you are also.

I worry about you left alone but I pray to God that you are all right. I know you, my dear wife, and you brave children, can keep going until this war is over and I can come home. I trust you found the "male deer" in the sink hole and that you've got

the spring planting done.

“We have, Papa,” Lillie said, as if he could hear her. Sarah made her hush.

I was proud of all of you at our Thanksgiving dinner when the soldiers came. You were so brave and the soldiers never suspected anything. They thought I was anxious to join up. They never knew Elwood was there. (After I got to Fort Scott I learned he came through in December, so I know he is well.)

The sergeant kept close watch on me as we rode down into Arkansas. I did whatever he ordered me to do and tried to show him how much I liked being in his patrol . . . .

“He’s a sly one, that he is,” Grandpa said proudly.

. . . After the second day when he seen I didn’t try to escape or even show signs of thinking about it, he eased up watching me. He gave me back my ammunition. Of course, I was studying them all the time. I didn’t want to escape then because if I did, they’d come back to our house and take all we had, probably killing Grandpa. So I bided my time.

We rode hard through northern Arkansas to join the main army. When we reached it, we had one skirmish. I volunteered to scout out the enemy position, so I missed the shooting. It didn’t amount to much.

Most of the time the army moved back and forth through central Arkansas. I asked to work

with the mess sergeant, for I figured that would keep me out of the fighting. Most soldiers hated that job. I told him I knew how to cook.

“Lands,” Mama exclaimed. “He’s never cooked a thing in his life!”

“Go on, Mama,” Sarah urged.

The mess sergeant took to me right off. After that I wasn’t with the men that captured me, so I knew that I could escape without anyone knowing where my home was. I didn’t try right away. I waited for a good opportunity. As long as the army was crossing Arkansas, I wasn’t worried, for I knew I could easily get into the Indian Territory, and from there make my way north to Kansas and a federal fort.

It was February before I saw my chance. The foot soldiers left at dawn and the cavalry an hour later with orders to surround a company of Union soldiers the scouts spotted north of us. The cook and supply wagons were ordered to march 12 miles west to set up camp. The others would meet us there at night.

We got to where we was ordered and set up camp. I figured on escaping before the army returned, but I had even better luck. A small federal patrol swung in from the north. We had only a few guards and they was soon taken. As soon as I seen what was happening, I ducked out. We were in open country, but there was a dry stream bed nearby I saw earlier. In the confusion I got to the stream and hid in the brush.

“He sure knows how to do that,” Grandpa said.

The Union soldiers soon captured all wagons and men and took them back north with them. I kept hidden until dark when the Union detachment left. I headed west, running all night. Toward morning I found an abandoned cabin where I slept a few hours.

“Why didn’t he join the Union army right then? Go to them and tell them who he was?” George asked.

“He might of got killed afore he could explain,” Grandpa said. “They might not believe him, and if they did, he’d be forced to fight with ‘em. He wanted to get to a fort where the Union held prisoners so he could serve out the war there.”

Mama continued reading.

I got to Kansas. I fell in with a friendly tribe of Osage Indians and spent the rest of the winter with them. George, I learned a lot about hunting in the Ozarks. I’ll tell you all about it when I get home. These Osages used to live and hunt all through the Ozarks before they signed a treaty with our government to leave about fifty years ago. They said they sometimes still make hunting trips to our area and they know just where we live.

I invited them to come to our place next time they go there. I told them they could trap on the Patterson places if they would check in on you. I got to worrying about all the outlaw tales I been hearing.

So, Aldeah, don’t be frightened if some tall In-

dians show up. The chief's name is Beaver Tail. He'll be wearing a beaver hat with a tail hanging down the back. Grandpa should smoke a pipe with them. Feed them and be friendly. They are good people and will come because I asked them to help you. They will even stay a while if you need them. Children, how would you like to know some real Indians?

"Yeah!" Harry shouted.

"I hope they come!" George exclaimed. "Imagine Papa being friends with Indians."

"If they helped Sterling, I'll welcome them," Mama said. "But I'll be frightened. I hope they don't come."

"You weren't scared of Alf Bolin," Harry said. "He was a bad man. These Indians are good."

"You're right, Harry," Mama said and continued the letter.

About a month ago two braves, Running Deer and Red Feather, took me to Fort Scott where we said goodbye. I told my story and joined the Union Army. The first chance I've had to send you word came today when the stage came through.

I cannot tell you at this time when I will get home. Do not be discouraged but keep in good spirits. I think all will come out right. Continue to pray to God to preserve us and our country from enemies. Kiss Grandma for me and tell Grandpa to hold on. Love to Lucy and the children.

I remain yours as ever, S. M. Patterson

No one spoke as the team walked briskly down the



shaded winding road. George tried to imagine Papa running from the southern army, then living with Indians, and now in the Union Army. He couldn't picture him in a uniform or living with Indians.

Harry was the first to speak. "Will Papa wear feathers and dance the war dance when he gets home?"

Everybody laughed. Mama laughed more than anyone. Harry didn't see what was so funny, but he joined in.

Sarah expressed their relief from the constant worry during the winter. "Alf Bolin is dead, we won't lose the farm, and now, best of all, Papa's letter."

"Yes," Mama said, "but Mrs. Harvey told me that Alf Bolin isn't the only outlaw in the area. There are other bush-whackers that sometimes come through looking for anything they can get."

The twins weren't worried. They believed everything would be fine.

In the late afternoon, laughing and talking about better times to come, the happy group pulled off the Oak Grove Road onto their ridge trail. They were bubbling over with things to tell Grandma and Aunt Lucy.

## CHAPTER 17

### EXPLORING

#### Summer 1863

The summer passed happily for the twins. During the winter, the worry, hardship, danger, and their mother's dependence on them almost made George forget they were still children. With much of the worry and fear gone and the heavy spring work finished, they enjoyed long afternoons during the hot summer days to do as they pleased. They weren't worried about the warning Mama heard at the store about other outlaw gangs seen in the area.

One of George's favorite pastimes was exploring. He and Sarah examined every foot of their land, often accompanied by Lillie and Harry, or their cousins, Catherine, Ray, and Willy. One beautiful fall day they hiked up the creek until they found its source in a huge gushing spring.

They stopped at small springs along the way to drink, cupping their hands to hold the cold water. Sometimes a trickle of water entered the creek from one side. The children scrambled up to discover where the water came out, usually from under a rock, or from the base of the cliff.

George and Sarah thought it strange that the creek didn't get any smaller as they hiked up two or three miles. The clear water continued to roll and jump over and around the rocks in its path. The land began to slope up gradually, but after about an hour they had to climb over rocks and huge boulders to stay near the creek.

They almost gave up finding the source, when they heard a muffled roar of rushing water ahead. Climbing some more they found themselves in a horseshoe-shaped bend in the bluff that curved around three sides. In the middle, nestled against the bluff, was a huge circular pool of water as blue as the sky. From it white crested water spilled over the rocks.

"I never saw anything like it!" Sarah said.

"It's a wonder," Catherine exclaimed.

The children stared. The roar of the tumbling water almost, but not quite, blotted out the sounds of insects and birds. Tree frogs chirped in cadence with an occasional low bellow from a bull frog.

There seemed to be no bottom to the water. All George could see down in the spring was darker blue water. The rock Sarah pitched in fell about two feet before the force of the water spit it up and sent it tumbling down the creek.

"This is where I want my farm," George said. "I'm going to call this Wonder Spring. Like Catherine said, it is certainly a wonder."

"Did Indians know about this spring?" Ray asked.

"Sure they did," George said. "They knew all about the land."

"I bet the Indians have lots of stories to tell about it. Imagine this being here all the time and us not knowing," Sarah said.

"That's because nobody has settled as far out as we are," George said.

Catherine said, "When we picked our farm there where the creek crosses the Oak Grove Road, Papa said that the nearest neighbor was ten miles north."

