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War Party

Chapter 1

Paiute Reservation, Utah, Thursday the 9th, Early Evening

Tommy Galiwee gripped the horse's ribs firmly with his knees and raised himself up high enough to scan the landscape ahead. His dark eyes burned with fire, his long black ponytail swished in the hot, dry breeze that kissed his dark cheeks, cheeks that already bore traces of weather lines. Legends of Geronimo filled his head. For the moment, Tommy envisioned himself as a proud warrior contemplating his enemy and the ensuing battle. Somewhere hiding among the rocks up the dry wash the white cavalry waited in ambush. An adrenaline rush surged through Tommy's veins. The thrill of battle seized him as it did every time he fought the enemy in Cavalry Canyon.

Glancing behind him at the imaginary war party waiting for his signal, he raised his right arm high, holding his bow proudly overhead. With a loud war whoop, he dug his heels into Chief's flanks and the dusty tan, old mustang charged down the dry riverbed. The horse still had some spunk in him and, drawing intensity from his youthful rider, was momentarily transformed into the warhorse of Tommy's fantasies. While his body rose and fell in tune with the galloping horse, Tommy deftly lowered his bow from overhead. Expertly he pulled an arrow out of

his handmade deerskin waist pouch and nocked it in his well-used Bear 60-lb compound bow. He drew back ready to fire on the first white soldier he saw. Gripping the modern bow, Tommy wondered whether the Apaches could have held off the white onslaught a bit longer if they had had bows like this.

Down the deepening draw they flew, the walls climbing up around them. Interspersed between the gray, dried scrub brush, black boulders of volcanic rock littered the dry riverbed forming a natural obstacle course. Tommy loved to race through the twists and turns on Chief's back. The pair dashed down the center of the wash, gliding left then right as they weaved around the bigger rocks. Chief flowed over smaller rocks in the middle of their path, sailing over them as if he could fly. The faithful horse drew strength from somewhere; his old bones always seemed to grow younger when Tommy took him out for war games. Maybe the horse, too, dreamed of battle.

Fifty yards down the draw, the arroyo took a hard right turn. Hidden around the corner by the high dirt walls, the floor of the dry riverbed sloped upward. Even though he couldn't see them, Tommy knew the white soldiers waited around that bend, knew because he'd put their tumbleweed-stuffed bodies there. To Tommy, that seemed like the best place for an ambush, where you could catch your enemy unaware. He didn't want his targets to be too obvious.

At the turn Chief slipped like a wraith around the tight corner, his chipped and splintered, unshod hooves landing firmly, digging into the dusty red and yellow-tan earth for traction. Tommy leaned with the horse as if they were one being. Chief knew the run so well Tommy didn't have to guide the horse. As they flew past the last huge boulder that marked the end of the turn, Tommy sighted down the arrow, anticipating that first target. The ghost of Geronimo rode alongside.

Horse and rider swept around the last curve in a blur. To his left Tommy spotted the first weed-filled cavalryman valiantly holding his ground. The tattered blue flannel shirt was stuffed with springy dry tumbleweeds making a barrel chest, the arms of the shirt spotted with tufts of broken straw-colored weeds sticking out of previous arrow holes. Golden strands poked out from the end of the sleeves to form skeletal hands. Tommy aimed, and then at full gallop, let the arrow fly. With a thunk it pierced the breast of the first target, cutting easily through what was left of the tattered shirt, sending a puff of crispy twig fragments into the still air.

Almost immediately Tommy had a second arrow out of the quiver, nocked and ready. He zeroed in on the second target, this one to his right, and sent the arrow into it. Then a third, but this time Tommy heard the arrow chink hard into solid stone and guessed he'd missed, and worse, had probably broken the arrow. No time to think about it. Horse and rider charged ahead, racing down the zigzag course of the dry

canyon turning right then left, all the way to the end of the draw. Almost too fast for the eye to follow, Tommy drew and fired, sending arrows swiftly into one stuffed soldier after another. As he reached the end of the arroyo, Tommy reined in Chief and paused to tally his performance. The horse obediently came to a halt, breathing hard. Tommy's mental count was out of twenty soldier targets, nineteen had been wounded or killed and only one had gotten away cleanly. One missed shot out of twenty. Pretty good, he thought, but he'd done better.