

**FROM
THE FAR
PLACES**

**SEVENTH NOVEL in the
MOCKINGBIRD SERIES**

BY

DOROTHY K MORRIS

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NOTE TO READERS

From The Far Places is the seventh novel in the Mockingbird Hill series. In this story, I attempt to show the melting pot that made up the population of early South Carolina. In those early days of the colony, men, women and children came from many countries and many varied lifestyles; yes, children, for quite often children as young as nine and ten years old, and even younger, came alone as indentured servants or as slaves from Africa or the Islands. This conglomeration of types, religions, nationalities and ethnic groups, with their accompanying stresses and tensions, created what the state is today. Some ingredients blend easily. Other ingredients will not blend at all. This novel is about that blending and separation.

In the year Sixteen Hundred and Seventy, planters from Barbados came to the Carolina coast to establish a proprietary colony. For the most part, these land owning men were descendants of younger sons of English aristocracy, who had ventured to the island to seek their fortunes in sugar, rum and indigo. When the call came to expand into the coastal lands of Carolina, some of these planters and

merchants sailed with their families and servants and landed at a place they called Oyster Point. When they had built a walled town between the two large rivers that flowed into the Atlantic, they called it Charles Town.

Primarily a business venture, this colony's purpose was to make money for themselves and the English Crown through the control of the Mercantile Rules. Their rice and indigo plantations were along the banks of the Ashley and Cooper rivers, and throughout the many rivers and creeks that branched off from these two. Parish names in this new place carried the same parish names from Barbados. This proprietary control lasted until Seventeen Twenty Nine/Thirty, when the English Crown took over the colony. It became a Crown Colony, as was Virginia.

My fifth book in this series *Dirty Rice* was my attempt to show the decades after initial settlement and the reasons for its wealth. *Tally's Nook* continued that effort. With *From The Far Places*, I take you deeper into the country. We begin to see the differences between the Colonial-born and the English-born, between the aristocracy and the commoner, and the effects these differences will ultimately have.

I have attempted in all of my stories about early Charles Town to be true to the conditions under which the early settlers lived, although I have taken certain liberties in the interest of fiction, such as names of places, settlers and

their first Crown Governor. In my progressive series of novels, I continue to include characters with whom my readers are already familiar and in each, I introduce new people to brighten the pages. These new people I hope you will be happy to meet.

*Except for certain place names, situations, and the
cameo appearance of Alexander Daniel, this book is
entirely a work of fiction and does not intend to
represent any person living or dead.*

Dedicated to

HELEN
&
CIMARRON



THE CAROLINA PIEDMONT is that region where the mountains of the ancient Appalachian chain begin the slope to the rugged hills that hug the eastern edge and become the rolling plains of central Carolina and Virginia. The Warriors' Path that wound its way through this land is probably as old as the first people who had lived in those hills and mountains and who had travelled the length of it for war and for trading. The path was tread by the southern Catawba to the Cherokee, with smaller tribal names throughout, the Pee Dee on the southern end and the Occaneechi to the north. The path eventually became the narrow road, deeply rutted by wagon wheels, winding through heavily wooded lands, which carried wagons of brave settlers through dangerous territory as they breached the frontier to carve a homestead in the wilderness.

Ultimately as The Great Wagon Road, it facilitated the movement of people from the North toward the South. As settlers came, innkeepers placed their rest stops, inns and

liveries approximately twenty miles apart; this being the distance a team of oxen could pull a wagon in one day. Now our major inland cities of Virginia and Carolina use this old path as major highways; however, before the beautifully landscaped highways joined one city to another, there was another reality. Through thousands of years, the Occaneechi Path had seen its share of unspeakable brutality as man preyed upon man for advantage. In ages past, it was not a path to tread lightly.

