Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

ALAN NAFZGER

Pecan Street Press
Lubbock • Austin • Fort Worth
BOOK DISCLAIMER

There is almost always some nut that gets confused. This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, geographical places, events and incidents are either historical events or the product of the author’s imagination and used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. While the author has taken some a historical liberties, Quanah Parker did have an expensive bull disappear into Texas.

Amazon Edition

Library of Congress has catalogued the hardcover edition as follows:

Nafzger, Alan
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull / by Alan Nafzger. – 1st ed.
p. cm.

ISBN: 9798650429869
FORT SILL

Fort Sill was a little better than a hundred and seventy-five miles from Charles Goodnight’s ranch headquarters in the Texas Panhandle. It was only ten steps for the former Comanche warrior Quanah Parker. The fort was an underfunded reservation fort, but a sharp post of some two dozen stone buildings. It's most devoted soldiers had to admit that the fort was the sort of post that you had to have on your record to get somewhere better. Despite Congress, it always seemed to prosper.

The day this account began, the parade ground was full of black cavalrmymen, especially adept at one particular drill. Mounted Buffalo soldiers were ferociously beheading wooden posts top with bundles of straw to the delight of spectators and participants alike.

Each time Goodnight rode in to visit his friend, the commander, he stopped first at Mrs. Brown's hotel and dining room. There she sat in front of him an extremely large breakfast, at ridiculously low prices; she did that for him regardless of the time of day. And the last thing he did before heading for the commander's office was plant a kiss on her cheek. But if that were the stirring beginning of the day, unfortunately, this time it was also the beginning of a dismal escapade involving a stolen Hereford bull.

Nothing seemed out of order; as Goodnight approached the fort, he passed the numerous laundresses, kids with animals, and a large number of impoverished Indians.

Goodnight hesitated at the door, but he went on in only when he realized that Ranald Mackenzie probably saw him through the glass. He had neglected to take care of something; he wanted a drink but in one of the wild saloons off post. It was just early enough in the day for any one of three saloons to be empty. Instead, the long waiting room was empty except for a sergeant clerk who just motioned for him to sit and wait. The crack in a windowpane looking out on the fort felt like a smashed thumb. Goodnight's boots echoed on the wood floor over to the window. The clerk busily took a stack of papers into Mackenzie and didn't come back.

Goodnight was always thirsty and knew a bottle and glass would be waiting for him if he ever reached Mackenzie's desk. Quanah Parker entered and sat for a while without saying a word. He sat for a while motionless, leaning forward elbows on his knees, hands holding
up his chin. It wasn't the classic picture of the Comanche warrior in his prime or how he posed for photographs, but of course, he was an old man by the time someone grew the balls enough to steal one of his animals.

Quanah’s old eyes, glazed over, might have been looking at the outdated map on the wall. Goodnight looked out on the post. Outside, a black soldier trotted by as if he'd forgot something. A single hen pecked around the livery's grain room. Two officers’ wives stood talking with folded arms, probably deprived of official status themselves, were now undoubtedly looking to advance their husbands' status. Soldiers were returning from afternoon fatigue (construction) and were molesting a water barrel. There was nothing else in that part of the Indian Territory but the wind.

Quanah stopped looking at the map and Goodnight stopped looking out the window; their eyes met briefly. Quanah took a deep breath through his nose and as Goodnight turned from the window, he spoke, “Goodnight, I've been to see every Quaker on this reservation, and nobody wants to give food. They say Washington has not send food for the Indian. I sure must have made a name for myself as one mean Indian, they not feed.”

Goodnight's voice was unsurprisingly deep and it seemed to reverberate up from a water well. “Now Quanah, that ain't so, you're the principal Chief of the entire Comanche nation; the only one ever. They ain't a man in all the Indian Territory that don't respect that. For Christ’s sake you did that with blue eyes. The thing is, you just let yourself get caught between times.”

“Let?”

“Let. Yep. Go on and get mad if you want to, but you own how many acres? Two million Comanche acres and you own 400,000 personally. And the only real cattle on that land are owned by me or Waggoner. You are leasing the range when you should be running your own beeves.”

“I don't want to make enemies with my cattle baron friends; political allies important.”

Goodnight rushed to sit next to his longtime enemy and newfound friend. “Screw Waggoner.”
“Screw you, too?” the Chief asked.
“Well, yea. If yaw wanna put it that way. Dammit, Chief. You gotta do what's best for your people.”
“I'm greedy as next man, but you don't see me going around promising to do business with old friends and walking out on them right in the middle of things,” the Chief said extra nobly.

Goodnight tried to make eye contact again, but Quanah wouldn't agree to it. He was studying the old map again.
“The fact is, if you don't get some food to your people, I don't care what they owe you; you're going to be in trouble.”

Quanah’s eyes went wide, “The wives and I will never starve.”
“That's not what I'm talking about; take a look at this.”

“Goodnight pulled out two letters and his reading glasses. One letter was from Ranald Mackenzie and another from the Indian Affairs director in Washington DC. Holding out the letter from the very office they were sitting in, Goodnight explained, “the government is hurting for beef to feed the Army and Mackenzie invited me here to take care of that. Why didn’t he write you for help?”

Goodnight held out the Washington letter at the same time, “Indian Affairs director, John Oberly, says beef for the Indians has been procured on the East Coast and is being shipped to you now.”
“It will arrive underweight; it's always that way,” the Chief pointed out.

“And rancid, don’t forget that,” the cattleman reminded him.
“Yes, and rancid,” the Chief agreed.
“Exactly. Get the point?” Goodnight asked.

Quanah was becoming enraged, but over the years had become expert at hiding it. He looked up at Goodnight and blinked a couple of times. Goodnight nodded and tapped the two letters together, “I expect with two-million acres you could raise enough beef to feed your people and the army both.”

“Supply our own beef?” Quanah asked.

Goodnight cut to the point, “Maybe stop leasing the grass and run more of your own cattle you can sell them to the agent. Do you like leasing the land to Daniel Wagner?”
“What is wrong with that? He lot like you,” the Chief resisted.
“Don’t say that,” Goodnight said.
“Big cattle man.”
“Yea, but he’s a banker,” Goodnight said.
“Yea. So?”
“That makes him a coyote,” Goodnight insisted.
“But you also lease reservation land; why would you shoot yourself in the foot.”
“I’m not. Oh, you might think I am, but beeves is funny they'll sell in whatever direction ya drive ‘em. There's Nevada; they found silver. Golden Colorado; I'll just move mine in that direction. And the Army will have to buy your beef. The price will be high.”
“Mackenzie is sick and if the next commander won't do business with Indians.”
“Then eat ’em; that's what they're for.”
“Maybe if I a young man. Truth, I be dead by the time my few cattle reproduce; you're already a big rancher. I'll be dust and the tribe will have a different leader; he might not want to be a big rancher type man.”
“You want to hunt buffalo don't you?” Quanah flinched.
“Noble idea. Young people need to see this before I go.”
“Friend, those days are over; there aren't any left”
Quanah slowly turned away from the map to test his honesty.
Goodnight felt like he needed to explain, “they're gone, I just crossed the Staked Plains coming here and I saw maybe four; there were however, many men gathering up the bones of thousands for fertilizer. Just the bones have created an entirely new industry.”
Quanah’s eyes watered.
“Chief, your past was glorious hunts, but your future is cattle, dumb, stubborn, unromantic cattle.”
“Buffalo, dumb and stubborn and sin for to be romantic. God offended.”
Goodnight looked a bit worried, “I’m sorry.”
Quanah continued, “You don't hurt my feelings; you scare me a bit.”
Goodnight was dumbfounded and it didn't immediately come to him how to explain the two notions of “romance.”
The Chief never joked, “You know yourself how white men have
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

themselves whims all the time.”

Goodnight felt he needed to get back to the arguments he was trying to make, “Well, I reckon the West is fading a bit, ‘in decline’ you might say, but I don't see people getting less hungry. People gotta eat, Chief; ya see what I mean?”

The sergeant clerk entered the room and motioned for Goodnight to enter the office. Goodnight ignored the clerk, which made Quanah visibly nervous.

Rather than upset the commander, he tried to hustle Goodnight along, “Okay teach me to be big ranch cowman.”

“Well okay, this could be a little irregular, but a cowman looking to start is tolerant of a lot a of things and an ambitious rancher will work ahead of the round-up so to say.”

“Are you ambitious?”

“I was.”

“And you want me ambitious too?” Quanah was speculating but understood.

The sergeant clerk stared angrily that the cowman would rather finish talking to the Indian, when his commander’s time was valuable.

Flat out Goodnight had to tell him, “You increase your herd by claiming a quantity of unbranded stock.”

“I steal cattle?”

“I told you there would be the need for a good level of tolerance,” the rancher explained.

“You stole cattle?”

Goodnight admitted, “To start my spread? Of course I did. But subsequently, I'm honest.”

“You shouldn't tease an old Indian this is an army post, not insane asylum.”

“Well, think about it; a herd is a fine thing to have.”

“I think.” Quanah said stoically, always stoically.

“The idea is to get cattle, right?” Goodnight reasoned.

“Know how to get cattle.”

“How?”

“Bring large band of Indians. Ride slowly around herd who make mistake of crossing reservation land. Say, ‘your government give this land to the Comanche to be his hunting ground, but you come here
with cattle, scare the game and your cattle eat the grass, so the Buffalo leave and the Comanche starves. Work all the time. Frightened of Indian image.”

“And they cut out some beefs for you?” Goodnight knew.

“Extortion.”

“How do you know that word?” Goodnight was curious.

“Mackenzie my friend also. He teach word.”

“He told you that? It’s a government word. Very tricky,”

Goodnight warned. “I’ll teach you a different word, an Indian word. Tribute.”

“It not Indian word. Never heard.” The Chief was stern.

“No, you take it and make it your word.”

“Tribute?”

“Yes tribute. They must give you the cattle to honor you. Not because they fear you. It’s better that way, legally.” Goodnight explained.

When Goodnight was in Mackenzie's office, behind a closed door, Quanah just realized three men standing just inside the door their appearance was so slight that Quanah first noticed their toes through worn boots. They were white and smelled bad. Quanah turned away and studied the sergeant clerk who pointed them to three chairs.

The sergeant inspected the three as they headed for their wait. They were sorry looking specimens and the sergeant even gave Quanah a glance to confirm it.

“We’re Texas Rangers, up from…” the pockmark leader said.

“You don’t look like Rangers, let me see your papers.”

“Well, we're going to go apply; that’s what I mean,” he slyly responded. They were greasy and filthy and probably only shirkers.

“You look like buffalo skinners,” the Sergeant suggested.

“I hain’t killed no buffalo ever,” the tall retard said.

“I didn’t say you killed ‘um. Did I? I said you skinned ‘em.”

They were dressed in the clownish mixture of Tex, Mex, army and native garb. The tallest looked like an idiot, mouth open and one of his front teeth missing. The younger one had clearly stolen a new Stetson; it was the only item on them that didn't look ten years old.
“And you're... cowboys, outlaws or deserters here to see the colonel? Which? All three?”

The pockmarked man chuckled like he wasn't offended, “That's very funny. Actually, we're here waiting on Mr. Goodnight.”

“Well, this ain't his office.”

“The reason we come in here is we asked in town and they sent us here.”

“And?” the sergeant wanted to know.

“We hear that he's looking for hands,” Pokemark said.

Quanah’s nostrils flared. There was anything wrong with asking for work. But Quanah was feeling it was pit viper who was asking.

The sergeant maintained the antagonism, “He's got all the help he needs,” and he said it tersely.

“What about you Indian? Where’s the tribe’s herd?”

“That's Quanah Parker,” the sergeant corrected him.

“I don't give a rat's ass who he is, but I do have a few questions for him... and now you Indian, you got a herd?”

“Naturally, I have all the men I need.”

“You're a smart ass Indian ain't ya?” The pockmarked man stood in anger.

“No, just drunk,” Quanah replied.

The pockmarked man laughed it off.

“You hear that boys? He's just drunk; caused him to sase me. Ya hear that?”

The low lives chuckled for a few seconds because the porkmarked man wanted them to. They didn’t realize they were sitting beside the man who owned most of the territory.

A light bulb went off in the Shirker’s head that maybe Quanah had beef and he didn't know anything about any leasing agreements.

“Man, look at your duds. You sure have nice threads. Maybe you’re a Chief or something?”

Quanah only listened.

“Ya, you are. So, tell you what, Chief. I'll make you a deal you tell me and my partners where your herd is and we'll go out and have a look at them, we'll tell you if they're fit enough to drive them where you want them.”

Quanah look thoughtfully at the map and then the floor; the
trash continued enthusiastically.

“Honest fact is we had hoped to hire on with the auger. He feeds best; hear tell about it anyway and we ain't eatin’ a real meal in well all winter, but if you got a herd and need help. Maybe we’ll just help you.”

With a toss of the head he looked outside, thought a bit and continued, “See, we’re sympathizers with the plight of the redman. We want you prosperous and brought into the big tent of America as soon as you all get up and walk in.”

The sergeant reached for something behind his desk.

Quanah spoke, “I have all the men I need right now, an entire tribe of expert horseman. I hear tell.”

“But, they ain’t cattleman. You need cowboys and besides we’re going to work for free.” Pockmark issued a grifter’s shit-eating grin.

The Chief sat and thought, but then said, “You need to talk to Isa-Tai, the other Chief of the Comanche maybe you can help him maybe. Or maybe he can help you.”

The Sergeant nearly chuckled, but he coughed it off.

The young hat thief whispered in Pockmark’s ear. The cozenner’s smile vanished and it left him with eyes a bit like broken glass. The pockmarked swindler couldn't seem to believe his ears; his eyes were swollen with rage. No one can be sure but probably what the youngest one explained to him was what a lot of people knew. Isa-Tai was a Comanche medicine man, a Chief in name, a magician, and consummate con-man. The whispering probably sounded included this, “He persuaded all those fool Indians to attack over at Adobe walls and he's about the lowest trickster in the Comanche nation.”

Quanah looked a bit defeated; he had told the joke for the sergeant's benefit but these strangers now clearly understood. So with the game up, Quanah spoke calmly and quietly, “Okay I'd feel safer with drunk Texas Rangers than your lot.”

Pockmark controled his rage, but not for long he whipped out his gun and his friends drew too, but slowly and ineptly. They weren't ready to kill an Indian, especially a Chief, in a colonel’s office.

To many the one looked mighty dangerous, but to Quanah it appeared that nothing would happened. The Chief’s cool gaze never
wavered; it was like he was at the photographer's constantly. The sergeant made a noise behind the prairie refuse. Quanah rose very slowly and stepped over to the side of the room. And then the three shirkers found themselves looking back into the black eyes of a double barrel shotgun lying across the sergeant's desk. At that range and the way they were lined up, using both barrels, it would take in the three of them with the blast.

Pockmark was the last to put his gun away; he glared over to Quanah who was no longer in the blast radius and suddenly showed all his fine teeth in a glowing smile.

“I feel like I just had a real close call and the only witness is an Indian so damn dumb he don't know who his real friends are. I ain’t raisin’ no sand with the army. No sir, not me, not today.”

But the sergeant was up and jamming the shotgun in the chest of the pockmarked man and from the jabs made the smaller man tripped taking a step back. To tell the truth, the trouble makers didn’t look all too surprised. Acted like it happened every day nearly.

The sergeant said, “Get off this post right now.”

The pockmarked man held up both hands and moved them as if pushing an invisible wall. He turned and stepped towards the door and turned back and made a take-it-easy gesture. Still he retained a tight, shy, wry little smile.

When the buffalo hunters were out of the room and down the street, the sergeant turn to Quanah, “My God, what was that all about?”

Quanah shrug, “cattle business.”

“You're a cattleman now?”

The sergeant broke the shotgun open, exposing two empty barrels. “By God, I gotta load this thing some time. Keeps slipping my mind,” and the sergeant smiled for the first time in two weeks.

Quanah was emotionless.

“Hey Chief, that was a pretty good line. About you feeling safer with drunk Texas Rangers. You mind if I write that down?”
PALO DURO CANYON

Pretty much the most important relationship in this story developed years earlier. Of course, Mackenzie was an ambitious man and Quanah had done a number of special favors for him. The favor that particularly bound them together was Quanah tracking down and bringing back a small group of renegade Comanches and their families. Life is a lot about timing and accommodating; Quanah just happened to be there available as Mackenzie’s aggressive methods (tactics) were being questioned in Washington D.C.

Quanah set out to find them with two older Comanche men, three young women, and several army pack mules loaded with supplies. He carried a white flag and a stern letter from Colonel Mackenzie on U.S. Army letterhead detailing Quanah’s “peaceful” mission and promising severe consequences for any Texan who interfered with it. Even with the letter and supplies it was a very dangerous job. The land west of Indian Territory was full of buffalo hunters, confederates and Texans and other men who hated Indians, especially Comanches.

The lightly armed party would have been easy prey and the fact that Quanah took the task with women as his outriders was typical of the Chief. He had in his old age become the ultimate opportunist (eight wives) and political machine (principal Chief of all Comanches).

The Chief wanted a favor from Mackenzie in return; he wanted to send the young men on one last buffalo hunt. He secretly dreamed about one last time or perhaps even an annual excursion if the buffalo could hold out for long enough.

Quanah and his party headed westward across the rolling plains, climbed the Caprock and crossed the perfectly flat high plains. Near the canyon, Quanah encountered a unit of forty black soldiers from the 10th Cavalry under Nicholas Nolan, a white Captain; they were looking for the same runaway Comanches who “might” have attacked some buffalo hunters. Not so much the cavalry soldiers, but it was their captain that wanted the glory of hunting and killing the escaped Indians and Nolan was seriously unhappy with Quanah’s letter and only promised to end the “crisis” peacefully. Whatever the
language, Nolan was burned up about Mackenzie's plan to offer the renegades a free pass back to the reservation.

Quanah told Nolan that he knew the Indians were to the southwest and he was going to talk them into a non-violent return to Oklahoma. The lie had its intended effect as Nolan rode off on a wild goose chase. They didn't supply themselves adequately, and soon they ran out of water and ended up drinking their own and their horses' urine as well.

Quanah didn't have a problem finding the runaway Indians to the northeast. He found them, of course, camped out in the ancient and traditional refuge for cold and hungry Comanches. The Indians had entered the Palo Duro Canyon and finding no buffalo, started killing Charles Goodnight's cattle. Goodnight, always sharply dressed, rode out to meet them. The Indians were in an ugly mood and having just learned their sacred canyon was now owned by someone else, a Spotted Cat Coat Man. And what was Goodnight wearing that day, his nobbish leopard jacket.

When Quanah and his modest group arrived, they had Spotted Cat Coat Man in the middle of a circle and asked him what he was doing there.

"I'm raising cattle," he replied.

They then asked provocatively did he not know that the land was theirs. He answered that he had heard that they claim the land but that the great captain of the Texans also claimed it and had sold it to him.

A parley with Quanah followed. Quanah did asked Goodnight where he came from, a loaded question intended to elicit the answer that he was one of the hated Texans. Comanches always drew a sharp distinction between Texans and everyone else. Texan encroachment, after all, had cost them their land and ended their lifestyle.

Goodnight was smart enough and lied and said he was from Colorado, whereupon the Indians tried to prove him wrong grilling him about every landmark and river in Colorado. Goodnight of course had established the Goodnight-Loving Trail to Denver and passed their rather simple tests.

Quanah thought he remembered Goodnight had been a Ranger tracking him and the women especially had their suspicions about
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

Goodnight, but he'd promised Mackenzie a peaceful diplomatic solution, so Mackenzie could look good in Washington. The Chief announced that Goodnight was not a Tejano and that he was ready to do business.

“What have you got?” The Chief asked.

Goodnight answered, “bullets,” but the cattleman did give them one beef per day until they found the buffalo. Quanah agreed and this was the only treaty the legendary leader ever made.

A week later twenty-five black soldiers and a white Lieutenant Hood, who’d been dispatched to rescue Goodnight arrived to deal with the Indians. Goodnight could only assure them that the problem had been solved. Of course, Goodnight knew it was Quanah who’d solved the problem.

Quanah won over the renegades by convincing them that they'd have to give up their lives on the plain. Quanah told them it was useless to fight anymore and that if they kept fighting the whites would kill them all.

Quanah’s entire career was based on a sunny view of the future; he did believe things would get better and he could back it up to a certain extent. He’d ridden in Teddy Roosevelt's inaugural parade. Roosevelt had hosted a White House party for several Chiefs. He’d hunted wolves on Comanche land in Oklahoma with Roosevelt, Burk Burnett, Daniel Waggoner and thirty journalists. Roosevelt, General Nelson Miles, Indian Commissioner R.G. Valentine, and British Ambassador Lord Bryce had all slept under his roof at Star House. Annie Heloise Abel caused an outrage when she slept there unchaperoned.

So when Quanah told the renegades, “President Roosevelt will feed you back on the reservation, and he’ll give you houses and in time you will become as wealthy as white men with lots of cattle and pretty things to wear,” he was stepping out on a limb but they believed him.

Then he asked, ordered them to return to the reservation, a distance of two-hundred miles as the crow flies across the potentially lethal plains. The deal had only turned his band into a far more numerous and more visible target.

Quanah took no chances; he traveled by night and he abandoned
their three-hundred horses and made up for them from his personal herd. There were several encounters with whites on that trip home, but Quanah, speaking broken English somehow managed to talk his way through.

So Quanah brought fifty-seven Comanche, fifteen fighting men and one white captive home to Fort Sill. Mackenzie was so impressed with Quanah’s diplomacy that he agreed to an unsupervised buffalo hunt, on the condition they could find enough remaining buffalo to hunt.

Goodnight was so delighted not to be killed, he gave Quanah one of the twenty-five Hereford bulls he’d sent to England for. And that bull became the subject of this story.

FRISCO RAILROAD DEPOT

One would have thought the World's Fair had come to the Frisco Railroad Depot the day the Hereford bulls arrived. People from at least four states came to see them. Goodnight had paid $75 each for twenty-five bulls. And one of them would be going to Quanah Parker.

Old Indians, who had Quanah’s ear and had seen plenty of four-year-old Longhorns go for five dollars, they shook their heads when they heard the price paid for the bulls, “That Irishman is getting skinned like a fat steer and his hide is hung out on the fence to dry.”

Goodnight was accused of “going over the line,” but he explained the gift publicly for everyone to hear. “This blood will make excellent cattle, good grazers and they’ll lay on meat and fat for the winter. If you wanna breed him to your heifers, talk to Quanah; why one of those steers he’ll make, might bring you fifteen dollars.”

Quanah walked carefully around the bull making a complete circle before speaking, “Will they graze?”

“Sure,” Goodnight stated.

“Red cattle.”

“Handsome,” Goodnight contended.

“Like me. Red.”
“Curly hair,” Goodnight tried to joke.
“Clean.”
“Whiteface and maybe white on their back.” Quanah’s bull had a distinctive white streak down his spine.
“Horns shortish.”
“But what’s important is their blockiness,” Goodnight explained.
“Short bones, not long like Mexican bones.”
“Look at the width and depth of the meat on their shoulders, back and hindquarters; all that is meat.”
“Steak animals,” Quanah analyzed one of the best keepers known to man.
“They're even tempered; easy to handle.”
“Lazy ass gentlemen,” Quanah summarized it pretty well.
Here the two men stepped up near the bull.
“Put your hand out,” and Quanah extended his hand, the young bull sniffed inquiringly the leather cuff the Chief wore, testing it with a speculative tongue.
The old Indian who remarked that Goodnight had been skinned, spoke up, “to short-legged they'll never make it in to water from the range.”
A different but equally cynical Indian agreed, “Never cover the ground for good grazing here.”
The old Indian had one quite personal parting shot, “No wonder this animal is a personal gift. If he had given it to the tribe, and not Quanah, it would be an insult requiring a council.”
The cynics walked away shaking their heads and telling each other it was just another lie told by the white men.

COMANCHE RESERVATION

Please understand, the reservation was a devastating experience for the Comanche. It was a classic welfare trap and many a native succumbed to it. But it was strange that Quanah Parker, once despondent and the hardest of hard cases, used the reservation to rise in stature and confidence. The Chief understood that the way to
power was through the white man. He cultivated friendships with the Indian agent, the Quaker J.M. Haworth, Army Commander Ranald Mackenzie, and of course, Goodnight.

On a reservation of sullen dispossessed Indians, Quanah made a point of being cheerful and helpful and cooperative with everyone. Haworth was a Quaker and had his job simply for that reason; he was a Quaker but what went without saying is he was an aggressive but a fair man, and not corrupt like tens of previous agents.

Mackenzie had contacted Quanah’s white family and argued that Quanah should not be punished for the sins of a former generation of Comanches. And he relayed all what was said to Quanah. The Parker's, his white mother’s family, wanted nothing to do with the Chief.

Mackenzie and Quanah, before Star House, had lived near each other, the Chief in his teepee and the colonel in the commander's quarters. For a time, they had been neighbors.

Quanah had told Charles Goodnight that Mackenzie had taught him manners and the whiteman ways, which Goodnight thought meant “politics.” The army commander and the Indian Chief spent considerable time together. It sure would be something if this account could have born witness to the etiquette lessons, but even more outstanding would be an account of the politics. No one can speak of their talks. They must have been entirely private. Politics and religion are always best practiced in private.

On the other hand, Quanah Parker came to the reservation from an interesting male society where consensus-building was the most valued political skill. A Comanche almost never killed another Comanche, regardless of the dispute. Quanah was naturally gregarious, and his first sense was to build consensus. McKinsey, irascible and hotheaded, taught Quanah little in that department.

Their relationship was simply that Quanah was a problem solver. Years previously, Quanah had brought in a brave who was charged with murdering a soldier…

Quanah bought a car, an old ambulance, and was named by his friends, “a dead wagon.”

He had a death bodyguard everybody called “dummy.”

He had twenty-five children, many he adopted.
He had a railroad named after him, the Quanah, Acme and Pacific Railroad, and he often drove the locomotive blowing the whistle and ringing the bell.

Unfortunately, on a trip to Fort Worth one of his fathers-in-law blew out the gaslight. It killed Yellow Bear and Quanah was unconscious for two days.

