



## Rachel and the Hired Gun

By Elaine Levine

My first book, Rachel and the Hired Gun, is being published by Kensington Books in January of 2009. I've found often as a reader--and always as a writer--when I fall in love with the characters from a story, it's hard to let them go. While we get to see Sager and Rachel again in most of my Men of Defiance stories, I thought it would be fun to give you snapshots of their back story through a series of shorts or "clips". These are scenes that never made it into the finished story, Rachel and the Hired Gun. They're rough character sketches or anecdotal events that didn't belong in the book itself. I'm releasing them as a serialized prequel to my first book. I hope you enjoy them!

--Elaine ([elvine@elainelevine.com](mailto:elvine@elainelevine.com))

Elaine Levine is a wonderfully fresh and original voice in western romance. RACHEL AND THE HIRED GUN is full of fast-paced action and powerful emotions. I loved it!

--Bestselling author, Joan Johnston

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### Clip 1: Sager's Beginning

Before he was a hired gun for Rachel's father, before he was even Sager, he made a vow of vengeance...



Eyes of the Wolf stood as straight as the ropes binding him allowed. The hot summer wind dried the blood around his neck and wrists, gluing his flesh to the rope restraints. He looked at his surroundings, intent on escaping. His captors had tried everything to prevent him from running. First they took his moccasins, then they bound him, and finally they stopped giving him water.

They stood about him now, slouching and inattentive in the heat of the ranch yard. A man came out of the house, tall, with dark hair graying at the temples. Sid Taggart. He exchanged words with one of his men, then shoved him aside and walked to the edge of the porch. Sid Taggart stared at him a long moment. No one moved. No one spoke.

Then he stepped hesitantly off the porch and barked an order at one of his men. Eyes of the Wolf made out the words “cut” and “rope”. The man argued. Impatient, Sid Taggart unsheathed his own knife. Eyes of the Wolf didn’t look at the knife, didn’t take his eyes from his mother’s murderer. Why he’d been brought here, he didn’t understand. But if it was his time to die, he would do so like a man.

Sid Taggart’s hands trembled as he sliced the taut rope that bound Eyes of the Wolf’s feet to his hands and neck, keeping him hunched over. Sid Taggart’s knuckles dug into his raw flesh as he sawed at the rope. Freed, Eyes of the Wolf slowly straightened. His back spasmed, protesting the new position. At fourteen summers, Eyes of the Wolf was taller than most of the boys in his village. He was almost taller than his brother, Blue Thunder.

He didn’t like being shorter than his enemy.

Sid Taggart stared at him a long while, his eyes speaking lies that could not be believed. His hand came up to touch Eyes of the Wolf’s cheek. Eyes of the Wolf slapped it away, glaring his hatred at the man.

“Good God. You are my boy. You are the very image of your mother.” Sid Taggart wept. What kind of man weeps before his enemy? Eyes of the Wolf wondered. “They did find you. You’re finally home.” Sid Taggart’s words made no sense. He’d been home when the murdering band of white savages slaughtered his mother and injured his sister, shooting them in cold blood. Murderers who belonged to this man.

Sid Taggart cupped Eyes of the Wolf’s face. Eyes of the Wolf jerked away. He took a step back. And another. Then spun on his heel and ran barefoot across the ranch yard. The gravel and dried weed stalks hurt his scabbed feet, slowing him. One of his captors caught him and knocked him down. The man gripped his neck and slammed his head against the ground, shoving his face into the dirt and gravel. Dehydrated and weak, Eyes of the Wolf hadn’t much fight left in him. He went still. Resisting was pointless. For now.

He wouldn’t always be surrounded, watched. He would wait for that time.

The man was suddenly yanked from his back. Eyes of the Wolf pushed himself up and turned over. He tried to spit out the grit, but his mouth was too dry. Sid Taggart and the man who had tackled Eyes of the Wolf shouted at each other. They spoke too fast. He couldn’t make sense

of their words. Something moved into Eyes of the Wolf’s line of vision, blocking the sun. He squinted to focus.

A white buffalo.

Blue Thunder had seen its coming. A white buffalo will stand between you and your enemy. Peace will follow when you hear the truth, he had said. This had long been foretold, but Eyes of the Wolf had forgotten it until now.

“Who is he, father?” Eyes of the Wolf heard the white buffalo say. He felt the hairs crawl up the back of his neck. Animals do not talk with white man’s words. The scene before him blurred. He blinked, but his eyes were too dry for that to do any good.

“He is your brother, son,” Sid Taggert answered.

Son. Eyes of the Wolf tried to focus again. The white buffalo moved toward him, resolving himself into a boy with hair the color of sand, skin like mother’s milk. It was a wonder he could live, being so white. But he wasn’t entirely colorless. His eyes were the gray of a stormy sky. If he was the white buffalo Blue Thunder had envisioned, he was a portent not of peace but of vindication.

A humming started in Eyes of the Wolf’s head. The song of his ancestors. They were coming for him, coming to steal him from his enemy. Darkness shrouded Eyes of the Wolf’s vision. As he surrendered to it, he wondered how it was that a murderer could have made a white buffalo child.

No matter. One day, Eyes of the Wolf vowed, he would kill Sid Taggert. He would avenge his mother and sister.

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That’s the end of Clip 1. Email me at [elvine@elainelevine.com](mailto:elvine@elainelevine.com) to let me know what you thought of it! Check out my [website](#) for more clips and news about my upcoming releases!

Until next time...over and out!

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