

A JEWEL FOR SISTER SARAH

Hooking up Bonny to the buckboard, Colton patted the sturdy horse on the neck and gave her an apple. He wiped the dew off the seat, checked the wheels, and went back into the house.

“She’s all ready, Ma,” said Colton.

“Thank you, Colton. Now where’s that sister of yours?”

“I’m coming, Ma,” said Sarah, as she bound down the stairs.

Meg Patterson and her family left the farm and headed for town. They only lived about a mile out of the small town of Cassville, but it could still be a rough ride, depending on the past week’s weather. Fortunately, Colton knew every bump and soft spot, so he skillfully kept the wagon moving behind Bonny’s steady pull.

“Last Sunday at church, I heard Mrs. Wilson say that they were expecting a new shipment of fabric this week,” said Meg. “Maybe we will find something pretty to get, if we have money left after the essentials.”

“When will pa be back?” asked Sarah.

“The return run from Chicago is supposed to be back on Thursday, provided they don’t run into any trouble on the rails.”

“Do you think he’ll have anything exciting to bring back, Ma?” asked Sarah.

“Oh, I don’t know, Sarah. Chicago is a pretty big city with lots of fancy stuff, but you know your father. His idea of exciting isn’t always the same as ours.”

“But we can always hope, can’t we?”

“Of course, Sarah. Sometimes, he will surprise us.”

“We stopping at the general store first, Ma?” asked Colton.

“Yes, that would be fine, son.”

Pulling the buckboard up to Henry’s General Store, Colton got down and helped his ma and his sister get off.

“Ma, I’m going down to the livery to see if Matthew’s got that new bridle in that we’ve been needing. I’ll be back in a few minutes to help you load things on the wagon.”

“Okay, Colton.”

The livery stable could be a busy place sometimes, but Colton always liked to look at the horses and gear that Matthew had on hand, so he spent his time well. Today, only one well-dressed stranger stood talking to Matthew. The stranger soon shook Matthew’s hand and left.

“Well, howdy, Colton,” said Matthew. “I’ve got that new bridle in for you.”

“Thanks, Matthew. How much do I owe you?”

“Five dollars, Colton ... I don’t know if it would interest you or not, but that man that was just in here has a fine-looking horse he wants to sell. I’ve checked him out and I have to say it’s one of the best-looking geldings I’ve seen come through here in a while. Looks strong, and the man said he’s very fast. He even comes with a good sturdy saddle and reins.”

“How much does he want?”

“One hundred dollars.”

“I don’t know. Seems like a good price. I’ll ask pa when he gets back on Thursday.”

“Okay, Colton. Here’s your bridle.”

“Thanks, Matthew.”

Colton walked back to Henry’s General Store to see if his ma needed help with anything yet.

“Look, Colton,” said Sarah, excitedly.

“Look at what Mr. Wilson got in yesterday.”

Mrs. Wilson smiled and pulled out a case from under the counter. When she opened it up, Sarah’s face became as dazzling as the necklaces that shown from their soft velvet bed. Her brother looked at her face, and then he looked at his ma. Meg smiled but shook her head. Henry’s General Store rarely ever got anything in of that nature. When Colton looked at the prices, he understood why his ma had shook her head no.

“My favorites are the sterling silver cross and the ruby in the star,” said Sarah. “I’d give anything for one of those.”

“Some day, Sarah,” said Colton. “Some day, maybe ... Those ready for the wagon, Ma?”

“Yes, Colton.”

After loading up the boxes that sat by the counter, Colton went back in to see if there was anything else. He overheard Mr. Wilson talking to

a lady across the room. Henry said he would see if he could figure something out but, off hand, he didn't know anybody who might have a spare wagon that they could bring the supplies out to her. Her wagon had apparently broken down and wouldn't be fixed for a week. When the lady turned around, Colton saw that it was Mrs. Parks who lived about a mile farther out from their farm.

“What do you need delivered, Mr. Wilson?” asked Colton.

“Mrs. Parks here has some sacks of feed and a few building materials,” answered Henry.

“If it's okay with ma, we've got room and I could bring them out to you after I drop ma and Sarah off at home.”

Meg shook her head yes, and the young man finished loading the wagon with Mrs. Parks' goods.”