"Yes," Ray said. "Nobody's on this creek 'cept us Pattersons and that new family 'cross the Oak Grove Road."

"I bet no one's ever explored this far before," George

said. "We're real explorers." He started running beside the spring branch back toward home.

Sarah stumbled as she ran after him, falling on her stomach with her hands outstretched. "George!" she yelled after him.

Ignoring her, George said, "Come on, everyone. I'll race you to that big oak tree at the bend."

Sarah stood up carefully, looking at her dirty hands and the log that tripped her. "George!" she yelled again. "Come back. There was a campfire here." She stared at some half-burnt, soot-covered logs that had been scattered as if someone had put out a campfire.

The children's happy mood immediately disappeared. Even the smaller ones realized that someone had camped there not too long ago. Leaves were brushed aside or matted down in a circle around the charred logs.

Lillie ran to Sarah. "Confederate soldiers?" she asked. "Maybe. But they're gone now," Sarah said to comfort her.

George nodded agreement. "Yeah. They're gone." He walked around the logs. "Looks like about two or three men. Wouldn't be soldiers. They'd be more. Maybe bushwhackers?" Then noticing that Ray and Catherine were starting to cry, he added, "They aren't here now, kids. It's okay. They've been gone awhile." He looked into the woods and back to the spring branch. "But we need to watch extra hard now in case they come back."

While the younger children were glancing around fearfully expecting to see armed men in spite of George's assurance, Sarah studied the evidence. Pointing to the logs still freshly smeared with ashes, she whispered to George, "They were here since it rained last week."

George nodded and whispered back, "I noticed."

The twins searched for footprints or other evidence. All

they found were their own fresh prints showing that several children had tromped around the south side of the spring and spring branch. There was nothing but the abandoned campfire to show anyone else had been there.

“We better get home fast and tell Grandpa,” Sarah said.

“Yeah,” George said.

With George at the head and Sarah coming last holding Harry’s hand, they ran home as fast as they could.

The families kept a closer watch after Sarah’s discovery. But there was no further sign of any outsiders. The adults figured the men who used the campfire might not have been outlaws, but were local fishermen or trappers. No need to fear them.

A few days later the children hiked down the creek toward the river. George and Sarah took turns watching. They didn’t see any more campfires or evidence others had been anywhere near their farms so they explored one of the caves on the creek just below Uncle Elwood’s place.

All the children went on the cave exploration trip. Willy promised not to whine or ask to be carried. As usual the twins were in the lead when the seven children reached the first big cave just below the Oak Grove Road crossing.

To enter it they climbed a ten foot shelf. On top of the shelf the wide and tall opening to the cave yawned at them. The cool cave dampness spread over their hot bodies, cooling them as they rested. From their perch they could see the creek and the thick woods for miles to the south.

Digging in the loose dirt, Harry picked up a pretty piece of flint rock.

“Look,” he said, “see what a pretty shape.”

Sarah took it. “It’s an Indian arrowhead!” she exclaimed,

looking at the perfect tiny arrowhead. The others started searching. They found more, some bigger, some broken. They also found broken pieces of pottery.

"Indians once lived here in this cave," George said.

"But these people were here hundreds of years ago," Sarah said as Lillie stepped back fearfully. "There aren't any Indians here anymore. They've all gone to Kansas."

"Or any bad men?" Lillie asked remembering the campfire they found at Wonder Spring.

"No, Lillie," said. "No bad men either."

Laughing at their first alarm, the children became Indians. Lacking feathers, they stuck leafy branches in their hats and sunbonnets. They took Indian names. George was Springing Buck, Sarah, Smiling Water.

"Let's go back in the cave," George suggested. The older children had brought candles to explore the dark passages. Everyone was ready, the Indian play forgotten.

The twins led, each holding a lighted candle. They didn't walk far until they no longer heard the sounds of the forest. One bend in the narrow passageway blotted out the light in the large underground room. Looking back the way they came, they saw only a faint glow of daylight which disappeared as they walked on. Except for the candlelight, they were soon in complete darkness.

The dome-like ceiling of the room was covered with tiny icicle-like rock projections. Underfoot there was a trickle of water they couldn't avoid. One at a time, drops of water oozed from the icicle-like formations on the ceiling and splattered into the puddle on the cave floor below. Occasionally a drop hit one of the children, making them squeal. Underfoot the little stream flowed back the way they had come.

In awe, and fearful, the little boys huddled together close

behind the twins as they crept farther back into the cave. When anyone made a noise, the sound bounced back at them from the cave walls.

At the far side of the first big room there was a small opening.

One by one the children crawled through the hole. George was last. Once through the passage, they stood upright again. But just a few steps farther, the ceiling lowered, forcing the taller children to stoop over to avoid hitting their heads on the rough ceiling.

In the complete silence of the cave, they had been speaking in whispers. To frighten the others, George laughed out loud and said in a louder than normal voice, "What's everybody whispering about? We ain't gonna wake up any Indian spirits."

He then gave a loud war whoop. The sound echoed and reverberated back and forth against the rock walls.

Suddenly the room was filled with hundreds of flying objects, darting crazily in all directions. There were dozens of squeaky sounds and muffled noises of moving wings. Willy began to cry in spite of his promise not to, but George was too frightened himself to notice. Catherine and Lillie gave low screams. Harry fell down and lay curled up with his arms over his ears. Willy clung to George. Sarah dropped her candle. George's candle fluttered in his unsteady hand for a second and then went out as one of the flying things came so close to it that the air movement from the wings blew it out.

Everyone instinctively squatted down. Guided by his sobs, George reached for Harry and held him tight. The flying things were everywhere, squeaking and fluttering.

When George's light went out, the noise from the flying objects began to disappear. Gradually the movement ceased.

Harry huddled against George. "Are the dead Indian

spirits trying to get us?"

In the complete blackness Willy sobbed, "Am I dead?"

"No, Willy, I've got you," Catherine said.

Never had George been in such absolute darkness. He felt like he was suspended in space.

Horrible as the flying things were, it was worse when they stopped. The movement and noise gave some direction to his blackened world. When all sounds ceased, he lost his sense of direction, not knowing which way they had entered, or where the others were. He had the sensation that he was no longer right side up. He thought that he must have turned upside down when he fell to the ground.

The low moans Harry made led George to him. Lillie whimpered until Sarah said, "I'm here, Lillie. It's all right."

"What was that?" Lillie managed to whisper.

"Bats," George said, finally realizing that his loud shout wakened them.

George's steady, familiar voice reassured the others. The word "bats" was something real. Often at home, just before dark, they had watched bats fly about their clearing catching insects.

George said, "I clear forgot about the bats. They sleep in caves in the daytime. We probably scared them as much as they scared us."

"We're sure brave Indians to be frightened of bats!" Catherine said.

"Are you sure they aren't dead Indian spirits?" Harry asked, still clinging to George. "Let's get out of here."

In spite of his fright, George had kept hold of his candle. With much difficulty, he managed to light it. The soft glow of the warm light from the tiny flame, spread over the children. Their frightened looks changed to smiles.

"This is up," Harry said stretching his arm to the ceiling.



“But which way is out?” Lillie asked, looking around.

“That way,” Sarah said, pointing behind them. She reached out to the stream of water by her feeling the current. “The water is running that way.”

“Let’s go,” Harry begged again.

Without more urging, George led the way out. Hurriedly they crawled through the narrow passage back to the big room, Sarah last. They almost ran toward the warm glow of light that was the entrance, not stopping until they were safely out on the rocky ledge overlooking Patterson Creek.

They sat or stretched out on the warm rocks in the hot sunlight of the July afternoon. George could not absorb enough of the light. “You know, Sarah, if those outlaw fellers at Wonder Spring come back, we could hide here in this cave.”

“Yeah!”

## CHAPTER 18

### THE HOG DRIVE

#### Early November 1863

“We need to sell our hogs,” Grandpa said the first of November. “We’ll drive them to Oak Grove.”

