# Winter's Song

## The life and death of Chief Paulina

*A Novel*

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For my family

# Introduction

Central Oregon is a high desert plateau with snow-covered Cascade peaks to the west and the remote Great Basin to the east. Fur trappers discovered it in the 1820s, miners exploited it in the 1850s, cattlemen's livestock grazed it in the 1860s, and then immigrants settled it over the following decades. Great wealth in gold, silver, furs, timber, and livestock were realized by the early pioneers who came here. It is a place of fantastic weather and beauty, which today attracts skiers, vacationers, retirees, and a whole new generation of those who wish to live the good life that Central Oregon offers. I was raised in Central Oregon and can attest that there are few places in this world that can match its beauty. I remember it from the 1960s when it was small towns and small businesses that served ranchers and mill workers. The pine forests provided logs to run mills in nearly every community. Irrigation canals had been completed to provide water for the farms and ranches. Central Oregon was just starting to bloom. It was a wonderful place to grow up as I am sure it remains so to this day.

In 2016, a group of protestors took control of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns in Southeastern Oregon. This area is also a place of natural beauty and reminds me a lot of Central Oregon in the 1960s. The protestors made many demands, but the one that caught my attention was the fact that they wanted to return the federal lands to its rightful owners—the cattlemen and ranchers. That seemed like an odd statement to me at the time, and I guess it also caught the attention of some other folks as well.

The Burns Paiute Tribe stepped forward and commented to the effect that would not the rightful owners be the Paiute—not the ranchers—as they held claim to the land prior to the ranchers. The refuge occupiers gave an interesting reply, ". . . the Native Americans had the claim to that land, but they lost that claim. There are things to learn from cultures of the past, but the current culture is the most important."

This event reminded me of the stories about early Central Oregon I heard growing up. Most seem to center on the settlers taming the desert and harvesting the forests. But what about before? Who was here before the settlers and what was their life like? The Northern Paiute, Shoshone, Bannock, Klamath, and Ute tribes inhabited the Great Basin, which encompasses much of Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Northern California, and Oregon. Living mostly in small family groups, they struggled to survive in a varied and sometimes harsh environment. In the mid-1800s while resisting pressure to move onto reservations, they fought the bloodiest and most protracted war with the US government that no one seems to have ever heard about. The white settlers called these people the Snake Indians.

If you have ever visited Central Oregon, there is one geographic name which appears more frequently than all others—Paulina. In fact, there are more geographic locations in Oregon named for Paulina than any other person. There is a town called Paulina, there is Paulina Lake, Paulina Marsh, Paulina Peak, Paulina Creek, Paulina Falls, Valley, Mountains, Spring, Prairie, Reservoir, Basin, Butte, and Horse Camp. Maybe even more, but that gives you an idea. So just who or what was Paulina? Short answer—Paulina was a Northern Paiute war chief who lived in Central Oregon from 1833 to 1867. For twenty-two years he fought to protect and preserve his tribal homeland from encroachment from other tribes, miners, and white settlement. *The Morning Oregonian* newspaper at the time called him the "Brutal Devastator." He was a Snake dog soldier, and this is his story, as told through his eyes.

# Prologue

*Paulina Basin, Jefferson County, Oregon*
*April 1867*

The predawn hour has always been my favorite time of a day, when the dark of night gives way to gray morning sky. The air is still as the birds begin to wake. A deep chill wraps around and through you, almost to your core. Life returns to the world as the land awakens once again. The smell of sagebrush and juniper floats in the crisp morning air. I sit here now by a smoldering fire, trying to drink it all in so I might remember forever how it feels. I will miss this time, as I will my wife and family, and all the old ones that came before me. All those who helped me on the journey through this life.

The young ones still lie asleep, spread around the edge of camp, their bellies full of the calf we roasted last night. Horse Trap sits high up on the ridge, alone as usual, on watch for the trouble that is to come. This day, though, I think he may sleep. I do not blame him; it has been a long road traveled, and he has been a true friend to me. I have time yet. Time to sit, to soak in the morning, and to live in my memories for a short time more.

*Chapter 1*

# Olallie Butte, Oregon Cascades

*July 1840*

When I was a boy, the people called me Buffalo Brush. They would not call me Paulina, the war spirit, for years to come. My family lived on and around what would become Juniper Butte in South Central Oregon, a land of good grass and water, with plenty of game. I remember in the late summer we would make a long journey to Olallie Butte situated high in the Cascade Mountains in the shadow of Seekseekqua (Mount Jefferson). My mother and the other women in our band came to gather berries, seeds, and roots to dry and store for the winter months. Many of the younger men would be off hunting or on raiding trips to the east, so my grandfather and the elders of our band would accompany the women and children to Olallie. We considered this area sacred, but no longer safe as other tribes also claimed this ground. The men were watchful, but mostly they gambled and talked while the children were free to hunt and explore. The air was cool and the water sweet high in the mountains.

