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Chapter 2

In the year 1851, President Brigham Young sent a colony to build a fort and establish a place called Parowan, thus extending the great Mormon expansion to the south, encouraged by the Ute Chief Walker. Since Chief Walker was not supreme even among his own tribe, it was imperative that forts be built in every settlement. As the thin line of forts began to reach farther and farther into Chief Walker's territory, he viewed this influx with alarm and incited his people to attack. Among the Mormons were those who genuinely loved the Indians and made constant appeals to them. Foremost in this number were Jacob Hamblin and Thales Haskell. Added to the hostility of the Utes were three other adversaries: the Navajos the renegade whites, and nature, which seemed at times the greatest adversary of all.

It was imperative that Hamblin and his company move on at once or they would all be massacred, yet what should they do with their comrade wounded to death? He was in too much agony to mount a horse; he could not last long; yet they had no minute wait. Lifting him hurriedly but tenderly to the saddle, they rode one on each side to keep him from falling, and rushed away while he begged them to lay him down to die by the trail. When the life had gone out of him, they lowered him to the sand, put his hat over his face and left him for the savages coming on their trail. They would take his scalp, mutilate, and insult his body, and leave it to the ravages of birds and animals. His bones were to be scattered and bleach a long time on the sand of this enemy country before they could be gathered by loving hands and given reverent burial in the homeland.

That was the contemptuous answer of the Navajos to the peace offer of a neighbor who wanted to be their friend instead of their prey. They had never been humbled; they felt perfectly secure in their remote deserts and mountains while they devoured weaker or more peaceable people on every side. Now they lifted their haughty heads in exultation of triumph over these peace messengers whom they had thrust violently from their borders. But disaster hung darkly, though unseen, over their heads, and it was in the destiny of the years that they would hail these Mormons as truer friends than they had ever expected to find among the despised race of white men. Hamblin and his company crossed back over the river, followed the long trail over the timbered Buckskins and over the desert to report the Navajo answer to their petition, and what was to be expected from that quarter in the future. O the austere Navajo, relentless and unbending. How and when would he be persuaded to accept ways of peace! The plunderers followed Hamblin's trail homeward and descended again from the forest of the big mountain to raid the herds of the weary settlers. Like creatures that live and work in the night, they skulked under cover and in the darker shadows by day. Woe to the herder who had slackened his vigilance or who suffered himself to be found helpless and alone! And these robbers planned death to all who dare to pursue them with their spoil. But calamity, fearsome and tremendous, struck

suddenly in the homeland, terrifying and scattering them as a pack of rats are scattered from their disrupted den. Their robbing bands came fewer in number now, but they came with the persistency of desperation as if their very lives depended on the nature and quantity of what they could steal. That was exactly what their lives did depend on, and the lives of their wives and children as well. Most of their thousands in home-refuge had been round up and driven away like cattle into captivity. Those who came plundering now were those only who, by their desperate flight, had escaped, stripped and destitute, to the ragged breaks of the badlands where they must survive as thieves or die as outcasts. And now, from that ominous mist over the distant Buckskins, pinched faces seemed to peer from the tall timber in mortal fear of the white soldiers behind them, and in equal fear of the angry sentinels in front of them keeping vigil along the Mormon frontier. Yet somehow, whether by day or by night, they seemed to come riding, riding; and when the darkness and hush of the night had passed, pony tracks on the trail showed that they had come - and gone. Never till now in all the ages past had the Navajos been defeated by their enemies. With vain exultation they related fabulous legends of victory and freedom through long and glorious ages with a God who loved them above all other people. Like birds with hooked beaks who devour weaker creatures, they were despoiling the Mexicans and Pueblos to their southeast and the Hopis to their west when they were first taken account of by authentic history. The influence of Hernando Cortez and his Spanish government reached feebly after them, to find them defiant and unyielding. By 1630, they had become known as inveterate robbers with impregnable retreats.