“Drive hogs?” George asked.

“Sure. Mr. Harvey buys hogs and cattle to sell to the army. We need to go to the mill and store again before winter. We can trade them for supplies we need.”

George looked at Sarah. They were experienced in going to town by now, but herding more than a dozen hogs?

“How can we do that?” Sarah asked.

“I’ll drive the wagon. And since you two by yourselves can’t handle the hogs, Catherine, Lillie, and Ray will help you.”

Though the other children were excited about their first trip to Oak Grove, George was worried. This trip would be different, not only because hogs are hard to drive, but they would be exposed to outlaws.

“Will we ever find all those wild hogs in the woods?” he wondered.

“How can we drive them that far?” Sarah asked, showing that she, too, was doubtful.

“And what about meeting some outlaws on the road?” George said.

“That’s a risk we’ll have to take,” Grandpa said.

For several months there had been no trouble from

soldiers or outlaws. Grandpa decided it was safe for him and the children to make the necessary trip even though Sarah finding the campfire proved some unknown men were in the area.

The day before the drive, all the children and Grandpa began the roundup. They couldn't catch the hogs, rope them, or lead them like horses or cows. Being smarter animals than cows or sheep, they wouldn't herd together and blindly follow a leader. Using long sticks, and with the help of their dogs, the children chased the hogs through the woods.

The frightened pigs raced in every direction over the unfenced land. Having run wild all summer, foraging for themselves in the forests with only occasional feedings of corn, the young hogs were frightened of people. They used many tricks to avoid the children and dogs. The children learned to concentrate on one pig at a time, driving it to the pen and quickly closing the gate. In spite of their efforts, George believed the hogs would have won, if Grandpa hadn't enticed them with liberal feedings of corn.

By sunset, after a day of the hardest work of the summer, the last of fifteen pigs entered the pen in Aunt Lucy's barn lot. Next morning they planned to drive them down the creek valley to the road and on to Oak Grove.

"We'll never make it," Sarah said to George at bedtime.

More tired than he'd ever been in his life, George agreed. "We can't chase after them all that way."

"Grandpa says they'll settle down and stay together once we get them away from home," Sarah said.

Even with Grandpa's assurance, George didn't sleep well that night. Getting the hogs to market wasn't the only thing worrying him. He could still see the abandoned campfire by Wonder Spring. With so many Pattersons out on the road, outlaws could easily see and hear them. They'd be easy prey

with only one grown man to protect the valuable hogs and five children.

Before light the next morning, Grandpa drove the wagon around the ridge trail to the Oak Grove Road where it forded Patterson Creek. Tying the team there and walking up the creek valley, he cut back through the woods to Aunt Lucy's to help the others.

The plan was for everyone, even Harry and Willy, to make a moving human wall from the pen to force the hogs to the creek and then on to Oak Grove Road. Catherine opened the gate to the pen. The hogs raced out, expecting their freedom. The women and children shooed and waved their arms and, aided by the dogs that were everywhere at once, drove the hogs to the creek.

The whole bunch of squealing hogs, barking dogs, and yelling people raced down the hill. The twins and Grandpa were at the creek, ready to turn the pigs downstream. When a single pig started to break away, a child or a dog forced it back to the herd.

The troop roared through the creek bottom field. The task was to make the hogs go down the valley, not up it. The creek was too deep and swift at this point for them to cross.

George scattered a few grains of corn the way he wanted the hogs to go. But the hogs were too excited to notice. They thundered down the hill, and to his surprise, turned downstream.

"Don't run them anymore," Grandpa yelled when he saw the hogs heading in the right direction. "Just keep them together."

He was now in the rear, prodding laggards with his long stick. The women and children spread out along the narrow valley to keep the hogs from darting off.

The hogs slowed to a walk.

“Don’t let ‘em stop,” Grandpa shouted. “Keep ‘em moving. When you hit the road make ‘em ford the creek there and follow the road.”

Since the hogs were moving in the right direction, the twins, Catherine, Ray, and Lillie raced ahead to the road. There they made a human wall to turn the hogs toward town. Yelling and waving their long sticks, they forced the hogs into the water of the ford and on up the Oak Grove Road.

“Keep ‘em moving, but not too fast,” they heard Grandpa warn from behind them.

“This isn’t too bad,” Sarah said to George as they walked behind the herd.

“Yeah.”

The younger children and women followed along for about a mile to teach the hogs to stay on the road. But the intelligent animals soon learned that the road was easy walking. Neither barking dogs nor screaming people with sticks pestered them there. Tired from the unaccustomed running and no longer frightened, the hogs huddled together as they walked along the hard-packed dirt road.

“I never thought we could drive them like this,” Sarah said when Grandpa passed her in the wagon.

“Being comfortable and having a full belly are the most important things to hogs. They’ll take the easy way right quick as soon as they see it,” he said.

Grandpa drove the wagon ahead of the herd. Standing in the back of the wagon, George threw out a few kernels to show the hogs that the wagon was the source of food.

“They’ll follow the wagon now,” Grandpa said.

Since the hogs were settling down, the women and smaller children stopped. Grandpa, Catherine, Lillie, Ray, and the twins waved goodbye to them. Standing in the middle of the road, Aunt Lucy held her dog, while the twins’ and

Grandpa's dogs continued with them.

Just as Grandpa had said, when away from their farm, the hogs bunched together and rarely offered to bolt. One dog and one child walked on each side while two children were behind. The fifth, usually George or Sarah, went wherever needed.

Grandpa drove three miles before stopping at another creek crossing for the pigs to drink and rest briefly.

Since the day was cold, the hogs weren't hot, though some did wallow in the water. After a short rest, Grandpa started again. The hogs liked the creek so much the children had to prod them with their sticks. The dogs barked and nipped at them to make them move again.

Going at an easy gait and resting occasionally, they walked the distance to Oak Grove, arriving at sunset. They didn't meet a single person on the road. The weary hogs went easily into the pen behind the store where the twins watered them and fed them all the corn they could eat. With contented grunts, the animals lay down, nosing and snorting until they were asleep.

The children were likewise exhausted. Two years before, they had walked most of the way to Missouri from their old home. They were hardened to physical work. But today's drive, on top of yesterday's struggle to get the hogs penned up, was the hardest work they'd ever done. For the last few hours on the trail, when the hogs were too tired to give them any trouble, the children took turns riding in the wagon. Whenever Ray got his turn to ride, he promptly fell asleep.

When the weary group pulled over to the campsite behind the mill, Grandpa let the children rest while he set up camp and fixed their supper. The wonder of the town to Lillie and Ray, who had not been there before, did not entice them that night.

The next morning, however, was a fresh new day. Rested and eager, the twins went first to the post office window at the store to see if there was another letter from Pa. None, but they didn't expect one.

Then the twins looked for their friends, the Harvey children. Grandpa conducted their business and waited his turn at the mill. They were in no hurry. They didn't plan to return home until the next day.

The children ran through the village looking at everything. The town youngsters were in school. It was so long since the Patterson children attended a real school, they had almost forgotten that anyone else still had school. Though they wanted to visit the school, they were shy about going.

Mr. Harvey said, "School'll dismiss for noon directly. Why don't you go over then. You can play ball and go in when books take up again."

Until noon the children amused themselves looking in the store and catching up on the news.

The war news was good for the North. The Union victory at Gettysburg in Pennsylvania and General Grant's victory at Vicksburg on the Mississippi River the past July showed that the Confederates were losing. With the Mississippi River now in Union hands, the Confederate states west of the river were virtually out of the war. A wounded veteran told the twins that he believed General Lee would soon surrender. At the frontier store at Oak Grove, the war was far away. Life was approaching normal. There were even a few younger men there, those wounded or discharged. Perhaps soon all the men could come home.

