

# The Avenger of Blood

by

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A few years since, at the base of this mound (near Council Grove Mission), a chief resided, whose young daughter was a girl of uncommon beauty, and this beauty was but the external manifestation of a pure and noble spirit. As a matter of course she had many admirers among the young braves of her nation. Her nature was above the arts of a coquette; and loving one among them above all, and only one, she hesitated not to let her preference be known, not only to the Young Eagle who had won her heart, but also to those whose suit she had rejected. Among the rejected suitors one alone so laid it to heart as to desire revenge. He, the Prowling Wolf, was filled with rage, and took little pains to conceal his enmity, though he manifested no desire for open violence. Both of these young men were brave, both skillful in the use of weapons, which far away on the buffalo plains had sometimes been used in battle; but while Young Eagle was noble, generous in spirit, and swayed by such high impulses as a young savage may feel, the Wolf was reserved, dark and sullen; and his naturally lowering brow seemed, after the maiden had refused him, to settle into an habitual scowl. The friends of the Young Eagle feared for his safety. He, however, was too happy in the smiles of his chosen bride to trouble himself concerning the enmity of another, especially when he knew himself to be his equal both in strength and skill.

The Indian customs did not permit the young couple to be much alone with each other, but they sometimes contrived to meet at twilight on the top of this mound, and spend there together a happy hour. Young Eagle was a favorite with his tribe, except among the kinsmen of the Wolf; and among the whites too, he had made many friends, one of whom, who had hunted much with the Eagle, had given him a Colt's revolver, the only one owned in the tribe. Delighted with this formidable weapon, he had made it a plaything till he became skillful in its use, and always wore it about him in addition to his other arms. This was a second cause of enmity which the Wolf laid up in his heart. He seemed to be revolving some dark scheme; but his secret, if he had one, was confided to no one. Bitter words sometimes were passed between the young warriors, but nothing more; yet it was felt that at any time a sudden rousing of passion might end in bloodshed.

One summer evening, just as the moon was up, Young Eagle sought the top of the mound for the purpose of meeting his future bride, for their marriage was agreed upon, and the appointed day was near. One side of this mound is naked rock, which for thirty feet or more is almost perpen-

dicular. Just on the edge of this precipice is a footpath, and by it a large flat sandstone rock forms a convenient seat for those who would survey the valley, while a few low bushes are scattered over a part of the crest of the mound. On this rock Young Eagle sat him down to await the maiden's coming. In a few moments the bushes rustled near him, and rising, as he thought, to meet her, a tomahawk flashed by his head, and the next instant he was in the arms of a strong man and forced to the brink of the precipice. The eyes of the two met in the moonlight, and each knew then that the struggle was for life. Pinioned as his arms were by the other's grasp, the Eagle frustrated the first effort of his foe, and then a desperate wrestle, a death-wrestle, followed, in which each was thoroughly maddened. The grasp of the Wolf was broken, and each instantly grasping his adversary by the throat with the left hand, sought his weapon with the right—the one his knife, the other his revolver. In the struggle the handle of the knife of the Wolf had been turned in the girdle, and missing it at the first grasp, ere he could recover himself the revolver was at his breast and a bullet through his heart. One flash of hatred from the closing eye, and the arm of the dying warrior relaxed; and as the body sank the Eagle hurled it over the precipice, and in his wrath fired bullet after bullet into the corpse as it rolled heavily down; and this not satisfying his revenge, he ran round and down the side of the mound, and tore off the scalp of his foe.

The young girl, who was ascending the mound to meet her lover, heard these successive shots, and knowing well from what source such rapid discharges alone could come, hastened on, and came just in season to see the Eagle scalping his victim. She soon brought her family to the spot, and every circumstance of the transaction showed at once the dangerous position in which the Eagle was placed. There was no witness of the combat, no means whatever of showing that he had smitten the Wolf in self-defense. The number of ball-holes in the body, and the tearing off of the scalp, all seemed to bear evidence against him, and he knew that the friends of the Wolf would take advantage of every circumstance in order to procure his death as a murderer. He felt that death was certain if he submitted himself for trial, and he therefore determined to defend himself as best he might, and await the result, as his only chance for life.

These Indians observe the law that was established among oriental nations long before the time of Moses, by which the shedding of blood may be rightfully avenged by the nearest kinsman of the slain, while the murderer, in this respect an outlaw, will of course defend himself as best he may.

At the same time the friends of the deceased are at liberty to accept a ransom for the life of their friend, and often—if for a time the murderer escapes the blow of the avenger of blood—a compromise is effected, and the affair is settled. In the meantime the avenger of blood assumes the

office at the risk of his own life, for if he falls, retribution is not demanded for him, but the next of kin takes up the original demand only for the blood of the first one slain.