I was in my seventh season the last summer I spent on Olallie. We had a dog I called Peebody who rarely left my side. He earned his name by lifting his leg on about every second bush he ever passed. Peebody was a big black animal, part of my mother's work pack. He adopted me early on, so she allowed him a level of freedom not given to her other dogs. Our favorite pastime that summer was chipmunk hunting. This process normally began with a rock chucked by me, which always seemed to just miss, followed by

a charge by Pee to dig the rotten critter from the rocks, brush, or logs where it had fled. Now Pee did not just dig, he attacked with both his paws and mouth, biting great mouthfuls of dirt, rocks, and twigs as he dug with his front paws and cleared debris with his back. If we got too close, our prey would jump from its hiding place to scramble off with Pee hot on his trail. We would repeat this many times until Pee or I lost interest, and we would wander off in search of our next victim.

Occasionally I would switch to a short bow and arrows my father had made for me. While we did not achieve much success donating meat to the cook pot, we had our moments. I remember one instance after much creeping and stalking, a cottontail moved from its hiding spot, running several yards before stopping to hide. I got a shot off before it moved again but nicked a branch, causing my arrow to ricochet off the rabbit's head. The blow slowed it enough for Pee to launch himself through the brush and deliver a death chomp to the back. The key to hunting with Pee, I had learned, was to catch him before he had the chance to devour the prey. Camp dogs relied on their scavenging skills for most of their meals, as scraps were few. Pee decided this rabbit was his; I did not see him again for a while that day. I was just happy to get my arrow back.

Besides hunting and exploring the mountain with Pee, that was the summer that my grandfather seemed to focus on my education. The people called him Hard Lip, a large man with short legs and a big, powerful chest. His lip permanently creased in the spot where he held his pipe, something which seemed to never leave his lip. His hands were the feature which caught my attention the most, the skin like hard leather, the fingers and nails thick, powerful, and scarred. I always hoped my hands would look like that someday. Hard Lip was my mother's father, a warrior of some note until his knees were shattered by a fall from a horse which, when healed, left him bowlegged and unable to walk well—he kind of rocked side to side when he moved around. Thus, he became a maker of weapons, smoker of the pipe, protector of camp, and an educator of the young. He had a gruff look to his face but a twinkle in his eyes. He was a talented man and expected much from me and my brothers.

My mother was married to another man before my father and had a son with him named Wolf Dog, my half-brother, five years older than I. His

father, a war chief, died in a fight with our enemy the Blackfeet. Later with my father she had my older sister Bright Eyes and my younger brother Black Eagle and youngest sister Cactus Fruit. Wolf Dog was now old enough to travel with the men, so only my little brother and sisters and I had come to the mountain with our mother. Hard Lip felt the time was right for Black Eagle and me to do something with our time besides chipmunk patrol, so we began spending the afternoons sitting in the shade watching him smoke his pipe and listening to his stories.

My grandfather said we are Paiute or Numa—the people—and that we came from lands far to the south long ago. Our ancestors rose out of the earth through a gigantic hole. They called themselves Aztecs and built stone lodges. Eventually some traveled north to live in the great desert, calling themselves Utes and Comanche. Later still, some migrated further north into the mountains, calling themselves Shoshone and Paiute. For many years, our people traveled by foot to gather our food from the land. We live in small bands and move often as seasons and food sources change. Until just recently we used camp dogs, like Pee, to help haul our heavy loads. When the dog gods—the horse—came to us, they allowed us to move greater distances and hunt bigger game like the buffalo. Our mounted warriors, which we called dog soldiers, could also better protect us. Since our people lived in small bands disbursed over a large region the dog soldiers formed warrior clans, such as the White Knives or Buffalo Killers. The war chiefs would gather the clan members when needed to protect our people.

The tribes to our north, the fish people, raid our small, remote camps seeking to move into our hunting grounds or to capture and sell our people in their slave markets along the Nch'i-Wana—the big river, which the settlers named Columbia. The Wasco, Chinook, Tenino, and Molalla tribes have been our mortal enemies since we came to this land. When my grandfather was a young man, he accompanied our dog soldiers to the great Wasco camp at the falls on the big river. They went as traders but spied several young Numa girls held there as slaves. He likes to tell the story (and he tells it a lot) of how our warriors lined up on their horses in the middle of the camp and demanded their release. When the Wasco refused, our dog soldiers attacked, riding through the camp, killing the fish eaters, and burning their lodges.

They freed the girls and returned home with many scalps. This raid kept the fish people away from our land for many years. More recently, diseases from the English traders have swept through the river villages, greatly reducing their numbers—but the fish eaters are still to be watched and feared.

