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## Chapter 12

*In the year 1851, President Brigham Young sent colonies to extend the Mormon territory to the south. Those who went had to fight four adversaries: the Cites, the Navajos, the renegade whites, and nature, which seemed at times the greatest adversary of all. No treaty with the United States could guarantee the settlers from the depredations of the Navajos. Even Kit Carson who displaced the Indians had found it impossible to quell them. Jacob Hamblin and Thales Haskell genuinely loved the Indians, and time after time won them to a reluctant peace, only to have it broken again because of the actions of the renegade whites. But at last the Mormons had begun their settlement, in the face of Indian attack and nature.*

After accepting this latest call to stay, the twenty-five or thirty A men still on the job set out to hold the fort regardless. They took stock of the dismal wreck where their \$48,300 ditch had been, a ditch-site not so good now as when they began on it in the spring of 1880. Where it was not obliterated by the force of water which had swept it lengthwise, it was gutted across by a hundred streams which had roared down on it from the cliffs. Bishop Nielson limped out over the devastation and called his people to begin on it again. They shoveled the smelly sediment out of their log houses, slushed up the chinks again with mud where the water had melted it from the walls, and moved back inside. They dug the shocks of corn out of the thick layer of mud and sand which the flood had laid down around them, hoping to use some of the corn for pig-feed, and they threw more dirt on their roofs to repair the leaks through which the rain had dripped dismally on their heads for weeks. Sustained by some unexplainable assurance of safety in the midst of all these dangers, they broke up the square of log houses where they had been cooped up in discomfort four years in the fort and built on their town lots separated by streets. This, however, did not mark the end of the Fort on the Firing Line; San Juan, the appointed incubator of Indian troubles and troubles in general, was destined to be hatching them out at frequent intervals for forty years to come. The bishop had the men survey again for a ditch; most of the former ditch had been rubbed completely from the picture, its course untraceable, its altitudes changed by the flood. They went up against it with teams and scrapers and shovels, keeping a sharp watch all the time on their horses. Those restless Piutes simply itched for some kind of rousing racket to relieve the monotony of the long stretches of peace, which somehow were unduly prolonged by these tame, compromising Mormons. They wanted, most of all, a nice lib tie war with its crop of free horses, free guns, loot, and license. To bid for such a harvest they would have to go where it was to be found and watch for opportunity. So they pitched their smoke-begrimed wickiups in a sprawling group near to one of the big cow-camps at what was called South Montezuma Creek, now Verdure, and got promptly into a fuss with a hotheaded cow-puncher over a stolen horse. Rip-roaring and uncompromising with a passion for

flourishing the ivory-handled six-shooter he carried on his hip by day and kept under his pillow at night, the cowpuncher shot one of the Piutes in the mouth as he contended angrily for the horse in question. That shot was the match to the powder. That Piute, known as Brooks, with the torturing bullet hole from his palate to the back of his neck, became ample stimulus for immediate war, much more so than if he had died, as men with that kind of wound are supposed to do at once. The sprawling group of wickiups disappeared, and the Indians sank from sight with a suddenness to astonish that cow-camp on South Montezuma. Two fellows gathered the outfit's horses and rushed them into a corral. But the Piutes had not by any means taken their departure, and they had not gone too far away to bombard that corral. When they tore loose with a roar, and their bullets whistled and rattled among the poles of the high fence, the fellows dodged and scooted to drop behind the first shelter they could reach. Joe Nielson from Bluff had been riding with this outfit, and fearing that if the Indians saw him with them now they would react with more impudence towards his own people, he proposed to go home, and fearing for his safety if he went alone, a cowboy named Fred Taylor went with him. They slipped carefully away down the creek and rode all night, warning the people at Bluff of what was happening at the foot of the mountain above them. The rest of the cowpunchers at South Montezuma didn't get away so easily. They contrived to shove their horses into an arroyo till the firing let up, and then they dumped their beds, their grub, and some of their most important valuables into a new wagon with a double-bed box, hitched on two span of big mules, and started by way of a very crooked wagon-track, not a wagon-road, for Bluff, fifty miles away. They huddled their horses in a jostling herd around the wagon, figuring it would tend to protect the spirited team and the unsheltered driver. On a brisk lope they went two miles to what is now called the Salt Lick and began to think they had dodged the trouble by a narrow margin, but right in the bottom of that little Salt Lick Valley, a pandemonium of shots broke loose from the clumps of oak on three sides of them. The big mules dropped in their harness; the herd of saddle horses stopped with a snort, milled, and scattered. Panic reigned supreme. One man was struck in the hip with a bullet and another in the foot, and everyone socked the spurs to his horse and "quit the flats." Riding warily out from cover, the Piutes rounded up the frightened horses and gathered around the new wagon and its dead mules. They ransacked everything to the bottom of the box and left the outfit in flames. Then they moved off deliberately with their big haul of good saddle horses towards the well-known and beloved rocks of their Elk Mountain, and their places of absolute security beyond Comb Reef.