The afternoon was fun. The Pattersons played ball with the school children at noon and recess. George was one of the best players. He noticed that Sarah was much better than

she had been in their school in Tennessee. In the past two years, they both had become tall and strong.

When books took up, the teacher told her students that the last stagecoach brought more than war news. "Just last month President Abraham Lincoln officially set the last Thursday of November as a national holiday for Thanksgiving."

Sarah poked George. "We've been celebrating it for a long time."

"Yeah," George said happily. "Now it's even more important than ever."

The teacher talked about the Pilgrims and the early settlement of America. "The Pilgrims didn't know how to farm or how to hunt in the new land," she said. "Without the help of the Indians, they would have died."

"We've sure been mean to the Indians ever since," Sarah said. Then she looked at George, her face red with embarrassment for speaking out in a strange school.

"You're right, Sarah," the teacher said. "We've taken their land, fought them, and tried to kill them all. Remember, children that this was their land, and they were only protecting their homes."

George couldn't keep quiet any longer. "The ones that lived here were the Osages, and last winter my father lived with them in Kansas. He likes them."

The teacher then explained that treaties with the United States government moved the Indians of the Ozarks west before many white families settled here. "But the Osages didn't understand that they must leave for good. They believed that they could continue to hunt and trap on the land. Some still come back each year."

The teacher continued, "We here in the Ozarks have a lot to be thankful for. We're glad the Indians helped the Pilgrims."



We're glad the Pilgrims stayed and many other people from the British Isles and the world settled in America. Now we're the pioneers ourselves. We're settling this country. One day Missouri will be as fine as Massachusetts is today."

During a quiet study time the teacher asked Sarah and George, "Would you like to borrow some books? You can return them next time you come to town."

George answered excitedly, "Oh yes!"

"But we won't be back until spring," Sarah said.

"That's all right." The teacher picked out ten books. The twin's happiness was complete as they showed them to their cousins. New books were a treasure. They knew by heart everything in the few tattered ones they had at home.

Before dismissing school, the young teacher said, "You children are the future of the Ozarks. The kind of place this country will be after the war is over and as it becomes settled will depend on you. And especially," she looked to the twins, Lillie, Catherine, and Ray, "on you Pattersons, who are settling where only the Indians have lived."

Sarah and George nudged each other with pride.

"We are the pioneers now," Catherine said.

"Yes, you certainly are," the teacher said.

"And Thanksgiving is coming up soon," Sarah said.

George lowered his head sadly. Papa would not be with them.

## CHAPTER 19

### BEAVER TAIL

Mid-November 1863

George and Sarah carried grain to the horses in their bluff pasture. Even though there had been no sign of danger for several months, they continued hiding the animals. The only drawback was the distance from the house made chores harder. But they didn't mind. Most of the settlers had lost all their horses to either the armies or outlaws.

Sarah rubbed the mare's soft nose and patted her neck. George curried the gelding while the horses munched the ears of corn. The sun, disappearing behind the bluff, cast long shadows on the grass. Sarah knew they should go back to the house to give Mama the pail of milk she just milked, but they lingered on. Neither one spoke in the evening peace.

"You did good job here," a deep, foreign-sounding voice said from behind them.

Frightened, George scampered behind a tree. Sarah forced back a scream and whirled around, tripping over the milk bucket and spilling it. All George could think was, "Ruined. It's all ruined, even with our constant watching for outlaws."

"You, Sarah. You, George," the voice continued, pronouncing the names in a strange way.

Standing not ten feet from them, wearing some kind of animal-skin cap, was the tallest man they'd ever seen. Beside him were two others equally as tall, each cradling a long gun

in his arms.

Though the men were armed, their appearance seemed friendly.

“Good job here,” the deep voice repeated. The tall man grinned and nudged his companions.

Realizing these men weren’t outlaws, Sarah caught her breath in an audible, “Oh.” Then to the tall man she said, “You must be Beaver Tail. Papa wrote us about you. Welcome.” She stuck out her hand for the big man to shake.

“I am Beaver Tail. Him Running Deer,” he said pointing to the grinning man on his right. Then indicating the third man, “Red Feather.”

Sarah shook hands with each, her hand almost lost in their big calloused ones. George, greatly relieved the men weren’t outlaws, but embarrassed that he was slow to speak, shook hands also.

Though Sarah outwardly appeared calm, her hand shook. George was also trembling from his momentary scare. He’d never seen anyone other than family members or outlaws on their land except at the house when the Confederate soldiers came and took his father. The quiet summer had lulled the twin’s alertness. The pleasant November afternoon relaxed their guard, so that the men’s sudden appearance left them trembling. If these had been bad men, they could have been shot without knowing the danger.

Almost instantly after his first fright, George, like Sarah, recognized these as Papa’s Osage Indian friends. Though Papa had written in his letter that they might visit, no one thought they really would come. Certainly not appear as if by magic in their hidden valley.

The men were dressed partly in white men’s clothing and partly in Indian garb. They wore moccasins and leather breeches, but wool jackets like Grandpa’s. Beaver Tail’s hat

was made of beaver fur with the tail hanging behind. The other two wore felt hats like Grandpa's and George's, only the Osages' hats were decorated with ornaments. Red Feather's hat sported a long red feather flowing gracefully from a fancy band.

George remembered his manners. "Will you come to our house to meet our mother and brother and sister? We will have supper soon. Can you join us?"

Beaver Tail translated to the others. They both nodded, smiling profusely.

"Yes, we come," Beaver Tail said. He pointed to the clearing, bluff, and horses. "Fine little brave. Fine little squaw." He patted George and Sarah each on the head. "Fleet Foot would be proud."

"Fleet Foot?" George asked not understanding.

"Fleet Foot. He run fast to escape the soldiers. Fleet Foot," Beaver Tail explained.

"Oh, Papa!" Sarah exclaimed.

This wasn't Indian play. These were real Indians who gave their father a genuine Indian name.

"We saved our horses," George bragged. He looked around the clearing at the animals. "You got any horses?"

Beaver Tail laughed. He translated for his friends who also laughed. George remembered hearing that Osages prided themselves on their horses, never going anywhere without them.

George reworded his question, "I mean, where are your horses?"

The three Osages were having such a good laugh at George's question that it took them a moment to stop.

"Come," Beaver Tail said and led them up the creek a short way. There, tethered to saplings, were three horses with camping gear and hides tied down behind the blanket-

like saddles.

“Horses,” Beaver Tail pointed proudly.

The twins ran to them. They were beautiful animals, but different from the ones they were used to. These were smaller, sinewy, and tough, with short manes and tails. One had spots on its rump, one was a bay color, the last spotted.

“Oh, you’ve been trapping,” George said looking at the fresh hides.

Beaver Tail pointed up the creek. “At Weeping Eye,” he said. “Good fur there. Good hunting.”

George knew he meant Wonder Spring. “That’s a good name for it,” he said.

“Yes,” Sarah agreed.

“We want to learn to trap,” George said to Beaver Tail.

“I teach,” he said. “Your father worried about you and sent us. We’ll teach young brave to trap.”

“Yippee!”

“Come, let’s go to the house and see Mama,” Sarah said. “She’ll want you to tell us about Papa. It’s this way.”

“Been there already,” Beaver Tail said.

“Oh!” George was disappointed for he thought what a sensation there’d be at home when he and Sarah brought the Osages in. He had enjoyed anticipating Mama’s reaction, not to mention Lillie’s and Harry’s.

“My mother has seen you?” George asked.

“Nobody see us. We see Fleet Foot’s squaw, a boy, and a girl, up there.” He pointed toward their cabin and held his hand to show the heights of the two children at the house. “We see two other lodges.” He pointed in the direction of Grandpa’s cabin. Old brave and squaw.”

Running Deer imitated an old man by stooping over and forming wrinkles in his face by squeezing his skin between his hands. The twins laughed.

"Also a young squaw, girl, two boys." Once again Beaver Tail indicated the sizes of the children and the direction of the next house which was Aunt Lucy's. "No other far as eye see."