**OCCANEECHI
TRADING PATH**

**SOMEWHERE IN THE
CAROLINA
PIEDMONT**

1730

ONE

JEREMIAH O'DONNELL HAD much to contemplate as he led his train of wagons down the old warriors' path toward the coast at Charles Town. Not the least of his concerns was the simple survival of himself and his twelve-year-old daughter, Sabrice, who traveled with him. He was responsible for the well-being of the oxen that pulled the long and narrow wagons laden with valuable deerskins. City markets hungered for these. Tailors would make them into soft fashionable breeches for gents in Boston, Jamestown, Charles Town, London and Paris. In addition, Jeremiah must prevent the few men who traveled with the wagon train from doing anything to cause the native tribes to reach for their tomahawks and arrows. These men hunted with friendly natives during the winter months and then they dared to venture on this perilous journey through territories of hostile tribes, who thought nothing of killing a stranger for no other reason than having his oxen to butcher.

It was springtime and winter snows and spring rains had left the land soaked. Oxen strained against their yokes to pull the wagons through deep muddy ruts, sometime getting so

bogged down the wagons had to be emptied of the hides before the men and oxen could pull the wooden wheels through the muck and out onto solid ground. The men and beasts often were soaked with these rains. They spent days of discomfort, using their personal waterproof gear to cover the precious hides instead of their own bodies. The trek was long and exhausting. There was little time or inclination to listen to the birds or to marvel at the blooming laurel or red bush. Jeremiah's mind often made its way back through his memories of how, those dozen years ago, he came to be in this place at this time.

TWO

THE LIFE HE NOW LED had begun for Jeremiah almost twenty years ago when he had come to Virginia as an indentured servant. He was the only son of an Irish farmer; his mother the daughter of a staunch Scottish Presbyterian minister, whose family had sought refuge in Ireland after the Highlanders' wars with the British. After his strict parents had died, he was left with a young sister to care for and no taste for farming or preaching. Being of an adventuresome sort, he indentured himself and his sister, Jenny O'Donnell. They came together to the colony of Virginia, he to work tobacco and Jenny to be a house servant.

After completing their indenture of seven years, Jenny chose to remain at her place in Virginia, where she was welcome and content. Jeremiah yearned for total freedom. He took passage on a schooner going southward. Eventually he found himself in the coastal Low-Country of South Carolina, a knapsack on his back, worn out shoes on his feet, a battered hat, threadbare clothes and holes in his pockets. In the knapsack, he carried his precious papers that released him from indenture and declared him a free man. He had his mother's battered

bible, her book of Shakespeare's sonnets and a locket that contained a tiny pen and ink drawing that was supposed to be his mother, but which looked nothing like the pinch faced, miserably unhappy woman he remembered. He kept the locket anyway if for no other reason than to reassure himself that he had had a mother. He had nothing of his father except fond memories.

The year he earned his freedom was seventeen hundred and nineteen and Jeremiah O'Donnell was in dire need of work, a bath, some food, in reverse order of importance. He really wanted a place to plant roots—a new home—a new family. He was lonely. When he asked here and there about finding work, the only hope given him was from a man called Liam Argent, a slave trader, known to take slaves inland to farms newly carved from the frontier west of Charles Town. When Jeremiah heard the offer, he immediately declined. Herding slaves for a living was not to his liking. Liam Argent suggested that Jeremiah go north along the river. In the piney woods, he would come to Clyde Ball's sawmill. He said that Jeremiah might ask there. Liam's directions were simple. Get to the mouth of the river and walk north along its bank until you come to a trading post. Go farther until you get to the mill.

Jeremiah walked the miles along the river, eventually coming to the place as Liam had said

he would. Piles of pine, oak and hickory logs covered the acreage. He saw the tall powerful man who must be the boss or the owner. He checked in his knapsack to make sure he had his papers and then walked toward him. The man stopped his work to watch Jeremiah approach. Jeremiah took off his hat and held it in his hands while he spoke.

“Good morning, Mister,” he began.

“Mornin’,” replied the tall man. “What can I do fer ya?”

“Looking for work. Just got out of my indenture and need work,” explained Jeremiah. “I can handle wood.”

The tall man looked Jeremiah over from his head to his feet and back up again.

“Don’t look so strong. Can you lift a pine log single handed?”