To the east are the Blackfeet living in the mountains of Montana. Our people must cross their lands when traveling to the Yellowstone country for buffalo. They travel many days to hunt the great herds, in hope of securing a winter's supply of meat and fur for robes. We have held our own against the Blackfeet until in recent years, when they have been given guns and whiskey by the English traders and told to hunt down and kill Shoshone and Paiute. The English want to trap the beaver on our land but fear our people. They call us Snakes. The English, French, and now Boston fur trappers have been crossing our land for some time. Mostly they have left us alone, traded some, but they take the beaver from the streams and kill the game we depend on—and offer nothing in return. Times are changing for our people. We survived the trappers and have held our own against the other tribes, but now white settlers come in ever-increasing numbers. They, too, take our game and bring diseases for which our shamans have no cure.

One day at the end of one of his many stories, Grandfather paused and relit his pipe. He told us we were good boys and that he was proud of us, but our time for being boys was coming too soon to an end. He wished we could have lived in his time, a time when the world made sense. Grandfather said we would leave Olallie with the next full moon, and our family would return to the camp on Juniper Butte. On the way we will travel through the Ochoco Mountains to Big Summit Prairie, where we will visit the Shoshone bands and see the great horse herds. Our father and the other men from our band should return by then from the buffalo hunt. There Black Eagle and I would begin our training by joining other boys in learning the way of the horse. Our time living with my mother's band was coming to an end.

Grandfather's words came as a shock. I nodded, stood, and walked over to the edge of our camp high on the flanks of Olallie. I stared off to the east at the vast high desert spread out before me. A warm breeze rose gently up the slope; smoke from a forest fire far to the south drifted across the horizon. This was our land, and someday it would be my duty to help

protect it, just like my father and Hard Lip had before me. I wondered if I would ever be ready or up to the task. Pee appeared beside me, standing motionless, watching off to the distance. Then he wagged his tail, sneezed, and shot down the hill on the heels of a chipmunk, with me right behind scrambling to keep up.

Over the closing days of summer, my grandfather taught us many skills we would need in the years to come. How to make a knife from obsidian stone, knapping the edges ever so slowly with the tip of an antler. How to work wood with heat, ashes, and sand to make a strong and straight arrow. He explained the different arrow tips, their uses, and the unique ways to fasten them to the shaft depending on what we were hunting, or who we were killing. Watching him work the materials with his powerful hands seemed like magic. He was patient, working slowly, checking, and rechecking the items each step of the way. He made it look so easy, and it all made sense when you watched him. When Black Eagle and I took our turns, well, it was not so easy. Frustration and some blood along the way resulted in several finished items, not so pretty like Grandfather's, but mostly usable. He never scolded, just watched us work, smoked his pipe, and occasionally grunted or pointed at this or that.

When the fall full moon came, we packed up our Olallie camp to begin the journey home. Peebody had to pull a travois with a full load of camp gear, so I would walk with him in the morning to keep up his spirits. Once we had been on the trail a while, I could move off and do other things without Pee chasing after me, spreading my mother's gear all along the trail. We traveled down the Warm Springs River out of the pine country, descending into the deep Deschutes River Canyon. We followed the old trail upriver before crossing, then made the long climb out of the canyon to the east. Traveling to the southeast, we crossed the sagebrush plains to the Crooked River, following along the canyon rim south until we reached the ford at Gray Butte which led us into the broad Crooked River Valley.

Here we camped in the grassy meadows along the stream and set fish traps made from willow limbs to catch the salmon moving up the river to spawn. We anchored traps in the channels; the large fish could swim into the trap but once they reached the end, they could not easily turn to free

themselves. It was a lot of fun wrestling a forty-pound salmon out of a trap when you are a seven-year-old boy. My mother and the other women dried the meat on large racks in the sun, mixed it with berries and roots, then pounded it into dried cakes for our winter meals. By the time the cold fall weather was upon us, we had enough fish, so we moved on up the river into the mountains and the large Shoshone winter camp.

*Chapter 2*

# Big Summit Prairie, Central Oregon

*October 1840*

My first impression of this great camp was one of absolute fear. I had spent my entire life to that point with my mother's small band. A large camp might have thirty people, most of which were family. Here, high in the Ochocos, was a vast mountaintop meadow upon which hundreds of people and over a thousand horses stretched out as far as I could see. The smell, the noise, the air felt different from anything I had experienced. I moved in close to my mother and kept Peebody at my side. Walking through a forest of teepees, I could hear babies crying, dogs barking, and people talking in languages I did not understand. Grandfather greeted people as we moved along, and my mother seemed at ease, but I felt frozen.