The twins looked at each other in amazement. The Osages had scouted the whole Patterson holdings without any of them knowing they were here. But George wasn't worried. He was thrilled to think that Papa had Indian friends.

The group walked up the hill to the cabin, the Osages leading their ponies.

"We are ready go back to lodges," Beaver Tail said pointing west. "First we must see about Fleet Foot's squaw and children. We promise Fleet Foot to help family. See if okay." He looked at each healthy, active twin. "Family is fine dandy."

Running Deer grinned and nodded his head vigorously.

"I'm glad you came," Sarah said. "Can you stay awhile?"

"Til new moon," Beaver Tail held up ten fingers meaning ten nights. "First will help 'Got Horses' trap. Then go."

Sarah laughed at George's new name.

"Sarah and me are partners. You'll have to teach her, too."

Beaver Tail showed surprise. He conferred with his friends. Running Deer kept looking at Sarah and grinning.

"I bet they can't figure out a girl wanting to trap," George said to Sarah. Then he said to Beaver Tail, "Sarah can do anything I can do. Even trap."

"We'll teach 'Spill Milk,' too," Beaver Tail agreed.

Now it was George's turn to laugh at Sarah's name. Indians teaching them how to trap! What could be better?

As they neared the cabin, George gave the turkey hen call immediately followed by the whippoorwill all clear signal to warn his mother that someone was coming, but all was well.

He didn't want to frighten her into shooting when she saw the twins with the Osages.

"Good," Beaver Tail said and looked at Sarah. Sarah gave the calls also. "You good, too!"

Supper that night was a happy meal. Beaver Tail couldn't talk fast enough to satisfy their curiosity. He told them how he found Papa after Papa outran the patrol of Confederate cavalry. The patrol turned back soon after leaving Arkansas. Beaver Tail followed Papa for a short distance, and then lost him, only to discover that Papa had spotted him and was now watching the Osage rather than being watched.

The men eventually confronted each other and became friends. Beaver Tail soon learned Papa's story.

"Fleet Foot talked much about family by Weeping Eye. We learned all names and promise to come."

## CHAPTER 20

### GRANDFATHER THE SUN

The next week was an exciting, happy one with the three Osages camped in the hollow meadow. No need to watch for or fear outlaws with them near. The grandparents, Aunt Lucy, and her children became acquainted with the men. Beaver Tail had to tell the story about Papa's escaping the patrol several times. Mama questioned him about how Papa looked, if he was thin or sick. She drew out every detail about his few months' visit with Beaver Tail's people.

As he promised, Beaver Tail took the twins with him on his trapping rounds.

Trapping was a profitable business. Men in the East and Europe wore tall hats made with beaver felt. Other furs were in demand also, such as raccoon, muskrat, mink, and otter, but beaver brought the highest prices.

The Osages knew about the beaver in the Ozark streams. Their tribe had hunted and trapped the area for a thousand years. Small hunting parties of Osages continued to come back to trap, even though the United States government didn't allow them to. The Pattersons welcomed them. They certainly were not going to tell army authorities.

Since the Osages had already set their traps the day they met the twins, the next day when they ran the lines to see about the catch, they took the twins with them. George rode behind Beaver Tail and Sarah behind Running Deer in the areas where they could ride horses. They ran behind them on the rough land when they went on foot.



Running Deer joked with Sarah about a girl trapping. At first he treated her as something fragile. However, his teasing changed to admiration. Before the first day ended, all three men accepted Sarah just as they did George.

The men had set their steel traps the entire length of Patterson Creek. They looked for tracks or dams or other sign the animals were there before setting the traps. They sometimes baited them with fish.

They showed the twins how to put the traps underwater and in front of the den openings and how to hide them with mud or gravel to make them look like the creek bottom. The traps were so well hidden that the twins couldn't spot them, even though Beaver Tail showed them where they were.

The Osages ran the traps, removing those with animals in them and checking the others. They left the empty ones two more days. Then if they didn't catch anything, they gathered their traps and moved to another location to try for a few more days.

When they got back home at night, Beaver Tail showed the twins how to skin the catch without ruining the pelt and how to stretch and cure it.

For a week they trapped. Under the Osages' supervision, the twins set traps that Grandpa gave them. The next day they had two beaver, a muskrat, and a mink. At the end of the week Beaver Tail pulled in all the traps.

"Enough," he said. They should stop before taking all the beaver. "Leave some for breeding. Better not trap this creek for two years."

The twins realized the wisdom in this. Just as they did with their own stock, they never butchered all of their hogs, no matter how hungry they were. If they did, they would not have any sows to breed the next year. That was what Beaver Tail taught them about the wildlife. Use only the surplus.

"Why don't you set traps up near Weeping Eye Spring?" Sarah asked.

"Already trapped," Beaver Tail said.

George and Sarah exchanged glances. "How do you know?" George asked.

"Some of our tribe trap there every few years. We won't trap . . ."

"The campfire we saw there was used by Indians," Sarah whispered to George.

"Yeah. And by these Osages. Isn't that wonderful?"

Sarah felt as if the world's weight was lifted. One less worry for the Pattersons.

"And it's still my Wonder Spring." George grinned and poked Sarah to continue listening to Beaver Tail.

". . . so we won't trap there for a while," Beaver Tail continued. "Save the beaver. Good land. Keep it good. Don't spoil it."

Sometimes at night the three Osages ate supper with the family and stayed to talk. At those times, Aunt Lucy's family came over.

The children asked lots of questions about Osage life. Harry often asked questions the others wanted to know but were too polite to ask.

"Beaver Tail," he asked one night. "I've heard folks call you heathens. I know what that means. That means you don't believe in God. Are you a heathen?"

"Harry!" Mama made motions for him to be quiet.

"That's okay, Singing Squaw," Beaver Tail said. Since she sang so much at her work, he gave her that name. "I want to answer. Osages not heathens. We believe in Wah-Kon-Tah."

Then he told them of the great mystery force, or Grand-

father the Sun, who kept order in the universe. "Grandfather the Sun travels each day across dome of sky looking down on earth," Beaver Tail said. "He sees anything out of order, or if his special people don't do what they should."

"Who are his special people?" Lillie asked.

"His special people are the Wazhazhe, or the Osages," Beaver Tail said.

"That's you," Harry said. Beaver Tail nodded sadly.

"Why are you the special people?" Lillie asked.

"Long story. Sad story," Beaver Tail said.

"Tell it," the children begged.

Beaver Tail told his story with such dignity and pride they hung on every word. He began slowly.

"It was winters and winters ago, so long ago it would take all the leaves of the forest and all the fish in the streams to count how many winters it was. Grandfather the Sun, going across the sky, saw that the Sacred One, the Earth, was dirty and in great disorder. So he sent to Earth his special people, the Star People, to teach the Earth People how to live. How to kill the deer so there are plenty of deer left to multiply for next year. How to fish the rivers and leave fish to breed more fish for other times and other people. He sent them to teach the Earth People not to fight among themselves, not to drink too much or eat too much. To teach them to care for their bodies, to exercise, and grow strong so they could care for the Sacred One, the Earth.

"The Star People floated down from the sky with arms outstretched, like eagles, and were welcomed by the Earth People who wanted to learn their orderliness."

"Were the Star People the Osages?" Catherine asked.

"The Star People were the fathers of the Osages," Beaver Tail continued. "Tall, beautiful people who settled the Ozarks, lived here many, many winters, more than anyone

can count. They grew powerful and great. There were no greater people in all the land west of the big water, the Mississippi River. They hunted far to the north and south and west. All people respected them.”

“But why did Grandfather the Sun send them to the Ozarks?” Sarah asked.

“Grandfather the Sun looked for a home on earth for the Star People. He saw the western prairies with lots of buffalo for the people to use for food and clothing and lots of grass for the buffalo to grow fat on. But there on the prairies the fierce icy winds of winter would blow down their lodges and kill the Star People.