When he got home from the delivery, Colton grabbed an old tin and dropped five coins into it. The seeds for Colton Patterson's business idea were planted. When his pa got home on Thursday, the young lad talked to his father about the horse that Matthew had for sale at the livery. When his

pa gave him the go ahead, he headed for town and got himself the first horse of his own. He then started passing the word around town that he made deliveries of most any kind. He even stopped at the telegraph office and offered his services for delivering telegrams to surrounding farms and ranches. New ventures such as Colton's were sometimes slow to catch on in that part of the country, but gradually people began to like the speed and convenience that his services provided. Each new week brought a few more coins to drop into the tin after meeting expenses. He made a vow to himself that when he had enough, he was going to buy one of those necklaces for his sister.

On Tuesday morning, the Patterson family got ready to make their weekly trip into town for supplies. Colton emptied the coin tin into a leather pouch and put the strap over his shoulder. Pa was with them today, so he drove the buckboard, and Colton rode Blue Moon alongside. With their first stop at Henry's General Store, Sarah ran inside to ask Mrs. Wilson if she could look at her jewelry case. Her brother could hardly wait to surprise her with the purchase of one of the necklaces. But when he got inside, she was already coming back out with a little tear falling from her eye.

“What’s wrong, Sarah?” asked Colton.

“The necklaces are gone. Someone bought them on Saturday, and Mrs. Wilson doesn’t know when she will get any more.”

Colton didn’t know what to say to his sister. He couldn’t tell her that he was going to buy one for her. That would only make it worse. But his sister was resilient, as were most of the people in that part of the country. You had to be to survive. Tomorrow was another day. Maybe something would come.

A few months later, Quinton Patterson told his family that a gang had stopped the train and robbed everyone on it. Whether it was well-planned or just a spur of the moment opportunity, they didn’t know. The outlaws made a big haul, though, as the end car was privately owned by a wealthy man who had a lot of valuables to put into their sacks. He told his son to be careful out there as there was talk that the gang was in the Cassville area.

The next day, Colton and his friend Running Bear from the Indian village went into the woods to do some hunting. Colton always liked hunting with Running Bear, as he was the best tracker he

had ever known. He could sneak up on a deer and touch the deer's antlers before the deer would even know he was there. The two young men had grown up together in school. It was unusual for an Indian brave to be allowed in school, but Colton heard it had something to do with a peace treaty from many years ago. Whatever the reason, he was glad to have Running Bear's friendship. The young Indian brave preferred that Colton call him Sam, and so he did.

When Sam and Colton came upon a rocky overhang, they heard voices from below. Peering over the edge, they saw four men resting around a campfire.

"What do you think, my friend?" asked Sam.

"I'm wondering if they could be that gang that robbed the train," answered Colton. "Let's watch them for a while."

"I don't think they're going anywhere more today," said Sam. "It looks like they're getting ready to bed down."

"If it is them, there's supposed to be two rewards out there, one for their capture and one for the return of the wealthy man's valuables."

“You want to take first watch, or do you want me to?” asked Sam.

“You take it, Sam.”

Darkness soon fell, and when it did, Sam woke his friend.

“Look at that, Colton.”

Three of the men had gone to sleep, and the fourth man stood watch. The fourth man took something out of a saddlebag he had next to him. Something in his hand kept shining with the flickering light of the campfire.

“That must be it, Sam. The saddlebag is filled with the wealthy man’s valuables ... We split the reward fifty/fifty?”

“What do you want to do?”

“Let’s keep watching. I’m betting that the guard will fall asleep too. If he does, do you think you could sneak down and get that saddlebag?”

“Can I not touch the tooth of a sleeping bear?”

“I’ve never doubted you, Sam, but I will keep you covered just in case.”

About an hour later, the fourth man did fall asleep, and Running Bear came back up with the saddlebag in hand.

“Okay, Sam, you take this into town and give it to the sheriff. He knows you, so he’ll believe you. Tell him that I am still up here. As soon as he can get a posse together, you lead him back up here. Hopefully, those guys down there won’t realize what’s happened before the sheriff can get up here.”

Running Bear knew the paths that led to town like the back of his hand, even in the dark. With his swift pony, he got to town quickly. The bag of valuables proved who they would be dealing with, so the sheriff and ten men followed Running Bear back up into the hills. When they got up to where Colton stood watch, they found all to be quiet. The posse took the gang into custody without firing a shot.

When the wealthy man heard that his valuables had been recovered, he rushed to Cassville the next day. He was so happy that he told Colton he could pick out anything in the bag as an extra above the reward. In the end, Colton gave Sam all the reward money to take back to his village. For his bonus gift, Colton picked out a large silver

cross necklace that had a heart-shaped ruby in the center of the cross.