The Young Eagle at once took his resolution, sustained by the advice of his friends. Completely armed he took possession of the top of the mound, which was so shaped that while he was himself concealed, no one could approach him by day without being exposed to his fire—and he had two devoted and skillful allies, which, together with his position, rendered him far more than a match for his single adversary, the avenger of blood—the brother of the Wolf. These allies were his bride and a large sagacious hound which had long been his hunting companion, and had guarded him many a night when camping on the prairies. The girl had in her veins the blood of Indian heroes, and she quailed not. She demanded with lofty enthusiasm to be made his wife, and then, acquainted with every stratagem of savage war, and with every faculty sharpened by affection, and her husband's danger, she watched, and warned, and shielded him with every art that the roused spirit could suggest, and which could be safely practiced.

In vain the brother of the Wolf surveyed from afar this fortress of the Eagle. It was evident that long before he could reach a point from which the young warrior could be seen, he would himself be within the range of his rifle without a cover of any kind. Often, by night, he attempted to ascend the mound, but scarcely could he put his foot upon its base before the dog of the Eagle would give his master the alarm, and then to approach would be only to go to his death. It was no mystery how the Eagle was supplied with food, for the young wife showed no solicitude, and yet no one saw her form, or heard her footsteps on the mound.

The brother of the Wolf knew well that the Eagle's wife must supply him with food, and determined, if possible to entrap him. He therefore studied and imitated her gait, he obtained opportunities of observing her dress, and when he felt that he was perfect in his part, he arrayed himself one evening in a dress the exact counterpart of hers, with knife and tomahawk concealed beneath, and bearing some food openly before him, took, just at twilight, the common path up the mound, where he knew the mere sound of footsteps would be less likely to alarm the dog or his master, and he hoped to approach so near without suspicion, that he might by a sudden rush, secure his victim. His plan was skillfully executed. He imitated well the light step of Eagle's wife; the approaching form was one familiar to the dog, and he had not caught the scent. He wagged his tail as he lay with his eye fixed as if he would soon bound up and forward with a welcome. The Eagle addressed his supposed wife in gentle tones and bade her hasten. The blood avenger was within ten feet of his intended victim, and thought that all was gained, when the dog, with one yell and one bound, threw himself upon him and bore him to the earth, with his

jaws grappled to his throat. Entangled by the female dress and throttled by the hound, he could not draw his knife, and the Eagle, who comprehended the scene at a glance, deprived him of his weapons, while held by his dog, and then pinioned his arms. "Now go to your friends," said the young warrior, "I crave not your blood. Your brother sought my life on this very spot, and I slew him, but only to save my own. But stay, you shall go home as a warrior should. You have shown some skill in this." He cut the pinions from his arms and gave him back his weapons. They were taken in silence and the humbled, yet grateful foe withdrew.

Three months thus had passed away, and negotiations were opened for a ransom. The friends in such a case agree first to treat, but do not engage to accept what may be offered for life. This is to be decided only on a spot appointed for the ceremony, and with the shedder of blood unarmed, and completely in their power, and bound by the law, to make no resistance. When the parties are present, and the proposed ransom is offered, it is considered by the friends of the slain man, and if accepted, all is settled; but if not they have the right to slay the murderer on the spot, without resistance from him or from his friends.

In this case the friends of the Wolf agreed to consider a ransom, and Young Eagle consented to abide the issue, he and his friends hoping that the sparing of the brother's life might have some influence in the decision, and besides it was now generally believed in the tribe that the Wolf had been the aggressor.

At the day appointed the parties met in an open space with hundreds to witness the scene around. The Eagle, all unarmed, was first seated on the ground, then by his side was laid down a large knife with which he was to be slain, if the ransom was not accepted. By his side sat his wife, her hand clasped in his, while the eyes even of old men were dim with tears. Over against them, and so near that the fatal knife could be easily seized, stood the family of the slain Wolf, the father at the head, by whom the question of life or death was to be settled. He seemed deeply moved, and sad, rather than revengeful. A red blanket was now produced and spread upon the ground. It signified that blood had been shed which was not yet washed away, the crimson stain remaining. Next a blanket all of blue was spread over the red one. It expressed the hope that the blood might be washed out in heaven and remembered no more, and last, a blanket purely white was spread over all, significant of a desire that nowhere on earth or in heaven a stain of the blood should remain, and that everywhere, and by all, it should be forgiven and forgotten.

These blankets, thus spread out, were to receive the ransom. The friends of Eagle brought goods of various kinds and piled them high before the father of the slain. He considered them a moment in silence and then turned his eye to the fatal knife. The wife of the Eagle threw her arms around her husband's neck, and turned her eyes imploringly full on

the old man's face, without a word. He had stretched his hand toward the knife when he met that look. He paused; his fingers moved convulsively, but they did not grasp the handle. His lips quivered, and then a tear was in his eye. "Father," said the brother, "he spared my life." The old man turned away. "I accept the ransom," he said, "the blood of my son is washed away. I see no stain now on the hand of the Eagle, and he shall be in the place of my son."

The feud was completely healed. All were at last convinced that the Eagle was not a murderer; the ransom itself was presented to his wife as a gift, and he and the "avenger of blood" lived afterward as friends and brothers.