“Grandfather the Sun saw the rich bottom fields along the big rivers with plenty of wood for winter fires. He saw nuts and berries and lots of deer, fish, and other game. But the spring rains would swell the rivers, flooding the valleys and destroying their gardens and driving the Star People from their lodges. That land wouldn’t do, either.

“So Grandfather the Sun decided to build a home for the Star People himself. He took sand from the western prairies and spread it in layers. Then he got layer after layer of gray rock and made the huge mound that is the Ozarks, higher than all the surrounding land. He pressed these layers of sand and rock together. Then he got soil to cover the mound, not forgetting to mix in some flint for arrowheads and scrapers.

“To finish it off, he carved hills and valleys, putting trees on the hills and streams in the valleys with pure cold springs scattered everywhere. The Ozarks is the land he built for his special people.”

“But why did he let his people leave it?” Lillie asked.

Beaver Tail looked down for a time before continuing.

“That is the sad part of the story. The Star People had a great

responsibility. They were to care for the Sacred One, the Earth. If they didn't do their job, if they got proud, or careless or disobedient, the Sacred One would weep. Then Grandfather the Sun would have to send new ones down to care for the earth. The lands would be given to the new people.

"After many, many winters, the Star People in their beautiful land grew lazy and fat with all the plenty provided by the Sacred One. They no longer lived by the orderliness of the heavens and let their villages become dirty with garbage. They were arrogant and stopped praying each morning to Grandfather the Sun.

"The warriors were powerful and proud. They killed their neighboring kinsmen without any reason. They strutted and were glad that others were afraid of them. They killed captives and took scalps from cowards or those who begged for their lives. They forgot they were sent to teach order and obedience.

"The Sacred One wept."

Beaver Tail paused and then pointed up the creek. "Right up this spring creek that flows through your farm was a quiet pool of water. Only a trickle flowed from it, disappearing into the ground a short way from the pool. The pool was deep and blue as the sky. It was quiet and peaceful like the eye of a mother singing her baby to sleep.

"One night the proud warriors came home with scalps they were ashamed of to lodges that were dirty and disorderly. The braves did not give thanks to Grandfather the Sun. They had killed all the deer and fished out all the fish.

"The Sacred One wept.

"The quiet pool became like water boiling in a clay pot. The earth moved. Water rushed out the now raging pool, knocking down trees all the way to the river. The quiet pool

became a gushing, foaming torrent as the tears spilled from the eye of the Sacred One.”

George asked in wonder, “The spring up here at the head of our creek?”

Beaver Tail nodded sadly. “The descendants of the Star People knew then that they had failed in their responsibility and that there would be new people sent here to care for the earth.”

“Are we the new people?” Sarah asked.

Beaver Tail did not answer her question. He continued, “The Osages moved to a far land with not much water. There were no springs or beaver creeks. There were not many trees. The wind blew hot all summer and cold all winter. They gave up this land that Grandfather the Sun built for his special people.”

Beaver Tail stood up, put on his coat, and walked to the door. His two friends, who sat nearby quietly all evening, joined him. At the door he turned to the seven children still sitting on the floor near his seat by the fire.

“You got a great trust,” he said. “Keep it good.”

The Osages disappeared in the night.

## CHAPTER 21

### THANKSGIVING PREPARATIONS

#### The Day Before Thanksgiving 1863

Tomorrow was Thanksgiving again, the last Thursday in November, the day that President Lincoln set aside. This year it was Running Deer who had taken George turkey hunting. Once again Mama was dressing the big bird, but this time with Lillie and Harry helping. Sarah and George had just finished all the chores. Red Feather and Beaver Tail were making last minute preparations for leaving. With the entire family begging them, the Osages consented to stay on one more day to join in their Thanksgiving celebration and dinner.

As the twins carried the pail of milk to the house from the bluff pasture, they stopped to rest at the top of the hill near the edge of the clearing. So much had happened since last Thanksgiving. Everyone had grown and changed.

“Look at Mama,” Sarah said, pointing to her mother as she stepped out the back door. “Isn’t she something?”

George studied his mother as if for the first time. Though always confident and sure of herself, Mama looked even more – he couldn’t think of the correct word – more in control, or majestic. She stood straight as she supervised Lillie and Harry. She knew where everyone was and had everything organized and planned. For the whole past year in this wild place, she had kept her family safe, even prospering. Yes, even Mama grew during the year.

Then as George looked at his little brother and sister, he could hardly recognize in them the babies they were a year ago. Though only six and nine years old, they worked as a team doing the major portion of the cooking and housework. Lillie could sew. So far Sarah had not learned to do that. Right now, the kids were pulling the feathers from the turkey expertly, as they had done on dozens of chickens this past summer.

“Look at Harry,” Sarah said. “He’s no baby anymore.”

George agreed. Remembering his bravery when Alf Bolin came, and at other times, he knew that the family depended on little Harry as much as on any of the others. Little? Better stop calling him that. He’s not little.

Lillie had learned to be patient, teaching Harry and staying in the house most of the time.

“Lillie doesn’t complain,” Sarah said, “But I bet she would rather be outside with us, working with the animals or hunting.”

“She’s getting like Mama,” George said.

“Yeah,” Sarah agreed. She ran to the house with her bucket of milk.

George realized that without Lillie, Sarah couldn’t be with him all the time. How lucky to have a sister like Lillie.

And like Sarah, he realized. She was so seldom away from George that he rarely looked at her carefully. Now as she paused at the cabin door, he studied her. Though he had hardly noticed it before, he was now taller than she was.

He was both proud and sad. He knew that, though their close relationship would always continue, soon they would not be able to do everything together as they had all their lives. So much depended on the oldest children. Alone they couldn’t accomplish much, but together they could do an adult’s work. They almost became one person. Unconsciously



everyone, including the twins themselves, thought of them as a single unit, The Twins, rather than two people, Sarah and George.

When Papa returns home, that will change, George knew. He would work with their father. Harry is big enough to learn to farm and hunt and Sarah will be needed in the house. She'll have to learn to sew and cook and keep the house. So far she had done very little of that. He was sorry that her life would change, but she must do what girls were supposed to do. It was part of growing up.

The Ozarks wouldn't always be pioneer country. The families would soon have neighbors, a school, and a store on the Oak Grove Road by the ridge trail. When that happened, he would work with men, and Sarah would be like other girls and women. He looked forward to the time and also felt sad that time was passing so quickly. Part of him longed for childhood to pass, while a part didn't want it to ever end.

Then he looked at Grandpa, who was fixing makeshift tables in the yard for the dinner, and thought of Grandma who was in the house. The two years in the Ozarks were not kind to them. Grandma was often sick. Grandpa walked more slowly and his hands often shook. With a shock, George realized they were both quite old. This was no country for old people, especially for those having as much responsibility as Grandpa had, the only man among three women and a bunch of children.

As these Thanksgiving preparations were going on, he didn't want to remember the bad time last year when Papa had to leave with the Confederate soldiers. At the time, that had seemed the worst possible tragedy. But Mama was right, of course, as she always was. Things could have been worse. And here they were, already at another Thanksgiving, and once again they had much to be glad about.

In fact, as he thought through the year, they had much more to be thankful for than last year. The war would soon be over, probably in a year or so. They had bigger fields now to grow more crops and keep more stock. Their cow would soon have another calf. If it was also a heifer calf like the last one, they'd soon have a herd.

They already had the second litter of pigs this year from the old sow and another litter expected from the young sow they kept. Their recent success with selling the hogs encouraged them to expand. As they could clear more land to raise corn, they could feed even more hogs.

Now with their new skill of trapping, he and Sarah should have pelts to sell come spring. They might even be able to add to the money in the sink hole. Maybe in a few years they could buy the land around Wonder Spring, or Weeping Eye. Yes, Beaver Tail was right. This was a fine land.