“Don’t know as I can right now, but after a few weeks I’ll be doin’ it right well,” replied Jeremiah.

“Can you handle a log saw?”

“Reckon I can.”

“What be your name?”

“Jeremiah O’Donnell.”

“Irish?” asked the tall man.

“Recon so, but Scottish, too. My Ma.”

“Oh, one o’ them,” mused the tall man. “Well, I rightly could use some help here,” he spoke slowly. “I could manage most by myself and had help for the little bit of work I needed help on, but now more people are comin’ in

and settin' up housekeepin' round about. I'm gettin' calls for more oak wood now 'cause some of 'em is makin' their own tables and chairs and such like.

"Name's Ball...Clyde Ball," he said as he held out his hand. "Work here is hard and day is long. Sun up to sun down. You still wantin' it?"

"Indeed I do," replied Jeremiah, offering his hand as well.

"Seven days a week with time off for church on Sunday. That is, if you go. I don't hold with such nonsense, but I 'low as how some do. Me, I go fishin'. You're welcome to come."

"Where can I stay? I mean, where can I sleep at night and where can I take my meals?" asked Jeremiah.

"Tradin' post is down the road. You might have passed it if you come from that way. Owned by Ole Man Royce Maclin and run by his son, Archie. Cute little daughter does the cookin' and cleanin'. Name of Sabine. That out o' the Bible you know. The Sabine Women, it says. I axed Sabine to marry me one day and she right out said no. Guess I ain't what she's lookin' fer."

"I did pass it," said Jeremiah, choosing not to comment on that last bit of information, thinking that Clyde Ball surely needed someone to talk with even if he didn't need a worker. "What sort of trading they do?"

"Come winters Ole Man Royce, he works the mountain hunting grounds with the Injuns, takin' in deer hides. Spring comes and he brings 'em down the Occaneechi Path to here. Archie he keeps stuff on the shelves for people hereabouts. Shot and powder, skinnin' knives. He got some good moonshine and always somethin' in the kettle. Card games at night. They got couple o' rooms hitched onto the back of the store. Got a few bunk beds for travelers and for some like me. I stay there. Got no missus so no need to go building no cabin. You can stay there, too. He got bunks enough. Archie he feeds me. He'll feed you too."

"He does this free?"

"God a' mighty no! I give him all the cut wood he needs to burn every month. Fatwood for startin' fires, oak wood for heatin', hickory for smokin' and cookin'. I cut it and haul it in.

"Put your stuff over there under that tree and come on and help me haul this log up on the trees. You eat yet?"

"Not today I ain't."

"We cut this log up and take the bark off, we'll go eat."

That is how Jeremiah O'Donnell met Clyde Ball and then met young Archie Maclin and his fifteen year old sister, Sabine, at the trading post.

For both Jeremiah and Sabine it had been love at first sight. Sabine Maclin gave him the

first decent meal he had eaten in weeks and he gave her his heart. He was the young man she had been pining for and waiting for. She was the most attractive and alive young woman he had ever met, and her temperament was nothing like his mother's or Jenny's. As he ate her tasty venison stew, fresh baked bread and butter, he could hardly take his eyes off her. She was rather petite with brown hair and the greenest eyes he had ever seen, and she could send messages of delight with them, causing his blood to warm and his heart to flutter. With her eyes gazing into his own, lingering, and with the slight smile on her mouth and a dimple in her cheek, she was telling him that she liked what she saw. Jeremiah knew then that he had met his future wife. Her boldness and the strength that emanated from her belied her petite frame.

THREE

CLYDE BALL WAS a pleasant man to work for and Jeremiah continued working with him. He welcomed the weekly task of hauling wood to Archie's place, which required most of his day and which allowed him an extra chance to see his new and secret love, Sabine. It was secret because he did not know how to tell her brother how he felt or how to ask for her hand in marriage. He had nothing to offer her yet. Also, truth be told, there was another reason he hesitated to declare his love. He was not sure he wanted a wife and bairns to tie him down quite yet. There was that worm of adventure still crawling around in his gut. *Then* he had the pleasure of meeting the renowned Old Man Royce Maclin.