To my relief, we continued to the edge of the meadow and made camp there, rather than in the middle of the great mass. The women unloaded the dogs and began putting everything in place. Grandfather and the other men had already moved off in search of their friends. My mother scolded me for "hiding in the bushes all day," so calling Pee, I slowly made my way out into the big camp. So many people, all in one place. The adults mostly ignored us, the kids would give us a long look or two but went on with their activities. We stopped to watch a game some boys played with long sticks and a leather ball. They would fight each other for the right to hit the ball,

then chase it across the field trying to hit again. I had seen nothing like it. Bloody lips and knees, whacking each other as much as they were whacking the ball. It looked like fun, but I could not figure out the point of it. Pee just wanted to run out and steal their ball, so, grabbing ahold of him, we moved on.

We continued to the far edge of the camp to see the horse herd. Our family had several horses, but they had gone with my father on the buffalo hunt. This number, all in one place, was beyond my imagination. Around the edge of the meadow was a long racetrack. Men and boys would line up on their horses, then race around the track while others cheered them on. I was sure Grandfather must be in there somewhere, gambling and hooting and having a wonderful time. I watched from a distance for a while but decided it would be best to head back to our camp rather than try to find him in that crowd.

While the people left us to ourselves, the camp dogs seemed very interested in Pee, and there were a lot of dogs. They would approach in groups—some came dashing in, some came slowly with eyes locked. Pee would pee, they would pee, Pee would sniff, they would sniff. They raised hair, growls would rumble, lips would curl, then I would kick the biggest one and off they would run. We repeated this process without too much trouble as we made our way through the maze until a tall gray dog appeared in front of us, teeth bared and eyes focused on Pee. I was about to move into kicking position when a boy, a couple years older than I, stepped into view and told me to stop. He said if my dog ever wanted to sleep in this camp, it had to prove itself to the others, and now was a good as time as any. I did not understand what he meant, but I hesitated and looked down at Pee. He glanced at me and then walked right up to that gray dog and the fight was on. I had seen Pee in a few snapping contests around our camp before, but nothing like this. This was loud, powerful, dirty, and came from the heart. Both dogs fought hard, and then it was over. They stopped, circled each other a few times, and were done. Pee came back over and stood next to me. The gray dog returned to the boy and sat down.

The boy smiled and told me Pee may face a few more battles here, but he would be fine. I asked him how he knew; he told me he shows no fear

to his enemies. The boy said his name was Has No Horse. I told him my name was Buffalo Brush. He said he already knew that. Then he was gone. As I headed back to my camp, I could not shake the feeling my, life was about to change.

That evening when Grandfather returned, he told us our father's hunting party had not been heard from that summer, which is not abnormal, but not a good sign. He said a party of dog soldiers left several weeks earlier to search for signs of them but had yet to return. My mother's face told me that this was a serious matter. My heart seemed to skip several beats as I tried to steady myself and look strong. My sisters cried. Grandfather moved over and held them tight but could offer no words to help. I think I may have cried, too.

We fidgeted around camp for several days, but no news arrived of our father's party. Grandfather decided it was time for my brother and me to join the other boys with the horse herds. We gathered our gear, said our farewells, and, along with Pee, followed him through the camp out to a small group of teepees on the edge of the great meadow. He told us to sit as he slowly loaded his pipe, gazing across the meadow while he lit it with an ember from a smoldering fire. He sat across from us and smoked a while before speaking.

"You have been good boys, and I am a proud grandfather. It has been an honor to share my lodge with you. But boys must become men; now is your time to begin that journey. First you must learn the way of the horse. A man will come soon. His name is Deer Fly, he will guide you on this journey. Listen to what he says and always follow your heart. You will live here now. Your family will wait for word of your father, but we must return soon to Juniper Butte for the winter. I will send you word if I hear any news."

He gave us each a stone knife and medicine bag, tapped out his pipe, leaned in and gave a long hug. Rising slowly with a grunt, he turned and walked away. I wanted to run after him; I wanted to go home with my family; I wanted to scream out, but instead I sat there unable to move. My little brother was crying; I wanted to cry too. Instead, I put my arm around him and held him tight. Pee licked my hand.

Deer Fly was a small wiry man of few words. He suddenly appeared at our fire and motioned for us to follow. We walked to the east end of the great prairie, down a narrow trail through a series of low rimrock canyons.

Here was a small creek choked with beaver dams and a rough shelter built back low into the rocks. We stowed our gear inside, then sat with Deer Fly on a log near the creek. Since we did not know what to do or say, we waited for him to speak. Pee sat with us for a while but got bored and wandered off to sniff around.