Quanah Parker greeted Teddy Roosevelt wearing a six-shooter. He was afraid someone might try to shoot the president as they shot McKinley four years before. They both spoke to various crowds, and Quanah returned to Lawton, “I got more cheers than Teddy.”

Quanah Parker went on a famous wolf hunt with Roosevelt. The party killed seventeen wolves, or perhaps coyotes, it's not clear…

Geronimo died with $10,000 in the bank, but was an unsympathetic character at Fort Sill. Only the media loved him. He was a cross-grained, mean and a selfish old curmudgeon. Geronimo drank and gambled.

Quanah hired white women to teach his wives to cook American fare.

It was bad enough for the Comanche to bend to the white man's will, now he had to line up meekly to receive the benefits. Little small helpless children, they were now fed and clothed by the government. Humiliating. But you've probably heard and seen this one hundred times before; the welfare never came. The system was cruel and degrading; the whites had taken everything that had defined the Comanche life and offered them nothing but squalor. Always on the verge of desperation, the tribes lived in hunger and dependency. There was no way out and no way back to the buffalo.

The white man's charity came in the form of food and annuities. The annuities consisted of $30,000 worth of goods each year for both Kiowa and Comanche tribes. Three thousand residents, that meant ten dollars per person. The goods included axes, frying pans, thimbles, tin plates butcher knives, and basic clothing. A lot of it was shoddy or completely worthless. The Comanche, most of the time, sold it cheap back to the white people.

The beef was issued on the hoof and the government's assumption was that the animal would produce edible food in the amount of fifty-percent to its total weight. This was a fine calculation
in a wet fertile season when there is plenty of grass. But in the winter or in draught, many of the range-fed cattle lost so much weight that many had value only as hides.

The reservation’s game was nearly hunted out, and the buffalo where totally off the map. When non-beef components of the ration came (flour coffee, sugar, salt), it was less than half of what the average soldier got, if the ration came at all. Many families went hungry.

Indian lore is full of accounts of reservation deprivations, rancid beef, spoiled food rations, pitiful blankets. Suffice to say, the government corruption was so egregious, they put the Quakers in charge of the Comanche. At Fort Sill, an upright Quaker gentleman was the Indian agent, but didn't help matters much (much of the corruption was in the nation’s capital); however, a Quaker administrator looked good politically and did give a number of vulnerable politicians some peace of mind.

THE INDIAN SCHOOL IN MARCH

The schoolhouse where the school board met was the same as the room where instruction took place. It was a big square and had a potbelly stove in the center. It had long movable benches for students and truly large windows so the young natives could see what they were missing. For a young native American, it was the worst of all possible architectures; they were clearly missing adventures outdoors. The oversized windows caused the native children to miss more than their fair share of answers. But most importantly, they were missing the entire point of being there. There were engravings of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln in place above the teacher's desk at the front. For the school board meeting Quanah attended, there was a long table at the front, in place of the desk, and one of the long benches that would seat five men - Isa-Tai and four white politicians.

Before the meeting, Quanah watched the way the young woman handled the assignments of various tasks. The boys had moved her
desk over to the side and they pulled up the big table for the politicians to use. She had the girls sweeping and dusting. She stood there to chat with the families. Quanah was fascinated. The students were devoted, and she was calmly undermining a whole culture that had until recently been based on buffalo, horsemanship, and war.

Quanah looked from boy to boy; they were studying him as well, but their eyes dropped as he looked at them. They were a frightened bunch that night. Not a single boy looked like he might issue a war cry and tomahawk Washington or Lincoln’s image, much less the politicians taking their place in front of the room. The boys might laugh outside his presence, but no one seemed near it that night. But when the teacher glanced at him, Quanah nodded; this was all to the good, but he never felt comfortable around frightened tame boys.

The night of the school board meeting, Quanah felt apart from his tribe, and he felt old.

Arriving early, he had seen five boys ride on horses now grazing in the meadows. He had noticed a carriage, a car, and a wagon bringing families. More people walked than rode; they must have come a long way.

He wanted to try to picture these boys at work on a buffalo hunt. The tall, lean one, with high cheekbones and long braided hair fit into his photo right off; that boy could probably ride. Quanah could tell from the way he spanned the bench. He might never run a bank, but he'd be deathly stubborn chasing down a buffalo.

There was a shorter boy beside him, staring out the window at the setting sun; he had quite a passion in his eyes. He was like a wolf in a cage, remembering what it was like to be outside. This must be Broken Paw, the one that got himself a lamp falling off a horse. Despite this wolf spirit, he'd be of little use.

Certainly not going on any hunt would be the fat son of Isa-Tai. The kid, obviously another con-man but still in training, beamed around the room as if the whole world were a pecan pie. And then there was the smallest kid in the room, and on that particular night, wasn't even aware enough to remember to button his pants.

But the short little muscled up fellow at the far end of the bench showed a usefulness. He was that special breed of Comanche that comes out of his mother not a large baby but a little man. He sat with
his legs spread wide as if crossing them would be a discomfort to his maleness. Quanah nodded to himself; he knew the position.

Most of the rest were simply unlikely to be invited. The one with the glasses might make a farmer. The corn he grew might supplement the corn the government wanted them to boil and eat. But for Quanah, corn was more for the pigs.

One boy was rumored that he didn't speak at all; that left him at home right there. And a boy was drawing a flower for one of the girls on his slate. No. Definitely not.

Just as the meeting was gaveled to order, the teacher probably read Quanah's mind about the boys. She suddenly raised her eyebrows. He had never been to a school board meeting and she gave him a knowing look that she was on to his designs.

“Miss Haversham, would you please begin the meeting and show our guests the depth of our new understanding?”

“John Abernathy, would you please favor us with your selected poetry reading,” and then she sat directly beside the great war Chief.

The tall boy, the one that could probably ride, scrambled from the bench and stood in front. Finding his place, he nailed it down with his finger, “Charge of the Light Brigade.”

He cleared his throat and read carefully, “Half a league, half a league, half a league onward into the valley of death rode the six hundred.”

The Chief squinted at the young man, unbelieving. The last line of the poem was read, “Honor the charge they made. Honor the Light Brigade Noble six-hundred,” and his high crackle voice echoed around the room.

Quanah groaned as the whole buffalo hunt evaporated before his eyes. He said out loud, “Oh my, their voices aren't even changed,” and he jammed on his hat and walked out. Fashioning himself as a new “political being,” he didn’t curse once until he was far outside.

Quanah went home.

The board voted, four to one, to pursue a more vocational education, the agricultural type. The one vote was from a bright but enamored politician. He commended her work in preparing the children for a higher education and he kept watching for her to oppose the vocational approach because he had first-hand knowledge
of her true feelings. He’d been to the school plenty before, and the students all knew his pet name for their teacher, “missy” and sometimes even, “little missy.”

Miss Habersham reluctantly agreed with the school board and finally was asked to have the student choir to sing a song.

STAR HOUSE IN APRIL

The thing that Quanah Parker was most proud of, rightly so, was the house he lived in. While many Comanche Chiefs had gotten government financing to build the three hundred dollar shotgun shacks that littered the reservation, Quanah for years lived in a teepee and he spent many summers under a brush arbor.

But as his status and wealth increased; he needed something better. In the end, U.S. presidents would come to visit him and he wanted a ten-room two-story house. He wanted the sort of house that any white rancher would have, and no other reservation Indian could even come close to dreaming about.

The hair in the butter was money. The cattleman friends might help, but best would be to get the government to pay for it. They owed him surely; his new peaceful ways saved them money and anguish. But Washington refused because of the wives. Staunch Baptists in the Indian Affairs office sank the whole idea.

Quanta didn't walk away easily. He peppered Washington with letters and even appealed directly to the Secretary of the Interior. He spoke to every officer at Fort Sill including Mackenzie and persuaded them to write letters.

He argued that other men with multiple wives had received grants, that lesser Chiefs had received funds for houses and that he was being treated unfairly because of an ancient custom. He would never reject any of his wives or offer any compromise.

Quanah hustled and demanded and negotiated but the Indian Affairs Commission was not going to change their mind. So in the end, the privilege of building Quanah's house went to the stockmen, that leased Comanche land for their cattle - Charles Goodnight, Burk
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

Burnett and Daniel Webster. They were happy to oblige and donate the $2,000 needed.

The interior was finished beaded board and ten-foot ceilings; there was a wall-papered formal dining room with a very long table and a wood-burning stove. A Quincy and the house sat on prime real-estate in the shadow of the Wichita Mountains. He painted enormous white stars on the roof, to represent his rank; he was just as important as any army general.

Quanah employed a white woman as a servant, a Russian immigrant. A deaf bodyguard everyone called “dummy” mostly guarded the house and the wives.

Guests to dinner had been General Nelson Niles, Geronimo, Lone Wolf, Mackenzie and Goodnight, of course, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, a British Ambassador, countless Cattlemen and President Teddy Roosevelt.

When Comanches became sick many times they would come to live in Star House and the family would be moved into teepees in the yard, many times, families moved the dying into Star House knowing Quanah would take care of the funeral expenses of anyone who died in the house.

I’ve not been able to determine which wife, but she and Quanah slept very late one morning. It was almost six before she shook Quanah awake. Naked, the old man moved rather quickly to the window with his Sharps cocked and ready. The equally naked wife went downstairs and woke the other wives who found weapons as well. Abruptly, all wives appeared on the porch in awe.

A dozen Comanche boys were making a racket, chatting with their weapons sticking out in all directions in the front yard, their backs to the door. Their horses were tied to the white picket fence that surrounded Star House.

Quanah and the wife hurried into their clothes. Quanah muttered angrily, “I could kill that Isa-Tai. You know that; don’t you? Apparently, he told the schoolboys I was at the meeting last night to organize a buffalo hunt, but I didn’t. I left.”

“Well, they’re here. A dozen horses scared the hell out this old lady.”
“I’ve not seen you naked parading around in this house, until just then,” and he chuckled.
“I thought it was whites. But they’re Indian boys.”
“He knows every boy would give his left testicle for a chance. And that is why they must be, they must have been riding half the night to get here at this early hour.”
“How do you know it was Isa-Tai?”
Quanah gave her a stern look as if to say, “Who else would do something so reckless?”
“He certainly is a devious coyote,” the wife commented.
“Yeah right, and now I'll have to tell them, ‘no’ which will make me the bad guy. Maybe they will just leave on their own?”
“Well, all your armed wives didn’t seem to communicate much. They’re still there.”
“What else can I tell them but to go home?”
“Well, I guess there's no getting around going out there.”
“Maybe there is a way to let them down easy.”
“I have no idea how to do that. They're sitting there serious as soldiers.”
“Be kind, Quanah. Please.”
“Make a big breakfast; we’ll kill this idea for a hunt with kindness.”
“That's the least we can do.”
“Is there food enough?”
“Quanah, you have 25 children.”
“Okay. Well, here goes their first big heartbreak.”
“At least they'll go home a little wiser.”
“Maybe they'll learn not to listen to Isa-Tai.”
“It's a good lesson to learn.”
Quanah went downstairs and opened the door. The boys had sat down; so now they all scrambled to their feet and stood facing him. Most looked shabby and a little lost in the dark. Quanah pulled up his pants an extra inch and he looked over to the East for the sun. He showed some extra irritation and said, “Morning boys, it looks to me like you're going to be hungry this winter.”
The boys glanced around to see what prompted that remark, but no one said a word.
An angry snorting came from the corral. Quanah knew it was a horse he called, She Demon. And she was complaining about the boys invasion of her space, which in her mind was everything in her view. It gave him an excuse to walk to the end of the porch and take a look. That done, he turned around and left the porch to approach the boys. They stood perfectly still. She Demon, on the other hand, didn’t ever stop pawing and pacing and snorting.

Two diametrically opposite groups – the new book educated braves and a hammer and tongs horse. The idea came to Quanah. Clear as the night would soon end; he felt it was inspired. No worries. No buffalo hunt. It would suck all the energy out of it. Everything solved. Quanah put his hands in his pockets and said, “I guess you heard I’m organizing a buffalo hunt for later this summer? We might, but I don't want to leave a line of graves, one every seven miles. Everybody that goes is coming back in one piece; no accidents.”

He scratched his head; all the boys watch steadily.

“Course the Chief always says that, ‘this time it will be better,’ but it never is. A hunt is never a school day. First, you're dealing with a wild animal, the dumbest rampaging creature on this our land. Second, they’ve been thinned out by the white men. You may have to go without food and sleep. You might bake in the sun; you might freeze at night. You might get run over in a stampede. Rattlers might get you at night when you sleep. You might decompose and feed coyotes and vultures before we find you.”

The boys watched the big Chief so intensely; he worried maybe he’d dressed too quickly. His big hands checked each button on his pants, and then he rubbed his jaw.

“But it takes more than two balls to buffalo hunt; you must ride a horse in a way that is magic, all the time and in all the places. I was just thinking the men on this hunt will be provided a string of eight or nine horses, beside his own. Each one of the horses will come from the big pasture, my horses and they don't, and I don't care if you can read white men's words or not they'll throw you sure as your moccasins, sure as hell, if you don't show them who's the boss. Some got a bad side. I got one over there in the corral.”

They all turned to look at She Demon.
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

“I know no one would ever take a horse like... well, she ain't got the permanent name yet. We won't take a horse like that on the hunt but all the same if there's anybody here that can stay on her ten ticks of the watch, I might keep him in mind when I get around to hunting buffalo and if you can ride her, you can name her.”

Quanah was very happy with his stratagem, and soon had his pocket watch out when all the boys filed into the corral. They didn’t sit on the top rail like whites, but he realized there wasn't any hesitation not a single boy seemed to be fearful.

“Watch out; that horse will kill ya!” the Chief immediately regretted saying that.

Of course, then the horse looked more like Yellow Hair on the Big Horn, surrounded and too preoccupied to stomp and maybe kill. She was continually looking left and right. The boys all seem to be ready to tackle her if necessary, but none seemed ready to ride.

The horse stood next to the snubbing post in the middle of the corral, and clearly felt the boys might rush her and tackle her at any moment. Having served the tribe for years and in extraordinary ways, the large Chief felt he deserved the luxury of, like an old white man, sitting on the top rail. He did so with his large watch.

“There she is boys, meaner than a calvary man's laundress and twice as drunk as the fat sutler, but she's the test you got to take. Remember, just remember, you come from many generations of horsemen and you might have been reading poetry your entire life, but your spirit knows how to ride a horse. Who’s first?”

The horse clearly hadn't been broken and they sat looking at the proud animal. There was a long silence, primarily because they thought maybe the Chief had finally lost his mind; they thought, “of course, they knew how to break a horse.”

The boys knew mares and fillies were always moody, information from their fathers. And their teacher, Miss Haversham, had delicately explained why, and even now, in fact, the horse had changed. She was now more nervous than angry and the younger boys were thinking the filly might just let them ride her, especially since there were so many of them.

“She can hurt you, remember that, but if you can't ride, then you can’t hunt.”
The tallest boy with high cheekbones stepped forward and the filly took a step backward. From the way he walked, there was no question of who would be in the saddle first. He roped her and six of them choked her out, all the while the tall kid was saying the most offensive things to her until she was breathless on her side. The second she stumbled, the five idle boys tackled her and sat on her.

It was the Comanche way, but Quanah’s eyes where as big as saucers. They operated nothing like he’d learned to expect from the school board meeting.

The tallest boy ran for the bridal on the fence. If ever made into a film, it would need to look like he was putting a bridle on a dead horse. Quanah was trying the calculate in his head the value of the horse they had killed. When the tall boy was done with the bridle, he bent over and blew into her nostril, it didn’t work and then the boy with a limp whispered something in his friend’s ear and the tall boy stood and fetched back a straw of hay. The boys climbed off her; she might have been dead. The tall kid inserted it into the horse’s nose and whirled it around.

She wasn’t a particularly endearing horse to Quanah, but he hated to see her go that way. The boys all began to look around, clearly they were beginning to feel guilty. But the Chief waited in anticipation, figuring he’d need to seriously scold them, until they cried, and later he’d need to speak with their fathers as well.

Miraculously, the horse coughed (breathed) four times and she stumbled up. She wobbled a bit like a newborn foal trying to steady herself. The tall boy reached up and grab She Devil’s ear and twisted it; she braced her feet against pain. Frozen, the boy mounted quickly.

By the time that her ear stopped hurting, She Devil discovered that something was pulling her neck around and she had a rider. Still disoriented, she thought it over and she arched her back and was about to jump straight up in the air but she didn't. She had the self-awareness to know she wasn't a wild turkey; that these crazy Indians might choke her again.

Quanah’s big watch, he’d not looked at it. The boy's face looked gravely serious, and he ran his heels across her ribs. Well, she didn't know what that meant, but she took a step forward.

“Good, little Missy.”
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

She heard that and it wasn't the same thing as getting choked nearly to death. Actually, she thought the sound was sort of nice. She took another two steps and the tall boy took off his hat, said a few sweet things, and he held the hat high like a cowboy. Everyone clapped and yelled.

“How long is that?”

Quanah frowned and admitted, “Okay, you broke her!”

“I'll get off her after a few turns.”

The tall boy moved her in a circle left and then a circle right. When she understood, the boy swung down with grace, brought the reins over her head. She Devil or now “little Missy” did think about biting the boy's arm. She made a half gesture and the tall boy punched her hard in the nose. Every boy chuckled because they were sure it smarted. He said to Quanah, “My name is John Abernathy but everybody calls me Bacon Grease. I'm the oldest. You need to write that down?”

Quanah blinked at the insolence and then his thinking went blank again.

Then Bacon turned to the fellow with broad shoulders and said, “Anvil, you go next.”

They evidently had a pecking order; the small wide boy walked toward Missy as if he were going to a barbecue and not to ride a horse that might recover her wits at any moment. She took a step back when the reins went over her head, but she didn't think to bite. When he jumped on her back, Missy pulled away and showed the whites of her eyes. It was too much one rider and then a second.

Anvil came right with her letting the momentum carry him on her back. Missy was deeply irritated; her pride was injured, and now it was being injured for a second time. And it was an injury in the worst sense, a second rider. A second rider was better than the choking but worse than the ear twisting. So when this small Indian dug his heels into her ribs roughly, it was an invitation for her to take flight, turkey or not. And using much of the profanity the earlier native had used on her, so she ran. The sun was up just enough to highlight the dust cloud she and the scrambling boys were making over the corral. And if she remembered her earlier choking, she didn’t seem to care if it happened again. Anvil’s strong hands clenched her rein like a vice.
Something jolted in her head, and she stopped running and came unwound. She began to jump, run and jump and turn, and the third jump was so evolved, Anvil went ribs first into the fence. Missy stood stunned and tired as the boy faced the Chief.

“I'm Throws Anvils at Cats and I'm not done.”

“He took the rope and tossed it around the horse's neck and proceeded to choke her down and everyone rushed to help. They did bring her to her knees and then Anvil patted her furious head.

They released her and again she wobbled a bit standing. Anvil jumped up on her back and took her through the paces left and right. Everyone yelled and clapped.

Quanah Parker's face was calm and his arms were folded, but his lips quivered slightly. The boys didn't know if he would laugh or be angry, after all it was his horse and maybe he’d become attached to it. Compassion for an animal wasn’t something common to Comanche’s, but the boys were acutely aware that the times were changing and they certainly didn’t want to offend, certainly not on the cusp of a real live buffalo hunt.

The Chief sat there, his emotions a mystery; he had a plan to deny them permission, but the plan had gone all wrong. It was a mess; Quanah wanted to hug them all and tell them what a delight to his old soul they were. He couldn’t of course. Instead, he posed for a photograph, something he’d rehearsed.

Without a reaction from the Chief, Anvil and Bacon helped Six Eyes and after a second or two of trouble and boy with glasses rode and the artist followed without incidence.

And El Gordo finally got up on the horse and Missy seemed to nut up a bit. El Gordo, Iso-Tai’s son, was grinning foolishly. Quanah knew the boy was frightened; but just like his father, the boy clearly could throw up a façade.

From Quanah’s prospective, the traits fathers gave sons, same with animals, were a powerful force of nature. The boy had a golden ring on his pinky finger and a delicate way with the reins, but the horse did nothing unruly. Quanah didn’t want the boy injured, but if the horse could muster just a little more resistance, he wouldn’t mind denying El Gordo a ticket to hunt. The fat kid was clearly loved, someone had been feeding him well, but Isa-Tai had been nothing
but a thorn in Quanah’s side since before Adobe Walls.

Quanah refused to talk about Isa-Tai or his days as a warrior. Wisely. When the Quaker’s son had asked him, how the whites had pushed the Comanches off their land. Quanah told him to sit down on a cottonwood log. Quanah sat down close to him and told him to move over. The Quaker’s kid moved and Quanah moved with him and again sat very near him and told him to move over again and repeated this until the Quaker boy was moved off the end of the log. That is about as far as Quanah went in talk about the war.

Aside from the war, part of the bad blood with Isa-Tai was religion. It used to be the turf of medicine man, but Quanah had become the leading religious figure and driving force in establishing the peyote religion. Peyote is a small spineless cactus, who's ingestion produces visual and auditory hallucinations. Meaningful during the early days of the reservation and adopted by the Poncas, Kickapoos and Kansas, Kiowa, Wichita, Pawnees and Shawnees. It was a major contribution by the Comanches to the other plains Indians. Quanah was known for saying, “The white man goes to church and talks about Jesus, but the Indian takes a pipe and talks TO Jesus.”

Isa-Tai certainly was a medicine man, a magician and realistically a con-man. He claimed miraculous heavenly powers and the ability to belch up wagonloads of cartridges, a slight of hand. He maintained that the white man's bullets had no effect on him and that he could make medicine that would make others immune too. He had never been in a battle before Adobe Walls.

Isa-Tai was able to make arrows appear in his hands as though they had flown there from the sky. He had a particular technique for creating the illusion that he was riding into the clouds. He’d gather people on a certain spot and then told them to look at the sun until he spoke to them. Then to let their eyes slowly fall to the place where he was standing. As they did this, they saw “dark bodies” descending to receive him from above. He would then slip away and remain concealed until his return. The Great Spirit would endow him with powers, power to wage a final war with the whites that would restore the Comanche nation. He told people to paint themselves yellow and the horses as well and paint would protect them from harm.

Adobe Walls should have been a slaughter of whites, but the
Indians blundered. In the distance, Isa-Tai sat on his horse, totally naked and painted yellow. He watched the epic failure of his medicine. Nothing he had predicted came true. The men who were supposed to be dead in their sleep were now shooting Indians like ducks.

The Cheyenne hated him for it; one of them struck him in the face with his quirt. An angry father asked him why the magic couldn’t be used to fetch back the dead bodies. Isa-Tai’s nice yellow horse had been shot out from under him, and in the highest form of insult, he was forced to walk home from the battle. His magic clearly failed, but the magic of the big fifties worked fine.

Quanah had been injured at Adobe Walls. His yellow horse was shot out from under him at 500 yards. He took shelter behind a buffalo carcass, where he was hit by a bullet that ricocheted off a powder horn he had around his neck and lodged between the shoulder blade and neck. The wound was not serious, but Quanah felt Isa-Tai had nearly been responsible for killing him. Quanah’s wives especially held an animosity for the medicine man.

But none of that mattered now; he had a terrifying obligation to meet. He’d have to carry it out as best he could. Little Missy was no longer winded, but she seemed to sag in the middle under the weight of El Gordo, but she had a duty to live, and she meant to do her damnedest not to get choked again.

El Gordo rode around a bit shouting around a wild horse and waving to his friends. El Gordo dismounted and that didn’t go well. He twisted an ankle and crashed into a cloud of dust holding his leg; however, he was still beaming. The Indian boys helped him to his feet and he brushed himself off, limped off, but he still had the golden grin. The ordeal was over, and he had ridden the horse. He looked up at Quanah and asked, “Can I go on the hunt, sir?”

Quanah just bit his lip.

Bacon Grease broke up the odd moment and called for Hellcat With a Broken Paw and watched with a special interest as a little Indian with a pronounced limp walked up to the horse. Quanah knew Bacon hadn’t called him until he knew his filly was good and tired. That meant he was afraid for his little friend. But he still might end up worse than a cripple. The horse might kill him there and then,
in the corral, or if he were weak, a buffalo might hook him later on the prairie.

Quanah interceded, “Hold on there boy. You sure you want to try?”

The little fellow glared up at his principal Chief and said, “that's why I come.”

The Chief argued, “Well, I don't know if a hunt is…”

The boy's face went blank with anger, but he was relatively moderate in front of all that power and prestige, “if they're going, then I'm going!”

“Truth is, if you're not whole, it's easy to die.”

“Try me!”

“Your parents know you're out here?”

“Try me!” The boy's voice was high and rippled with a man's pride. “Sure, I got a busted leg, but what's that matter on a horse? Just try me!”

Quanah was taken aback. He shrugged helplessly.

The boy pulled his hat down and brought the reins over the horse's head. He jumped, swung himself up and his heels dug in sharply and Missy was off, bucking fairly seriously.

Quanah felt a dark satisfaction in his original plan at least one of the boys would be safe at home. This one surely would eat dirt. He was a little glad Missy now had a second wind. Quanah had been the last Comanche warrior and totally unable to accept the limp. He felt Isa-Tai, on the spiritual side of tribal affairs, would have accepted the limp without hesitation.

Quanah was wrong, the boy rode, and in the end, like a white cowboy with one hand held high over the other. When she stopped bucking, easy on the reins, he had Missy run to each corner and then he turned her to go through a few other gyrations. The boy with the broken paw was a flawless rider. And he'd drawn his time out on the horse to show Quanah that it was clear he wouldn't be thrown.

“Open the gate; I'll ride her clear to the fort and back!”

But Quanah shouted, “Okay, consider yourself tried, now get down from there before you kill my damn horse.” Which seemed a compliment to the young brave.

The boy remembered Quanah’s opposition to him, and meant to
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

make him pay, “You bet, but you sure this horse is whole?”

He let go and slide smoothly off the horse and landed on both feet. He faced Quanah Parker, “I’m Hellcat and I can ride the devil and don’t even need a saddle.”

Quanah was about to look away unimpressed, but there were two wives having a competition which could yelling “breakfast” loudest. Both were standing on the porch, clearly at odds. Quanah looked over his shoulder and slowly climbed down. He had not jumped from a corral in twenty years. The boys rapidly left the corral and were halfway to the house before Quanah’s moccasins touched the ground. He was a bit taken back.