George joined Sarah in the kitchen. "Remember two years ago, our first Thanksgiving in the Ozarks?" she asked.

"Yeah, just a few weeks after our trip from Tennessee. We barely had a house to live in."

"What will two more years bring?"

George was so deep in his thoughts he didn't hear Grandma chatting away while making pies. ". . . and what a return besides offering them our blessing in thanks for all they've given us?"

"Blessings! Thanks!" Sarah hugged her surprised grandmother. "Grandma, that's what Papa meant. You solved the last of the mystery!"

"Land, child, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Papa's message. She said, 'Don't be backward about offering blessing next year at this time.' Don't you see, 'offering' means giving. 'Blessings' means thanks. Don't be

backward about giving thanks. ‘Don’t be backward,’ he said. Those words spoken backward are, ‘thanks giving.’ He meant Thanksgiving!”

Grandma became excited, too. “Then that was part of Sterling’s message just as you’ve said all along?”

“Yes!”

“You may be right,” Mama said, “but I still don’t know what he’s telling us.”

“He said that Thanksgiving next year at this time (it’s that time now) when all is clear (when the night bird, or the whippoorwill, sings) we five will be together.”

“Six,” Harry said, though the others paid no attention to him.

“What’s the big secret about that?” George said.

“I guess he was saying that time will pass and things will be better.” Sarah admitted that didn’t tell them much. “I guess since I was the one that was looking forward so to Thanksgiving that he told me specially.”

“I’m sure that was it,” Mama said.

“But why didn’t he just out and say it? Why all this mystery?” Sarah asked.

“You’re the one with the mystery,” George said. “And you’ve solved it to discover that there is no mystery. C’mon, let’s spread some of our ‘blessings’ to the Osages.”

That evening the Osages stayed for supper as did Grandpa and Grandma. Sarah explained to the Osages what Thanksgiving was about. They readily understood. Instead of only one day set aside, they had several occasions during the year for festivals or dances in thanks for some bounty.

“We are happy to join your celebration,” Beaver Tail said.

“Me, too,” Running Deer said and laughed gaily that he could understand enough English. He poked Red Feather in

fun. "Red Feather, too."

Red Feather nodded vigorously and banged the table so hard to show his approval that he spilled Grandpa's coffee. Everyone laughed as Mama cleaned it up.

After supper everyone went outside into the mild night. After Grandpa built a fire, the Osages did their dance to celebrate a good hunt. The children joined in, even getting Mama in for a time. No possible urging could induce the grandparents to join.

The Osages chanted some of their songs. The children tried to imitate them but they could not utter the unfamiliar sounds. Hearing the fun, Aunt Lucy and her children walked over and joined in.

Grandpa got out his fiddle and, to the children's delight, played some jigs and hoe downs. The children danced crazily for awhile. The Osages soon caught the rhythm of the fiddle music. Their feet tapped and stomped Indian fashion, giving a new and funny twist to the dance steps American settlers had brought over from the British Isles many years before.

The happy group dispersed. Aunt Lucy's children and the grandparents down the footpaths through the woods, the Osages to their camp in the hollow meadow, and Mama's children into the cabin.

Sarah whispered to George as they climbed the ladder to their beds in the loft. "The Pilgrims had Indians at their Thanksgiving."

George nodded. "I thought of that, too."

## CHAPTER 22

### THE THANKSGIVING MYSTERY

Mama and Grandpa felt safe with the Osages camped nearby. No one could surprise them with the Indians there. However, the Pattersons were so used to caution that they drove only one team and wagon to bring the food and people to the dinner. Grandpa hitched up his team and went after Aunt Lucy and her children and their part of the dinner.

The mild November weather continued. Everyone spread out their dishes of food on the makeshift table Grandpa had fixed outside. He hid the team and wagon while the children erased the tracks.

Beaver Tail and his companions watched the proceedings and grunted approval.

“No tracks here,” Beaver Tail said, “so no wagon.”

Everyone laughed. Grandpa smiled. “If you Osages don’t see any tracks, then no one else will,” he said.

The women were in the house preparing the last dishes and helping Mama get the turkey ready to bring out. Grandpa, the Osages, and older children were visiting and telling stories. Harry and Aunt Lucy’s boys were running about at play.

“Let’s play ball,” George suggested. He and Sarah had saved twine and wrapped it around a porous rock to make a baseball. Mama had sewed a cover to prevent the string from unwinding. A stick for the bat was easy to find.

Sarah had no trouble getting Running Deer to join them. He soon caught on to the game. The other two Osages watched a few minutes before they also joined in. They were

so much better than the children, hitting home runs every time, that Grandpa suggested the men bat left handed.

Running Deer next showed them how to play a game where they hit a piece of wood on the ground with a stick.

In the house Aunt Lucy discovered she forgot to bring her persimmon pies made with honey. She was so disappointed at forgetting them that Mama sent Sarah and George after them.

The twins ran merrily through the forest, which now at the end of November had no fall color left. Most of the leaves had fallen, making each footstep crackle as the twins stepped. They chatted about the day's activities and about the Osages.

They talked about the books the Oak Grove teacher lent them. "Tell me about your book, *Pilgrims Progress*?" George said. "Is it about the Pilgrims in America?"

"No," Sarah said. "It's like everyone of us is a pilgrim and the journey we take is through life."

"I like that," George said. "Here in the Ozarks you and me are like the pilgrims. What happened?"

"Well, Christian is the main character, and he travels along a road, which is the road of life. He comes to all kinds of troubles and temptations to do wrong. There's the City of Destruction, the Delectable Mountains, and the Dungeon of Despair. He meets all kinds of people, good ones like Faithful and Hopeful, and bad ones like the Giant Despair and Worldly Wiseman, until he reaches the Celestial City. That is Heaven."

George was excited. "You know," he said, "the names in that story are like the names Indians give. They mean something."

"Yes, that's right. I never thought about that. Like Weeping Eye Spring. The Osages are pilgrims, too, and the spring

is one of their bad places along their journey of life.”

“And the same for us,” George said. “Mama is Hopeful and Grandpa is . . . .”

“Faithful?”

“Yeah. Alf Bolin and the Confederate soldiers are Giant Despair and . . . what are we?”

“We are . . . .” Sarah paused. “Oh, I know. We are Tomorrow. That’s it. The teacher at Oak Grove said we are the future.”

George laughed. “For the past two years you’ve been looking forward to a Thanksgiving celebration and now that we are finally having one, you want us to be Tomorrow? Tomorrow the Osages will be gone.”

“I wish they could live here.”

“So do I,” George agreed, “but if the soldiers caught them, they’d be marched back right quick. Grandpa said they’d be punished some way.”

“That isn’t right,” Sarah said. “Maybe God, or their Grandfather the Sun, has something in store for them like the Celestial City.”

“Maybe.”

The twins found Aunt Lucy’s pies, wrapped them up in a tea towel and started back. They were so busy talking that at first they didn’t hear the hoof beats of trotting horses above them on the ridge trail.

“I wonder why Grandpa is driving the wagon now,” Sarah said. Then the twins looked at each other in alarm.

“That’s not Grandpa!” George whispered and pointed. The ridge trail bent back to the south away from them at that point. Through the bare trees limbs they spotted the blue coats of at least two riders disappearing around the bend.

“Soldiers!” George whispered.

“Union soldiers,” Sarah said.

They raced madly toward their cabin.

George gave the bob white call for soldiers over and over. He didn't know if they were near enough for those at home to hear. He was afraid for everyone, but especially the Osages.

Arriving at the cabin before the mounted soldiers, George spotted the three Osages fading into the forest. The alarmed family was scurrying about. Lillie, Harry, Catherine, and Ray ran into the house to hide under the floor. Mama and the grandparents were rushing around hiding traces of the children and Osages. Aunt Lucy held Willy.

Sarah started to run to the house, but George grabbed her arm. "Safer here," he whispered.