Spring had come and Royce Maclin came down out of the mountains along the trading path, and brought the pack train in to the trading post with his yearly delivery of hides and furs. The night that Old Man Royce Maclin came with the pack crew, Jeremiah had watched with fascination. The motley crew from the hunting camp was composed of two natives, a half-breed, and three white men who had escaped from the clutches of the law and

now preferred to live their lives in the mountains, far from the reach of magistrates and sheriffs. They unhitched the oxen from the wagons, bedded the oxen down with feed and water, and then settled around a campfire with their bedrolls. However, their sleep did not occur until the early morning hours and not before Jeremiah and Sabine had sat up most of the night with that rough lot. The men from the mountains told exciting tales of the adventures they had had and the dangers they had overcome. There was little need for exaggeration.

Never quite happy out of his beloved mountains, after only a few weeks on the coast, Old Man Royce Maclin was ready to go. It was time to load the wagons with iron pots and skillets, axe blades, beads and mirrors and colorful blankets and muslin cloth for the natives. An awful yearning overtook Jeremiah. He wanted to go with Mister Maclin to the hunting grounds. Jeremiah was excited as though he were a youth again and felt that this was exactly why he had come to the New World—to experience just this. He wanted to learn about the natives who lived in villages along the trading path. From the way the wagon men talked, they must be different from anything he had ever known. However, there was Sabine and no matter how much he wanted to go, he also wanted Sabine. He was not even sure that Old Man Royce Maclin would allow

him to come along. If allowed, he surely could not wed Sabine, bed her, leave her possibly with child and go off on a hunting venture. Jeremiah was sorely vexed.

The young man was not alone in his deep thoughts. Sabine was Sabine and she watched his excitement rise as they listened to the hunters constant boasting of their manly adventures. The girl was young but wise enough to know what was going through Jeremiah's mind. She could see it written on his face. He would not be satisfied until he had gone with them. She believed that there would be handsome young native girls and women all along the camps the length of the path. Her father, Old Man Royce, even had a native wife in that wilderness, her and Archie's mother having died of a fever many years ago. In truth, the old man may have had the native wife for years before their mother had died if for no other reason than to keep his hair while living and working among them. It was the best way for a man's acceptance into the tribe. No wife...no lodge to sleep in. If her father allowed her beloved to go on the next trip, surely he would find an attractive native woman to share his blankets. Archie Maclin's young sister was determined not to let that happen.

After the campfires burned down on that last night, and his men slept, Old Man Royce remained sitting alone on one of the cypress stumps placed in a circle about the fire. He

scratched the still glowing embers with a long stick. Jeremiah, unable to sleep because of his growing excitement and anticipation, left his bunk, pulled on his boots and took his jacket off the hook by the door. He went out quietly and walked up to the old man from the front side so as not to startle him. He stood for a bit, not knowing what to do or say or how to approach Royce, until the old man spoke.

"Sit, young'un. Not growin' no taller a'standin' like that. What's on your mind, Son, like I don't already know," he stated, still poking the embers.

Jeremiah sat on the stump across from the fire.

"Might I—go with you—when you leave?" he asked hesitantly.

"Now don't that beat all? I thought you finally got the nerve to ask me for Sabine."

Jeremiah blushed red, not having realized how obvious he had been.

"Clyde know you aimin' to go?" asked the old man, still poking the embers.

"I haven't said anything to him yet. Thought it best I ask you first. You might say no," replied Jeremiah, thinking that he was being courteous. "Don't want to be a bother or a drag."

"You will be. Can't help it. You want to go bad enough you be walkin' by one of them loaded carts when we pull out tomorrey. You keep up, well and good. You fall back it's your

hair, but if you is walkin' out with us tomorrey, you 'member that you do one thing to rile any native I'll let 'em have you. You got that?"

"Yes, Sir, I got that. I won't be trouble and I'll work my tail off."