The wives had lots of hot coffee and raisin bread, jelly and honey. Quanah sat at the head of a grand table, the expansive ceiling above him. The boys crammed huge pieces of bread into their mouths.

Quanah glanced at the wife whose idea it was to let them down easy. She shook her head understanding that her part of the plan (the breakfast) have been implemented but that clearly she knew his plan about the horse has failed. She may have been watching out the windows. Yet she had a funny feeling and funny little half smile. Smile as she did, the wife returned to the kitchen and didn’t dare laugh in front of her husband for being soft with young people.

After breakfast, six boys rode Missy without a scratch. And when the last brave was on board, a white boy rode up. He was the Quaker agent’s son, half-grown and handsome and contemptuously amused at what he thought he saw, Comanche’s frightened of a horse.

Quanah and the wives were fascinated with the white boy’s height, horse and the fact that he had dismounted so effortlessly. Hellcat walked from the other side of the corral and went over the white boy who waited with hand extended for a shake, the native then sluged the piss out of the Quaker. The white boy fell hard. While he was getting up, Hellcat was circling him, fists ready.

Hellcat told him, “This is an Indian only event.”

Then as the Quaker boy was picking himself up, Hellcat punched him in the ear, “and I told you, if you kept sticking your nose into our business this was gonna happen.”

The white boy looked more outraged at the prohibition than the punch in the nose and ear. His stare was murderous as he lunged.
The smaller Indian was no match for his size but managed to keep twisting away. It was a while before Quanah could climb down and get over to the fight. He and Bacon Grease pulled them apart as all that energy wasn't solving much. No one was winning.

Once apart, Quanah was interested to see that the white boy stood almost a head taller than short and blocky Hellcat. The Chief said, “Hellcat pick on somebody your own size please. Maybe the white man wants to hunt buffalo?”

Hellcat blasted out immediately, “No, you can't let him.”

Bacon joined in, “It’s our hunt, and more importantly they’re our buffalo.”

Hellcat, “He showed up at the school, I don’t know a month ago. Said he’s tired of the white school and wanted a desk with us.”

Quanah wanted to know, “What did Miss… Miss…”

The boys helped him, “Miss Haversham.”

Quanah asked, “What’d she say?”

Bacon answered, “She sent him to his father.”

Quanah, “And who is his father?”

Bacon, “the agent.”

Quanah looked at the white boy and remembered that he was a Chief and consensus builder and a political entity.

“I can bring a wagon full of supplies and won’t take any of the meat.” the young Quaker argued.

The Indian boys all laughed.

“Now, let's not be hasty; maybe this boy wants to learn. I met a man in Washington at the Great Father’s parade; all he did all day was study the native ways. He told me about Creek, Seminole and Mohawk ways and I told him about Comanche ways. The man wasn’t required to hunt.”

Bacon was confounded, “And this is all he did? And the government paid him?”

“Yes. Called Anthropologist, have no cattle and they don't farm.”

“And they're not soldiers?”

It was a good question. The agent was an important ally of the Chief, probably the most important and Quanah was searching for a way to gracefully invite the agent’s boy on the hunt or at least not offend him until he could ascertain the wishes of the kid’s father. The
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

Quaker might want the troublesome kid out of his hair. Perhaps not. Quanah noticed a real riata; it must have cost ten dollars, and it was twice as long as any Comanche made rope and it looked so stiff it stayed in a perfectly round coil.

“That's a lot of rope you got; there can you use it?”

“I'll show you,” the Quaker boy rode into the corral and whacked poor Missy to the run, until she was running full speed then in a perfect throw he roped and then freed her and then he stood on his saddle, as he’d seen a trick cowboys do and he arrogantly took a bow.

The Indian boys were enraged. Hellcat screamed and charged at the white boy and his mount. The Quaker boy stepped down into saddle and with his coiled rope, beat the native kid over their head four or five times.

“It's enough,” Quanah shouted.

The white boy jumped off his horse and was about to use a fist on the brave but limping young kid, but Quanah caught him around the waist and as old as he was, did keep Hellcat off him with an extended leg. Quanah held them apart hopping on one leg until the Indian boys could restrain their friend.

Right now, if we go I'll be looking for someone to take care of the Remuda and with that fancy rope I might trust this boy with that job.

White boy stopped struggling.

“When?”

“That's a good question. I'll let you know,” the Chief said.

The white boy walked with his rope toward his horse. A dozen pairs of eyes looked at him with deep distrust and resentment.

The Quaker seemed to soak up the hate and relished it, and he rode off in the direction of the fort.

Hellcat, “You should have let us fight.”

Quanah turned to walk into his house.

“What about me, I ain’t rode yet,” a tiny boy protested.

“That’s right, we ain’t all proven our worth yet,” Bacon Grease added.

“Well, get busy. Unless you killed her already,” Quanah continued into the house.

“How will you know if we all ride? That was the deal.”
“A deal?” Quanah stated, “There isn't any deal; I said I might.” Inside, the wife he woke up with that morning said she understood the white boy would be allowed to hunt. Quanah explained, “He's good; he has an expensive horse and rope.”

The wife was concerned, “He's a loner; that might be trouble.” Quanah finished the idea, “And he promised a wagon loaded with supplies.”

The wife asked, “Where is a boy going to get a wagonload of supplies?” Quanah ended the debate, “He's the agent's son. The Quaker’s son.”

She was surprised by that but considered it a solid reason not to harass him any longer about it. She grinned, “You will never admit it, but you are as sly as any white politician.”

She beamed for a week, fully a foot taller than the other wives, proud of her crafty husband.

STAR HOUSE IN MAY

The young Braves who Quanah had recently brought back in must have known to stay away. They would have been ideal members of the last buffalo hunt but they shot their wad by leaving the reservation, scaring Charles Goodnight, worrying Ranald Mackenzie and inconveniencing Quanah Parker.

Hillcat’s family were the first to arrive at Star House. They must have been on the road for hours. The wagon held a man or woman and numerous children.

The most put out by the entire ordeal of begging was Hellcat who was flushed with anger and embarrassment. He should have been going on the hunt; he would be going on the hunt. He had earned the right and his friends as well. It wasn’t accurate but he believed that the older braves had fortified, they’re right by leaving and making Quanah bring them back. Hellcat pretty much sulked and refused to look at Quanah and the Chief refused to look at the boy.
While Quanah’s face finally set on the families driving into the yard, the wives glowed warm, friendly and generous. The guest tried not to stare at the real glass, and the fancy stained-glass windows, wood floors, elevated ceilings that showed no sign of leaking. The wives poured cider for the children and coffee for the adults. Everyone got cookies.

The wives had decided the young boy with a limp should be allowed to hunt and they would serve him coffee. While the boys slated to hunt watched in envy, it surprised Hellcat and he swore he loved these women. And the minute the Chief passed on… He picked a favorite wife and promised himself he’d bring a gift for her from the hunt.

The parents of the boys discussed moving all the children, including the boys, outside. It was clear that the row was about to get hard to hoe. Hellcat didn't move to leave and his mother was just about to ring an ear and when his mother’s eyes went wide, his father said, “This whole things about him, he's got a right to hear what's said.”

Hellcat’s mother sipped her coffee without responding. She was a typical Comanche woman, large wide and wound tight as a top. Until she had been served coffee her right hand had been a clenched fist. Two wives were especially kind to her, but six wives had made up their mind that the boy with the limp would be allowed to go.

When the children, and the boys, were outside, the wives began to chat about how Hellcat had grown and that not so long ago he had been just a boy and that now he was a man. Quanah smiled to himself, what a shrewd on organized set of wives he had. He didn't necessarily want them pushing the kid’s cause but they were exercising their God-given power. The innocent conversation made Hellcat’s mother burn in irritation; she quickly answered before her husband spoke first. After the man spoke, the wives were typically out of it.

“He looks older than he is. He’s only fourteen.”

“It’s not about his age,” the Chief tried to explain.

Hellcat's mother replied immediately, “just fourteen and never very strong.”

Quanah’s primary wife, chimed in, “But he'll be on horseback
and he’s clearly a good rider.”

Hellcats mother looked at her hard, “He's never in his life been in the best of health.”

It was clear that no one would mention the actual broken leg that hadn't held healed properly.

Quanah stoically said, “Oh, one can see that.”

The men and women looked at the Chief. The door opened and a few boys came in even though they’d been asked outside. Hellcat’s father cleared his throat and was working up the courage to differ with the great Chief. Hellcat took up his coffee and his Mother snapped it up from him.

“There’s time for coffee when you're grown up.”

A wife, friendly with the boy’s mother, immediately poured him cider and another friendly wife brought him a plate of cookies. His mother smiled confidently and felt this symbolism would win the day.

Quanah, flat out, ask the boy’s father, “I don't know why you even let him ride.”

Hellcat’s father growled at the Chief, “I don’t know; he helped break that horse and rides everywhere. Seems to me the boy rides pretty good.”

“But good enough?” the Chief asked.

Hellcat couldn’t take anymore politeness. “You said if I rode the horse ten seconds and I did.”

“I'm worried about ten days of riding that's why said I'd consider it nothing was definite.” Quanah replied.

Quanah turned to the boy's father, “I made a mistake telling them I'd consider young children on a buffalo hunt. I didn't think that first kid would break the horse. I thought she'd throw them all and the whole issue would be dead. It's dead anyway, the Buffalo are gone I don't see how there can be a hunt.”

There was a long silence.

Hellcat’s father was feeling confident and equally informed as the Chief, “I don't know; there might be a few enough to give the boys a taste. Obviously, you feel even a taste would be important; you’re taking the other boys, many smaller and younger.”

Quanah contemplated and essentially gave in, “I would like to ride out there and give them a look-see.” It was Quanah’s way of
conceding, gracefully.

When she realizes what had happened and that she’d lost, Hellcat’s mother was hotter than a fish fry and she stormed out to the kitchen followed by the two wives that has sided with her.

“What did I say,” pleaded the father and it looked like he might chase after her. That would be a very unmanly and un-Comanche thing to do.

So, Quanah rescued him from that and filled the dead air, “Oh now friend, you are persuasive but I did see it right away; your boy was born to the horse. He did stay on that filly and showed her how it was done but…”

“You told the Quaker boy he could go.”

Quanah just lost all foothold.

What ended that awkward moment were the six wagons that pulled up outside and in an hour there would be a total of 13 wagons, 40 horse and 53 children and 17 pairs of parents. The yard swarmed and overflowed with ear piercing play. It was mass chaos outside, except for the potential buffalo hunters who stuck together, already in tight knit group. They stood around talkin’, like grown men. Inside the Chief’s house it was only slightly less chaotic.

Inside the house the women were talking, laughing and whispering and some were beginning to cry as the hunt began to materialize. After admiring the house, especially the windows, the floor, the staircase, they helped Quanah’s wives with the food. The meal had taken days to plan and now hours to execute it, beef, potatoes, rice, cakes and pies. Bread, with a huge bowl of honey, in the middle of the table for dipping. The wives made a major event of it, showing off their husband’s wealth but also sharing it.

Quanah took the seventeen men out to the porch with a very large box of tobacco. They lounged and passed the box around rolled smoke and partook. Very soon they were all in the mood for a long and thoughtful deliberation; this hunting buffalo was a serious thing. It might take hours and increase amount of tobacco to decide.

Quanah concerned a good number of fathers by coming directly to the point. He folded his arms and said, “I guess everyone knows there ain’t any buffalo to hunt this year.”
It was the one statement they hadn't come to Star House to hear. It took the pros and cons out of the whole meeting. There wouldn’t be the long and thoughtful deliberation and the endless tobacco.

“I know that meddling Isa-Tai must have said different. He means well and he probably dreamed that he saw a herd, but he doesn't speak for me.”

No one said anything; the tobacco was having a mellowing effect. Quanah went on compelled by the silence.

“Still, I don't want to call him a liar; there may or may not be a herd out there. So, I did something totally against my duties as Chief; I let a horse decide. And that makes me a horse's ass, I let She-Devil, or the boys are calling her Little Missy. I let the horse settle it and she did. Your boys rode the hell out of her, broke her, nearly killed her twice. But they rode her, your boys; surprised the daylights out of me.”

Day Old Bat Shit said, “Quanah with all due respect, you've been with the politicians too long. Comanche boys these days can read, sure, but that doesn't mean they forgot their heritage. They ride horses to school each day. They work around horses. If you say you should have left the horse out of it, fine, but you need to take these boys out to their historic lands.”

“Now Bat Shit, how can I back out of a thing like that now. They rode all the way out here just like you did today. I don't want a name for being harsh on boys. I'm too old to be harsh. I was at the school board meeting and they was looking at me like I was an eight-foot rattler with something they wanted.”

Choose Tobacco laughed, “Kids always look at you like that.” The other men chuckled.

I knew what I was facing.

Choose Tobacco gave them a hug and said, “No, but on the other hand, they got to grow up sometime and it would be better to grow up a Comanche rather than a white man in a school room.”

Bat Shit helped, “That’s why my ears perked up, hearing you were taking a group on a last hunt. The first time I thought, son you'll leave with Quanah and come back a man.”

“Oh, Bat Shit, any old coyote hunt would do that.”

“But this way we get a wagonload of supplies, we won’t
necessarily need to actually take.”

Every boy's father chuckled.

And every boy's father spoke; it had already been agreed, but now it was further agreed that Quanah would be the only one leading the hunt and they only trust their sons with him. Some were more enthusiastic than others but they all agreed.

Quanah was humbled and passed the tobacco around once more.

“I don't doubt one that your boys could find a herd out there and bring home the meat. Might not be easy, but it won't be impossible either. But what I can't understand is why you have so much confidence in me. The only thing I've done is lead our people onto a reservation.”

There was a pause and Runs Late said, “I think it's noble of you to take the blame pretending you weren't hard enough in your in the wars. I believe it if our boys fail, you will again take the blame and pretend the failure the hunt is your fault.”

There was a pause and Mexican Hat said, “I want my son to be a man, but I also want him to prosper in the white man's world like you do. If he can't be a success in this new white world then I want him to know it's his fault and not yours. And if he leaves a good Comanche, then he'll come back a better one.”

Quanah stood, “I got a lump in my throat. Them sons of yours are too much responsibility. This hunt smells like trouble but I can see both pros and cons.”

Green Dog got up, “Well, friend it's up to you and I've decided that whatever you do is okay with me. We're with you either way.”

The boys were out at the breaking pin on the opry seats. They were silent and glum and not the least bit hungry. The drama sucked the boyhood right out of them. After Bacon Grease had told them, “He don't want us, Missy, or no Missy. They just sat in the hot sun and contemplated dark futures.

The Quakers boy rode by. He always seemed so cocky, of course, he had already obtained permission to go.

Somebody said soft but clear, “White boy” and some other kind words.

The Quaker boy turned back and stopped in front of them. They
were above him on the top of the fence and there were seventeen of them, but he didn't care. He was good-looking as the devil, a camp whore had told him that in confidence. And he was just as able, he didn't need any cat to tell him that.

He said to the Indians, "I'm fifteen, when I was twelve, I shot a black Seminole trying to have his way with the neighbor's daughter. Maybe you think I lie, but I don't care."

Hellcat said, "I don't believe you. That's exactly what a Quaker wouldn't do."

“My pa's a Quaker. Climb down from there, gimp. I'll show you."

Quaker boy dismounted, the two boys went at it in the barn and the fight was undisturbed until the fathers decided and the women called supper.

The women were sipping coffee and talking about births and deaths and what a pity pitiful beef allotment had gone rancid. Hellcat's mother hadn't given up and she moved among them trying to work up opposition to the hunt. But that wasn't going so well. The men weren't talking about what was decided but slight signals must have been exchanged. Finally, the mother just sat in a corner arms folded.

The people ate well. Quanah was a very generous host. They talked and smiled.

Bacon Grease asked Quanah if he wanted him to go on the hunt. Quanah said that if he was going, that he'd be the first one chosen and Bacon told him he could only help the Chief if Hellcat was allowed to go as well. The two boys evidently were close friends and Quanah tentatively agreed.

There was a strange look on the Chief's face as he watched the two boys walk to their horses then suddenly it hit him those two boys had tricked him into talking like the hunt was on. Negotiating with him! He wanted to go and straighten them out before they got to the road but a Chief couldn't be seen chasing sly boys and decide that he was feeling too old to ride up the road; how would he ever hunt a buffalo.

Inside, Quanah's wives wanted to know when he decided and he couldn't say the exact moment he changed his mind and they just
chuckled and chuckled, the die was cast.

INDIAN SCHOOL IN JUNE

Quanah had bad news to deliver and put it off half an hour and put it off an hour, but by the end of the school day, he was over there. He sat by the door, hat in hand, “Miss Haversham, if you don't mind, there's been a problem. I'd like to talk to the boys. I thought this would be as good a place as in the sun.”

“Why certainly, sure. We are out of the sun. Sit yourself down, Chief.”

She consulted the tiny silver watch hanging on her blouse.

“We’ll only be a minute, and the entire room can be yours.”

The Chief stepped inside, and the girls stared at him like they had never seen a man before. Quanah Parker was simply a bronze Adonis, even more beautiful, no matter how old he was with all that power and experience. The girls didn't care if they were number nine. “It wasn't a shame to be one of numerous wives,” they thought; it wasn't like in books. This was real life.

The boys looked at him, in a sense, in a similar way. The only difference lay in them saying, “He'll bring us to the buffalo.” Forget any idea of them growing up to be six-foot. They wouldn't be of course they calculated in the next year or the tallest of them would be 5'5”. And they sure as hell wouldn’t develop blue eyes, but he would bring them to the buffalo.

There was a clatter of hooves outside, and the Quaker’s boy pushed open the door, and without noticing Quanah, he smashed the instructional environment with his announcement.

“My father says they'll be no hunt.”

Miss Haversham simply give up trying to finish the day.

She motioned to Quanah, and Quanah motioned for the boys to sit, and he stepped up. The Quaker’s son obeyed and looked around him at the class, trying to get a sense of things. He'd only been in school room long enough to be sent to his father's office. This time
he noticed the girls, and they noticed him. The Quaker had
interrupted their final minute of study, and three-quarters of them
forgot the Chief and had fallen in love with his handsomeness and
brut size.

The Quaker’s son heard it again, “white boy,” and looked at the
Indian boys in with scorn. He held his hat at just the right angle that
it shielded a middle finger. Quanah understood there was a finger
there behind the hat judging from the expression on the Comanche
boys faces.

Miss Havisham asked if maybe the girls could listen to the news
she thought even bad news might be informational. They all asked,
“please” and said, “sir”.

Quanah said he didn’t think a bunch of political talk would much
interest the girls, and they were burning daylight with silly “please,”
but then when the girl didn’t leave, he stood up anyway and began.

Quanah Parker always measured and always genteel, let loose a
string of profanities in both Spanish and Comanche. Miss Haversham
had no idea what was said, but she correctly judge the tone of it, and
within ten seconds, there wasn't a female in fifty yards of the school.
The boys enjoy the flight of the deer but realized there be no hunt,
and they sat stone-faced.

Quanah continued as if nothing had happened.

“Colonel Mackenzie shot up the library. Target practice on books
trying to see if then stop a bullet, and the doctor removed the colonel
from command and there goes the buffalo hunt. Results were varied.
I know he was ailing, but they're sending him to New York for
valuation and if that's not enough, there’s the bull. Someone stole my
damn Hereford bull and led him off into Texas.”

Quanah had delivered the news rapidly, with one long breath.
Silence. The boys simply looked for the Chief’s reaction; that was
their focus. They looked to see if he blinked or lip quivered, or hand
shook uncontrollably. Nothing. The Chief simply stood there looking
at them waiting for their reaction.

And then he continued, “I feel like I'm stumbling through the
worst calamity that ever hit the reservation. You know how worthless
the Mexican cattle are. Sure, they're tough and disease resistant, but
dammit we need meat. They've stolen my new bull and what's worse my friends, your friend Colonel Mackenzie has been removed from power, and now I'm sure I'll never see the staked plains again. Much less see a nice healthy steak.”

The boys were absolutely silent. He walked over to the side window angrily, straightening his clothes, and he came back to stand with his hands on his hips.

“Pound-for-pound he's worth a lot more than any of you. He's more important than all the buffalo left on the prairie.”

“Who you think took him Apache? Tonkawa? Texans?”

“I'm told the tracks cross the Red into Texas.”

The boys were staying after school, learning the most important lesson they’d ever learn and first-hand too. They heard the situation and watched the way Quanah conducted business and how he used his hands, voice, and facial expressions. It was nothing like books, but they didn’t realize it at the time. They admired the big silver buckle shining on his belt. His waist was narrow like a white man, but his shoulders are wide like a Comanche. They felt the floor shake when he walked across the room to that window. They would always remember the resonance in his voice vibrate in their heads. This was a man. He knew just want to do, and they had no idea.

It was Hellcat who spoke first, “So what ya gonna do?”

“In situations, you must be tough on yourself. I was dumb and I had the ball down at Big Pasture, on the border, where any ambitions damn Ranger could come over and steal him. And for that, I apologize.

The boy sat still learning.

“And then after that, you gotta be tough on everyone else as best as you're able. I'm old, so I'll raise hell. I'm going to Washington DC to speak with my friend, President Teddy Roosevelt about this thievery and other atrocities, rancid meat, thin blankets.”

“And if you were young?” questioned Hellcat again.

“I'd hunt them down like dogs.”

“So, we can't hunt buffalo?” the tiniest boy asked.

“Hell, yes. We'll hunt buffalo… when I return.”

“What are we supposed to do until then?” Hellcat again.

“You'll take instructions from this teacher lady and if you're lucky

43
you'll be poets and doctors and bank presidents.”

“But it's summer; this is the last day of school.”

“Be a preacher if you want. Oh no, I know what you are thinking about… I was a boy once too, you know. If I catch you off this reservation, if you so much as make a buffalo look up without an adult right there, I'll hand you over to the Army, and they'll send you to Leavenworth to be in chains.”

“But you chased them older buck clear to the secret canyon, and you didn’t send them to chains in Leavenworth?”

“Well, for you fellas, I'll make an exception and insist upon it.”

Quanah was about to storm out of the room but reconsidered. He turned, “I'm sorry this is hard on an old man. You’re boys; you want to help your people. Honestly, I'm told the future is cattle. And we don't need warriors; we need cowboys. I can't believe I'm saying this but you might see a tear for the buffalo. I’m an old man, don’t forget.”

There was a long pause as Quanah searched for a bone he could throw them, something to pacify them.

“Down at Big Pasture there is a herd of horses, so round them up break those worth the effort. Each of you can have nine for the hunt, when we have it. Provided you do the work. You got to find out what each horse does best, and if you can't pick your horses out of hundreds in the dark then they aren't yours, and we aren’t hunting. Deal?”

“How will you know?”

“There will be a test. As my British diplomat friend says, ‘a bloody old test.’”

He turned to the blackboard, he picked up a piece of chalk.

“Might need to know where you’re going. Here's Mount Scott, here’s Fort Sill. Here's the Red River and there's Big Pasture. Your horses… My horses will be there. Don’t get killed.”

THE TRAIN LEAVING

Aside from the escape from Palo Duro, this was Quanah Parker's
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

finest ruse. Of course, he had some help. He and Mackenzie boarded the train for Washington and New York. Mackenzie had recovered from his temporary insanity and was going to an army Hospital in New York. Quanah was going to see the president. Waiting on the train to depart, Mackenzie wrote a document, looked official, but he predated, and it gave Charles Goodnight and Quanah Parker, actually “ordered” them to hunt down the thieves and return the Army property, the bull. The bull was Quanah Parker’s property, but to read the document, one wouldn’t realize that. Mackenzie thought an army claim to ownership might facilitate the Bull’s return.

As arranged with the train’s engineer, the train stopped just east of Fort Sill, no station just prairie. Mackenzie and Quanah disembarked; Charles Goodnight was there with 23 horses, 3 saddles and provisions for a month. Quanah’s wives were all experts at making beef jerky and that was incredibly helpful. The train continued eastward and the three legends road south to where it was said the bull’s tracks had crossed the Red.

LEAVING STAR HOUSE

At dawn the next morning, the yard begin filling with boys and horses and guns. Later, we learned the trunk of guns Colonel Mackenzie had left with the Quaker agent had been broken into, and a number of antique pistols or rifles and even swords were taken along with ammunition. Mackenzie had been a collector before he boarded the train for New York.

Goodnight has collected Missy, but Quanah’s other horses were loud and protesting because the boys spoke softly and whisper. Like Missy they weren’t used to a lot of native boys sneaking around in the early morning. They were surely natives, but wore new pants and a variety of shirts. Five of the seventeen had brand new Stetsons, clearly stolen. Six of the seventeen were on stolen horses, all with the “US” brand. But the plan was to cut those horses loose once they
had their own string.

Quanah's wife didn't go right out to them. They watched out the window to see what family had done the best equipping their boy. The wives had prepared several weeks of food for the boys.

“Maybe this roundup will turn out better than a buffalo hunt.”
“I hope.”
“They're so quiet; you think they're hungry?
“It looks to me they've been up all night.”
“It looks to me like they stole half the post.”
“You think we should take those guns from them?
“No, let them play cowboy.”

In the dark, a wagon approached, and the boys frozen mid-sentence. They were rigid with fear. The authorities were onto them about the horses.

But it was just the Quaker's son with a wagon of supplies all liberated from the agency, and he'd stolen his father's distinctive Stetson, the biggest one on the market. He'd loaded the wagon with so many useful things, thingsthey had forgotten to steal they couldn't just tell him they didn't want him along. He had a Dutch oven, matches, forks and spoons, blankets and slickers, and most importantly, picket pins and rope.

The principal wife invited the native boys in for donuts dipped in honey and sugar. When his happened, two wives distributed the food from the wagon to the poorest of Indian families. And while this happened, inside, the wives sat huge bags of jerky beside each boy eating at the long table.

WICHITA FALLS BAR

In a bar in Wichita Falls, the bar dog seemed to know all about the three men's business and didn't protest an Indian in his establishment, which was peculiar. He said to Quanah, “You know, I know someone who can get your bull back.”