Eventually Deer Fly looked over at us and spoke, "Your grandfather is a good man and seems to have taught you some manners. This will be your camp until the spring. There are other camps spread through these canyons with boys such as yourselves. We will bring the horses here for the winter. They will know where it is safe and how to get food. Your job is to break the ice, so they may drink, be on the lookout for wolves and bear, and to keep your eyes peeled for any unfriendly types who might want to wander off with a few of our ponies. If there is trouble, one of you ride for help, and the other, well, deal with the trouble. It is good you have that black dog—it looks like he might be of some use to you. Someone will bring you food occasionally, but hunt when you can. I go now to check on the others."

And then we were alone.

*Chapter 3*

# Big Summit Prairie, Central Oregon

*November 1840*

Alone for the first time in a remote canyon far from our home. I have powerful memories of this time; it marked the beginning of my life's journey. At first, we sat in a daze, uncertain what to do with no adults to guide us. Then we realized we were free to do anything we wanted! So, we explored the area, scrambling around in the rocks and wading in the cool waters of the creek. Later in the day, we decided to gather as much firewood as we could, stacking wood everywhere in the rocks surrounding our small lodge. Keeping busy seemed to help us forget how much we missed our family. I do not remember being scared or lonely, as I had my brother and Pee. It was more a mix of worry about my father and an uncertainty about how to go about our business each day. We were not boys running around camp anymore; we were now expected to become men. Just how, I was not sure.

The following afternoon, we wandered down our canyon and across a narrow ridge to find a small valley with good grass and water. We spotted a lodge in the distance with two boys and a dog off to the side butchering a deer. I recognized the dog as the tall gray owned by Has No Horse. As we walked into their camp, I kept my eye on Pee, hoping there would not be a repeat of the great battle witnessed on their first meeting. To my surprise,

they sniffed each other, then both sat down on their best behavior, maybe in hopes of a handout from the butchers.

Has No Horse looked over and greeted us with a smile, "Good timing! I figured you would come visit as soon as you smelled some food. This guy here is called Horse Trap, though he might want to be called The Great Deer Slayer from now on. He seems to be good with a bow."

Horse Trap just nodded in our direction and kept to his skinning.

"I'm to spend the winter here with him, and he hasn't said three words in the last week. I may go crazy, but I should eat well," he said with a wink. "I see that black dog of yours made the trip." Has No Horse reached over and carved off two big chunks of belly fat and meat from the carcass and threw one to each dog. "That is good because my big gray seems to like him, and he needs someone to run with. You girls are welcome to take a hind quarter back with you if you like—I think Horse Trap here will keep us all in plenty of meat this winter."

Black Eagle and I squatted down while we watched them work. "We are a little unsure about what we are supposed to be doing," I said. "I know we need to watch the horses, break ice, kill bears and all. Is that it?"

Horse Trap laughed.

Has No Horse smiled and looked over, "You two don't look like you'll be killing too many bears. Look, my family is Shoshone. I know you two are Paiute of the Hunipuitoka and Horse Trap here is Wada Paiute from south of here. Our people send boys here to become men. The best of us will become dog soldiers, our job to protect the people, our land, and our ways. My father was called Horse. He was a dog soldier and great war chief, with a herd of many fine horses. He was killed just before I was born, and all his horses went to his father and brothers, so the people called me Has No Horse. I am here because of my father, you two are here because of your father and brother Wolf Dog, and Horse Trap is here, because, well I am not sure why he is here—maybe because he is good with a bow!"

We all smiled, even Horse Trap a little.

Has No Horse continued, "This is my second winter out here. Someday soon I hope to ride with the dog soldiers, to learn the ways of a warrior. Do not worry too much about the horses, they do just fine on their own. Keep

your eyes open, hunt when you can, and try to stay warm. We will be here, and soon we'll take you to some of the other camps. I will introduce you to everyone. Maybe teach you some gambling skills? Those are excellent knives you carry; they would make a nice wager. Here, take this shoulder and that black dog and get back to your camp before it gets dark, you get lost, and we must come find you!"

As the weather grew ever colder, Black Eagle and I kept busy working to improve our shelter. I gathered logs and branches to pile around the outside while Black Eagle built a massive stone fire pit inside. His work was truly a thing of beauty, and with a few modifications we even got the smoke to vent to the outside. We made just about every type of spear and club imaginable, and soon had a good cache of weapons to defend our fortress. Early on, the sounds of the night would keep us awake, each noise a potential bear or Blackfoot warrior seeking our scalps. Clutching our weapons, we would huddle in our robes while Pee just snored contently by the fire.

With time, we understood what Pee already knew. The world is not a scary place when you learn to trust the rhythms of nature. The wind in the trees, the sounds of the insects and birds, the horses as they fed along the creek bank. Coyotes calling to their pack mates in the morning, the raven's squawk as it patrols its territory. There is a balance to the world. Once you allow yourself to become connected with it, you realize you are not alone. There is life all around you, sharing this time and this space. If you listen to nature and can feel the balance, things will normally be fine. I would learn later it is when you feel a disruption to the natural rhythm, when the world becomes quiet, then your defenses need to go up.