"You'll be trouble, Son. You don't know Injuns. You never do know when you did somethin' sets 'em off. You have to watch and learn. And I mean fast."

"I will, Sir. Then I can go?"

"What about my daughter? I done seen the looks you give her. Like a boy looks at a new hound pup, and I seen the looks she give you. She done picked you. She ain't never looked like that at a man before as I recall. Flat dab turned down Clyde and he's a good man."

Jeremiah hesitated before replying.

"I like her, too, Mister Maclin, and I'll come back after this one trip with you. Then I want to marry her. Think she'll wait for me?"

"It might be most a year 'fore you get back, but seems to me she waited this long. Might wait a mite more," replied Old Man Royce as he struggled up from the stump and, without another word, went to the bunkhouse behind the trading post, leaving Jeremiah to think on all of it.

Jeremiah did not sleep at all for the few hours left until daybreak. He lay awake weighing his options. On the one hand, he was young and adventuresome. The thought of traveling with the pack train up into the hills

among heathen folk, seeing the way they live, listening every night to the fantastic tales of the crew, hunting and fishing every day was almost more than he could deny himself. On the other hand, he was young and lusty and Sabine Maclin was a very tantalizing morsel. She was pretty. She was lithe. She was a bit sassy and altogether too tempting for a young man to pass up. It seemed that she matched him in every way; that is, that he knew about. He did not doubt that she would match him all the way, when the time came. Therein lay the problem. When would the right time come? Would it be within the next few days or weeks? Would it be next year? Would she have him now? Would she wait for him? Toward the end of his long night, being the young man he was, he made the choice that he knew was right for him now. He would never have this chance again. He chose to go with Old Man Royce O'Donnell and leave his fair Sabine behind--temporarily, of course.

Way before dawn, he was standing with the other men waiting for the old man to come. Jeremiah had said his goodbyes to Archie Maclin and to Clyde Ball. Not able to find Sabine, he had asked Archie to please speak to Sabine and explain to her why he had to go and that Archie should tell her that Jeremiah would be back to marry her if she would have him when her father came again from the mountains. Therefore, with the clear conscience

of a young man, he had his small bundle and was prepared. He watched the men hitch the oxen to the loaded wagons. Old Man Royce came out with a hunk of bread and a cut of cheese in his hand and yelled to his lead man.

“You got the extra oxen?”

“We got two young ‘uns,” the lead man replied. “That enough?”

“Recon so,” answered Royce. “Have to do. Not many people wantin’ to send their good ox out to feed Injuns.”

Jeremiah listened with intent. He wanted to learn all he could while on this adventure. He ventured a question.

“Mister Royce, Sir, you bring the other oxen in case one pulling a wagons goes lame?”

“No, Boy. Don’t you see them oxen is still too young to pull nothin’? We bring ‘em so we can tie one to a tree when we overnight close to Injuns we know don’t like us coming close to their territory. They take the ox and allow us safe passage. Before we started leavin’ ‘em a puny ox, they used to take one of the steady pullers and they’d butcher that ox right there whilst we was sleepin’. We never heard nothin’, not even the arrow what kilt ‘im. We wake up, be naught but a smear of blood on the ground. When we go near them groups we either tie an ox to a tree or we leave some iron pots and kettles close enough they can find ‘em. Like a present. They look for it now. We run out of things to give ‘em we gives ‘em a deer. We all

know they can kill their own deer, but these is gifts. A gift has meaning. We done it so long, not leavin' something would be an insult."

"What would they do if you didn't leave something?" Jeremiah asked.

"You don't want to know, Boy, and I hope you never do," replied Old Man Royce, spitting a line of tobacco juice farther than Jeremiah ever had been able to do. "I must be crazy bringin' you along," he muttered.