Quanah replied, “Not my bull,” and he pointed to Mackenzie. Mackenzie stepped forward and stated, “And why would the
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

army have to pay to have their stolen property returned?
   “Cuz, it's not Army property. Everybody knows that's Quanah Parker's bull.”

Mackenzie reached for his official document and showed it to the man behind the bar. The saloon keeper looked over the paper and scoffed, “I think you,” pointing to Goodnight, “gave the bull to you,” pointing to Quanah Parker, “a favor for you” pointing to Mackenzie.
   “So it's the Indian’s bull. Wouldn't have been stolen otherwise,” the bar keeper finished.
   Goodnight said, “So if we felt like, it might be cheaper, time wise, for these fellows that we pay you to return the bull?”
   “Well, you can pay me. And I'll pay them.”
   “Well, how do you know they can be trusted to return the bull?”
   “Well, lets just say they’re in a position of authority over the matter. Understand? Truthworths sorts.”

Mackenzie, never ever compromised except as a last resort and he entered the conversation again, “Why should anyone pay law enforcement to return stolen property?”
   “Who said anything about law enforcement? The Indian wants his bull back. Why else would he be here? You're as good as out of the army. That's why you're here and hell you're a cattleman, and you go wherever you please, but the Chief here, he's here for his bull. He's a Comanche standing in Texas, and that ain't the best safest place for him to be.”

Charles Goodnight punched the barkeeper in the nose and took a full bottle of whiskey when they left.

SOUTH OF FORT RICHARDSON

The Quaker’s son and Hellcat were fighting over something, probably not the horses because each of the seventeen boys had a nice string and there wasn't much confusion what was what. It wouldn't be such a big deal, they had fought twice before, but this time, they were using knives. Or threatening to use them on each
other thus far they had only missed.

Tito was Hispanic and as Mexican as tequila and was Charlie Goodnight's hired killer. Gray hair, but when it was black he'd been in the Mexican cavalry. The Comanche called him “Los Pantalones,” which was short for “El Diablo de los Pantalones,” because he'd shot a man once with a Deringer hidden in his pants. The buffalo hunter, a former Confederate, had disarmed him and were planning on robbing him. Didn’t work out so well for him.

The boys didn’t know it, but he’d killed more than his share of Comanche Indians and even three white men, all Confederates, but they had it coming and he had never lost his soul. His cool on the prairie was legend. No one had seen him wined or sedentary.

When Tito surprised them and starting to cuss them, the boys who were trying to knife each other, they stopped. Tito didn’t stop the profanity however; he went on berating them with the most persuasive filth the boys had ever heard. In fact, Six Eyes hustled for his paper and pencil and only then did Tito stop the four letter word play.

Tito glared at the Quaker’s son and Hellcat and then at Six Eyes “Eye Eye Eye. This is a trick to steal my Spanish. I’m not saying another word unless I'm paid.”

The boys were too shocked to speak or laugh. “I see you got an oven; why aren't you using it? You’ve been eating jerky only since you left the reservation? Put those knives up. I work for Charlie Goodnight,” and he pulled out a bag of flower off a pack animal. The two combatants put up the knives.

“I'm going to let you two off, but don't get in your heads that I'm soft.”

“You ain't over us,” said the Quaker’s son.
“T’ll know who you are, and I'm am over you.”
“And how's that?”
“You're those Renegade Indians from Fort Sill and out here killing and stealing ain't you?”
“No, we ain't killing and what we stole, we borrowed from up at the fort.”
“Yeah. Charlie Goodnight told me to cook for you while you round up the horses.” Tito said.
“We did that already.”
“He told me to watch out for ya.” Tito insisted.
“Watch out for us? We don’t need no watching out for.”
“Well, he told me keep you up there.” Tito revealed.
“We’ll tell him we didn’t see ya.”
“I just come from there and they thank y'all you've gone buffalo hunting, and you'll be back when you run out a what Quanah’s wives gave. Cuz they say not a one of you can cook.” Tito let them know.
“The flour, beans and salt was all pilfered from the wagon, probably when we was eating donuts.”
“There ain't no Buffalo down here, boys. Ain't no Buffalo anywhere. And, you all don't know how to make biscuits do you?”
“Ain't been taught yet?”
The boys were silent.
“You all cowboys or what? I almost missed you. I was over there about a mile and all I could see was big giant hats. I said that can’t be them. I’m looking for Indians.”
The boys were just as silent.
Tito looked in the wagon at the empty oven, the ropes, the pickets and all the guns.
“Looking to fight the entire state of Texas and bring back a Hereford bull?”
“I heard are you the one that took him?”
“I'm just doing what I'm told, just like you. Only you was told to stay put. Round up and break the horses and stay put.”
The Quaker boy was adamant and even put his hand on his sidearm, “Well, we ain’t going back ‘till we got that bull. He too important.”
Hellcat broke the tension, “What if we tell you, there's five of them yeah? Moving south two up front with the bull and three riding behind them hanging back probably watching for someone tracking them.”
“Let's cook us up some dinner and tomorrow we'll find them and well, ask them.”

The next morning, Goodnight, Mackenzie and Quanah Parker were standing over the boys when they awoke.
“Comanche Indians?” Quanah exclaimed.
“My best man?” Goodnight explained.
“No guard, and no fire,” Quanah complained.
“And no coffee!” Goodnight complained.
Mackenzie added to the insult, “We got Mexicans and Redskins has disorganized as midgets.”
“We've been ambushed,” Tito said to the boys in fluent Comanche.

Goodnight wanted a word with Tito. And they walked off so all the boys could hear was, “I thought you were gonna keep an eye on these boys.” The boys watched, unable to hear his response, but Tito shrugged his shoulders at least six times and the conversation ended.

Quanah Parker also wanted a word but with Mackenzie, in private. When they came back, Mackenzie placed all the seventeen boys under arrest and told them to place their weapons and knives in the jewelry box. For Tito to take the beef jerkey out and put the weapons in. And for the box to be locked. Tito was told to kept the key.

Quanah had gotten them arrested, but was pleased with the boys when they showed him their choices of horses and the Chief regarded them as sound, and for that generation surprising. If his people could endure that much schooling and still retain their Comanche eye for a good horse, maybe they would make it in the white man’s world.

Another good thing Quanah immediately noticed, the boys were pairing off; almost everybody had his friend to look out for. Tito had told the three adults about the knife fight, but the Quaker’s son and Hellcat looked as close as prairie oysters. How odd would that be if they became friends?

The boy’s choices of horses revealed a great deal about them Quanah watched as the boys cared for their strings. When they were done with that, he felt he knew them better. The Quaker son took chances on horses that might today only show potential. The Chief considered the white boy shrewd. Hellcat, on the other hand, had his cautious picks, and that was understandable, he'd been thrown and broken a leg and now he didn't feel like taking any more chances.
The smallest of all the boys was named Five Roosters and he was most proud of his string. Maybe ten years old, the boy proudly led the horses as if he had had first choice at Big pasture. His legs were so short they stuck out somewhat to the side when he rode. Quanah watched them going over there horses looking at hooves and discussing points. It wasn't a new sight, but Quanah hadn't seen it since before the reservation years. Before even the most experienced Comanche warrior regarded his string as something a little special even if he did change the string a hundred times. Their pride in their horses promised much, and Quanah told them so. They'd chosen a man's string, and they were their property so long as they cared for them and that even he the Chief of all Comanches couldn't ride one without their permission.

Charles Goodnight had planned on sending Tito ahead as scout but reconsidered, now he assigned Tito the wagon and three pup sized boys, the youngest three boys, would remain back and Tito would teach them to cook. Goodnight notices Tito playing (wrestling) with a few boys and felt perhaps the man may have become tired of killing. And now, he did nothing but smile about his cooking. Everyone else would ride hard and overtake the thieves. That first night they were all together, Goodnight set up from his sleep, “the prairie’s on fire.”

Quanah looked as if he were going to cry and bound off. The report was exaggerated. There was a twenty-foot patch of burned grass and a smoldering blanket that had been used to beat it out. A tarp and a quilt someone’s momma had included, or perhaps it was stolen too. But the prairie itself was still intact. The herd hadn't bolted, but there was that smoke-filled smell drifting about. Luckily, it was a windless night.

Quanah bent over a half-sack of Bull Durham that was abandoned near the burned area. Beside it was a charred book of cigarette papers, and the Quaker boy called his “Bible.”

The Chief said nothing about the Quaker kid’s “Bible” or the sack of tobacco or the fire. He looked out and saw a whole landscape of potential tragedy, boys turn to jelly under a stampede. Quanah washed his face several times and then mounted Missy and
yelled to Goodnight, “We’re picking up the pace.”

And then he murmured to himself, “I've got to get this over and done.”

**DRY CREEK AT THE RIO GRANDE**

A Comanche warrior with a string of eight horses might travel one-hundred miles a day. And Quanah meant to do that, but they ran out of room at the border. They reached the Rio Grande, and the chase took on an entirely new color.

“Wait, this doesn't make any sense. They stole a bull and are bringing it all the way to Mexico?”

Goodnight and Mackenzie took Hellcat, and the three rode the riverbank looking for the tracks they found on the trail, always a bit shaky. But the trail had gone cold, and everyone was flushed, but it was Hellcat who yelled he’d found them.

“Them?”

Quanah, Mackenzie, and Goodnight, in that order, arrived to find a prospector in the shade of a mesquite, just admiring the bull who was standing in an entirely creek bed.

“He's a bit hollow horned, but otherwise, what an animal!” the prospector said.

So that they could talk to the prospector, Quanah had the boys disperse. Maybe the other thieves could be found.

According to the prospector, the Rangers, one “white-haired loud and gregarious. Got a philosophical bent an’ maybe a little lazy,” and another “he’s hard to judge, but square, stubborn, stoic” had gone into Mexico to steal a herd of Mexican cattle to go with their new bull. He didn’t know any names, but they had a tall feller, named “Pea Brain” with them.

Immediately, Quanah had an inkling and wanted to confirm just one more detail, and he asked the stranger how tall these men were.

“I wouldn’t call the mean Ranger short; he acts bigger than he is. But the loud one is about four inches taller than his partner. And the dim wit’s a bean pole; he’s gotta be three inches taller than that.”
Goodnight knew exactly who they were but asked the prospector anyhow how he knew their plans.

“I heard ‘um.”

“And they just out and told you they was going to Mexico?”

“They ain’t the shy type. Stealin’ cattle out a Mexico. Pretty ballsy, if you know what I mean.”

“Stealing Mexican cattle’s one things, but to steal a bull off a U.S. Indian reservation, well that’s something else.” McKinsey framed the entire situation.

“If it’s the fellows, I’m thinking about they ain’t that low.” Goodnight insisted.

At that Quanah raised an eye, “When you were a Ranger you were always on the up and up?”

Goodnight shrugged and didn’t wanna lie to the Chief. His friend would see right through it, so he didn’t answer.

“Acted like they do it all the time,” the prospector assured them.

“What?” Goodnight asked.

“Well, go into Mexico. Honestly, I don’t know where they got that bull,” the prospector said.

“But two borders. Well, it seems a bit far-fetched.” Goodnight asked.

Mackenzie speculated, “Maybe they aren’t Rangers anymore.”

There was an awkward silence.

Quanah broke it, matter of factly, “I know them. Dealings before. It’s not a surprise.”

And the prospector added, if there was any doubt, they left their Mexican cook a few miles downriver.

And if suddenly, in Texas, as nearly deep as one could get and about to confront his antagonists on their own home turf, if that wasn’t bad enough, Quanah’s brain throbbed later that night with gunshots down on the river. They had moved the bull a significant distance to the northwest and were patiently waiting.

Goodnight wanted the herd the Rangers were supposedly bringing back. He yearned for them since the minute the prospector mentioned the possibility. But, he was getting out of the Mexican cattle business; he wasn’t gonna let himself get caught between times.
That’s why he bought the bulls from Europe. His Indian friend, however, needed a herd to go with the bull he’d until recently lost. Goodnight even had a trail in mind. He’d not travel directly north but loop over west toward Fort Concho and then home to the reservation it wasn't the straight easy line home, but it might discourage pursuit.

So when Goodnight heard the gunfire down at the river and then the herd, he felt the plan might work. The plan was to abscond with the herd in the direction of Fort Concho.

It was too easy. The herd thunder across river border. Several shots were fired from Mexico from a distance and they just seemed for good measure, perhaps to drive the cattle a few hundred yards into Texas. And the seventeen native boys instinctually fell in and without, took control. Seamlessly. They began moving them in a northwesterly direction. The plan was for the boys not to fire, even though they’d been issued their guns. But that Goodnight, Mackenzie and Quanah Parker would ride in around, in around the herd and eliminate any opposition, but there wasn't any. The three men sat on horseback, facing south, waiting, but whoever stole the cattle in Mexico had just disappeared.

Dumbfounded, the men caught the herd at daylight, and sure enough, they had come into sole possession of a herd of longhorn cattle, mostly unbranded Mexican cattle, thousands of head.

They figured either the Rangers had been killed fleeing back across the river, or the shots were to drive the herd into Texas and in that case the Rangers had probably returned to Mexico for even more cattle.

The three men speculated and guessed but nothing was definitive but the buzzards behind them. Mackenzie and Quanah rode back to see what the birds were circling. It was the prospector who'd been run over in the stampede. They buried him and saw no sign of Rangers. The only sign of civilization was a lonesome little town where no one wanted to say anything.
WEST OF ANACACHO MOUNTAIN

Parts of Possum was the only native boy that Quanah could spare to ride to Tito and the three pups who were camped on the Nueces. He was to tell Tito that they had the bull and a herd of Mexican cattle and to bring the wagon toward Fort Concho. The young boy felt honored to follow, take the message and maybe bring some donuts back. There was something prestigious about bringing donuts. Part’s goodbye was something of a question and a plea, “Sir, what if I run into Rangers?”

Quanah had confiscated all the guns and wasn't passing them out again. He looked seriously back at the young Comanche and said, “Son if you can't beat them, join them.”

Without thinking, the boy said, “Yes, sir,” and rode off so small on his horse that it looked riderless after a mile.

Goodnight knelt and drew in the dirt with a stick. The oval was the herd. The dots were the horseman.

“You Juniper trigs listen up. I'll run pilot, of course, me and the Chief. Mackenzie out in front scouting. The swingmen on the near side we got you (Bacon Grease) and you with the limp (Hellcat). On the far side, you (Pint) and you with the glasses (Six Eyes). Down here on the flank we'll put you, Isa-Tai’s son, I don’t know your name (El Gordo), I know your pa and you the wide one (Anvil). Everybody else will take turns riding dull music in back. If I called your name, hell I don’t know your names, but you got a position you stay put there.”

“Them three little pups, you stay with Tito and the wagon, you're in charge of wood and your job is to protect him and the wagon, but try not kill nobody unless Tito gives ya permission. You'll still take your turn at night, so get used to sleeping during the day.”

Those young boys with Tito, weren't eleven or twelve even, probably just ten. They knew they were small but thought maybe the white cattleman liked their disgusted looks. So, they each folded their arms and looked out over at Tito; they were to gather wood sure but they were Mexican man's guard? Regardless, no one would threaten the group’s cook or wagon; they looked adamant.
Goodnight stood up from the drawing in the dirt, he painfully unkinked his stiff knees.

“We actually came a long way unorganized yesterday. Don’t ask me how you did it. But, if you’ll bare with me now. About driving these cattle, I need you to listen. Remember, nobody leads a cow nowhere. The dumb animals got to think it's their idea the way they’re going. All you do is nudge and more often than not, don’t even a nudge. All ya gotta do is follow. That way, they don’t easily riled.”

Goodnight continued, “That big hunk of beef is a Hereford bull, and he'll put weight on his calves. He's the leader, and frankly, he's your tribe's future. Since your government in Washington DC don't wanna live up to their obligations, your Chief aims to feed you as best he's able. Don't let anything happen to that bull, and you see something wrong, you scream bloody murder.”

The boys lounging on their saddles in a variety of positions but mostly with their knees hooked over the horn. They were all-overish new to cowboying, and they didn't seem entirely excited about it yet. But they’d come this far without stopping.

Goodnight was certainly enjoying the sound of his own voice, because he just kept on. “The cow can cover less ground in a day than tree but you keep ‘em moving and if you don't get too anxious will not have any problems. Sometimes they can read your mind, and they'll fall right in line and other times they'll bolt. If you're thinking peaceful thoughts and we’ll make eight to ten miles a day depending on a lot of things.”

The boys stirred and one even yawned. Quanah saw this as a sign of disrespect. He knew that a war party might look at the leader with loathing. Only after winning something would he feel appreciated. Goodnight would probably lecture them over and over and he knew some of the boys would shut him out, until they got somewhere.

So Quanah spoke up and in the Comanche language, “Take care to listen. Your people need this beef and your father and brothers are far away. No woman will come here and be your mother. If you make a mistake and if someone asked me if you're my son. I'll tell them that I don't know you and to leave you.”

And it was Quanah’s turn to lecture, “Continue to take care of
your horses. No tribe is better than its horses. The war party depends on the condition of the remuda. Keep your saddle blankets clean and dry, change mounts often and check their huffs and take care of yourself. The only way you can be useful to the tribe is if you are good for moving cattle. You’re on your way.” Quanah, out of habit or perhaps seriousness, had used the Comanche word for “war party.”

“He wouldn’t leave one of us out here alone in trouble. Would he?” One of the seventeen asked Hellcat.

Quanah was seriously up in years, but heard it clearly and he turned.

“I have and I will. The bull is more important than you. I can’t. I won’t ask my friend for another. And he is not the sort of friend to embarrass me with the offer of another. That is why we are here. Prideless men can stay home and ask for more and more gifts to piss away.”

They each sat up in their saddles that point was shocking all they knew were gifts from the government. But they liked the man-to-man way that Chief was talking to them and he poured cold water on the whole situation with the most disturbing information that ever been told, “the lives of the women outweigh those of all of its braves.”

The Chief asked Mackenzie if he had anything to say.

Mackenzie acted like he wanted to say something but then simply uttered, “Oh, (expletive deleted) it. Get on with it.”

The rest of them were startled out of their blankets at four in the morning by Charlie Goodnight, “Rise and shine and move or we’ll leave you right here.”

A sleepy voice in the pitch-black said, “That white men can't tell time, it ain't even tomorrow.”

Yet Goodnight’s big voice said replying, “The hell I can’t, I've been up since yesterday and keeping watch. No fire, no coffee, no biscuits, no grub, grab you some jerky and get your horse. Pick a rim rocker cuz we ain’t burning daylight like yesterday, understand?”

A white boy's voice grumbled in the dark.

Goodnight addressed it, “That's right; I aim to be out of sight by daylight and out here that's a long ways.”
 Eventually, the dark was filled with small figures that grunted and bumped into each other and rolled up their blankets then they stumbled off into a deeper darkness. Minutes later the figures returned with a horse. They wanted beef and hot bread and dried fruit but reached into their bags and settled for jerky. Don't leave nothing laying around, this herd is a hot potato and they'll be looking for us, pray for rain to cover our exit, but I doubt that's going to happen. Never does, does it Chief?”

“Don’t never seem to,” Quanah answered.

Goodnight’s “organized” drive began in the dark. Mackenzie pointed out a few stars that would led them to a spot he'd selected ten miles northwest and went immediately back out. As he left the camp, Quanah half smiled. It was very dark all they could hear was the clanking of horns as they waited restlessly to begin.

Goodnight was everywhere placing the boys. He explained with furious energy and cussing like a buffalo hunter, he shaped the boys around the herd. When everyone was set, with all eyes on him, he finally took a deep breath and whispered, “Let’s move out.”

The boys relayed the message to begin from front to the back of the herd and they begin clicking their tongues, like Goodnight had taught them, and the began nudging. The great mass came to life. Bacon Grease nudged the great Hereford bull and he stirred and took the lead. At the end of the day, Goodnight wanted the herd so tired all they could do was graze, drink and sleep. The boys worked hard that first week the herd moved up a new trail up toward the Colorado in what seemed like no time. Man and beast we're getting the in the way of moving cattle.

The boys and the horses would push, they pushed. Those with less push did less but it all equaled out in the end. The herd moved as one giant movement. The boys had a number of issues in the rain but learned to share tarps. One would told the tarp when the other slept and then they would stitch. Only Bacon Grease had tarps of their own. El Gordo had one to himself because nobody would have him. Bacon Grease has one because he wouldn’t share with anyone.
The Quaker’s son was first to kick, but even that was taken out of context. The boy only said, “This is the last you'll see of me.”

Quanah Parker looked startled but the kid might have only meant he wasn't suited for cattle work and after this drive he’d be drifting. Quanah Parker began taking off his belt and he said to the boy, “I thank you for your time and effort especially for the wagon and supplies; the only thing I have is this Silver Buckle. If you are leaving I don’t want you to be without; it's a nice silver one.”

“Hang on. I ain’t going nowhere. I'm just telling you this cattle business ain't for me. I ain't fickle but the only place I’m going is home.”

CORNER WINDMILL

Two days later after a rain, Bacon Grease was alone eating jerky on horseback waiting for the herd to move. Hellcat rode over and sat with him.

“What's the matter, Bacon?” Hellcat asked.

“Nothing.”

“Well, I've been took back at the way you throw’d in with that white boy. Sharing a tarp with him, yours got burned up in the prairie fire. And then it rained, I figured naturally we’d share,” Hellcat said.

“He asked.” Bacon explained.

“I didn't have to ask?”

“I wouldn't think so.”

“You gonna keep on with him?”

“I reckon,” Bacon didn’t waver.

“Well, I never thought you'd choose a white man over me and for sure not no Quaker,” Hellcat stated.

“He ain't,” Bacon stated.

“You don't know that,” Hellcat was sure.

“I happen to know he's got one of them girly photographs in his war bag,” Bacon revealed.

“What's that mean?” Hellcat asked.
“Ain’t you never heard of the San Fransico?” Bacon asked.

PANTHER BLUFF WATERHOLE

When Tito arrived, they’d been eating jerky for seven days and had been working herd twelve hours a day and spending two long hours of guard at night. They were hungry and always tired. By the end of the day, eating only jerkey, no one had the energy enough to laugh, but after Tito arrived, there was some exuberant talk. And, when the donuts arrived, even the older men felt a certain jubilee.

As they ate around the fire, it was a while yet before the first guard was put out and people that generally started sleeping didn’t. Now they were filling their bellies and competing in events.

Quanah, Goodnight, and Mackenzie noticed a musical oddity they couldn’t explain. The Quaker kid was teaching Six Eyes to play the guitar.

“No Comanche,” Quanah admitted, “ever showed the interest, not even the slightest interest.”

Mackenzie countered that he did never seen anyone with the, “gumption to try to teach a Comanche music.”

Goodnight didn't like the idea of the guitar taking up space in the wagon but admitted that it wasn't his wagon as he was accustomed. The plucking sounded better than you would have expected of a boy. The dart and hoop games were suspended to listen.

Tito busy at sourdough for the next day asked, “who's that playing? It can't be Six Eyes; he can't be that good at first

“It's me, sir. I learned half this song and still working on it.

“He got the notes on paper?

“Yes, right here, see?”

“So if he knows so much, why don't he play it himself.”

“He does, he plays it out there for the cattle.”

“I heard of cowboys singing for the cattle, but never no guitar playing.”

“Well, I never heard about it plenty. Mr. Goodnight said, “It was
a fine way to treat both cattle and women.”

The boys all chuckled.

“What? You play your guitar, and they take their clothes off?”

“Well, I think; but you ain't got to figure much to play the notes; it's just arithmetic. I'll show anybody that cares.

Tito picked his way between bedrolls toward the little fella and music, it had some riding on top and thousands of notes underneath.

Tito held at arm's length in the firelight.

“My God, I'm sixty and this is what causes a woman's clothes to fall off?”

Everybody laughed; Tito gave him back the music sheets and the strumming begin again. The part Six Eyes knew was sweet and bold and unaflared. It was the progress learning, it that was slow and hesitant. Slow and irritating.

Quanah wanted to lay on top of his bedroll and look up at the sky. He’d sent out the first guard, and the talk between bedrolls was slowing. The herd had been restless now they're drawn in tighter, a quiet overtook them, but like the boys, they never really slept. They might rest, might do nothing but wait. They’d watch the guard come and go, and they listened to the guards all through the dark night.

The two on guard would circle the herd in opposite directions, walking their horse slowly and gently ease any wandering cow back into place. At the far side of the herd, they met, consulted Quanah’s big watch, then they separated and went humming around the herd again.

The boys seem to take all this as if it were in their blood. The horsemanship Quanah could understand; the horses had brought them Empire. He was almost too surprised about the boys and the cattle; he would have been more comfortable if he could see a little strain in their faces or hear a complaint. Instead, he saw little sons of his tribe becoming cattlemen, the work of white men. It was hard, but the boys showed a strange exuberance. And a toughness, they must have aching rear ends from all the riding, but they weren't taking the entire experience in stride. They ate, they move cattle, and they slept or pretended to sleep. They lay among rattlesnakes in the wildest desert left in America, and they laughed most of the night.
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

Quanah rolled up in his lammy and laying it over his horse. Beside him was Mackenzie, who was cinching up a saddle. They stared over to the boys and listening to two native boys.

When Quanah spoke, it was quietly, “That gimp yonder, Hellcat. He's a funny one for someone with such a short temper; he's quite as a pebble inside.”

“He's got horse sense,” Mackenzie observed, “and he's quick, don't take long for him to figure something out.”

Quanah said, “Only drawback is to fool kids all the time trying to prove he's as good as anyone else. I never could use a warrior with a limp, but you got to give the kid his due.”

Mackenzie remarked, “Yep, if his pride don't trip him up, he's going to be somebody around these parts someday.”

Quanah lived by an immense calendar printed on the sky, and he was smoking his fingers yellow trying to make haste slowly. Two whole weeks had gone by before the boys learn to sleep at will and wake rapidly. Goodnight had taught them a world of things about cattle. Mackenzie had taken various boys on short scouting trips teaching them along the way. Quanah himself had not slept well. It was the first time in his life that he had found himself too tired to sleep. A slight doze was all he could manage, and he was always worried whoever stole the bull and delivered the herd from Mexico would overtake them. They hadn't, so that meant to him they would. The Chief never sounded worried, but his eyes began to look out of caves.

Mackenzie said to Quanah, “I don't know why you can't sleep. I think the boys are working out just fine.”