It was a long winter and a cold, wet spring. We kept a small area of the creek free of ice and managed to stay warm and fed. I had grown comfortable in the solitude. The wolves did not come to our canyon; there was a big cat around, but we lost no horses. We hunted, rode to visit the other boys, and learned to gamble some. When the weather warmed and the grass began to grow, men came for the horses, and we were free to return to the big camp.

Rather than ride back with the men, we walked, but not directly back. Black Eagle and I traveled north for several days, taking our time, until we

came to a small creek. There we camped, bathed, cleaned our gear, and ate fish we speared from the crystal-clear waters. It felt good to walk and to be free of that little canyon. The world was coming back to life, and we felt connected to it. We had to force ourselves to go back, but it was time. Hard Lip would not be pleased if we ran off for the summer on our own.

Upon our return to the big camp, we found it much less crowded than in the fall, but still plenty of kids and dogs running around smoky fires. Uncertain just where to go or who to talk to, we wandered, waiting to see who we would run into or, better yet, who might feed us. Late that afternoon we spied Horse Trap sitting under a tree braiding a horsehair rope. We squatted beside him.

"We thought you two ran home to your mother," he said.

"Good thought, but I knew you'd miss us too much if we left. We just went for a walk. Pee needed some exercise after lying around all winter," I replied. "We were wondering just what we should do now that we are back at the big camp?"

He looked at me for a minute, then said, "You could go see Deer Fly, like I did, and he'll put you to work, maybe braiding some rope or something important like that. Or I hear your big brother Wolf Dog is in camp. Word is he and his bunch are riding out soon, not sure where or why, but it might be a lot more interesting than braiding rope all summer. I'll tell you where he is if you put in a good word for me with him."

I leaned back and smiled, "That might be the most words I've heard you speak at one time since I met you!"

He went back to braiding, nodding his head off to the left, "His bunch is down the slope there by that little creek. I am counting on you to get me off rope duty."

We laughed and headed over to see if we could find our brother. Wolf Dog was now about fourteen summers and had been riding with older boys for some time. I had not seen him much since he left us but was sure I would recognize him. Down by the creek, we noticed several young men milling around; others looked to be napping in the shade. We hesitated, then walked on, scanning faces in search of our brother. No one seemed to take notice of us. Then a voice came from one of the nappers under a tree.

"I recognize that Pee dog, but you two don't look familiar. Much too big to be my brothers." He sat up. "The Buffalo and Eagle seem to have landed in my camp."

"Napping in the middle of the day—I should have known that was you, big brother," I said.

"Yes, famous warriors need a lot of rest between the killing. Sit down boys, it's been too long. Tell me some stories."

Black Eagle spoke, "Mother is back at Juniper Butte with Hard Lip and our bunch. Our father never came home last winter. Some say he is dead. We wintered on horse duty in a little canyon east of here. We wandered back and just now found you."

It was hard not to notice his eyes were a bit watery.

"Ahh . . . I heard about your father. No one seems to know what happened to them. They went a long way east and a lot can happen between here and there. Someday maybe we find out, huh?"

I sat a minute rolling a twig around in my fingers, then tossed it aside, "Hard Lip said he would get word to us about our father if he heard anything. In the meantime, he wants us to learn horses with Deer Fly. Seems we will be here a while."

"You know how to ride a horse?" asked Wolf Dog.

"Yes," I replied.

"You know how to eat a horse?"

Black Eagle laughed, "Sure!"

"Then you both already know all you need to know about horses. They get you from here to there and when there is nothing else available, you can eat them. You may not have heard, but your big brother is becoming an important man. I ride for Red Wolf—he is the big leader. We carry his word to all the bands. We are his eyes and ears," he boasted.

"You are his messenger boys?" I asked.

"Ahh . . . no, something much more important than that . . . well yes, I guess you could call us that. Some of the boys are moving on. Going home or joining warrior clans. I have some holes to fill and a couple of camp boys like you could come in handy."

"Camp boys?"

"Yes, camp boys. Water the horses, gather firewood, stand watch . . . everything I do not want to do. In return, you get to ride with us. See much country and meet great chiefs and warriors. You want to be a dog soldier someday, maybe even a war chief. This is your path. You are lucky you found me today."

"Camp boys?"

"Good, you are in," he replied. "Find a spot under this tree, grab some food over there, and make yourselves comfortable. Tomorrow we will get you some horses and gear. We ride in two days."

