

Excerpt For Sarah's Journey

After a good night's rest, Sarah tended to her toilette. It had been strange not to have Wolf sleeping a few feet away, but Sarah bedded in the girl's room and he in the boy's. She'd missed the gentle sound of his snoring.

Stifling a yawn, she joined Wolf, Father Brouchard and the others for an enticing breakfast of hot biscuits with berry jam. Days started early at the mission, with prayers being chanted by the priests, while Indian children arrived from their village, greeting those who resided at the school. It seemed everyone had a purpose, and chores were completed well before the morning meal was served.

After they ate and gathered their belongings, Father Brouchard escorted them outside. "Are you sure you don't want to stay another night? You're more than welcome."

Wolf reached to shake the man's hand. "Thank you for your hospitality, Father Brouchard, but we're gonna mosey down to the trading post and see about that horse.

I'm in need of a job, and the sooner we get to Independence, the quicker I can earn the money to pay off the balance on the land I told you about during breakfast."

"I understand, my son. God go with you." The priest turned his gaze to Sarah, "And you too, my child."

She smiled, her brow already beading with perspiration in the warm morning sun.

An Indian lad, a miniature version of Wolf, led Scout from the barn. The long braids of the moccasin-clad boy dangled just past his shoulders. He held his head high, his chin jutting with the same pride Sarah had witnessed so many times in her traveling companion. The only difference between the two besides age was the hue of their skin and the youngster's deep ebony eyes that proved his full heritage—nothing like the hypnotic hazel ones Sarah found so distracting of late. He'd joked about stealing her money. If only he knew she feared the loss of her heart much more.

At the sound of approaching horses everyone turned toward a swirling cloud of dust climbing skyward. Sarah's heart quickened until she glimpsed the familiar blue coat with gold buttons on the first two riders appearing from the haze. A cavalry troop, maybe fifty strong, in two perfect lines, reined in their animals in front of the mission.

While the rest of the regiment remained astride, the ranking officer dismounted, removed his hat and approached. "Good morning, Father Brouchard. First Lieutenant Blandon Moore at your service. You might recall we passed through last month."

Despite a seemingly pleasant disposition, the officer's eyes fixed a stony glare on Wolf. "May I ask your name?"

“Only if you tell me why you want to know.” Wolf stared back, his tone defiant.

The Lieutenant’s jaw tensed. With narrowed eyes, he glanced over his shoulder. “Sergeant Flynn, you and Private McCoy dismount and take this half-breed into custody!”

At the rigid tone in their commander’s voice, the two men scrambled down, each grabbing one of Wolf’s arms.

Sarah gasped.

“Let me go, dammit!” Wolf fought against restraint until they twisted his limbs so far behind his back, his face contorted with pain.

Sarah cast a pleading look at the priest, but seeing him stand quietly with fingers interlaced, it was clear he wouldn’t intervene. Despite detesting confrontation, she squared her shoulders and stepped forward. “Excuse me, Lieutenant, but what’s the meaning of this?” The quiver in her voice belied her courage.

He removed his hat and raked a surveying gaze over her. “And who’s asking?”

“Sarah Collins. I’m traveling with Mr.... Grey Wolf. I’m sure you’ve made a mistake. There is absolutely no reason for the horrible way your men are treating him.”

“Would that be Miss Collins?” His gaze rested on her bosom then moved to her face.

She squirmed beneath the undeniable hunger in his eyes.

“Yes.” Her voice was terse. “Wolf has been kind enough to save my life and see me to my destination. I would appreciate it if you would allow us to continue our journey in peace.”

Lieutenant Moore frowned. “Traveling alone with a breed? Humph! I’m sure you would like to continue... whatever it was you were doing, but I believe your friend is a thief. There’s a wanted poster floating around with his picture on it.”

“Again you are very much mistaken,” she said in the wake of the Lieutenant’s insulting tone. His intimated impropriety heated her cheeks.

“Well see about that.” He replaced his hat and turned to his men. “Secure the prisoner on his horse. We’ll take him back to Fort Leavenworth and see if the quartermaster can identify him as the scoundrel who helped himself to the stolen supplies.”

“But...no... wait...” Sarah’s shoulders sagged.

“Good day, Miss Collins.” The officer made a slight bow, spun on his heel and remounted.

Sarah watched helplessly as the men tied Wolf’s hands and threw him astride Scout. She dropped her valise and ran to his side. Peering up at him, she clutched his leg while her stomach twisted into a knot. “What can I do to help? They can’t just take you away and leave me out here alone.”

His brow furrowed. “I’m afraid there’s nothing to do. Wait for me. I’ll get back... try to get back as soon as I can.”

Sarah’s tears mingled with dust stirred up by the departing horses, and she swiped the grit from her cheeks as the last riders disappeared over the hill.