“Sure, sure. None are dead yet, but you got to watch them every minute.”

Goodnight brought Quanah some coffee.

“God, they're so damn many things that can happen moving cattle like this. Even if you have Goodnight here, but these are only boys, and theirs are good, some looking nearly grown, but some still just boys.”

Quanah said, “I'm worried I have to tell some mother we lost her boy.”
Mackenzie commented, “You did that enough already?
Quanah replied, “You too, I imagine.”

Mackenzie left the fire and came back with a brown bottle in his hand.
A number of boys were waiting just outside of earshot; they saw the whiskey. He poured healthy amount of whiskey into the three cups.
Goodnight asked, “You keep thinking about Hellcat’s mother?”
Quanah couldn't figure it, “Who told you that Goodnight?”
Goodnight, “Well, Hellcat himself, and he says he was so ashamed, he wanted to run off. He said he would have if your bull hadn’t been stolen.”
Quanah, “If he did run off, I’d run off with him to somewhere the buffalo still there.”
Mackenzie, “To tell the truth, it might have been better to pay the Rangers to give the bull back.”
Goodnight, “But he wouldn't have this nice herd had we done that.
Mackenzie emptied his cup. “True, but we wouldn't be worried about the boys suddenly.” Mackenzie swallowed liquor easily as if he couldn't taste it. “Come on Chief, I got a feeling I'm wasting this on you, but let's finish this cup off with one swallow.”
“No, Mackenzie. I got to keep my upper story about me.”
He pushed the cup to Tito’s coffee, and he filled it.
“Don't drink that stuff at night, that's what Whiskey is for, for sleeping. That black stuff is for waking. This is for sleeping. Go to sleep friend, at least lay your head down.
“What about you Mackenzie, you don't sleep any more than I do.”
“Well, at least I ain’t confused about what medicine to take.”

Mackenzie, “Ain't willing to let loose and sleep anymore. I sit back and sip whiskey and look back, and I got plenty to look back at.”
“Your soldier's heart is hard, but your body is broken.”
Quanah looked at the colonel as if he sensed what was coming.
Mackenzie, “Dying is a peculiar responsibility.”
Quanah, “You don’t want to reveal too many mistakes before you go.”
“Same as you, I made a mistake or two in my life.
“Indian Massacres?”
“Syphilis.”
Quanah threw out the coffee and held his cup out for whiskey.
Mackenzie humbled, “When I was twenty-five, I was the most pigheaded young stud ever to leave West Point. Well, I just had to have my brother's wife, she seemed like the most lovely creature, so I decided to love her. Now I've killed her, luckily, my brother was killed in the war, otherwise…
Goodnight was curious, “And the books in the library, the irrational behavior, the irritability?”
Mackenzie, “Early signs of the disease. Now, the Army knows, of course.”
Quanah. “So now you'll run away to New York?”
Mackenzie, “I'll die a miserable death in an asylum.”
Goodnight, “But you have had a woman on your arm, I've seen you walking with her. Sure at every post, a private doctor at every post and a woman, a simple trick to fool the army.”
Quanah responded, “You needn't be so proud to think your’e the onliest jackass in the world.”
“A long time ago, I lived free among the Buffalo and the Palisade and planes and had as many wives as I wanted according to the laws of my people, I used to go to war in Texas and Mexico and take what I wanted. They wanted me to stop fighting, and I sent messages all the time. You stop Quanah. They did not say then, ‘how many wives you got Quanah?’ Now I'm civilized on the reservation, and all I hear is talk about wives. Which one do I throw away? ‘You little one, you go away you got no papa.’”
“I have eight wives, and the Quaker says I'll rot in hell for it.”
Goodnight, “You won't rot in hell; the devil won't have you.”
Mackenzie, “You don't go to hell for having eight wives. Hell, some people would say, with eight wives, you’re already in hell.”
Goodnight thought, and Mackenzie needed more attention than a man with only eight problems, “Syphilis? Funny, you're the one white
man that I never pictured making a mistake. Burns village but hardly more.”

Mackenzie said, “Goodnight, I burned village, kills a few renegades, wore out a few horses, that was war and easy to put out of your head; don't matter a bit to me now. But for as long as I live, I'll never forget my sister-in-law's demented state at the end.”

Good night answered, “Welcome to the human race we've lost a colonel and gained a human.”

That night, the three men slept.

The next morning, Bacon Grease remarked that the three men looked human and hard to waken.

Hellcat lowered his voice to answer, “They ought to be, they got last night’s sleep from a bottle. When I come from my rounds, I seen them pushing a bottle back and forth and just swelling it down.”

The Quaker boy looked at him, doubtfully, “you jobbin’ me?”

Tito said, “No coffee varnish on this trip.”

“But they're above us and I figure he meant no liquor for us that we’re too young.”

“Or we’re Indians.”

“Well some preachers don't listen to their own sermons. Tito himself got a bottle. He's hiding it in the wagon.”

Everybody took long hard looks at the three men to judge the price of being drunk last night. Oddly enough, because of the sleep, they looked better then they had before.

“I know they might be big men, but I never knew and thought that they'd be two-faced.”

“They didn't tell us we couldn't drink. Tito told us that, and he's under them.”

Supper was different that night. Nobody talked. When it was over, the dart and hoop games were quieter than normal. Six Eyes was slower learning his dozen new notes, and Hellcat was sneaking little glances at Tito. Mackenzie was out with his horse. Goodnight would be sitting the first guard any minute. Tito would be fertilizing the brush anytime. And Quanah was an old man and probably already asleep.

They were lucky; the wagon was unguardered and totally open.
Someone whispered, “Okay, Hellcat. All clear.”

Up slowly as if he were going to the gallows. It wasn't smooth, his leg, but he managed in a cold sweat to bring back the bottle.

Tito returned, belched and didn't notice a thing. The Quaker’s kid waited for a minute, then felt the bottle through Hellcat’s shirt. Hellcat thought the Chief was awake, and his eyes were on him; suddenly, he pulled the bottle out and pushed it into the Quaker kid’s hand. He, in turn, quickly jammed it inside his own shirt.

They thought he must’ve noticed something, but he only muttered, “useless boys” and took more wood to the fire. A nice fire made him feel secure. The Quaker’s son got up, stretched, and with his back toward Tito yawned and said, “Well, I think I will take me a nap and turn in. Been quite a day,” and he strolled off into the darkness, and the silence closed around the entire camp.

The fire was low, and Tito hadn't noticed the flat bedrolls. The older Indian boys, along with the Quakers kid, suddenly thundered into the camp, everyone naked on a horse, and they rode around in a wheel whooping and hollering. The sound of hooves and war cries so horrifying the sleep of Quanah, Mackenzie and Goodnight along with Tito, they all ducked for cover behind saddles. Tito hid under the wagon.

The four men unable to focus, speculated. Mackenzie guessed, “Apache.” Goodnight guessed, “Tonkawa.” Quanah settled the issue, “Comanche.” By then, they were able to focus and realized the boys were just drunk.

Tito said, “I told them about drinking and this trip.”
Mackenzie, “Where'd they get the tonsil pain paint? Not from me, you guys finished me off last night.”
“I brought it,” Tito admitted.
“No, you didn't? Why?” Goodnight wanted to know.
“I thought I had it hidden under stuff in the wagon,” Tito explained.

Goodnight said, “You mean those nippers stole your whiskey? Where were you?”

Quanah said, “I tell you Comanche boys can smell it. I've noticed that. I can't smell it. I'm too old, but boys can smell it so you can't
hide it.”

“Better drink it before the Comanche comes around,” Goodnight jested.

Tito suggested, “They didn’t do any real harm and ain’t stampeded the herd.”

“Yet,” Goodnight answered.

Quanah sighed deeply, and he said, “Ignore them, and they will go away. But I tell you, I’m sick of boys, both white and red. I’m tired of all you, and your boys have any color and cows. I'm tired of not sleeping.”

But in the morning, Quanah was up and uncharacteristically loud, “Get gaited,” Goodnight was helping him.

The Chief was pounding on the frying pan with a spoon to beat ancient time. He sang loudly, with the boys all hungover gritting their teeth.

LIME KILN DRAW

There was a lot of talk about this outlaw with the Christian name, John Wesley Hardin. He’d risen somewhere in Texas and drifted. Nobody can tell you precisely what he’d done, but everyone agreed he wasn’t a very likable fellow. Which was a common occurrence, if the Rangers didn’t like ya’ you were screwed. So when the Texas Rangers came to take him away, there had been a running fight, and there were two dead Rangers. Then Harding had vanished. Rumor had him only a hundred miles from San Angelo, with Abilene next, and that would put him not far from the herd. But everybody with a level head knew the Rangers would eventually get their man, long before you ever reached Indian Territory.

With all the talk across Texas was about the undefeated outlaw, Quanah was more interested in the grass, and the grass was drying up. He pictured what it would be like north of San Angelo. There’d be next to nothing for the herd to eat and nothing but fuel for another prairie fire. If an accident of lightning didn't turn it into an inferno, Harden could. If chased, with the wind this way, he could
Quanah Parker’s Hereford Bull

easily wipe out not only his tracks but his pursuers as well.

Harding had been roaming all through the crackling dry state that his herd had crossed. Quanah knew that the white man wouldn't like the heat any more than anyone else. Normally, the chances of meeting Harding would be slim, but the man was deranged and doing things the Chief had a hard time remembering. Maybe Harding was the reason the two Rangers hadn’t come for their cattle, yet.

Regardless, he began to nudge Goodnight, and Goodnight begin to nudge the boys. They even cut out some of the mothers with their younger calves, so they could travel faster. They counted twenty-four-hundred head after that. And Quanah called the boys together.

He watched them coming in, their clothes fit better. The ones that had stolen the Stetsons were developing character. They must have liberated them from a store because they were all bent identical. It was part of the white man’s culture, but each of his braves had now bent his hat differently. He could see they’d know who it belonged to.

And they were part of the working economy now. These boys didn’t complain about the weather, or hunger, or the idiot cattle. Instead of whining, they bitched like grown men, and they were telling their own stories now, not repeating those of others. No one had mentioned Miss Havisham, and over two weeks; they respected each other more and interrupted each other less. They liked to listen to the Quaker kid or Six Eyes play guitar. Most importantly, they could see that the cattle came first. One kid, Little Horse, who never really made himself known, spent most day at bull nurse, six feet from the bull and had managed to bring back three dead rattlers, and they were still south of the Colorado. He was bound to save the bull several times more.

They did what they had been asked to do with all the skill they could devise, and when they didn't know what to do, they'd come ask Quanah and if he didn’t know, he’d send the kid over to see Goodnight. No brave wanted to approach Goodnight without going through the Chief first. Quanah had a pat answer for those he didn’t know, “There are cowboy questions, and there were Indian questions, and I’m an Indian. The cowboy is over.”

Quanah was immensely proud of them and then only became
better. Time and events would bring them the rest of the way.

Not all of the boys got down when Quanah spoke. This was on account of Harding being out and about, of course, if something happened to spook the herd. The mounted boys would be immediately up and dealing with it.

SOUTH OF MOUNTAIN SUSAN

One day they came upon a covered wagon stranded out on the prairie. One horse dead from snake bite, a man-a-hanging and his wife and a baby in the wagon. They were helpless, many miles from civilization with no food, no gun for hunting, not even the ability to make a rabbit snare or the know-how to dig in Indian turnip. The man hadn't eaten for two days.

Quanah slouched over in his saddle, his arms folded on the horn listening. His sharp eyes looked at the man's eyes. Three boys where watching, studying when the Chief, to see what he wanted to do. He raised himself up in the stirrups and shifted his holster, “Come along, we'll adopt you.” He told the boys to hitch a team to the tongue, and their surviving horse was sent to graze with the remuda. Quanah asked Tito to stop and feed the starving family.

PAINT CREEK ON THE COLORADO

Goodnight explained to the boys, “In the morning, pick a good swimming horse, that water is going to feel good on a hot day, but this isn't no picnic. Some of you might not get across, and some of the cattle might not either. You'll have to move fast. You gotta get the herd across before they realize. It ain't natural for them. This much water will feather their brains all to heck. And sure as you need them on the reservation, they'll try to turn around and try to go back, and of course you won't let them do it. They'll swim, not knowing which direction to take. Try to break that up. That's why you don't let
them get in that milling pattern. All right, go back to your games.”

All the boys glared at the cattleman as he strode off into the night. Six Eyes seemed in awe a bit and then said, “Wouldn't it be nice to own half the Comancheria for your own personal cattle ranch. You could spend your time knowing everything,” and then the boy turned and looked up, and Charles Goodnight was standing over him.

“Haha, I ain't all that smart. For example, when I made up your mind about this crossing, I done forgot the most important part. Maybe you'll want to eat tomorrow? The eyes of the boys shifted to the wagon, the wagon that contained the food. Tito had his roller shaping some tortillas and was whistling like he’d never fired a shot in anger.

Goodnight pointed out, “It won't float. The water’s too deep, and that thing's too heavy. What we got to do is put down the games and the guitars and build a raft. Right now.”

They looked at him, and they look to Quanah for confirmation. Quanah looked blank-faced in return, and Goodnight went on, “What's more, we're going to have to go a long way to get the wood. The herd hears all that construction, and we'll be chasing them all night. So get up. Let's go.”

It was a busy night. They had to pick the proper trees and cut them down and drag them back to the godown. They tied the logs together and rolled the wagon on top. They lashed it down. The boys were happy to go on guard duty, just to rest in the saddle after all the lumberjacking. Tito did heroic work keeping the coffee flowing. And to boot, he's produced an endless supply of donuts. Mackenzie, an engineer first, then a cavalry officer, supervised the construction. Goodnight divided his time between keeping an eye on the cattle and holding the noise down. Quanah Parker didn’t sleep but silently watched the south for riders.

When that job was done, he freely admitted, “Boys, you did a wonderful job. It won't be light for another half hour or so. Eat and have a short rest. You'll need to be alert when we punch them across. Tito put some fat on their blisters.” Everyone ate breakfast wrapped in tortillas and lazed about. There was nothing to do but wait for daybreak.
Goodnight ended their sleep with an order to strip nude so that they’d have dry clothes on the other side. “Grown men can ride wet, but kids shouldn't get pneumonia.”

The boys said nothing as they peel down to their Indian selves, out of their cowboy clothes, everything was thrown into the wagon. They didn’t look too nervous about it, but Quanah reminded them if they died, he’d come with their clothes.

The first splash brought relief. Goodnight with his massive body seemed not to notice the rope brought tight and the raft floating. Mackenzie seemed to notice. The braves all dug their heels into the horses sides and pulled deeper and deeper. It wasn't until the horses were swimming that the raft got a bit cockeyed. Goodnight shouted notice. The swimming horses snorted, and the braves tightened the ropes; the raft righted itself and drifted perfectly to the go up on the other side, where Mackenzie was waiting for the landing.

When the wagon was safe on the on the north bank, and Tito brought the mules, a certain exhilaration took the young braves. The awful thing was actually, it was sort of nice. This was a real adventure, no matter what the cattlemen had said or how worried the Chief appeared. It was nice water, pleasant, and the wind made it seem cool. When the wagon was up and hitched to the team, the braves shouted and raced back across the river for the herd. Bacon and Hellcat singled out the Hereford bull; they spoke to him in the most blunt way and in the Comanche language. They would allow him the luxury of work that never ended, “putting weight on next generation” and they coaxed him into the water. The rest of the herd was just as coaxed.

Goodnight was a master; he'd chosen a smooth place to cross. Although the current was strong, figuring the drift, he put the herd in 100 yards up from where he wanted them to emerge. Mackenzie disappeared from the landing area, and the boys narrow the herd to about a dozen wide, and they stepped into the deep with nothing but a grunt and wide eyes. Reaching the other side, none showed any gratitude; they went up to graze like it were an everyday event.

Each time a pair of boys reached the far shore, they turned around to make another turn escorting the herd. Goodnight had Quanah sit on his horse on the south bank with his six-shooter
strangely drawn. Goodnight was also ready to launch in if needed to
right the herd. Quanah and ready on the left, hand on his Colt.

Goodnight kept reminding them to go slow, but to be persistent.
And they worked together like them two graceful wheels, one on the
left and one on the right and the heard was being pressed through
gears to the other side. Suddenly, a brave's horse stumbled, and the
cattle drew up. Those swimming started to turn. Quanah and
Goodnight in unison shouted to keep going. Those in midstream
fought the braves. Some got past the wheels and then started to swim
in circles. Panic was on the cusp.

That was when Bacon vanished; his horse simply went under.
Even Goodnight, who’d seen it all, didn’t seem to believe it.
Quanah turned pale. The brave sunk and Quanah muttered, “Damn
the cattle; let ‘em drown,” and he lunged in where he had last seen
Bacon.

Through the swirling wheel of cattle, Quanah rode until he
reached Bacon's extended hand. Quanah, while aged, still had
massive shoulders and chest; he hauled the boy completely out of the
water like he would have a catfish and laid him across the saddle.

Quanah and the boy reached the north shore. Only then did
Goodnight fire his gun and enter the deep. Firing intermittently and
riding up near the panicked cattle. The gun's report gave them a sense
of direction, and they wanted no part of anything so loud. They were
suddenly swimming hard for the north shore. The boys scream
something close to the old war cries, and many were beating the
cattle with their ropes.

But the hero of the day wasn't Quanah or Goodnight; it was
Mouse, the quiet little fellow who showed his true talent. In the
confusion of the mid-river panic, Quanah had dropped his colt into
the river. The Chief considered it lost, but not Mouse. He’d made a
note where the pistol fell and when the herd was over out of the
water. He dismounted and jumped in. The Chief and then the other
braves tried to persuade him to leave the water and leave the gun; it
took him ten minutes, but he finally came up, showing everyone the
Colt. Swimming was unusual for a Comanche boy, but to swim
underwater was something given by a higher power. Tito was
especially wide-eyed over finding the Colt underwater. Everyone was
impressed, and El Gordo said he’d had a dream about a man who could readily change into a fish.

Quanah said to the boy that returned his weapon, “It is good for a man to be so persistent; remind me of this when we get back to the reservation. The boy walked with more roll in his gait. This swagger persisted for an entire week; the brave’s mother insisted that it lasted until the day of his marriage.

Goodnight posted two riders to shape the cattle while the others dried off. They put on clothes and changed mounts. About the time everyone was dressed, Mackenzie rode up with Bacon's horse; it looked funny. The poor animal was full of water and looked completely bloated.

Instead of being glad to be alive, Bacon was a bit put off and felt the horse had nearly killed him. After a few seconds thinking about the horse's condition, everyone chuckled. Ten miles north of the crossing, they slaughtered a steer, and it was the first fresh beef they had in years. One young brave, born on the reservation, insisted it was the only fresh beef he’d had his entire life, that he’d only had cured government beef.

NIPPLE PEAK

“Rembrandt” was the white name of the boy who drew pictures. He got that name from Miss Havisham at school, where he used the chalkboard. He worked very hard at being the fellow the girls loved. Everything was his drawn for their amusement. When Miss Havisham showed them some art in a book so expensive, she was the only one who could touch it, and the boy had a new summer name. The day after the river crossing, Rembrandt rode up to Quanah with an overheated mount, “Sir, sir. There's a big cat over on the far side of the herd; he looks to be stalking them.”

“A cougar?”

“No sir, and big as a cow. I thought maybe you should use your rifle on him.”

Quanah took the hint, and he rode with the boy, his repeating
rifle in a holster on his saddle. They track the cat for over a mile before they saw it. It was a beauty, big and healthy, so to say; it was finding prey. The tail was flickered hungrily has it watched the cattle from above.

Quanah remarked, “Hate to tell that cat; this is Comanche beef.”

But when Quanah lifted the rifle, Rembrandt whispered, “Sir, can I shoot him, please. I've never had the chance at anything this big before and since we aren't going for buffalo anymore…”

Like the cat, he licked his lips and added, “Everybody knows I'm as good a shot as that white boy.”

The boy’s eagerness was enough to persuade the Chief, and he carefully handed the boy the Winchester. The boy raised the rifle and fired almost immediately. He didn't miss by much, but he did miss. The big cat disappeared in a flash. The boys signed side and waited maybe 20 seconds before showing only a tail moving through some tall grass. The brave fired again. Quanah, of course, was silent and didn’t judge, not immediately.

After searching the tall grass, “Didn’t anyone ever tell you about squeezing the trigger? Don't pull it, when isn't a rush. Now try it again, aim hit that rock over in front of that bush. Now squeeze the trigger; don't jerk it.”

The boy followed instructions and hit a rock perfectly dead center. Only then did Quanah take back his rifle.

“Maybe the night guard should have rifles tonight?” The brave suggested.

Quanah didn't respond.

The boy thought maybe the old man hadn't heard, so he repeated the question.

Quanah responded this time, “I heard you. The problem is, if a Texas Ranger kills, you need to be unarmed.”

When they reached the camp, Rembrandt worried the Chief would tell the story of missing the cat, but he never did. Rembrandt realized he would have been humiliated.

The day was miserably hot and dry, and everything was covered with a vast amount of dust. Cattle began to scatter in all directions. The braves rode back and forth, trying to keep them in a
recognizable shape. All-day there was no grass and worse, no water. The herd was becoming testy. Mackenzie rode ahead to find something, but there wasn't any within a reasonable distance. Mackenzie presented Goodnight with a dilemma. They had a choice of stopping for the night with a hungry and thirsty (restless) herd or go on until long after dark to a place where there was grass and water.

Goodnight chose the later, and Quanah nodded in agreement, naturally. Goodnight was always right about moving cattle. Quanah Parker was always right about the weather, and Mackenzie was always correct about mathematics. The cows and the boys either or both could have complained, but they didn't.

Tito complained but not for himself, “A man can go many days without food, but these poor boys they'll blow away in this wind if we don't feed them soon.”

Goodnight changed his mind, and Quanah didn't protest. Goodnight reasoned, “It's better to stop when you know the conditions than to push them on in the dark to a place where the conditions aren't known and might be worse.”

That night was pure dark. Everyone looked for firewood, and they sweated. The calm night almost never arrived. Man and Beast were too uncomfortable to rest. The boys were bitchy with each other. Even the coffee showed signs of a mistake; it was nothing but belly wash, and someone brave got brave and pointed that out to the Tito.

Tito retaliated by referring to them all as “little girls” for three days.

MESQUITE CREEK

Randal Mackenzie suffered a great deal in his life. He had a serious sunstroke when a boy. He suffered horrific wounds but played a central role in many Civil War battles. He was irritable from years of extreme exposure to weather; chasing Quanah Parker for prolonged periods in temperatures ranging from 114° to -3°. He did
have an explosive temper, and while the army said he had difficulty establishing close relationships, clearly he and Quanah were close. He had also suffered an odd accident somehow, falling off a wagon at Fort Sill; he injured his head so badly he was in a stupor for three days. He was unusually irritable in the days that followed.

At night sitting around after Tito’s burrito, Mackenzie philosophized, “I'm convinced that the finest fighting soldier in history is a plains’ warrior with a repeating rifle. That is the best combination of mobility and weaponry for this modern warfare.”

Quanah dreamed, “I wish I'd had a few now.”

Goodnight offered to help, “Repeating rifles? There’s two in the jewelry box. Tito has the key.”

Quanah was blunt, “Guns? I speak of warriors. Cattle be on reservation before Rangers catch us.”

Goodnight asked, “Mackenzie's column nearly caught you that time; how'd you get away.

“We were defending our village and our women and our children.”

Goodnight, “One would think that an entire village settlement consisting of several hundred lodges, with large numbers of women and children and old men, tons of equipment provisions and supplies along with your remuda and cattle would be an easy enough query.

Mackenzie, “I don't know how you know how he didn't, and he’s refused to tell me. I’ve befriended him, pulled every string to get him and his people on what they needed. I’ve, in detail, given him my experiences from fourteen Civil War battles and five Indian campaigns. I taught him every cavalry trick I know.

“And he still won’t tell you how he escaped?”

“Not a word.”

“Quanah, you hid an entire Comanche Village on the open plains, the flattest place on earth.”

Mackenzie, “I knew we were hunting an entire village, so I moved my men northeast along the Clear Fork of the Brazos, I thought I had him. You left in haste, draggin’ an enormous load with you.”

“Did I?”

Mackenzie continued, “The trailed divided, and then it seemed to
cross and re-cross itself. We went back to where the village was originally. But now the traces of lodgepoles and thousands of livestock seem to do the impossible, climbing hundreds of feet up the nearly vertical canyon wall and up the cliffs of the caprock.

Goodnight asked, “What’d you do?”
Mackenzie answered, “We climbed it, an extraordinary really steep ascent.”
Goodnight didn’t know the answer, “And what was on the top?”
Mackenzie, “As far as I could see, nothing. Not a living thing, no doubt. That was a terrible place to be. It was getting colder, and we were in our summer uniforms, so the Tonkawa Scouts found the tracks again, but this time they went down back over the bluffs and down into the canyon. Disgusted and apparently duped once more, we made a dangerous descent only to find the same tangle of wild crisscrossing trails. Some were leading up the valley and others down. The Tonks fumbled about, but they found that the trail led once again up and over the steep cliffs this time on the other side of the canyon again. We went all over the rocky cliffs; it was a shrewd trick, Quanah.”
Quanah chuckled, “It was. Wasn’t it?”
Mackenzie, “You sure beat the Tonks that day for sure.”
Quanah, “I beat you too.”
Goodnight, “Give us a hint, how’d ya do it.”
Quanah, “Go ask Isa-Tai; maybe he say. He got no friends.”
Mackenzie chuckled, “We got some nice puppies out of that chase.”
Quanah, “Puppies?”
Mackenzie, “Up top it was cold; there were all these puppies. Everywhere and we had no coats, no gloves but we figured we were close, I thought that because your riders suddenly appeared on our flanks trying to divert us. They taunted us and
Quanah, “Maybe I was a bit nervous. You closed that I expected.”
Mackenzie to Goodnight, “He began to discard all of this debris, lodgepoles and tools, especially puppies which my men managed to pick up and put over their saddles.”
Goodnight, “So why didn’t you just follow the trail of puppies?”
Mackenzie, “We did, I thought one final battle would happen, and then the blue norther hit. Rain, sleet, snow and fifty mile-an-hour wind.