"Okay, but one more thing," I said. "There is another boy, his name is Horse Trap. He is on rope braiding duty with Deer Fly and wants out. He is good with a bow and talks not so much. Can we bring him along?"

"I know this one. You are smart to take care of him. He will be one of the good ones. Yes, we will take him along," replied Wolf Dog.

Several days later, eight of us rode out of the big camp, all inexperienced boys led by our fearless leader Wolf Dog, not yet fifteen summers. Armed with bows, knives, and an assortment of clubs and spears, we were a scary bunch. We took our time, worked the kinks out of our gear and tried to get comfortable with our mounts. Most of us had ridden some, but this was a whole new level, and I do not think they gave us the best ponies. Mine was a biter. He took every opportunity to let me know who was boss. At first, I tried to reason with him and took a gentle approach. Maybe we could become friends if I could build up his trust. Lots of pats and kind words, but the minute I would look away he would bite me. On the arm, on the butt, it did not matter to him, whatever exposed flesh of mine he could reach. So, the next time we got together, I came prepared. When the bite came, I swung around and clubbed him with a good size rock right on his ear. He went down to his front knees, steadied himself, then got back up, and shook his head. We were best friends after that.

Our gang rode, rode more, and after that we rode some more. We rode the creek bottoms looking for tracks or signs of trapping activity. We would lay over on ridge tops in the evenings and scan the horizon for any distance fires or smoke. We searched for hidden springs and explored caves. Some nights we would ride guided only by the stars, then sleep through the

following day. I felt alive, and I felt free. I also felt a bit confused. Just what was it we were supposed to be doing?

When I put this to Wolf Dog, he just said, "Eyes and ears, brother, eyes and ears. We have a green crew, so I thought it would be wise to wander some and get you all in shape. We don't have to be anywhere until the half moon."

We eventually turned south and in time entered enemy territory—Klamath and Modoc country. This was where we were to meet up with our big chief Red Wolf. On high alert we rode along a small creek bottom toward a flat-topped butte where Wolf Dog told us the meet would take place. Red Wolf was there to parlay with a Modoc chief named Schonchin. The Modoc were not necessarily our friends, so the sooner we joined up with Red Wolf the better.

The air in the creek bottom was still, the only sound that of our horses ambling through the brush. No birds, no insect sounds. Feeling a sense of alarm, I turned to say something to Wolf Dog. Suddenly there was a loud scream, and a blur came flying out of the trees, pulling both Horse Trap and Black Eagle from their mounts at once. I pulled back hard on my horse, so hard he rode back on his hind legs, flipping me off his back end. I rolled up to my knees, grabbing for my knife as Pee ran to my side. Just then five men stood up from the tall grass along the stream, not screaming war cries, but laughing. Apparently, these were Red Wolf's sentries, and they had laid a little trap for us.

"Wolf Dog! You ride with deaf and blind puppies now! You better send these little ones back to their mommies for some more suckling," one man laughed.

"Storm Cloud, I knew you would be here, but I didn't see you either. Maybe you are finally getting good at something. Let those two up. One of them is my little brother and the other one you don't want to have mad at you."

"Ah . . . this one bites, uh. Good, we need some new biters. The one with the knife, he looks like he may be a brother, too?"

"Yes, his name is Buffalo Brush, the little guy is Black Eagle, and the biter there is Horse Trap. You already know these other fellas."

"Okay you pups, clean out your pants and we'll get on up the trail. Red Wolf is pissed you are late," directed Storm Cloud.

We rode on to the butte and into Red Wolf's camp. The Modoc were already there, the meet with Schonchin underway under a large pine tree in the shade. Modoc warriors milled around on one side of the camp and ours on the other. None of the Modoc seemed happy to see us. Our job was to stay out of the way and guard the horses, which we gladly did. Wolf Dog tried to look calm, but I think he was just as worried as the rest of us. It was nearly dark by the time the meet ended. Red Wolf and Schonchin stood and gave each other a quick embrace. After a few final words between the two, Schonchin mounted his horse and with a whoop led his men off in a gallop. I stood from a distance watching, scared, amazed, excited; I was not sure which, but I felt alive!

Red Wolf called some men over to him, including Wolf Dog and Storm Cloud. They stood in a circle as he spoke. I could not hear what was being said, but everyone looked serious. Storm Cloud then motioned to three men, and they all came over by me and mounted their horses.

"I got you covered tonight, little Buffalo pup, but you owe me," Storm Cloud said. They rode off in the direction the Modoc had gone.

The rest of the men then all gathered their gear and mounted their horses, so we did too. Wolf Dog moved up beside me. "We ride all night. You guys stay right on me and stay quiet. The meet went well, but Red Wolf says you can never trust a Modoc, so Storm Cloud is watching our back. We'll go north and camp on high ground come morning."