They crouched in the same spot she and George watched Alf Bolin's visit. Sarah moaned, "Oh no! Not again. It's not fair."

George gave one more call to let Mama know where they were. She waved in their direction while looking down the road where everyone could now hear the sounds of horses.

A clear call of a bob white came from the ridge road, right where three Union soldiers rode into plain view. On hearing the call, the twins hiding by the timber line and the group at the house glanced around quickly to see if they'd missed one of the children who could be signaling them.

The strong bob white call came again followed quickly by the whippoorwill all clear call. Everyone knew that the two calls coming together meant that someone friendly was coming. The calls came a second time, seemingly from one of the soldiers. He trotted briskly toward the frightened group clustered near the loaded table.

Sarah grabbed George's hand and shouted, "When the night bird sings, and God willing, all six are together . . ."

George slapped his hand over her mouth, "Sarah, are you crazy?" he hissed.



Sarah pushed him back and stood.

The three soldiers rode their horses right up to the group.

“Well, aren’t you going to invite us to dinner?” the first soldier asked with a broad smile on his face.

Sarah was already half way to him. “It’s Papa!” she screamed.

“Papa!” George yelled understanding at last Papa’s coded message. Racing behind Sarah, he grabbed his father’s outstretched arm and vaulted up behind him on his horse.

“Sterling!” Mama cried, running to him.

Grandpa sat down weakly. Grandma wept, saying over and over, “Praise the Lord, it’s Sterling.”

Aunt Lucy smiled and clapped. Lillie, Harry, Catherine, and Ray raced out from under the house, knocking down the rocks of the foundation in their hurry to get out. Lillie and Harry ran to Papa, reaching his horse just after Sarah did. The children almost overwhelmed the horse until Papa dismounted, grabbing the girls and Harry in one big hug.

“He did say six like Harry insisted,” Sarah couldn’t help gloating to George and Ma. “All six of us are together.”

They were too happy to argue about Papa’s message now.

“Before you left last year, you told me that you would get back for this Thanksgiving, didn’t you?” Sarah asked.

Papa hugged Sarah again and his eyes crinkled. “Yes, God willing.”

Mama’s face lit up. Her eyes sparkled, her head lifted, and her mouth spread into a delighted smile. The light inside her, which had been burning on low, suddenly switched to high.

Papa hugged the children, half carrying them with him, as he handed the reins of his horse to one of his companions.

He kept his eyes on Mama's face as he approached her. Still holding the children, he clasped his wife.

"Oh, Aldeah, Aldeah!"

"The six of us together," Sarah said. "We've solved the Thanksgiving mystery."

"That's right. All six of us," Papa said.

George was the first to think of his duties as host. He gave the all clear call for the Osages to come back. Then he invited the other two soldiers to dismount and join the family.

The Osages appeared from the woods, standing quietly at one side. Harry ran to Running Deer. "That's Papa!" he exclaimed, pulling on his arm.

Running Deer nodded. Papa turned to the Osages, greeting each one by name in Indian fashion. He said a few words to them in their language and brought them back to his family, including them in the group.

Then he turned to the two soldiers accompanying him. "Wilson and Carter, this is my family. Welcome to Patterson Creek."

## CHAPTER 23

### THE BEST THANKSGIVING EVER

The merriment of the family the night before was nothing compared to the joyousness of Thanksgiving Day. With Osages and soldiers there, there was nothing to fear. Everyone was safe and Papa was home.

Papa even brought the good news that his brother had arrived safely in California.

Such good news was almost unbelievable.

Papa and his two soldier friends, on a temporary assignment in Springfield, had received a ten-day furlough. Papa wanted to see his family, and the others planned to look over the country Papa talked about so much to see if they wanted to settle there after the war. They were both from eastern Ohio where they owned small farms. The abundance of land in the Ozarks intrigued them.

Everyone tried to convince them to move. Having neighbors was the one thing lacking now on Patterson Creek. After the big dinner, the women could hardly pull themselves away from the talk to clear up. The children did not play games that afternoon as the conversation flowed on all sides.

Papa wanted to hear all that happened on Patterson Creek. He had received no word since leaving a year ago. The family wanted to hear all of his activities. The other soldiers were interested in everything about the land. The Osages beamed and smiled. Even Beaver Tail could not follow all the talk.

Toward evening the Indians rose together and came

solemnly over to Papa and Mama.

"We must go," Beaver Tail said. "Fleet Foot is safe. Family safe. Now we must go to our lodges." He pointed west.

"Oh, Sterling, I forgot," Mama said. "I knew they had to leave. The children and I talked them into staying another day." Then she turned to Beaver Tail. "You are a true friend, Beaver Tail. Come back." She turned to Running Deer. "We shall all miss you, kind friend." She spoke to Red Feather, "What you have taught us these days we will always remember. Have a safe journey."

"We will return next year," Beaver Tail promised.

The three Osages, accompanied by Papa, disappeared down the path to their camp. Papa wanted to visit with them before they left. They'd travel only at night until they reached their home in Kansas.

The family asked Papa's soldier friends many questions. The men explained that soon after Patterson joined the army, he was assigned to their unit. The three men became good friends.

Carter and Wilson both believed that their unit would stay where they were the rest of the war, since their main job was guarding the Confederate prisoners. The three had volunteered to bring a detachment of prisoners to the garrison in Springfield, but they must report back by December 16.

Wilson said that he wanted to move near Patterson Creek. He asked the twins to show him during the next few days.

"Not Wonder Spring," George whispered to Sarah.

"No, that's for you," Sarah said. "There are lots of other great places to settle."

When Papa returned from seeing the Osages off, he said simply, "They've gone."

Grandpa got out his fiddle and played some hymns. The soldiers joined the Pattersons in singing the old favorites until it was time for the other families to go home.

Aunt Lucy and her children sat in the back of Grandpa's open wagon. Smiling now, Grandma sat on the spring seat by Grandpa. George thought that ten years seemed to lift off the grandparents' ages. Grandma kissed her son once again, Grandpa shook hands, and the noise of the wagon bumping down the trail almost covered the children's happy chatter.

Wilson and Carter stood apart from the six Pattersons who stood close together in front of their cabin. Papa had his arms around Mama. The twins, almost as tall as Mama, stood in front of her. Harry held his father's free hand and Lillie leaned against him.

Sarah waved to the disappearing wagon and looked at George. George knew what she was thinking. Together they said out loud.

"This has truly been the best Thanksgiving ever."

"And Pioneer Partners solved another case," George said. "The Case of Papa's Gold!"

THE END

## ELLEN GRAY MASSEY

*Author, teacher, speaker, historian*

“Ellen Gray Massey is a Missouri treasure. She has spent a large part of her life writing about life, teaching about life, speaking about life.” Bob Priddy, author, historian, and news editor at MissouriNet radio.

Massey has published numerous articles, short stories, essays, a two-act musical play, eleven non-fiction books and sixteen novels. In 1995 she was inducted into the first Writers Hall of Fame. She has received awards from the Missouri Writers Guild and is a three-time Spur Award Finalist from Western Writers of America. Her specialty is the Ozarks and western Missouri, where her family still owns and operates the prairie farm and where there is no longer any evidence of the bloodshed and destruction that occurred before, during, and after the Civil War.

From 1973 to 1983 she directed Lebanon, Missouri, high school students who published a magazine, *Bittersweet: the Ozark Quarterly*, which became a book, *Bittersweet Earth*. Ellen has given 428 talks across the country – 120 of them for the Missouri Humanities Council. She published *Footprints in the Ozarks: A Memoir, Our Robin Is Read* and *Skeleton in the Cistern* in 2012.

Her other young adult books that relate to the Civil War in the Ozarks include *Borderland Homecoming*, *The Burnt District*, *Brothers Blue and Gray*, and *Her Enemies Blue and Gray*. She lives and writes in the Ozarks.

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