Goodnight, “Let me guess, the trail of puppies and lodgepole ran out?”

Mackenzie, “Nothing… it just stopped. Middle of the plains. Nothing. So I turned back.”

Quanah, “Must have been hard, givin’ your aggressive nature.”

Mackenzie, “The generals gave me hell about.”

Quanah, “In retrospect, you made the right decision. Your men were fatigued, horses baked, or I should say frozen. It was a night that soldiers and horses might die in the ice.”

Goodnight, “You were wounded the next day?”

Mackenzie, “Wouldn't have happened but for my impetuousness. They had to cut the arrow out of the bone. Hurt like hell.”

Goodnight asked Mackenzie, “What happened next?”

Quanah interrupted, “I went free.”

Mackenzie sulked a bit, but was still trying to figure it out.

Goodnight, “So tell him how you did it.”

Quanah, “Probably not.”

Goodnight, “Why it’s over and done with?”

Quanah, “What does that matter?”

Goodnight, “Cause the war’s over.”

Quanah reasoned, “Might need same trick again. Later.”

Goodnight, “We’re all getting up in years, what are the odd?”

Quanah, “Let me ask you if you bed a woman, any women, do tell about it around?”

Mackenzie, “Hey, wait a minute. I told you how I got syphilis and how I infected my brother’s wife. Right?”

Quanah, “That talk, not my mistake. Friend.”

Goodnight, “Colonel, he just ain’t gonna tell.”

SAND SPRING

The most romantic story of Quanah’s early life involves his first
Quanah Parker's Hereford Bull

marriage. He had many attractive wives later in life, but nothing so dramatic as his marriage to Weckeah.

"It's a familiar story many people know it. I loved Weckeah. We had grew up together, and she was in love with me. She beaded my moccasins and bow quiver."

The boy asked, "You wanted to marry her?"

"You should be aware; there is almost always a problem finding a first wife. But after the first, it seems they come along easily enough."

The boy asked, "I'll remember. What was the problem with Weckeah?"

"Her father, Old Bear, opposed partly because of my white blood but also because I was an orphan and had nothing to trade and no standing in the tribe."

The boy inquired, "So what did you do?"

"Well, hold on; it's complicated. A rival suitor, Tannup, the son of a wealthy chief."

The boy asked, "But she didn't want Tappan?"

"No, but his father offered ten horses for her hand. I had one horse."

The boy asked, "So how did you get her?"

"She pleaded with me, exciting times for a young man, to borrow horses from my friends and I did, but when I went to make the offer, the Tannup doubled his offer. Now he was going to give her father twenty horses."

The boy asked, "So you borrowed another ten horses?"

"My friends didn't have ten other horses."

The boy asked, "But you did marry her, right?"

"I was undeterred; we eloped."

The boy exclaimed, "You stole her?"

"Well, it wasn't uncommon back then, but generally, the poor boy's family would gather up some horses to soothe the dishonor suffered by the girl's parents..."

The boy surmised, "And you didn't have that?"

"No, of course not, I was an orphan. I risked death and her too. Comanche families can be quite unforgiving. Tannup's father would have had no problem recruiting men and seek retribution."

The boy asked, "But, you eventually paid him, Tannup's father?"
“I took twenty-one warriors and made like a rabbit. We traveled south for seven hours before resting. We travel at night, splitting up and rejoining a number of times. We came together at Double Mountain. Finally, we stopped at the Concho River and used that place as a base to steal horses.”

The boy asked, “You were the leader?”

“It was my idea. Weckeah was so lovely and such a good woman. The others went and stole their sweethearts too and also stole the sleeping Texans. We were happy to own a large horse herd.”

The boy tried to calculate, “So you had to pay, how many horses?”

“After much haggling, Tannup’s father received nineteen horses.”

The boy continued, “And Weckeah’s father?”

“The same.”

The boy did the math and exclaimed, “Thirty-eight horses! You hesitated at that price?”

“No, I knew where there was a ranch where I could steal fifty in a few hours.”

DRY DUTCH CREEK

At midnight, Hellcat and the Quaker’s son came from their night watch. They woke up their relief and sat to eat some biscuits Tito had left out for them. Quanah woke, and he snapped his head in the direction of the south. And then he vented at the white boy because the relief hadn't risen.

“Look, you're going to get us all killed. They've gone back to sleep. Shake ‘em and don't consider yourself done until they're on their feet.”

The Quaker boy literally did shake Six Eyes and then El Gordo. After Quanah relaxed, he asked how the herd was. The Quaker’s kid shook his head, “sort of on edge.”

“They smell the javelinas out in the brush.”

The Quaker responded, “It's like they're waitin’. Just standing there waiting.”
Six eyes offered up an idea he'd put them to sleep with a guitar; “I only got three-fourths of the song mastered, but figured cows ain’t that smart to notice and that ought to be enough.”

Quanah’s response was, “Play softly.”

The Chief would have offered more advice but noticed that Hellcat wasn’t limping too badly, and El Gordo's no longer fat. No one else seemed to have noticed. Perhaps, Tito had noticed because he had been the one to take up El Gordo’s pants.

Quaker boy laid down and dreamed of the red light district in San Francisco; he’d never been, of course, but he did read and had heard some stories. He had some photos, and he had a vivid imagination at night.

At the far end of the herd, El Gordo stopped to hear Six Eyes playing the song. It was beautiful, strong, and perfectly played until there was a slight jostling of the herd and a calf bellowed out in pain. That cat had trailed them, and the cattle bolted.

The panic wasn’t just a few; all of them, the entire herd, was running as fast as it could. They were simultaneously off and running; the thunder of the hooves was like the worst of storms and the clacking of the horns, and it was eerie.

Quanah yelled, “Our cattle!”

Tito threw all the wood in reserve, in haste on three fires. Quanah didn't have a night horse, so he and Tito stood, in the middle of the fires, next to the wagon listening. Into the storm, the brave boys themselves literally jumped on their waiting night horses.

Goodnight was the last to ride out and chase the herd. The Quaker’s son was right behind them. Hellcat yelled at Bacon that someone needed to go on the other side of the heard. They all rushed wildly to keep pace, but it was abundantly clear that all that could be accomplished was to ride along with the cattle; eventually they would tire. The boys rode like they had never done before, and several miles later, the cattle did begin to slow. The Quaker no longer really believed in God, but thanked him anyway for not putting prairie dog holes in their path.

Goodnight wanted to get them into a mill; once the cattle were circling, they’d have to slow. He didn't know, but Hellcat and Bacon were instinctually trying the same thing on the other side of the herd.
And the herd turned into a rotating mass and slowed.

The problem was the Hereford bull and the second half of the herd; either they smelled the other branch of the Brazos, miles away, or maybe it was just dumb stupidity; they didn't stop until they were tumbling down the south bank into it.

Every boy blessed Jesus because they found the bull standing a little dazed and standing in knee-deep water. On the other side of the bank was a distant figure; a Philadelphia man they first thought was looking for gold, but later it turned out was looking for buried bones in the river bed. Professor Cope hadn’t seen the bull tumble down, but did think to count two-hundred cattle take the fall down the ten-foot embankment. The bull they felt was lucky, and the only good thing they could calculate there were over five-hundred of the herd on the north bank. But and it took two days, to find and bring and the others over.

Every single member of the party seemed to ride by in five-minute intervals to examine the bull for injuries.

Goodnight and Mackenzie sipped coffee and looked silently at Quanah and Rembrandt. The boy was clearly begging to use the rifle, and Quanah was steadfastly refusing, which was almost always the Chief’s negotiation position on anything, but there seemed to be a story. Goodnight, not Mackenzie couldn’t figure it quite out. But clearly, the boy was protesting a bit too much and not out helping the other braves round of the scattered herd.

There was a kathump-kathump of hooves as Six Eyes rode up rapidly; the three men and Rembrandt stared at him. Maybe he did tell a story Quanah and Rembrandt didn’t want to share.

“It was a cat; I found the tracks. A big cat and I mean B.I.G.” and he got down from the horse. Mackenzie and Goodnight looked at him over their coffee.

Mackenzie asked, “Why you figure that artist kid wants to go kill that cat so bad?”

Goodnight responded, “Maybe he saw it and didn’t say nothing.” Quanah rose as if he couldn’t face the boy face-to-face, he stalked off into the morning.

Goodnight and Mackenzie both got up and asked Six Eyes at least twenty questions, and nothing more of it was said.
ON THE BRAZOS

Quanah knew they had to be missing a good number of cattle; he squinted at the endless landscape. The night of the stampede, they’d camped fifteen miles from the branch of the Brazos, and missing cattle were spread over a hundred square miles each cow for herself.

Goodnight divided up the young braves into three groups one north of the river, and two groups (one sent west, and one sent south) worked south of the river. He sent the wagon, Tito, and three youngest boys ahead to where the yankee was camped; they’d all meet there when the scattered herd could be reunited.

Bacon and the Quaker’s kid drew the roughest terrain; it was an ass breaking job, but they were missing a lot of cattle. The two boys chose their best rim rockers, horses they call they could take the hard riding.

Because of the supposed outlaw, Bacon Grease wanted he and the Quaker to work together or at least to remain in sight of each other, but the Quaker’s kid was a loner. Nothing crazy about that, just that he more than most preferred to work hard and fast. And he did; he moved in and out of the creeks and gullies and brought out a number of strays. Bacon found a few more, and they were dragging them slower and slower back to the scientist’s camp. The Quaker boy brought a group back into Bacon's group, then turned around and went further.

By the middle of the day, he hit a southerly bend in the river, about ten miles from the rendezvous. This was neither a good place or a good time. He didn’t worry about all the talk about a deranged outlaw.

As it was, all he knew it was hot, and there might be a cow just over the next hill. He wasn’t overly worried about cockeyed criminals but just didn’t want to hear what Quanah and Goodnight would say if they knew he'd come this far and missed a couple of head.

He did, however, decided to head back. Even the fittest beef couldn't have come this far since last night, he reasoned. That was when he noticed some tracks; they looked like two or three beeves with two horses driving them from behind. The tracks were fresh. He followed rapidly, always glancing ahead, and no time he saw the dust
up ahead and dug in his heels. When they heard him coming, the two riders abandoned their loot and took off upriver fast.

There were three head, and all of them Mexican members of the herd judging from their condition and look. The Quaker kid brought them around and started back east. He wished Quanah hadn't taken his gun. He hadn't gone a mile when the riders were behind him, and they didn't seem frightened now. Neither was he. He'd turn and wait on them. The boy's eyes went wide when he saw they wore badges. All the same, he kept his right side concealed so they couldn't see he didn't have a weapon. They pulled up wide apart, wisely; they had rifles pulled and levelled from the saddle. If he had a pistol and was so inclined he'd only be able to kill one but the other would surely kill him. Strangely, he didn't have a weapon but was running it through his head.

They were experienced, hard looking men. They didn't appear weak or sloppy in any way. Judging from their stars, they were in the pay of the state, but they looked sloppier than buffalo hunters. Seeing the Quaker boy's age they relaxed a bit, but they kept looking him over trying to figure out just how dangerous he might be.

“Drop your gun, son.”
“Not till you drop yours.”

The law weren't accustomed to it, not anywhere. They were accustomed to accosting anyone they wanted and doing just about anything they wanted. But, of course, they weren't looking to be killed either.

And when the Quaker kid said, “Just slide those rifles back into those holsters, and I'll be satisfied,” they obliged him.

And when they did that, the kid was feeling his oats, “And you boys keep your hands where I can see 'em. I've heard one too many stories about the crooked Rangers, but I always thought you more upright than to come right out and rustle off the range.”

“We ain't done any such thing. Damn you, kid.

“Bull shit. You knew you was in the wrong. You seen me coming and lit out, leaving them.”

The one Ranger said, “A man's got a right to protect themselves.”
The boy said, “And when you seen I was alone, then you came back for 'em.”
“When we looked up your outfit from the brand you'll get paid.”
The boy pointed out, “Ranger, there ain't no brand on these cattle.”
“There ain’t no brand?”
“They’re Comanche beeves and we're taking them to the reservation.”
“The reservation?”
“They gotta eat just like everybody else.”
“You’re stealing beef out of Texas to take to the reservation?”
“Stealin'? Who said anything about stealing?”
“Well, you claimed it was Indian beef.”
“Well, you’re just a damn kid and our outfit’s tired and hungry so we're taking these beeves.”
“They ain't mine to give anyway, so I'll just take them back to the herd.”
“You ain't moving nothing without the captain's okay. So how you like them beans?”
“Which one of you's got a family?”
They thought about it and then the old Ranger with red hair said, “That does it. First, that damn outlaw makes asses of us, and now we get held up by some smart-ass kid punching cattle for the Indians. Sometimes, it just pays ta stay home.”
The other Ranger looked thoughtfully at the boy and asked him, “Which side of the river is the outlaw on?”
“What outlaw? We ain’t seen no outlaw.”
“What outlaw? Only the worst group of criminals and going exactly the same direction you’re going.”
“I've been looking for strays and mindin’ my own business. If we passed a outlaw, it was at night, and there was a stampede.”
“John Wesley Hardin.”
The boy looked from one to the other, “You mean THE John Wesley Hardin? No wonder you look so worn out; he ain't somebody easy to catch. I heard.”
The Quaker kid was chuckling, and he didn't notice the young Ranger edging further around his right side.
The older Ranger turned to his companion, “I'd like to know what the hell's so funny about getting turned around like this. I figure the entire state will hear about this.”

Suddenly, the Ranger spoke nearly behind the kid, “This kid ain't got no gun. He's a baby, and all bluff.”

“What did I tell you we should have stayed home?”

The boy realized he'd have to comply with them, if they raised a rifle to him, and they did. The Ranger camp was only a few miles, and it was a mess and unorganized. The captain looked tired when he turned around. It struck the boy as odd; they were camped at all, and the horses grazing; they were supposed to be tracking Harding.

The mustached captain was worn out but cordial, maybe the sight of beef made him nice, ‘cause he immediately wrote a voucher for three head payable in Austin. Just as the paper was signed, a shot killed one of the steers, and they immediately started the butcherin’, and he said, “Son have no doubt about what we're doing. These may be your employer's property, that I'm sure, but if he was here, Indian or not, he'd have given them freely to this effort. We're trying to do some good here.”

Quakers kid looked at him coldly; the captian sounded like he’d repeated the same speech seven or eight times before, issuing paper that wouldn’t ever be cashed.

“You may not know it, but we've run into a bushel of bad luck.”

“No, I can see that.”

“Dry water holes, unreliable scouts, and terrible lack of information. Harding's been in Fort Worth, Abilene, and San Angelo all in the last week. He must not just be an outlaw, pretty sure he's a wizard as well.”

The kid was folding and unfolding the voucher, waiting for the talk to be done so we could leave

“But we're gonna run him down and bring him to justice.”

“Tell your trail boss not to worry it. We ain’t licked yet.”

He was too young to say it to his face; the Ranger reminded the kid of Don Quixote. The kid was old enough that it did occur to him.

“I'll tell my boss, alright. You can count on it.”

The boy looked at the man still sitting around; they were all looking away, that lost all respect for the captain.
On the way out of the camp, one of the Rangers that had brought him and told him, “Pass the word about Harding, son. He's been popping up all over the place. He thinks he's invincible.

“And with you chasing him, he might be.”

“He ain’t, we just ain't been able to do much about it cause of bad luck.”

“You’re just full of excuses, ain’t ya?”

“Well, you just watch those cattle.”

The boy looked over at the Ranger, “No outlaw’s gonna take from Quanah Parker, like you just did. This paper ain't worth much but I'll let you know if we see him.”

“Harding won't have even given you that.”

“You people are worse than Harding if you ask me.”

The kid kicked his heels and set off at full gallop.

The Quaker boy was handsome and healthy, but he spoke with such hate toward the law there at the end; the Ranger was days trying to figure what had brought that on. And the Ranger finally decided that the sas was just too onerous; if he ever met that kid again, they’d beat the hell out of him and send him to prison.

The group to the south came back with nearly two-hundred of the missing cattle. The boys sent to the west brought home almost three-hundred. There was no way of knowing how many they lost, but Quanah didn't say a word or look overly worried. The Chief was very difficult to read and was always simply Quanah, solemn.

Goodnight was the first to show his worry about the Quaker’s son. Quanah might have worried but didn't show it, or anything. It would cause everyone trouble if anything happened to that boy particularly.

Tito spoke up, “I figure maybe he rode over to the Fort Worth, had a hankering; he ain't no cowboy, you know. He was telling me about San Francisco and the whores, seems he researched it. He may have seen all the cattle brought in and figured it was under control, so he drifted.”

Quanah spoke, “Yes, he might have just gone. His family doesn't tie him down. He belongs to himself already.”

Everyone was looking at the Chief. Quanah looked back for an answer. The young native boys all shrugged. They didn't know if
they'd see the white boy again.

There were a few hours before dusk, and Quanah decided he needed to look for the boy. Of course, he wasn't overly worried; all in all, the Quaker's kid could take care of himself. But, of course, he the weapons locked in the wagon. It was just that the kid had managed to cover a lot of ground; there was no sign of him in any direction.

Politics was what really set Quanah off looking for the boy. The possibility that whatever happened, or was happening, to the boy might turn the good relations he had with his Indian agent father. Maybe the kid had run off, sick of cows. Maybe he was in a whore's bed in Fort Worth, but as far as the Chief knew the kid had left without any cash money.

Quanah rode west; he had a hunch you'd find the boy in that direction. He worried he'd find the boy under a horse, leg broken alone and helpless. The Chief looked up each gulch. When you found the right hoofprints, he knew the boy was there of the camp. He spurred his horse, but Missy went lame. Quanah got down and stood with his fists on his head; it would be all night at least walking back to Camp with an injured horse. Quanah wasn't happy when he set out.

Then about a half-mile away, he saw a rider throwing up dust, he was coming from the northwest moving toward the camp. It was the Quaker boy. Quanah drew his pistol and fired in the air; the rider didn't slow but ducked behind his mount with a heel over the saddle horn. And to boot, he may have been looking at him under the horse's neck Comanche style, which surely was a trick the Comanche boys had taught him. For whatever reason, he didn't make out that it was Quanah who'd fired the shot, and he never slowed, not even a step.

When Quaker boy got to camp, he immediately asked where Quanah had gotten to. Mackenzie broke the news to him, "Quanah is out looking for you."

The boy was certain that Harding had fired that shot at him. But the outlaw was a secondary concern next to the news of the Rangers has stolen three head. He was deeply excited, and that got everyone else excited as well, everyone except Mackenzie and Goodnight. They, weren't Indian, felt no animosity toward the Rangers. Rangers never stole from them; and as far as the two white men understood
they only took from the bottom half and who could blame them.

To the white men, Harding wasn’t even on the map either.

Goodnight saw the natives were in fear, and the Chief wasn’t there, so he felt he needed to say something, “Oh come on; they won’t even come this way and if they do they’ll pass us by. What’s they want with us, with you? They just wants to keep moving, appearing to be law men, so they get their pay. The herd? Hell they ain’t used to working.”

The Quaker’s son glared at him, “All right, but when they start driving off the herd. They might have Quanah Parker right now. You can't reason with a Ranger, and he's a Comanche in Texas. And I accidentally told ‘em, the cattle were his.”

Mackenzie tried to reason with the boy, “You've been talking to these Comanche about Rangers ain’t ya. I heard ya even left your school and was trying to go out there to their school. Rangers ain’t like outlaws’ they’re on our side.”

Goodnight wanted to know, “And why you think it was Harding who took a shot at you. That would ‘lerted everyone around there. No outlaws gonna do that, not and miss.”

The boy had an answer for everything, “The Rangers said he's done loco.”

Mackenzie questioned him, “The same Rangers you don’t trust about the herd?”

“I'm telling you I heard the shot and I saw him he dismounted trying to steady himself for another shot.”

Hellcat, squinted out over the prairie, then offered, “I got a feeling it was the Chief, and he needs needed help. Nothing else makes sense.”

The Quakers kid’s eyes went wide and he made for the jewelery box on the wagon murmuring, “I ain't got to… I ain't gonna go out there without my gun.”

Goodnight and Mackenzie both stepped over to the wagon, “No. No, guns.”

“I'm going to get our guns. What do you say boys?”

The native boys didn't know what to do, their Chief was out there alone in the path of Rangers, but two respected white men were seem opposed.
But Hellcat flew up on his mount and made nothing but a Comanche yell and rode off, and the other natives rode after him equally enthusiastically.

The Quaker boy was left with nothing but to watch them ride off. Goodnight and Mackenzie persuaded him, Quanah would want someone out with the herd, and they put him in charge of the three youngest boys, the ones who’d been helping Tito. The Quaker boy was told to teach the youngest three Indians on riding guard. The boys finally got their turn with the herd, they even had a system of alarms in case of trouble.

The next morning, it was Hellcat who found Quanah’s tracks. They were clear. When the braves rode up over a hill, Quanah was leading a potentially lame Missy, but polishing his rather nice silver belt buckle. One of the boys volunteered to walk Missy back to camp. Quanah and the boys rode back slowly and didn't see any outlaw.

DEAD MAN SPRINGS

The Quaker kid gave up on the three youngest Indians, when the braves returned with the Chief. Quanah Parker was beyond endurance and refused to listen about the threat the Rangers posed. The Quaker was loudly packing, mostly throwing, his things. He cried real tears and didn't give a darn who saw him. He was leaving, and he was going to take his two guns by force if need be.

Tito leaned against the wagon with folded arms watching the drama. Goodnight with Mackenzie approached the boy.

Goodnight laid it on thick, “If you don't mind me asking, where are you going? Fort Sill? I mean, you ain't going to tell them you walked out on the Chief and all this beef. He was the one that went out looking for ya. Sure, your daddy’l be happy. The prodigal son and all. And sure the Chief hurt your feelings, but look at what you’re doing here. You’re leaving him and all them cattle in Texas?”

Mackenzie wouldn’t have been a friend if he didn’t add at least a little, “Hell, the Rangers might come get ‘em any minute now.”
“That’s right,” Goodnight confirmed. “I wonder what people will say around the fort,” McKinzie added.

Goodnight’s turn, “I know what your mama will say, ‘oh my little boy’s come back to me!’”

“Ain’t that sweet?” Mackenzie piled on.

Goodnight’s turn again, “Quanah don't know nothing about cattle or boys or being a man. Tell them that! You might find a few fellers to agree. You can be friends with them.”

Mackenzie took his turn, “He don't sleep but an hour here or there, worried about you boys and that herd, but mostly about you boys if just one of you gets killed well the cattle don't matter.”

Goodnight, “The cattle matter to the tribe. Heck, you ain't never been hungry, why are we even talking to him?”

He looked at Mackenzie like it was a lost cause.

There was the sound of hooves entering the camp.

Suddenly Tito yelled loudly, “supper's ready,” and the rush was beautiful. The man fed everyone, and no one even looked at the Quaker kid, no reason to.

The Quaker son did leave out and with his pistols, south; Fort Worth was nearer but that wasn’t far enough. He was the one who figured out that the outlaw was the one traveling behind the herd at a distance, using the herd to hide his tracks. Harding's trail just mixed in with the thousands making their way back to Indian territory. The boy returned to the herd with the news. He contemplated leaving again but never did.

THE OLD BRAZOS RESERVE

Hellcat and Tito was with the Quaker kid, who was persona non grata with the tribe for leaving the Chief out with a lame horse. Hellcat hadn’t wanted to go, but Quanah had ordered him. They rode six hours in the direction of Fort Richardson looking to buy flour, sugar and coffee.

On the way back, they ran into a proverbial set of cats in a red
wagon. Once spotted, it was less than a minute before the wagon stopped. It appeared the women wanted something. The two cowboys cautiously approached. The wagon was fancy, naturally, and driven by an oversized bobcat and beside her sat a moderately oversized sized barn cat. The larger of the two looked about forty-five and the other one was maybe thirty. But inside the wagon were two tender kittens, maybe as old as seventeen, both of them were sleek lookers. Tito and the boys stared hard, and the women responded. Hellcat didn’t wear a hat, but the Quaker boy followed Tito’s lead and lifted his hat with enthusiasm.

When the seventeen-year-old poked her head out of the wagon, the Quaker removed his hat totally and Tito followed his lead. She was the best-looking of the bunch. The one driving addressed her speech to the Quaker, but Tito kept answering her questions. Clearly, judging from all the eyes batting and chuckling, the girls were fascinated with the white youngster.

Tito skillfully negotiated a deal and then in private even asked for special consideration be taken with the boy, who he explained was not only a virgin, but had a religious upbringing. The revelation worked its magic on the younger girl, who turned out to be still sentimental and she grinned at the opportunity.

But negotiations broke down once the woman learned Hellcat wasn’t a Mexican, but a Comanche. Tito had slipped and mentioned it. Tito wasn’t a complete idiot, but he’d gotten carried away that day. The one seemed lit about breaking in a Quaker boy. Why wouldn’t one of the others want one of the finest horse soldiers on the plant; that was according to Mackenzie. Later, Tito wrote the wife he had back in Mexico that he was coming home because he felt he had, “signs of early decline.”

First, the whore that claimed she was nineteen said she needed to “maintain her reputation,” and that caused the large and medium whores to feel like they needed to do the same. And the big whore, who wasn’t in much better condition than Tito, freely admitted they’d entertained natives before, but she said they “drew the line” at with Comanche.

Tito was outraged and lectured the women while the Quaker boy and the youngest girl got to consortling. With reckless disregard to
his own self-interest, he surely wouldn’t get any after that; he told the women in no uncertain terms, “a lady would have handled this in a more diplomatic way. It’s one thing to set a steep price too high for commerce. A lady might say ‘five dollars;’ these boys ain't got that, but now this young one heard you say, ‘not with a Comanche at any price,’ that's just wrong, and to take one an’ not the other; hell woman, these boys got to work with each other every day.”

The Quaker boy exited the wagon…

“Well now! I wonder how well they’ll work together, cause we ain’t none of us going with no Comanche.”

The whores that didn't want him seemed to just suck the life out of him so Tito offered to take Hellcat to Fort Worth, where he knew a few that didn't care about anything but money. But the native boy declined.