The wagons left the trading post just as the sun was creeping up, its light coming in narrow rays through the tall pines. The air was fresh and invigorating. Well-rested oxen began the long haul with renewed energy. Jeremiah felt a surge of adrenalin rush through his entire body, especially his innards. He trembled with excitement, for in that moment he was happy to be himself, here and now, and would not want to be anyone else in the whole world. He knew there might be danger but he had no idea what sort. He had heard tales of Indians and how frightful they were, or could be, but here was Old Man Royce Maclin, who had made the trip over the trading path many times, and was still alive and healthy. Jeremiah had that young man's confidence that he could cope with anything that came his way. He was certain that, considering how men are inclined to exaggerate, the dangers could not be as bad as he had heard.

While the elite on the Low-Country coast had established and nurtured their society through class, name and blood ties, others established their own culture inland from Charles Town. Northerners, immigrants, released indentured servants and convicts, all found freedom in that never-never land between the hills and the coast. There were no townships established yet, but there was land for the taking; that is, if it could be wrested from the native population. If a man could afford a wagon and an ox or mule to pull it, he might brave the dangers to carve out a bit of that precious commodity for himself and his ever-growing family. That happened more and more, causing more animosity between these frontier settlers and the natives, who felt pushed off land they considered theirs.

The danger for any white man or woman or child grew exponentially with each new piece of land taken by white men from the forest, with each new field plowed and planted, and with each new room added onto a log or adobe hut. Livestock were stolen or killed right there and the carcasses hauled away. Homes were burned to the ground in the night with men, women and children still inside. These things occurred most often because of differences between the two cultures. Whatever the reason, occur they did and now, travel through this land and along the trading path

had become more dangerous with each passing year.

While the Cherokee of the northern Piedmont attempted to accommodate the white settlers, the Katapu of the southern Piedmont were more warlike. Under their umbrella lived those remnants of tribes that had suffered decimation at the hand of the whites and from the whites' diseases. This situation often left native pitted against native for territory. Added to that, was the lack of knowledge travelers had of the numerous taboos, evil spirits and witches, which ruled the lives of these natives.

The first, second and third day took the pack train through relatively civilized territory. The road inland traversed land already settled by free men from England, Scotland, Ireland and a few who had come south to escape the cold winters of the northern colonies. They traveled through well-tended plantations and farms west of Charles Town, and then ventured further into the Midlands. They came to a small settlement on the third day. This settlement was the home of an earlier Indian trader and it marked the real entry into native territory—Jeremiah's first experience of wilderness. Here natives still claimed their tribal lands, and brave or foolhardy white men risked their lives to settle and call the land their own. Until now, the danger to the pack train had been only the occasional runaway looking for food. Now the

danger became mortal. Royce's foresight in bringing gifts to the natives had so far kept him safe on his many journeys.

That night after the men had secured the oxen by their nose rings to the line, leaving them enough length to lie down, they gathered around the campfire to talk of the day and eat the last of the bread and cheese and fresh roasted rabbit the men had killed on the way.

"Quiet days so far," opined one man, tipping his cap to Old Man Royce.

"That's how we want 'em," replied another and then he added, "Cap'n, that boy he's keepin' up a' right."

"What boy, Jimbo? You mean Jeremiah here? Why, he ain't no boy," replied Old Man Royce.

"No, Cap'n. I mean the boy what keeps up the back with me, walking through the dust and ox shit. Y 'all change the ox every day so they don't have to walk back there all the time, but I do. I'm there ever day breathin' that dust and he's there with me. I wondered 'bout 'im at first--why you took on a new boy, then I saw he could keep up. He's keepin' up right good and he's quiet."

"I ain't took on no new boy," replied Old Man Royce, glancing over to the man to see if he were joking or not.

The other men began to look around to see the new boy. There was no one new and

certainly not a boy. The men around the fire began to chuckle.

"Jimbo, you seein' thangs," chirped one.

"It him wishin'," said another, bringing harsh laughter from all.

"Yeah, he walkin' back in that ox shit his mind doin' tricks. Boy, my ass. His mind doin' tricks."

"Ain't neither," grumbled Jimbo. "He been there ever' day we been out. I even talked to him."

"No shit. He talk back?"

The men all laughed at Jimbo, filthy from the dust that he had to walk through, and his boots smelling of ox shit. He stood up, took off his hat and swung it at one of the laughing men.

