

A
Boy
& *his*
Gun[©]

by R. Scott McCoy

This is an original short story and has
never appeared elsewhere.

Blazing! Adventures Magazine

Publishers
2007-2008

New York

The sky was so bright and blue it hurt the boy's eyes and blurred his vision. There was not a cloud in the sky to block his view of the birds that circled overhead. The boy counted five. His stomach hurt and his mouth was dry, but he couldn't make himself get off the ground. In the end, it was the ants that got him to move from his hiding spot.

The boy stood and brushed them off while he walked to the edge of the bluff that overlooked his home. He could see his mother's hair moving across the back of her dress, but that was all that moved below. The boy's name had been Jacob, but all those who had ever called him that were now gone. He would pick a new name, but not yet. He would know when.

The boy walked down the gentle slope like he had a hundred times before and up to the body of his father. The boy who had been called Jacob pulled the arrow out of his father and cleaned off the blood. He would collect all of the arrows and return them in kind. The Indians had come out of nowhere, and that is where they returned, leaving the boy who had been called Jacob alone in the world.

When he had collected and cleaned all of the arrows, he went inside and packed his father's saddlebags with what clothes and food he could find. The Indians had not left much, but they also had not searched well. His father thought no one knew he had the gun. The boy, sick one Sunday years ago, stayed home with his father while the rest of the family went to church. He had been feverish, but he remembered the spot under his parent's bed from where his father had taken out the gun. His father had put the belt around his waist and drawn the gun many times from its holster. His father's hand moved so fast that Jacob couldn't track the movement, but he heard the click of the hammer falling over and over again on empty chambers.

If his older brothers had known, they would have both wanted the gun, but now he was alone and the gun was his. It took him a few minutes to dig through the hard packed earth to the box below. He used a knife from the kitchen and felt guilty for ruining his mother's fine silverware; she would have tanned his hide. The earth gave up the box grudgingly, and the boy brushed it clean before he set it on his parent's bed. He washed and dried his hands before going back to the box. His hands shook as he opened

the lid. The smell of oil and leather filled his nose. There was a large rag the boy removed to reveal the leather, lead and iron that would become his life.

The belt was far too large for him, so he slung it over his shoulder, which put the gun near his hand where he could draw it. He pulled out the pistol and almost dropped it, surprised by the weight. His father had made it look so easy. The wood grips were worn smooth and were the color of dried blood. The dark metal of the barrel had deep swirls that shifted in the light. It was beautiful.

The boy tried to pull the hammer back and failed. He used both thumbs and was rewarded with a triple click. He went back outside and walked up to the large birds that had stopped circling in favor of what had soaked into the ground. They squawked at him as he approached. They would not take wing as long as there was easy food and no threat.

The grim faced boy raised his father's gun and aimed for the nearest bird. He pulled the trigger and the revolver bucked out of his right hand and knocked him back on his ass. The birds flew up a few feet then settled back to their feast. The boy brushed himself off, picked up the gun and re-cocked it. It was easier the second time and he held it tight with both hands and stepped closer to the nearest bird. He held the gun steady and squeezed the trigger until it bucked in his hands. This time he held on, and when the smoke cleared, he saw there was a dead vulture on the ground next to the body of his Sister. Four more shots and all of the scavengers were dead; the boy was alone once more.

The wind blew from the west and he faced into it and let the breeze dry his eyes. His family had come from the east and both his parents had said many times that there was nothing worth seeing in that direction. The grass in front of him was dry and yellow and stretched as far as he could see. Through it was a trail beaten down by the passing of ten horses. The boy followed the trail, leaving his name and family behind.

He did not look back.

Grey Wolf threw another log on the fire and rotated his spitted rabbits. It had been a long ride and he and his men were tired.

"Something is spooking the horses," Kills Many said.

Grey wolf looked up at him and his friend Water Snake and wondered for the hundredth time how he had managed to partner up with two Dakota warriors. There were too many whites in the land of his fathers and now it seemed any enemy of the whites were now his friends, or at least companions.