Tito led the boys back to the herd, but early the next morning, Tito then argued that they should all go and look, that looking was free. So, Tito put the three youngsters to guard the herd and fourteen young natives and the Quaker boy all rode off to find the now legendry red wagon. The plan was to wait for the women to wake up in the morning then look at them and then leave.

Well, the woman didn't wake directly. Tito threw rocks at their wagon, and it should’ve worked, but that didn't stir the women. He took a stick and whacked it against their wagon to wake them. Now, the women woke, slowly at first and rapidly when the larger whore shouted an expletive, and “the entire Comanche nation” had them surrounded. The woman screamed and scrambled for her outdated rickety muzzleloader. She slipped, pointing the gun out the wagon and shot her own kettle, which for the boys put the “fat in the fire.”

The native boys instinctually formed a wheel to keep from being hit, in case she managed to reload. They whooped, hollered and rode two circles around the wagon. The woman, fortunately, didn't handle her gun well and dropped it entirely out of the wagon on the ground. The boys, eventually after getting an eyeful, 'cause medium-sized whore left the wagon to fetch the gun and both young whores, half-clothed, braved to bring the horses up nearer the wagon. The boys broke off the wheel and moved out of range, but the woman did manage to get another shot off.
Tito hadn't planned on it playing out this way, but still the same; the result was pleasing him and the boys, and they laughed and laughed. Six Eyes kept mocking the woman, “the entire Comanche nation has us surrounded!” but they stopped the foolishness when they reached earshot of the three grown men.

Later, Ranald Mackenzie thundered up to Tito on his horse and dismounted like it was the end of the world. He asked Tito if a wagon had passed the herd.

“Sure, but we passed it.” Tito was stirring a stew.

“Those boys didn't stop did they?”

“Colonel, everything's fine. The ladies stopped and we sort of hurried them along.”

“They stopped?”

“And didn't want nothing to do with us.”

“What? Those cheap-ass whores would a dosed the whole lot of ya, if you let them.”

“I don’t think that's going to be a problem.”

“And they didn't want nothing to do with us?”

“Actually, they were pretty rude about it.”

“You mean cause they’re Indians?”

“Well, they said cause they were Comanche.”

“Well, damn them stingy whores. I ought to go over there an’ have a word.”

“Ah, you’d be just wasting your time. Let ‘um be.”

ANTELOPE CREEK

The next fifty miles were hot and dry, and there was little grass. The day after they crossed the Brazos, there were no clouds. There was nothing but wind and sun. Tito told them this would be a fine day to die and go to hell, “you never know what happened to you on this.”

On his way to nighthawk the remuda, the smallest Indian, Owl Breath, drank coffee. He asked Tito, “when do you sleep?”

The Hispanic man answered, “In the winter, like cowboys; same
as you Indians.”

They dawdled at breakfast the next morning. The herd had kept where they were put all night, but on toward morning, the Hereford bull decided to look for better grass, and it took the boys several miles to find him. The three young Indians helped Tito pack and unpack at chow time. They collected wood and got a great deal of work done. In return, Tito let them sleep under the wagon during the hot part of the day and he kept them stuffed with sugar treats he made. Tito went through untold amounts of sugar. Even in the blazing sun, he slipped the three little workers hard molasses candy.

Tito had hardly pulled, and his mule team fifty yards before a wagon wheel grazed a rock every spoke on the wheel broke off.

Owl Breath rode for help, and the wagon was unloaded. In no time, Goodnight had located Mackenzie, the cavalryman but also an engineer. Mackenzie took for boys an axe and a saw back to a thicket of Mesquite trees they’d passed. In less than two hours, they came back with a dozen smooth trim spokes. Tito didn't seem to believe it, then he looked up at the sun, but then he don't believe the heat either.

The sun never slacked off, and now the hard work began, they replace the broken spokes in the heat of the day. Mackenzie did all the work, enduring the heat, half eaten up. But in the end the new wheel was better than the old. “Accidents can be lucky, you know,” Mackenzie told him.

While the youngest boys and Tito reloaded the wagon, Mackenzie teased Tito, “Now if you think you're going to break another wheel, turn things over to one of these pups.”

Tito’s eyes went wide, “I can tend this wagon without no more help from you, mister Colonel man; just leave me be.”

Mackenzie chuckled and the boys rode off to catch the herd. Tito climbed up into the driver’s seat, grabbed the reins, and hollered at the mule team to “get.” Despite the heat they did; they lunged forward into a hole and broke the front axle cleaning in two.

Tito and the boys stared unbelievingly at the splinters. When Owl Breath started off for help a second time, Tito stopped him, “No. Me and the three of you can fix this thing. You know this time we don't need no engineer Colonel poking fun at our skills.”
Toward afternoon, Goodnight wondered why the wagon hadn't passed them yet. Then he remembered how slow the mules moved in the heat of day. Most days Tito moved the wagon in the morning before the heat became repressive. Goodnight decided he would send a boy back, if the wagon didn't show up soon.

But before then, the drifters appeared. The instant Quanah saw them, he told Goodnight there would be trouble. Goodnight sent a boy back to tell Tito to get on up here with the wagon, “I think we're going to need them guns, but don't let them see you go.”

Except three of them, the drifters wore city clothes and moved alongside the herd a quarter-mile away. There looked to be eighteen or twenty of them, and they clearly were watching everything that was going on. Goodnight told the boys to keep moving until dark and not to look nervous or weak to their “guests.” Two hours before the sunset; they built a small fire and bedded down the herd.

Later, it happened that Goodnight and the Quaker’s kid were near each other on horses watching as a band of no-goods appeared.

“Who are they?” the kid asked.

Goodnight, “Shirkers.”

“Sure are a lot of ‘em. What’s a shirker?”

“Losers.”

“Where they from ya figure?”

“Well, they’re shiftless. Among the willows. I see ‘em one time squat in some homesteader’s abandoned cabin and lived there until it fell over,” Goodnight recalled.

“And then they moved on?”

“Stole anything that wasn’t nailed. They're too lazy to work and figured the world owes them something and they always got some hard luck story. Never heard so much whinin’ in my life and they treat women like shit. Woman died in agony. No doctor. They just let it happen,” Goodnight said.

“Baby died too. Huh?”

“Yep.”

“Well, why don’t somebody do something?”

“Nope, seems that's the future of humanity.”

“What are we gonna do?” asked the Quaker’s son.

“Well, if they don’t move on, I figure well, have to kill some of
‘em.”
  “Just like that?”
  “Just like that. Believe me, son, they'll kill you, and take the herd and leave you for the coyotes and never bat an eye.”
  “I must have missed something all those years up at Fort Sill.”
  “You missed the white trash and the next time you see Mackenzie, you can thank him for that ‘cause he did run them off.”
  “Oh, I know now. The ones that come around looking to take advantage of the Indians,” the Quaker said.
  “Yep, that’s them,” Goodnight said.
  “He hates ‘em damn pretty good. Strange an army man protecting the natives like that.”
  “Why you say that?” Goodnight asked.
  “Other soldiers don’t seem to.”
  “It would take a lot for the Colonel not to do his job.”
  “He don't have no use for them.”
  “Anytime a person takes more than he gives back and he's a shirker,” Goodnight defined the term.
  “I heard once a man at the Fort telling Mackenzie he was forced into it by ‘circumstances’ he claimed.”
  “You ain't got to be a shirker,” Goodnight said.
  “The Colonel showed him pretty good.”
  “That the fellow he kicked in the ass?” Goodnight asked.
  “He did an’ in front of the whole fort.”
  “I heard about that,” Goodnight grinned.
  “I ain’t never gonna be one. I can tell you that.”
  “Well, see that you don’t.” Goodnight said like a father would.
  “Yea, but why would anybody wanna live like that?”
  “It ain’t always easy, ya know. It’s like a hole you fall into,” Goodnight warned.
  “How ya figure?”
  “People ain’t looking where they’re going. I know a few lawmen that are. Railroad men always are, bankers, lawyers, and dentist are nearly always shirkers. They might not be shiftless, but still they take and don’t give back. Now, doctors, blacksmiths, and cooks generally or not,” Goodnight explained.
  “Cattlemen too. They ain’t either.”
“Well, thanks. I appreciate that. The natural-born enemy of the cattlemen is the shirker,” Goodnight stated.
“I never thought about it that way.”
“Shirkers and coyotes is the story of my life, boy.”
“What about cowboys?”
“You mean the men that don’t own them, but rehired to work cattle? Hum… I figure it’s about fifty-fifty with them. To be honest.”
“You ain’t gotta worry about me.”
“I don’t; cause you’re raised by your Quaker folks.”
“Takes a lot to make them judge.”
“Well, I don’t wanna interfere with your upbringing.”
“No, please do,” the boy wanted to hear it.
“Well, since you’re asking me. Sometimes there’s just too much and you gotta judge.”
“There sure is a lot of them,” the boy gestured over to the group that was moving parallel with them.
“I'm positive you're different; you're probably more like Mackenzie and your Comanche friends. The tribe before the reservation, they’d run them off someone that didn't pull the wagon.”
“I know Quanah Parker really hates being around Hellcat, but he ain’t no shirker. I know him real good. He ain’t lazy or shiftless,” the Quaker vouched for his friend.
“The Comanches have a fairly strict code.”
“I hear people talking around the fort, debatin’ an’ I think they’re a noble race.”
“Your Comanche friends are. There's a few tribes from over in East Texas that aren’t.”
“I only been around the fort.”
“Well, they might tell themselves they’re wealthy enough to share the wealth, but most societies don't abide with it,” Goodnight concluded.

ROUND TIMBER SPRINGS

Two hours passed with no wagon and no supper, and now the
strange men were out in the dark. The men, Goodnight especially, wondered where the hell the wagon was when Tito was needed. The youngsters didn’t know it, they didn’t know him the way Goodnight knew him, but he could easily revert to his previous cold-blooded, born to exterminate, killer. Goodnight wanted that wagon for the guns locked there; Tito might show up unexpectedly, however. He had always been sly in the past.

Mackenzie's only comment was, “What are the trash waiting on?”

Quanah knew the reason, “They want everybody together before they ride in. Only they're buffaloed; they’re probably looking up ahead for the wagon where it belongs.”

“All hands and the cook,” Goodnight sent a second boy, Hellcat, and told him to slip away and go back and find Tito. Goodnight added his instructions, “ride out fast north then silently double back and be silent. They think the wagons up ahead. That might throw him off keep them from riding before we're ready.”

And Quanah, added a bit more but in the Comanche, indecipherable mostly cause there weren’t any hand gestures. And the Chief took off his belt and silver belt buckle and handed it to the boy, who rolled it up and stuffed it in this shirt.

Goodnight interrupted, “Are we done here?”

When they nodded, Goodnight slapped the horse’s ass and shouted, “North, and be loud.”

The shirkers already knew where they were, so they built a big fire to lead Tito to them. Without a belt, Quanah cut a rope to cinch up his pants. And he stood with the boys, no longer guarding the herd, close to the fire.

Quanah said, “Whoever they are, they should a just took the herd and they didn’t. They'll be coming in now. But before they do, we should talk.”

Mackenzie and Goodnight listened. Quanah continued, “What I will say will hurt you Mr. Winchester Quarantine and Colonel U.S. Cavalry because you can't put this these boys’ lives in danger for no damn bull. You shouldn't have sent for the wagon; you only want the guns. Had these boys been white sons of soldiers and settlers, would you have sent for the wagon?”

Both of the white men understood the Chief’s angry tone and
wisely refused to answer.

Quanah, “I take that back. I think both of you pull guns always no matter what race involved.”

Goodnight, “Well, they’re gonna take your cattle.”

Quanah, “Fine. Let them have.”

Mackenzie contributed, “They know we're only three men and they look like fifteen, or twenty, if five are out looking for Tito. And they can see these are boys. And I doubt they care what color they are.”

Quanah said, “That's good. Will leave it just like that,”

Mackenzie looked like he might rather die there in Texas that night as opposed to in a New York Asylum. For two hours, his hand had been on his pistol. But now he looked around at the boys and at Quanta’s humility. Mackenzie moved his hand to a more relaxed position.

Quanah thanked him, “The meek shall inherit the earth.”

Quanah was very familiar with the Bible. The two men nodded that nod they agreed. The white men tossed their weapons onto their beds and rolled them up. Quanah only had to glance at the Quaker, and he hid his pistols as well.

Quanah’s voice rose, and he spoke in Comanche to the boys, “You're not to be brave or combative or anything Comanche. You're outnumbered; just act like boys. Go play the games of your childhood and make noises like children. When they do ride in, stop playing and look frightened as you can. Don't talk or say anything. If you don’t know what to do just look at me like you expect me to do something.”

The boys looked at the Chief with absolutely no expression. Mackenzie and Goodnight couldn’t follow it, the Chief had spoken so rapidly, and when they looked for a clue in the boy’s faces, there was still no telling what had been said. Mackenzie was wrestling with the idea even the boys hadn’t understood anything either.

“That understood?” Quanah shouted in English, and the native boys started into action. They chased each other and shouted, and others played a wrestling game.

Quanah’s eyes focused on the Quaker kid, “I don't want you to be a hero, and you read so many damn novels. I worry about that.
The Quakers boy had a question, “What did you tell them?”
Quanah, I told them, the Texans not want to kill children.”
The Quaker kid responded, “I know a little Comanche… and you
said something about pissing.”
“I ask them if they thought wetting their pants a bargain to
continue living.”
There were sounds out in the dark. Quanah had finished his
thoughts, but again in Comanche he told the boys, “Here they come.
The wagon doesn't matter anymore. Use your brains.”
The shirkers came in from all sides. They walked their horses
easily as if they didn't want to startle a herd, or the three grown men,
who could have begun shooting. When they stopped, the camp was
inside a big circle.
Mackenzie didn't look too confused or afraid. He’d been in a
hundred or more scrapes and was missing half a hand from Jerusalem
Plank Road. Nor did Goodnight look frightened. He just as
experienced and who’d been in a circle of renegade Comanches when
Quanah had rescued him. Goodnight even jested with the Chief and
asked him if he thought he could bargain his way out of this one.
Quanah nodded he would try, “but renegade Comanche’s have much
more horse sense than Texans like these.”

From the dark, a vaguely familiar voice, “Hello, friends.” Then
with a surprise, “Why bless my soul if it ain't Quanah Parker Chief of
the whole Comanche nation. And in Texas too boot.”
Quanah looked at the man coming into the firelight; it was the
pockmarked man that had drawn a gun on him at the Fort. Behind
him were the other two fools, the tall one and a younger one. The
younger one still had on the odd-looking Stetson that looked just as
stolen.
Quanah had traveled from the Indian Territory nearly to Mexico
and back; yet apparently, these three hadn’t bathed since that day at
the fort. They were just as dirty and stunk measurably more, but they
looked ignorantly with themselves pleased with themselves, like
they’d just come onto some money. The rest were only vague shapes
in the dark.
The pockmarked shirker had obviously looked forward to this
encounter for a long time; he played it like a bad stage actor, big and loud. Everything sounded rehearsed, and even for the prairie, it was very bad theater.

“Now ain't this the biggest prize you ever had in your entire life, boys? I never thought I'd see you again at least not here in Texas of all places. In fact, the boys and me, we thought if we did find you, it would be on the reservation, where we might be at a disadvantage. But here you are in Texas.”

“Yes, I here. What you do now? Take cattle?”

“Well, I’m not much not much good at… cattle. But good thing I met up with some real cowboys and they said it would be best if we got them here and took them to Wichita Falls. So we thought, okay.”

There was movement and a voice spoke out of the dark, “Hi, there Mister Goodnight.”

Goodnight looked over his back; it was a cowboy named “Lucky” and his two friends that had years previous work for Goodnight and Adair but he couldn't recall their names. In Goodnight’s mind he just called them “the twins.” In fact, since he couldn't tell them apart to their face, he had always just call them “twin” if they were apart and “twins” if they were standing next to each, and he never assigned one a job without the other.

The three Cowboys that had once worked for the JA, you could smell them, but when they stepped up, they were out of place. In this setting, the cowboys looked something like fancy pure-bred cattle dogs in the company of Indian dogs.

Lucky's voice showed his fright, but he did get through it, “Now no offense, Mr. Goodnight, but these ain't your cattle. They look Mexican to me and probably belong to the Indian Chief. Cause… well, forget cause… they ain’t your cattle. So, we’re just going to sell them in Wichita Falls.”

Pockmark spoke up, “That's right, whatever might happen to you three men, personally tonight, you can be sure these beeves will see the market. Now I think everybody will be in a better mood if we had some eats; where's that Mexican cook you got?”

There was a pause, while Lucky and the twins left to tend to the herd. Every outlaw was starring at the pockmarked leader, hoping he’s remember to do their bidding. He felt their eyes and after a bit
of confusion, he remembered what to say.

“Mr. Goodnight, we wanna eat,” the pockmarked outlaw demanded.

Goodnight seem lost in thought, “Well... Well, I don't rightly have that information, the wagon pulled up ahead of us this morning. I sent a boy for them, but he might have just gone too far. I imagine he’s waiting for us, probably on the red.”

Pockmarks snaps his fingers, “You sent two boys back old man,” and one of his brought up Hellcat who was tied to the saddle horn. The boy’s face was lacerated and swollen.

Goodnight asked, “Well, where’s the other one?” “Got away. We could a had him you know, but we ain't no baby killers. Cut him loose, boys.”

Hellcat dismounted and nearly fell over, totally defeated and ashamed of himself.

Quanah spoke softly in Comanche, “It's just as well, boy.”

Pockmarked demanded, “So where is that damn wagon? One boy ran off south, but this one insists that it's off to the north. So which is it?”

Mackenzie broke the impasse, “If we knew, then we’d a already ate ourselves.”

The pockmarked man said, “Lordy help, you're a sly man; they teach you that in the Army?”

Nothing was said in reply, “Well I guess we'll just sit and wait in the meanwhile. Ya’ll come fetch their guns.

They didn’t have any weapons, but several of the shirkers came near into the light of the fire.

The native boys moved closer to Quanah. Two bravely stepped in front of Quanah and ten stood behind him.

Tito must have never fixed an axle in his life; he knew general the idea and understood how it worked but doing it was another matter. The three native boys were of no help; they did pretty much nothing but watched the Hispanic man curse. They did what he asked, but the actual work was done by Tito who was learning by experience.

Tito had found a tree straight enough but cut it too short at one end and had to go back and find another. It was late in the afternoon.
by the time the job was almost done; everything was done and might have fit, but Tito hadn't finished when the word came. Despite the seeming emergency, he slowly finished the job; he had no intention of riding up on twenty men on a wagon. It made for a slow-moving target. And it certainly wouldn't happen in broad daylight.

He sat the four young Indian boys down and told them, “The next thing we got to do is wait till tomorrow. That means for you to stay put.”

The boys looked blankly at the slightly older boy who brought the message.

That kid said, “But Mr. Goodnight said to hurry up with the wagon.”

Tito argued with him, “That was early this morning. Things have probably changed, I figure. Now, they are all praying we don't show up. You'll show up tomorrow. I'll go now and see what's up.”

Then he loaded his model 94, a model 97 and his two Colts and he climbed up on the Indian’s horse. Goodnight should have figured that Tito would figure out a way to get in the mix, yet he worried that someone would get hit if Tito just charged into the camp shooting anything that moved, which was his proclivity. Quanah, on the other hand, hoped Goodnight’s killer would just sit still.

Pockmark called out suddenly, “I'll be damned, they ain't all Indian boys. Goodnight? Mackenzie? This your boy?”

Again, nothing was said in response.

“Step out here in the light, boy.”

The Quakers boy walked up like he was on hot coals.

“That ain't no boy; look how pretty she is.”

One of the shirker animals whistled, “Now that's as pretty a thing as I've seen all summer; better than that senorita in San Marcos and even better than them whores in the red wagon.”

There was a storm of foolishness that move to lewdness. The Quaker’s son stood and looked at the ground.

“Show us them girl parts you got,” some buffoon shouted.

“You got girl parts?”

Quanah stared at the pockmarked man. Of course, the outlaw didn't notice. He did, however, raise his rifle to the young boy’s stomach.
“What about a look,” questioned the bandit.
The Quaker boy neither answered nor looked up.
Quana’s stare had become fury, and he seemed to have made up his mind.
The rifle jabbed into the boy’s belly. The Quaker’s son swallowed and raised his hands to his belt, but Quanah began a death song, which caused every native bay’s heart to stop and then start.
It caused the pockmarked man to move the rifle off the boy and when the rifle was halfway between the boy and himself, Quanah’s song changed into a war cry. Quanah threw himself at the rifle before there was much of a struggle, Pockmark’s whole camp was on the old man.
They held him while Pockmark braced his feet and clenched his fists, “Finally got ya, Indian,” and he hit the big man in the gut as hard as he could three times before the Chief’s knees buckled. Once down several others joined in beating him with feet and fists. The boys watched in horror as the iconic Chief was beaten.
“Get up, savage an’ apologize.”
Quanah slowly rolled over, but he didn't get up.
“Now you're going to say you're sorry or all of you is going to get the worst of this.
The smaller man took Quanah by his hair and pulled him up. Quanah murmured only after he was kicked in the balls.
“And everybody here’s gonna hear.”
In agony, Quanah said, “I'm sorry.”
The smaller man let go. Quanah fell. The outlaws laughed. They’d heard a hundred times about that day in Mackenzie's office.
Quanah’s eyes moved to the boys, signaling them to do nothing.

That's when two Texas Ranger simply rode in. Goodnight and Mackenzie showed a glimmer of hope, and even Quanah thought they might help, but the outlaws didn't react at all. Their stars were clearly visible. The talkative Ranger, a white-haired fellow with a reputation for tricking whores into rigged card games, spoke, “You tell these men you’re Rangers? And you’re taken the herd to Wichita?”
The pockmarked man said he was getting around to it.
The talkative Rangers said, “Well this is taking entirely too long. That Mexican that works for Goodnight here, he ain’t just a cook and I’m thinking he’s probably got a rifle on you right now.”

The other Ranger, who’d been staring out into the dark as the conversation developed, busted out, “Hell, you ain’t even cuffed ‘em.”

“Nope, forgot,” said the pockmarked figure.

Goodnight, “Look fells, I know you two, and we go way back. Let’s just cut the bullshit, huh? Just let us go on our ways, and this misunderstanding never happened.”

“I’m sorry. Mr. Goodnight. We was friends, that’s true, and you was one hell of a Ranger yourself. But I just can’t let that get in the way,” said the blatherskite Ranger.

“In the way a what?” Goodnight wanted to know.

“These beeves was stolen out a old Mexico,” and he looked at the pockmarked man, “Ain’t that what you said? And these fellows is the ones that done it?”

Goodnight protested, “They’re Comanche beef and were driving them to the reservation.”

“They’re ain’t branded. How do I know whose beef they are?” the Ranger argued.

“Hell, even if they was branded, ain’t no Comanche sign hold no sway in Texas,” the other Ranger said.

The pockmarked man wanted to be equal partners and felt like he needed to participate, “I don't even know if the Comanche even have a brand, don't recall anyway.”

The short, less talkative, Ranger told him to “shut up,” and he did for a time.

Goodnight questioned, “So how are we any of your business?”

The white-haired Ranger stated, “Indians raiding into Mexico? There's a treaty with Mexico about that.”

The other Ranger added, “I think ya’ll done bit off more than you can chew.”

Mackenzie offered something, “the Army is in charge of that and I'm standing right.”

The pockmarked outlaw mustered up the guts to speak, “You're as good as out of the Army; in fact, you're not even here you're in
New York I hear.”

The loud Ranger nodded to Quanah, “Watch this one; he's supposed to be tricky.”

After Quanah was cuffed, the talkative Ranger explained, “You three men are going to Abilene for trial. Raiden into Mexico that ‘mounts to treason. My partner will be returning the cattle to their owners, probably diverting war, or maybe the cattle just scattered. Frankly, I ain't decided yet. I'll figure it out before I get where we’re going.”

“You’re crooked,” Goodnight protested.

“I’m a god-damned hero. I’m taking you three in single-handed. A desperate cattle baron, disgraced cavalry officer and the rogue Chief of all the Comanches. Hell, a hundred years from now, they'll still be written books about the Ranger that arrested you all, armed and dangerous, in the same criminal transaction.”

“Whale away; it won’t fly,” Goodnight.

“Well, you ain’t shirkers, but there ain’t a man yet, I found, that can trump a Ranger’s oath. It’ll fly. I’ll swear to it.”

Suddenly, in the distance, hooves. The three cuffed men and especially Goodnight who’d seen Tito work, dropped flat. Tito dropped two of the outlaws with his repeating rifle and quickly (too quickly and from a different direction) another report brought down a third.

Before Tito and the horse came into the firelight, the outlaws dove for cover and many just figured their best chance was to escape the light and run off into the dark. Turned out however, the dark wasn’t entirely dark enough. There were shots from an unknown and unseen pistol.

Inside the camp, Tito fired two shotgun blasts and then emptied the two Colts into anything that moved. He killed six and wounded four. Empty, he raced the horses out into the darkness just out of sight. Tito reloaded. The two Rangers discerned the noise of reloading and they trained their weapons in the general direction. The Mexican would be riding in again.

Tito came. The Ranger’s fired. Tito’s right arm jerked and one of his pistols fell in the grass, nearly starting a fire. Tito shot a man with his left. Everyone fired most missed, but Tito’s left arm jerked nearly
off, but he kept coming. The next round of firing, put Tito off his horse. The Hispanic man got up on his hands and knees and begin to crawl.

Lucky rode up and said, “what the hell's the shooting all about; you want to start a stampede?”

“That damned Mexican outlaw just tried to kill us,” complained Pockmark.

The shorter outlaw shouted, “Come look. You know this feller’s got fifteen holes in him, and he still ain’t dead.”

The pockmarked man said, “We'll finish him off.”

The small one replied, “I ain’t shooting no man with fifteen holes already in ‘em.”

Lucky leaned over in the saddle and looked Pockmark directly in the eye, and was dead serious, “We need to get out of here right now, that Mexican was with JA, and he may have sent for help. They hear about this, and they'll be riding here.”

“You mean tonight? I mean now, right now.”

“You running scared or just crazy; ain't nobody coming tonight,” the loud Ranger boasted.

“All the same we’re starting out for Wichita Falls, with the herd; you can tag along and help if you want, or you can go with him,” and the cowboy gestured at the taller Ranger.