"I swear by my Momma, rest her soul, they is a boy what's walkin' with me. And no, he don't talk back when I axe him a thing, but he there."

Old Man Royce looked up at Jimbo and stared for a moment.

"Then you better go find him and see what in hell he's a doin' here. Now."

"If he's here!" called the crew as one voice, laughing louder.

Jimbo left the fire and looked around. Forest on one side and wagons out in a meadow of tall grass, all in a circle around the fire. The boy had to be in the woods or hiding in one of the wagons. He chose to check the

wagons before venturing into the dark woods. The men had divided trade goods evenly, so as not to make one wagon heavier than another. They had packed cloth, blankets, iron pots and kettles, and the lighter boxes of colored beads closely in each so as not to roll around and to use all space. They had placed a tarpaulin over each bed of goods and tied the cover to each corner. Jimbo went to each wagon, untied the back corners and folded the tarps back. He found the boy in the third wagon, curled up in a space he had made for himself in between the colorful blankets and the bolts of muslin cloth.

“Git yo’ ass outen there, Boy!” growled Jimbo, and he yelled back to his comrades. “I found ‘im. See! I told ya. He’s right here in this wagon.”

All the men came to see, with Royce in the lead. They got there just as the boy stood up from his hiding place. He was extremely dirty and smelled to high Heaven. He wore no hat and his hair, blunt cut and tied back with a piece of heavy string, hung to his collar. He looked small and weak and tired as he looked down at the men first and then his gaze rested on Royce. Royce gazed back at the boy. Neither spoke but the men could see Royce’s visage grow redder and redder and take on a look of real wrath, even though he said nothing. He just stared at the boy and the boy stared back. Then Royce’s eyes softened and he began to smile. Then he began to laugh and shook his

head. The men looked on and wondered what was happening. After the longest moment in the history of pack trains, Old Man Royce looked over to where Jeremiah O'Donnell stood.

"You do this?" he asked Jeremiah.

"Do what, Sir?" asked Jeremiah, not knowing what evil he had committed.

"Don't you even recognize the woman you claim to want to get hitched to?" asked the father of the youngster standing in the wagon, as the men looked on in amazement.

Jeremiah looked up again, long and hard, and the boy looked at him.

"Sabine?" exclaimed Jeremiah loudly.

"Every inch my daughter," said Royce. "Almost, that is."

"I had nothin' to do with this, Cap'n Royce," replied Jeremiah.

"He didn't, Pa. I come on my own 'cause I know he'll git one of them Injun women and he won't come home. I won't let that happen!"

"He won't get that far, gal," said her father. "He and you will high tail it right back down to the tradin' post tomorrow mornin'."

"Pa, ain't you got no sense? He takes me back home he always wonder what he missed. He always wish he could o' gone all the way out there. I'm stayin' and goin' with both of you."

Royce thought for a moment and realized that her logic was precisely correct. She was his

daughter, for sure. He knew that Jeremiah was a young man who still needed this adventure. Sabine was a total match for Jeremiah and him both...a chip off the old block, she was. He turned back to face the whole crew.

"Jeremiah, you touch that gal 'fore you're hitched I'll turn you over to the Injuns first camp we come to. That goes for each one of you jackasses. You even look cockeyed at her you'll end up bein' fun for the squaws. Bored squaws make fun last a long time. You want that?"

A loud buzz of "no" came from the men. They knew, every one of them, what it meant to be fun for the squaws, and they knew that Cap'n Royce would do as he threatened. No one of them would touch hide nor hair of his daughter.

"When can you hitch us, Pa?" Sabine asked quietly.

"We reach home camp Chief, he'll hitch you. Until then you two keep away from each other."

"How long will that be, Pa?" asked Sabine.

"Gal, don't push me. I can still turn you over my knee. You done put our crew in danger, so if I was you, I'd stay right back there with Jimbo. You heah? We got 'bout twelve more days 'til we got close to the foothills. We'll be passin' Injun camps when we hit 'em."