"It is nothing," Grey Wolf said, "probably a coyote."

A deafening blast of fire lanced out from the darkness and Water Snake was thrown back off his feet. Grey Wolf drew his revolver and fired into the darkness where the flash had come from and started to get up. There was another flash farther to his right and he heard Kills Many scream. He ran sideways and fired blindly, trying to get to his horse and away from the firelight. He heard one more shot and felt a bullet whiz past his head. He ducked low and sprinted for his stallion. Grey Wolf leapt on his horse, pulled the reigns free and spun toward the flats. There was another flash directly in front of him and pain shot through his chest as he fell to the ground.

A small figure leaned over him, no larger than a boy. The shape was backlit by the full moon and Grey Wolf could see the shape of an arrow in the small hand.

"You killed my family," the boy said, "and now I kill you."

Grey Wolf watched the boy shove the arrow into his belly, but he could not feel it.

The boy who called himself Gabriel looked down at the Dead Pawnee. He had expected to feel something as he plunged the first of his ten arrows into the man, but he felt nothing except the shooting pain in his leg. He went back to the fire and looked into the faces of the other two. He didn't think either of them were one of the ten, and now he was sure. The smell of the rabbit made his mouth water, it had been two days since he had eaten. He searched the men for weapons, money and supplies and loaded up the best horse before going back to eat.

Gabriel was warm and felt at peace. He could hear an angel sing and thought death was not so bad. There was a cool wet something on his forehead and he opened his eyes and saw an angel.

"You're one lucky boy, you should be dead." A man said from the door.

Gabriel tried to croak out something but the girl put her finger on his lips.

"Don't try to speak, you need your rest," she said.

"Yup," her father said, "if Jessica hadn't found you on the edge of our spread, you'd be dead for sure by now."

"Leave him be daddy, there's plenty of time for talk later when he gets his strength back."

Gabriel had never seen anyone so beautiful in his short life. He looked down and saw his leg was bandaged but other than that he was naked under the sheets. He looked up to see Jessica blush and turn away. She must be near fourteen, same as him, but she looked younger. Gabriel slept.

"You don't have to go. Daddy said you could stay on and earn your keep." Jessica said.

"I'm sorry Jess, it's the first thing I've wanted in five years, but I can't. I made a promise and I have to keep it."

Gabriel waved to Mr. Anderson then turned his horse north. His chest ached worse than his leg as he rode off. He didn't look back.

The snow stung the young man's face as he rode through the dawn. Gabriel swayed gently from side to side as his horse stepped carefully over the rough terrain. He could see small wisps of smoke rising from the camp ahead. The two sentries hadn't put

up much of a fight and had made even less noise. He didn't want to kill more people than necessary. He had seven arrows left, and his information put one of the ten in this village.

He steered well clear of the corral and entered the camp from the back, keeping a ridge to his front and a stretch of birch to his right. The snow crunched loud in his ears, but he knew from experience that the noise didn't carry more than a few feet. He dismounted and tied his horse to a sapling. He removed one of the seven remaining arrows and slid it into a small quiver strapped to his back. He checked his guns. There were two identical Colt 45 caliber revolvers with four and three quarter inch barrels that rested in a double rig synched around his waist. He had a second, old worn belt wrapped across his chest. In it was his father's old Navy Colt black powder pistol. He covered it with a blanket from his saddlebag to protect the powder while he checked the loads. They were dry and ready for work.

He heard a twig break to his right and his hands were filled with iron before the echo faded. A small, very scared boy froze in the process of hauling his doeskin britches up. Gabriel re-holstered his left pistol and put one finger to his lips, suggesting silence was preferred at the moment. The boy stared, but made no noise. Gabriel moved toward the nearest tent. There were at least fifteen, but the man he was looking for marked his tent with a symbol that he remembered well from the man's horse. Another forty feet and he saw the Pawnee tribal mark he was looking for.