The white-haired Ranger was adamant and loud as ever, “No, he ain’t. This is my case an’ I'm taking ‘em in alone.”

The native boys in the smoke and confusion disappeared into the night and weren’t any shot by whatever strange gun was out there. They immediately had the remuda, on their own.

Pockmark found his mount and was about to ride after them, but everyone were following Lucky to the east. They wanted the money when the herd sold, and the quiet Ranger was with them. The Quaker boy followed the outlaws, not saying a word, no one really noticing.

The talkative Ranger put the three handcuffed men on horses and headed out in the opposite direction.

The boys eventually returned to the fire. Tito did have fifteen holes in him but was still not dead. He'd crawled up to the farm.

Hellcat mentioned, “I think the white boy joined ‘em.”
Bacon defended him, “Maybe he'll stampede the herd, slow them up, so we can catch them.”

Tito grumbled for them to gather around, “The grown-ups can take care of themselves, but for you, time to hang your fiddle, party’s over, please go home.”

Hellcat wasn't listening to it, “For first we got to get to find out where the wagon is, then we got to get there.”

Tito wasn’t done, “I told the young pups to bring the wagon in the morning,” and he added, “Don’t kill the white boy.” Tito then closed his eyes and died.

The native boys had nothing to say.

The next morning the wagon arrived and they wrapped Tito in a tarp and lowered him into a hole. While they stood around eating jerky and cold biscuits, Hellcat started talkin’ like a war chief and asked about the key to the box with the guns. They’d accidentally buried it, so they broke the box open with a large rock.

Hellcat was, “One thing. They got it all over us in a number of ways; they're bigger than us and they're outlaws. They seen this sort of trouble before, so we got to go at them light, easy and slowly.”

Their silence was his election as war chief, his permission.

“If we can, we should make it all quiet. Three of us have bows, one at a time. If they get wise to us and come after us, we scatter and come back. If they catch anybody, they'll finish him slow just for the fun of it. Texans are the worse. We’ll pick drag Riders and cut them out of the herd, three arrows in him, so the thing is done quietly and we’ll take it real easy.”

STEINMAN HOLLOW

None of the outlaws were good warriors; if there had been anything out of place, still they wouldn’t have seen it right off. Even had they had ever fought, they were too disloyal and fickle. When the native boys disappeared a man, they discussed it but always decided the man must just have turned chicken and flown the coop. They
even chuckled how close they were to Wichita that a man would turn and run right before a big payday. They all had weak minds, and the idea of a larger share of the cattle trumped any suspicions of foul play.

They were only four days west of Wichita Falls and had dreams of spending the money. The spirits of the rustlers crashed when they heard Lucky's orders of crossing the Wichita River. None of them liked bodies of water, even piss ant rivers like that one. Few could swim, and most stood at on the south bank hesitating. The herd crossed without a nudge even, leaving three, and then two, then one, on the far bank.

The last one left watching was the most squirrely of the outlaws and needed a passel of men around him he needed to sleep, and for someone to watch his back. But now he was studying the south end of the herd and standing on the measly Wichita afraid of the water and even more afraid of being left alone.

They yelled at him across the river and waved for him to “come on,” but he waved back, “mind yourself.”

They moved on ahead outlaws and cowboys and all out of ideas how to avoid the water, and everyone moved out of sight, he finally took a deep breath, gave his horse a kick and walked into the water. When the water reached his boots, panic set in and he thought to turn the horse back, but three arrows struck him in the chest. He made no sound but clung tightly to his horse, praying maybe the horse would cross the river and join the herd, and he might get help that way.

And it looked like it might work out that way, the outlaw was mighty adamant about clinging to that saddle. Hellcat dove in and swam for the horse, the outlaw fought to hold, but could only produce a hateful stare as Hellcat pulled him off the horse.

The river would have taken him around the bend, but one of the outlaws came back to checked on his buddy. He saw the body, three arrows obvious, floating down little more than a stream. The outlaw on the far fired his pistol in the air. Hellcat swam for the south bank as bullets impacted the water and then the red sand.

The other native boys opened up on the north bank with their rifles. The silent war was over. They’d follow the river and found a
body with three arrows. The silence now meant nothing.

ONE TREE CREEK

It was Knife in Honey who put them in a real situation. Of all the young braves on the trip, he was the only boy stubbornly taken Sundays to a white church. When he stumbled into an outlaw, the young brave had the draw on him, but just couldn't pull the trigger. He remembered what it felt like to be hungry, plenty, but just couldn't kill. Not cause he was scared, it was because it was wrong in the Bible. The preacher had pointed out you weren't supposed to kill, reminding him of the wages of sin and promising him hell if he didn't put the savage ways aside.

The Anglican preacher had left out the tales of the white slaughter. He just let the outlaw reach out and take his pistol and then let him be tired and even walked back to a fire under a tree. They hung poor Knife upside down above it. He told the outlaws everything they wanted to know and didn't think once about misleading them. As confused as he was, he did have the sense to swing his body from on top of the fire. He managed only to think about making a circle around the outside of the fire, which was better than swinging back and forth like a clock pendulum.

The two torturous outlaws watched with genuine fascination, gambling how long before the boy's hair would singe off. Quiet Ranger tried to explain to pockmarked man that they couldn't just leave the herd and charge out and shoot the young braves. They'd scatter, and the herd would as well. Clearly, they didn't have enough men.

The short Ranger actually said little, but it was clear he figured that speed was their friend taking the herd on the Wichita Falls. He told the men torturing the kid, “‘Stop gawkin’ and get hidden in that brush, so when the others show up, they might be surprised.’”

Two men stayed in ambush by the tree only on the condition Pockmark and the Ranger would secure their share of the herd when sold. The quiet Ranger was still in earshot when he heard three pistol
reports and then three more.

When the Quaker boy got to the tree, Hellcat was dead. Knife had been cut down, but his hair was gone; his scalp was broiled and bloody. And he was so exhausted from swinging he couldn’t stand up or ride.

The Quaker’s kid was entirely puzzled in the brush, three of the outlaws had gut wounds and their pistols were hauled off. He reasoned one of the native boys might have done it for revenge for the torture, but he backed out of that idea… whoever did it had cut the rope and just left poor Knife to lay there.

It seemed clear; Knife’d fallen into the fire and rolled out of it. Evidently, Hellcat had walked into the ambush, but it didn’t add up that he’d killed the bushwackers and then prevented them from killing themselves. Even their knives were in the pile of weapons fifty yards east.

SOUTH OF HAROLD

Sometime in the night, two guards in back of the herd were impaled with lances. The cowboys, Lucky and the Twins, couldn't find the herd for a while, but the night guards were right where they fell. One was alive and kept asking the others to kill him. The outlaws had eventful lives, but mostly it was with their back to such going-on’s. Nothing this gruesome had ever entered their experiences.

A hellish chaos took over, and the Ranger tied tried to push the herd all night, but it only exhausted the outlaws. They could hardly communicate or understand directions in normal situations, but without sleep and obviously being hunted they were impossible. Everything was confusing. They argued and drew weapons at the slightest noise. They withdrew their friendships and remained with the herd only because of greed. Lucky and the Twins did all the work being cattleman by profession; they were outlaws only by circumstance.

The cowboys, always trying to do the right thing, kept telling each other, “they’re Indian cattle and Indians ain’t got no rights in Texas.”
They didn't sleep but being professionals did manage to keep the herd together and headed in the right direction. All they knew was they had to get the cattle to Wichita Falls to get paid. The smaller of the two Rangers kept reminding them.

WEST FORK POND CREEK

They were in sight of Wichita Falls but one outlaw, and totally aware of how near he was, simply rode away from the herd.

He asked the Comanche boys for food, and the schruncher ate like an animal, and they let him live. When he was finished, he mounted his famished horse and started towards Jacksboro. He did this within two miles of Wichita Falls.

“Thank the Great Spirit these Texans are so dumb,” Six Eyes laughed.

NORTH OF DAGGETT'S SWITCH

In the dark on the outskirts of Wichita Falls, the shot came from the Mesquite, and the outlaw on the left flank fell off his horse. Half his face was gone. Every outlaw held up their horse, but they knew they couldn't do anything but push on and hope they weren't next. They didn't know where the shot came from and were too exhausted to even guess.

“Sheez the trigger don't pull it; now hit that rock over there.”

SCOTT STREET

Another shot and one of the drag riders fell, another shot, and a man slumped forward in his saddle dead, but didn’t fall until the horse stopped over east of the tracks.
Another shot was fired from the dark.
“Damn you red niggers,” a voice yelled out, “now you done it. First, you heathens kilt my kin; and now you kilt me. This hurts, damn it! You’ll pay, you will all pay for this unjust treatment, unfair treatment.”

Waiting for that fellow to die before they approached him, Bacon Grease asked the Quaker’s kid what the man was lamenting about. The white kid explained, “shirkers is that way. They been taught since they was babies to think it’s always somebody else’s fault.”
“That's stupid; it’s his own damn fault.”
The Quaker went on, “Mr. Goodnight says nestin’ will ruin the Comanche nation living on the reservation.”
Bacon asked, “He said we’ll be like them shirkers?”
“Not exactly; he said whenever the government gets involved they make more shirkers than not.”
“Not with my people they ain’t,” the native boy maintained.
The two boys sat on their horses silent for a moment. Finally, they rode over to the dead body,
“Why this fella's got worms! Intestinal worms! Will ya look at that Bacon! They’s detached themselves and is crawling like the devil,” and they were evident and wiggling around in his wound.
The outlaws fired in panic now. There were some fellows with a lantern out looking at something behind them, but there was nothing to see in front of them. They simply fired in the dark and hoped the dark didn’t fire back.

RIVERSIDE CEMETERY

A man in front of the herd was only wounded by an arrow, but he panicked and raced up a hill, masquerading as a bone orchard. The poor fellow had no idea on the far side of the cemetery was a cliff and a river below. He rode his horse right over the edge and screamed something terrible tumbling down.
Aside from the fellow that road his horse over the cliff, the entire chase through Wichita Falls had been relatively silent, there were rifle
shots and some screaming, but what set off damndest inconvenience was the splash he and the horse made at the bottom. The last man survived the fall, at least two-hundred feet, into the Wichita River. He floated down pawing at the water and went over the falls and didn't resurface.

Ironic is a bitch of a horse to break. That splash of the last shirker startled the herd, as exhausted as they were, into running. They ran through downtown and right past the cattle pens.

DEPOT ALLEY

Once the herd ran past the cattle pens, the pockmarked man and the two outlaws on the west side of the herd, peeled off and rode south or southwest. One was shouting, “We’s dead. We’s dead.”

The three cowboys and the smaller Ranger simply veered away east and down River Road. They didn’t stop until they reached Spanish Fort. That Ranger never ventured into the city again. But the cowboys, Lucky and the Twins, years later stole Waggoner’s best thoroughbred, and on a bitterly cold day, robbed the largest bank in the city and were lynched for it.

CASHION COMMUNITY

The herd didn’t stop running until they were well out of the city. And all together, without any indication, they simply bedded down.

That next morning, Bacon Grease assigned the new responsibilities. When he came to the Quaker’s kid, the white boy had left camp traveling south.
THE FLAT OF SAN ANGELO

Pockmark and two of the shirkers were feeling the heat after the fiasco and headed due south and then southwest as fast as they could go. Without a tail feather left, they wanted to get to the flats of San Angelo, two hundred and thirty miles southwest; if they could make it there, they felt they might survive. One shirker had a sister with a husband at the fort. They figured maybe she’d put them up until they could contact the Rangers for more work.

The flat was the biggest cesspool in Texas; there must have been at least six saloons, three large lazy cat houses and a smaller more selective one. The area was so notorious, the soldiers from Fort Concho were prohibited by their commander, especially at night, and most soldiers obeyed those orders.

Near-death tragedies, like the one they’d escaped, typically cause men to examine their lives and the situation moving forward. They took a bath in the Concho River and stole some clothes off a line. They borrowed some money from the one man’s sister and they walked about feeling much better, safer anyway.

The first thing Pockmark and the shirkers did with the money was visit Lottie Da’s for a drink. Beers in hand, they roamed the room looking at the games of roulette, faro, and poker. Then they sat down and listened to the piano player and speculated on the women which ones were whores and which ones was just working for the bar. They commented on Lottie.

There was a serious man, somewhat out of place, because he didn’t seem drunk and was playing solitaire, and glancing up occasionally to watch the events unfold, just like the shirkers. He didn’t look the type to wear something fancy or conspicuous, and just the fact that he was in the Flat probably meant he didn’t want to bring attention to himself. However, he had on a very large and perfectly polished silver buckle and a curiously rustic belt that bordered on native leather.

He’d heard the shirker conversation, and eventually, when they got to instructing themselves, the confident-looking gentleman, listened and didn’t introduce himself in return.
The pockmarked man should have thought more carefully, because what he heard as weakness. So, he complimented the man on his belt and asked if he’d won it in a game.

The man, in the most lawyerly and gentle tone said, “You gentlemen shouldn’t stare and talk about women like that here in the Flat. These people are mostly on the dodge, and the law won’t come here, no matter what you’ve done. These people are serious about their drinking, gambling, and some of them love these whores. But manners are paramount. You don't ask a man’s name or business, and every woman here is a lady. Raise all the sand you want, but a breach of etiquette can get you killed. Easily.”

Primarily, they were intimidated enough by the man’s elevated language, but they had no idea who they were talking to. Whoever he was, the pockmarked man put any idea of putting his hands on the belt buckle aside. They kindly thanked the man for his advice and apologized for their rough start.

As bad as things had been leaving Wichita, they, all three of them, thought they’d landed in outlaw paradise, and that was the opinion of the man playing solitaire. He obviously didn’t like them, but he seemed an educated man, sounded like maybe he was a mouthpiece that had done a little time in the slammer even; if the law wouldn’t even come there, certainly no Indian would dare follow either, not if they knew what was good for them.

After a time, they moved from beer to whiskey, and soon they were feeling better than they had a right. They spoke with everybody and forgot the rules laid down to them.

There was a group gathered at the end of the bar, and they drifted over to see what the excitement was about. The center of attraction was Lottie, her own drawing card.

She was smaller than a ladybug, sharp as a tack and cute as kittens and she had a quick wit that drew laughter by the wagonload.

Lottie could easily be mistaken for a whore, but she owned her own saloon, and she did work upstairs as well. Now she charged double anyone in town, but she was very very choosy. If she took you upstairs you would have to be scrubbed from head to toe, pass inspection by a real doctor who’d supposedly accidentally killed a sheriff’s wife. And they’d have to sit and wait for an hour, behave like
it was Sunday morning. The men who’d endured the treatment swore by it and loved Lottie.

That night she was all gussied up and in girlish high spirits. And she refused to say why. This made the boys herd around her and banter back and forth their guesses. Pockmark and his friend listened to the only entertainment on that side of town.

“Lottie, you gonna get married?” A man guessed.
“Me, married?”
“You been here enough times to know I'm the kind of filly that needs breaking once a week, and it's best if there's a new cowboy in the saddle.”
“All the same, you’re dragging a rope?” the man continued.
“No fellers going to get that far with me.”
“No, you’s soft on somebody,” a man suggested.
Another chimed in, “Look at the way you’re laughing; somebody's done borrowed on his saddle and asked you to marry him.”

The lawyer type fellow who’d warned the three sapheads off, got up from his solitaire. He put down a five-dollar piece and pointed to a bottle. Lottie looked him over, “I swear that I'll buy a lot of soap, and you ain’t gotta wait around in your birthday suit.”

“Gentlemen, Lottie’s not getting married; it’s her birthday.”
Lottie laughed and said, “Somebody told you, I bet. You've all been in on this. Somebody told you. No? Oh, you're a liar. My maid told you, didn't she?”
“I promise, she didn't,” the lawyer said and returned to his cards.
“So, Lottie that's why you’re all dressed up so especially nice? It's your birthday. I knew it was,” an old-timer claimed.
“You ain’t much a good liar either,” she said.
“Today’s your birthday Lottie?” a man asked.
“Well, since it’s after midnight, it was yesterday. I plum forgot to celebrate,” she smiled.
They all roared.
“But we got to drink a toast to your special day.”
“I can't drink a toast to myself,” she laughed.
“Sure you can, you're helping us say thanks.”
“Well alright, just one,” she agreed.
By the time they had issued a dozen compliments to her youth and beauty, she’d loosened up a bit and unbuttoned her blouse. A button and then a dollar flew and a second button then a second dollar.

“Hey Lottie, let's see a third button.”
Five silver dollars flew onto the bar.
“Oh, no! Take your money back, I'm modest, too modest for that.”
“No way; we’re calling your hand.”
“Here's ten dollars,” and the man slapped it on the bar.
Dollars kept raining in on the bar.
“There now that’s a lot of money,” she admitted.
“That's enough to give us a peek.”
Still, even more dollars were pitched on the bar.
She blushed and laughed and said, “stop it” and “people will think I'm the worst attraction in this town.”
“You started it!”
“All right boys; there ain't enough money here; everybody put in another.”

Another sixteen dollars came in, and finally the the bar dog was filling beer mugs with the coins. Lottie was trying to act meek, but there was a dangerous uninhibited laughter in her voice.
“I swear, don't a girl's name mean anything in this town? Wait till people on the other side of the river hear about you doing this to me. It ain't fair to tempt a girl like this. That's a raft a money and you know what silver dollars do to me.”
“Not enough?”
More dollars came in.
“Well I never thought I'd live to see the day Lottie would back out of what must be $200 silver dollars.”

Her eyes glazed. One of her hands rolled a dollar coin along surface the bar. She looked into the beer mugs lined up on the bar, full of coins.
“Even if there was twice that much money on the bar.”
“Alright boys, she'll do it for twice this. She said, she'll take it all off.”

They raised the money, and she was mighty upset, or sort of
pretending to be upset.

“I appreciate the compliment; I know to some of you that’s your last dollar.”

Someone put a drink in front of her, and she threw it down in one swallow.

“I like you, but you have to know being a whore and acting like one is totally different landscape. And the difference between the two is something I've taken pride in knowing.”

“We know you're the most well-behaved lady in all of Texas, and we ain't meaning you no problems. To us, it's just economics. To people that hear the story, well, they'll understand; it's more the money and has little to do with morality. Right boys?”

They all agreed, but then the room felt quiet as a church.

“So there is the money and it's yours for the takin’, unless you're inhibited.”

“It ain’t that,” Lottie argued.

“Over four hundred dollars says you ain't got the gumption.”

“I ain't no coward; I'll do it, but here's the deal. I'll walk down the middle of the street naked. Totally naked from one end of town to the other. But, I'll do it in my own sweet time. I'll carry a weapon, maybe two, and if I see or hear of one of you. I'll shoot your head off, and I'll need a hundred more dollars. I'll do it for five hundred.

A few more dollars hit the bar. Loans were made. Lottie crossed the room to converse with two of the girls that work for her as the boys just needed seventy more dollars.

It was the event of a lifetime, and the already crowded Lottie Da filled to the brim as word spread in the other saloons emptied. Everybody was watching the dollars in the mugs and the clock. Lottie went about her business like it was any other night. Then, around 4 a.m., someone noticed she was gone. On the news, all the Flat fell into silence.

Ever so slowly, the saloon emptied. The crowds went into the streets and filled in the dark recesses. They peeked out windows and around corners. Lottie's saloon was empty except for the man with the fancy buckle and belt, and the barkeeper, and even he went to the window. The money, left sitting in beer mugs, was left virtually unguarded.
The Quaker’s boy had lost their tracks when he got to the Flat, but he intended to find the shirkers. Hellcat was dead and Knife in Honey’s nice hair was ruined. It wasn't that large a place, but the whole town seem dead at 4 A.M.

He walked the main street and noticed the entire population must have been leering out of every conceivable hiding place. He walked up to each several of the people, some drunk and some not.

“Son, don’t you know better than to ask questions like that?”
“Watch where you're going, son.”
Or there wasn’t a response, but there was always a cold look.
The boy peered up at them and moved on.

Lottie dropped her packaging and stood gorgeously bare in the middle of the street. It seemed a miracle that such a petite girl would have the strength to lift those .45s, but she managed. She held them in a way that made people stay out of the moonlight. Before taking a step, she looked around at the nearly silent town and when she was certain she was the focus of universal attention, she began. It was true, she was ready for anything on two, or even four, feet; but she knew she wouldn’t not fire. If she shot someone, or even shot at someone, it would give the whole thing away. She’d just walk one step at a time and hope no drunk fool tried to molest her. It was all something of a bluff, but of epic proportions even for the Flat.

With her eyes glued on the end of the street, she was aware of movement behind her. The shadows were alive there was movement following her from shadow to shadow, but worse was a boyish figure crossing from sidewalk to sidewalk in front of her. Twice he crossed in front of her, and she raised a pistol, but never did he flinch or even look at her.

When he walked in front of Lottie, he felt eyes on him, but he also felt they weren’t his quarry, which was somewhere in front of him.

Twice, when he reached the other side, the Quaker was asked, “What's wrong with you boy; you looking to get yourself shot?” and then told, “Dumbass, you’re gonna get shot.” But for some reason, he persisted.
Without remembering the wise lawyers warning about etiquette, the idiots knocked the barkeeper over the head and started emptying the beer glasses into a sack.

“Help yourself,” the lawyer said as he continued with the cards. The three outlaws half jumped out of their skin and were clearly thrown, but Pockmark recovered, they thought, nicely, “We just want what’s coming to us.”

“Well, sure. A course,” the lawyer again didn’t look up from the cards.

“It’s just that we got shafted on a cattle deal,” the pockmarked shirker explained.

“I totally understand, please be my guest,” the lawyer gestured to the money.”

Finally, out on the street, an old woman with her desperado husband (the only a compassionate soul in the Flat that night) explained to the kid, “Her patrons left five hundred dollars in beer glasses on the bar, if she’d walk in the street naked. But she says she'll shoot anyone that looks.”

“I didn't bet anything,” the Quaker answered.

“Well, you're going to get shot,” she tried to reason with the kid, “an’ ya don’t want that do ya?”

“I doubt she's going to shoot anybody,” the kid argued.

“She don't care,” the woman insisted.

“She won't shoot ‘cause she knows they'll shoot back, if she did,” the teen said.

Lottie’d been naked before but she was worried about her name; she’d promised to shoot anybody peaking, but it was getting hard to miss everyone in town leering at her. And everyone could see that kid was there spoiling her bluff. While the kid didn’t seem a direct threat, he might embolden someone else. She figured she might have to shoot him just to make a point, just to show her patrons would know she meant business.

It would be easier if he gave her a little respect and not cross the street in front of her again. If he did it again and then if he looked at
her she would have to shoot him.

She bolted for the maid, made holding a wrap at the other end of the street. They could be gone the next day and in another town the day after that. She could invest the five hundred in a hotel or laundry, anything safe, but the kid refused to look at her.

The pockmarked man and his outlaw buddies weren't looking at Lottie, but they did catch a glimpse of the boy through the saloon’s glass. Out in the alleyway, they realized their horses were at the other end of town, but they didn't want to parade their weighted down jingly sack in front of everybody; it never occurred to them to shoot it out with the fifteen-year-old. There were three of them. Nor did they think of splitting up or hiding the money and coming back for it later. They moved from building to building along the alley. Instead of crossing the street for their horses, like rats they scampered into a livery.

The Quaker’s son happened to see through the glass as well; them leaving out the back. He entered the bar, made note of the empty and toppled over beer glasses, the groggy barkeeper recovering, and a cordial helpful man simply pointing out the back door. The kid found and inserted his sixth lead plumb.

Lottie’s barkeeper, now aware of the theft, followed the Quaker who was obviously on to something. Lottie saw the kid enter her saloon she picked up the pace and reached her rap.

The Quaker did pause at the stable door, to accustom his eyes to the dark. He began looking into each stall. The Quaker’s kid found them at last cornered in the dark. They stared up at him and he looked down at them, and only then did he draw his pistol and fired six times. When the smoke cleared, the stable was quiet. He stepped out into the alley, he looked between buildings, he saw Lottie's pink streak into her maid’s arms.

And then turned to see, between two buildings, the young man, the only person not scrambling for a door, horse, or cover. He was emptying the casings. Their eyes met for only a second, but it seemed understood. The Quaker’s kid turned and saw Lottie's barkeeper come out of the stable with the sack of coins. She naturally left the
street with her maid and ran into her saloon, and he did the same.

No one witnessed it but the barkeeper and the maid. Early the next morning, both of them mashed like chirpin’ birds, the Quaker’s kid and Lottie left the Flat and for where no one knew. They simply disappeared west.

ABILENE COURTHOUSE

Events in Abilene didn’t go as the swaggering Ranger had planned; the judge was a Baptist and half deaf and thought the Ranger said his name was “Cuss.” He told the Ranger to get the hell out of his courtroom. His official ruling what that he knew, “for a fact, Rangers, all total, tend to steal more than the thieves they hound” and that he had never heard such a ridiculous “cockeyed” story and that, “if there were Mexican cattle and a Hereford bull they should be returned to Quanah Parker,” immediately.

The talkative Ranger later lamented that he had no idea that the judge had been on the great wolf hunt with Chief Parker, Goodnight, Mackenzie and President Roosevelt. But frankly, any court would have rejected the Ranger holding that hot potato. The white-haired Ranger reasoned to himself that Abilene was just a bad choice. And next time, he’d find a more friendly judge.

WILD HORSE CREEK AT THE RED RIVER

When the herd reached the Red, tragedy loomed. The Hereford bull walked directly into quicksand. Indian braves threw a rope around his horns, but that was only a holding action. It didn't seem to be a solution, the bull didn't seem overly panicky but did fart the entire to two-hour stalemate.

Luckily, very luckily, Goodnight, Quanah, and Mackenzie arrived.
The army engineer improvised two large poles into a type of levered crane contraption to lift the bull from danger.

Cinched up pretty tight, the bull let out a tremendous fart when the belt around his midsection tightened. Everybody, but Quanah Parker chuckled as they took it as an indication Mackenzie's device might actually work. It did.

INDIAN TERRITORY

Later the herd, actually held up a westbound train allowing Quanah to board. He rode the train to Fort Sill where he had fits explaining why he had bruises on his face after consulting Congress. Goodnight rode west. Mackenzie rode east.