As soon as the cowboys could collect their wits, they got in touch with other men of the saddle and inducing a company of soldiers to go with them, they took up the trail west of Salt Lick. They discovered with surprise that the Piutes had not hurried away as they had supposed but were waiting confidently among the tall timber for them to come. When Piute scouts told them the white men were on their trail, they moved off to the west, keeping tauntingly and mockingly just out of rifle range, and leading the furious posse into dangerous regions with which it

was not at all familiar, and through which it had no business to follow. Across Elk Mountain they followed and down the west side into a precipitous strip of territory known now as White Canyon. It was mad temper rushing in where wisdom would fear to tread. The Piutes knew every foot of that country; they knew from the first where they were going and where they would send that mob of cowboys and soldiers back the way they came. The "Mericans" knew nothing at all about the cliff-bound traps into which they were being led nor where that game of "follow-jack" was suddenly going to stop. They simply followed the tracks, and when the outfit in head plowed up the dust with bullets too near in front of them, they took the hint and traveled more slowly. On the south wall of White Canyon at what is known now as Soldier Crossing, the Piutes stopped on a high shelf and called mockingly for the mob to come on. That was for them a very generous way of announcing that they wished to be followed no farther, but the rearing pack at the foot of the hill misunderstood the signal and spurred on to the foot of the steep trail. The wonder is, since it was the Piutes' own chosen game, and since they had stacked the cards to have it all their own way, they didn't dispose of every white man in that reckless gang and thus make another prize collection of choice horses, guns, high boots, and wide hats for the big carnival for which they were preparing. But savages are governed by extravagant beliefs and incomprehensible superstitions, and it is inexplicable why they refrained from taking the big prize when they had maneuvered it within their easy reach. Instead of letting the eager cavalcade of bluecoats and cowboys come on up the hillside to where the last frantic one of them could have been finished off like a rat in a trap with not the least chance of defense, the Indians shot the two men in the lead at the bottom of the trail, a cowboy named Wilson and a soldier named Worthington, and the rest of the posse fell back to the shelter of a little ledge of rock.

In the narrow shelter of that little rim, the fuming, outgeneraled company waited all that hot July day, listening in helplessness to their wounded companions calling ever more faintly for water. When the shadows of night made it safe for them to move, they began meekly and sorrowfully to follow their tracks back to South Montezuma. From Soldier Crossing the red-handed victors crossed the country southwest through a maze of cliffs and gulches supposed to be without any trail at all, and entered the country east of Hole-in-the-Rock by the mysterious lake, where the Bluff people had hidden most of their cattle in what they thought was safety. In the heart of this remote wilderness on the grassy shore of the strange lake, which the Piutes called Pagahhrit, and which they regarded as the inner sanctum of their ancient retreat, they held a wild celebration. They danced and sang and exulted with savage shouts which echoed and re-echoed in the naked cliffs. They glutted themselves and their yellow dogs on the choicest cuts of beef from the best animals of the range. Yet the number they could consume in their most riotous extravagance, was small indeed compared to the number they shot for the love of slaughter, leaving them untouched to rot. When it was known in Bluff that this gang had gone south from White Canyon, the people feared for their cattle, and arrived at the lake to find it

stinking from the big celebration. The celebrators had gone, leaving no track to show how or where they had found exit from this rimmed-up corner. Some of the Bluff men gathered up what was left of their cattle and drove them out, but others saw nothing to be gained by moving. "Why leave this place?" they argued, "Where, in this Piute-infested region, can we find anything better? It'll be only a little while till these fellows have another fuss, and they'll go plundering wherever they please, for now we know they can go anywhere." Time proved that the Indians had crossed over into the impregnable fastnesses of Navajo Mountain beyond the San Juan.

During the winter of 1884-85, the builders of the fort made again what they called a ditch, a channel in the sand with such little fall to the mile that the blue sediment in the water filled it to the level in a few weeks. When spring came with its unfailing sandstorms from the southwest, they turned the muddy water in that sand channel, plowed their sediment-enriched fields, and the situation had half a notion to look lovely. They had been promised prosperity, and they believed it had begun. What a gloomy world this would be if hope should fail to tread the heels of disaster! Yet it was to be a long time before things really did look lovely, to stay looking that way very long at a time in Bluff. Into that situation which was half inclined to look lovely, came a disturbing report of a man named O'Donnel, who had come from somewhere in New Mexico with a big flock of sheep to skin the hills of every bit of feed in the vicinity of Bluff. It was the same strangle-hold that the Navajos had taken on them three years before, but in that case it was possible to get relief by pleading on their knees before various agencies of the government. No government agency had any right to move O'Donnel and his sheep. According to law he had much right as anyone else to the grass and forage around the remote little town; and, if he took a notion to stay there, he could not be molested in that right, though it starved the people to death. He knew his legal prerogatives as a citizen; he had found a good range covered with grass and flowers after the big rain; and he was resolved to avail himself of all its benefits. Bishop Nielson called a council, and they considered the crisis from every angle. It was an ugly prospect-they couldn't drive the fellow away at the point of a gun as the cowmen to the north of them would do at once if they were crowded, and the idea of buying him out seemed like "the longing of the moth for the star." They racked their wits in vain for a better way, and then they sent to ask for O'Donnel's price. His figures staggered them-they seemed out the question. O'Donnel knew they could afford to pay more for his sheep than anyone else would pay, and they could not afford to let some other buyer get ahead of them, for then they might fare even worse. He knew he had sufficient leverage to pry them right out of their homes and away from about everything they had in the world if they refused the sum he saw fit to name. The people of Bluff simply had to be rid of those sheep or abandon their homes and go. And they had resolved not to go, but to stay and hold the fort regardless. O'Donnel seemed to know that, and he had more deadly grip on them than the Navajos had taken.

The bishop sent a boy around asking the men of the town gather again. They knew he was resourceful, and they tried to guess what he had to propose-he would perhaps have some of their most apt diplomats go and plead with the fellow to move to some other place. When they met at his home in the evening, the little room became still with expectancy as the old man arose and looked at them with studious appraisal. "Ve vill puy de sheep," he announced.