Gabriel slid the arrow out of its sheath and eased open the flap of the tent. There was enough light from the weak winter sun to show the silhouettes of two forms covered in a blanket. He stepped inside and moved next to the man. He pulled back the blanket and laid the arrowhead against the Pawnee's skin just below his ribcage. The older man opened his eyes and stared into the pale face of death. He knew this face. He had seen this man kill his friends and he had barely escaped and since then, this face had filled his dreams.

"Who are you?" The Pawnee warrior asked.

"A boy you should have killed years ago," Gabriel said as he slid the arrowhead into the man's heart. The woman woke up and took in a breath to scream but the young

man pointed his revolver at her and shook his head. The Pawnee twitched one last time then lay still. Gabriel kept his revolver on the woman and exited the tent. Once clear, he ran for his horse as the new widow's screams woke the camp.

He did not look back.

The saloon was loud with cowhands letting loose after a long cattle drive. The money passed hands quickly and none of the ladies stayed downstairs for long. Tom looked at his cards for the tenth time then back into the eyes of the man called Gabriel. He looked down at the stack of chips that recently had been his, then back into the eyes again. They were hard eyes that betrayed no emotion, except perhaps boredom. His face was harder than his eyes and had a scar that ran from his temple down past the edge of his mouth, pale and jagged on his otherwise tanned face. Tom looked back at his cards again and swore under his breath.

"I see you and raise you five." Tom said.

The old cowboy to his right tossed in his card and sat back in his chair. Gabriel tossed in his chips.

"I call," Gabriel said, "what have you got boy?"

Tom dropped his two pair, kings over nines with a smile and started to pull in the pot. Gabriel tossed his heart flush on top of the stack and Tom felt like he'd been kicked in the gut. He looked up to curse the man's luck but Gabriel was a blur of motion.

The saloon doors opened and Gabriel felt nine years old again. The man looked much older than he remembered and dressed like a cowhand, but he was definitely the last of the ten.

Gabriel watched as the man scanned the room and stopped when their eyes met. The man had a gun slung low on his right hip. Gabriel's throat was dry and his hand was wet. He could smell prairie grass and hear his mother's screams as the man came

through the crowd toward him. When he was ten feet away, Gabriel looked at him down the sight of the old Navy Colt. The people in the saloon scattered in all directions, but soon headed out the exits, leaving the two men alone.

"I'm tired of dreaming of death and looking over my shoulder," the Pawnee said. "If I am to die, let it be today, with my boots and not lying in my bed like an old woman."

Gabriel looked down at the arrow then back at the man, "I carry your own death back to you. Do you want it from my father's gun or from your arrow?"

The Pawnee nodded, "I sowed my own death that day and since then I have died a thousand deaths. I only meant to kill your father. I chose my companions poorly. You need to know that your father was not always a farmer. There was a time when he took what he wanted with the gun in your hand. He took more than money from me before you were born."

Gabriel looked at his father's gun and heard the truth in the man's words. He looked back up and saw a knife in the man's hands. He looked into his eyes as the Pawnee shoved the blade into his own chest. Gabriel ran forward and caught the man before he fell.

"Why?" he said, looking into the old warrior's eyes.

"I told you, I am tired of death and deserve much worse."

Gabriel remembered all the people he had killed getting his revenge. So many more than the ten he had gone after that day so long ago. He wondered if any of their sons would come for him some day.

"I forgive you," he said. He lowered the warrior to the floor, grabbed his few possessions and walked outside.

He looked back at the man and thought he could still smell prairie grass but the screams had stopped.

The boy's arm hurt where he had fallen, but it was worth it as long as he got out

of church. His mother had taken his younger sister and brother and left him home alone with his father. The boy's name was Jacob after his father who was out feeding the livestock. Jacob Junior looked at the arrow and knife that was mounted over the mantle above the fireplace. His father never spoke of it, or the guns that were buried under his bed. His father didn't think anyone knew about them, but he had seen late one night them over a year ago. His father had taken them out and practiced with them. He was so fast, faster than Jacob thought a man could be. His father put them back and covered the box with dirt, then cried. He had never seen his father cry before or since. Jacob wanted the guns. He wanted to be fast like his father.

Why did it take so long to become a man?

end