We moved single file slowly through the pine forest until it gave way to sage and juniper flats. We rode up, across, and then back around a rimrock bluff so we could see our back trail for several miles just as the sun was rising. Here we hobbled the horses in a mahogany thicket and the men spread out across the rim to take turns watching and napping. They left our crew with the horses. No sleep for us, not that I could have. Late morning, a group of horsemen came in view, following our tracks. Not a Modoc war party, but Storm Cloud and his men. We signaled to him; they turned and rode on up the ridge to our camp.

Storm Cloud dismounted and walked over to Red Wolf, "They went back to Old Schonchin's big creek camp. Some men were grumbling about this

or that, but Schonchin seemed not to hear them. They eventually bedded down but put out sentries. Must not think they can trust us, huh!"

Red Wolf smiled. "He is still mad about a bunch of ponies that went missing along with some trade muskets. Thinks we might know something about that. I tried to assure him we are seeking a truce, not his horses. We need to work together and put these old differences behind us."

"I seem to remember something about some horses and a few crap muskets . . ." Storm Cloud said.

"No, I think you are mistaken. I told him that sounded like something the Klamath would do, not us," replied Red Wolf.

"Then you must have been convincing. Why do we want peace with the Modoc? They've been a pain in our ass for years."

"The fur trappers that worked our land are fewer now. They took the beaver and caused problems for our people, but they kept moving, and we could manage their numbers. Now the English and Bostons are sending other men. Men who travel our country and make marks in their books. These men are here for some other purpose that we do not yet understand. But we know that to the east there are more and more Whites and they are pushing the tribes out as they move west. We must prepare ourselves for what is coming, even if we do not yet know what that is. A treaty with the Modoc helps secure our southern border. Now we must ride east, we must meet with our friend Gourd Rattler and learn what he knows of what is coming. But not today. Today we rest."

Storm Cloud brought his horse over to me. "Okay Buffalo Bush, you can pay off that favor you owe me by seeing that this fine pony gets a little water. I think he is a parched."

"Brush, it's Buffalo Brush, not bush. I will get this guy some water. Are we riding east with you tomorrow?"

"Oh, I don't think you pups are ready to be dog soldiers yet, so I doubt it. He will probably send Wolf Dog and the bunch of you off to spread the word, something about keeping hands off the Modoc for now. At least until I can get back here and check up on their pony herds again," he laughed.

"I am ready! I can help in camp, I can watch the horses, I can stand guard while you sleep!" I pleaded.

"Ahh...you may be ready in your heart, but you are not yet ready in your mind or your body. Give yourself time, pup, while there is still time. Grow strong and learn this country like the back of your hand. You are on the right track, but I don't think I'd sleep real soundly with you on lookout, not yet anyway."

"Storm Cloud, how am I going to learn anything riding with a bunch of boys?"

"Pup, I don't have any answers for you. I am a simple man, not a chief or a shaman. You are on a journey through life, and right now you are in the pup stage of the journey. Later, if you survive the pup stage, you will begin the man part of the journey. Enjoy each part, keep your eyes open, and try to learn something each day," he replied.

"Here is something you can do with your little brother or that quiet one over there giving me the stink eye. Each of you grab a rock, not a big skull busting rock, but something more moderate. One walks off a good way, sits down, and becomes one with the world, hearing and seeing everything that goes on around him. The other person waits a bit, a short bit or a long bit, and then stalks the other one. He becomes silent and invisible, blending in with the world and moving with the stealth of the rattlesnake. The one who can pelt the other with the rock first, wins! So rather than playing puppy games with sticks and balls, start learning some skills that might keep you alive when it is time to begin your man journey. Now my pony here is still thirsty, and I am still hungry, so why don't we take care of those two things first?"

I nodded as he walked away.

Red Wolf and his dog soldiers left early the next morning, riding to the east, intent on finding Gourd Rattler, our ally and the big chief of the Eastern Shoshone. They believed he should be somewhere in Idaho or at least would arrive there soon. Wolf Dog led us north up along the Deschutes, then we turned east to the Crooked River Valley and on to Summit Prairie. Along the way, we spread Red Wolf's message of the Modoc treaty. Most camps were just small family groups intent only on gathering food and staying out of trouble with no intentions of doing any Modoc raiding, anyway.

It made us feel important to ride into the camps, meeting with elders, passing on Red Wolf's word. Most shared food if they could and badgered

us for news of the outside world. The normal questions were had we seen this band or that, were there any trappers in the area, were people fishing a certain creek, or did we hear that so and so had died. The quiet questions, the ones asked in private away from the women and children, were about the ghost people, the wagon trains, the miners, and soldiers. What did we know, what had we heard? Fear was entering the hearts of our people.