In 1705, the Spaniards in Mexico had to drop all other business and carry on a series of punitive expeditions against them, which amounted to nothing at all. The Navajos mocked at them and continued their plundering operations with all the persistence and deliberation with which they planted their little patches of corn or cared for their flocks of sheep. Workers though they were from the distant past, their philosophy was to eat at least a part of their bread by the sweat of other men's brows, and no one in the world seemed able to change that ingrown philosophy. Yet to the north of them across the San Juan River lived a people who believed in eating all their bread by the sweat of other men. These people were not workers like the Navajos, but inveterate idlers, no possessions for which the Navajos would be lured over among them. Thus with never anything worth the hazard, nothing to lose and everything to gain, they stole from the stealers. Native to the most impregnable region of barriers which nature had made in the precipitous southwest, they could sally safely out from their defenses to rob or torment the Navajos, and if pursued too closely, they could disappear completely. Once among their defenses, it was death to follow them. These near neighbors north of the San Juan were Piutes, more implacable as fighters, more persistent as thieves, more cunning, more cruel than the Navajos. From the remote past they had been a sharp thorn in the flesh of these desert pirates. The story of their wars, of how the Piutes stole Navajo, women, of how the old San Juan was sometimes their defense and sometimes their betrayal, is a history in itself. It was

in the unfolding of events for this saucy little gang of Piutes to prolong, for more than thirty-five years, the fight of the fort on the firing line.

In 1805, the Navajos aggravated the Spanish-controlled Mexican government to the breaking point, and with an army it invaded their country from the south. Finding them in Canyon de Chelley, it slaughtered twelve or fifteen hundred men, women, and children. Even this terrifying blood-bath gave them but a temporary chill, for the Spanish power in Mexico had already begun to decline, and by 1815, these bandits of the wilderness found no one to challenge their supremacy unless indeed it was that nest of Piutes across the San Juan. No strong power called them again into question for thirty years. Without restraint from any quarter in all that time, the Navajos brought forth a generation of men with hot contempt for any government but their own. They had been a law to themselves for at least three hundred years, perhaps much longer, and they considered themselves free from and superior to all other peoples on earth. They made their raids east and south according to long-established custom, bringing back their spoils and their captives. When their country became United States territory, they challenged at once the authority of the new government, and went on spoiling the Mexicans and Pueblos as before. Who was Uncle Sam to foist his authority and his laws on them? Had they not been mocking at the governments of white men for three hundred years? And the white men had wearied of their defiance and gone away, leaving them supreme on their native sand. Even before the treaty was signed with Mexico in 1848, General Alexander Doniphan had led a division of United States troops into the Navajo country, and had them agree to terms with the new government. Accepting the general's terms was the quickest and easiest way to get rid of him and his troops, but these men of the desert had been free too long to subordinate themselves to any outside power without meeting some convincing display of force. As soon as the general and his army disappeared, the treaty became a despised scrap of paper. They followed their age-old habit of spoiling the people around them, and in September 1849, General John M. Washington arrived with a force to check them, and to arrange what he thought was a clearer understanding. Trustful and patient as Doniphan had been, he effected an agreement without harsh measures. Again when the uniformed fighters disappeared, the Navajos turned with a sneer to their old vocation. The Mormons had recently arrived in Salt Lake Valley, and in the two years or more while they were extending their frontier towards the Navajo border, these men of the desert gathered strength and insolence to offer them a more alarming challenge than they were ever to receive from any other tribe of Indians. The Navajos agreed to no fewer than six treaties with the United States, disregarding every one of them with premeditated resolution. After mocking successfully all that time at the new government, and mistaking its patience to mean its weakness, they had evolved a pitiably exaggerated notion of their own power and importance as a people. When it was told in this country, that Mormon towns, with herds of horses, cattle, and sheep, were filling the hitherto-desolate country north of the Buckskin Mountains, it tickled their avaricious hope of more gain. Easy spoil from a new quarter—they planned the raids which in due time

were to endanger all the settlements of southern Utah. Now besides their old plunder-trails to the southeast, they would have other profitable trails to the northwest. In the deep and obscure windings of the Colorado they would find secret crossings to be used in perfect safety, and from the deep solitudes of the big timber they would descend with surprise on the prey. Ten thousand places of security would await them as they came loaded homeward. The new field offered more than the old field had ever yielded. It was at this dangerously proud day of their history that they murdered George A. Smith and thrust the peace envoys rudely from their borders.