



Rachel and the Hired Gun

By Elaine Levine

This is the second installment of my serialized prequel to Rachel and the Hired Gun. Be sure to visit my website (www.elainelevine.com) for the entire prequel!

--Elaine (ellevine@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 2: Son of Bear Talker and Brother of Blue Thunder

Eyes of the Wolf leaves Sid Taggart's home...

Eyes of the Wolf paced the circumference of his hot, airless room, feeling the walls inch inward with every pass he made. The hard structure of Sid Taggart's dwelling blocked the breeze and muted the sounds from outside. It was a bad place to be.

He spent hours each day pacing, conditioning himself to walk on his injured feet. Though they had healed since he'd been brought here, he had to be ready for the long walk home.

It was a journey that would start tonight.

Sid Taggart's men left his door unlocked for the first time since his arrival last week. He eased his door open, revealing a long hallway with many doors. No lamps were lit. The only light came from the crisp blue moonlight behind him. He stepped into the hallway, distrustful of the shadows. His mind whispered every ghost story he'd ever heard. If they lived anywhere, ghosts surely lived here, in the home of a man like Sid Taggart.



Eyes of the Wolf made it to the stairs and slipped down them silently with his careful hunter’s stride. His senses were tuned to sounds before him, behind him, traps that would bind him to this dwelling forever.

The lower part of Sid Taggart’s house had many rooms with much furniture. He wondered why white men couldn’t just sit on the floor. A dim light glowed around a corner ahead. He heard women’s voices speaking in Spanish. Eyes of the Wolf knew Spanish better than he knew English. Padre Xavier Francisco had taught all the people of the village his language so that he could tell them stories about the white man’s God. The English that Eyes of the Wolf knew came from Albert Sager, the trapper who traded with his village. Albert Sager was a much less frequent visitor, and so Eyes of the Wolf’s English was weaker than his Spanish.

Eyes of the Wolf paused outside the door where the women worked. He could leave right now, but he needed a knife if he was to survive the trip home. And he was hungry. The smells coming from inside the room reminded him how little he’d eaten over the past week. It would be a while before he would be a safe enough distance away that he could stop to hunt.

He would eat, find a knife, then leave.

A quick glance inside the room assured him the women were alone. The young one saw him first. She gasped, startling the old woman. The girl was perhaps his age, perhaps younger. “It is him, Maria! It is the master’s son!” she hissed.

“He will not hurt you, Rosa. Stand very still,” the old woman counseled.

Eyes of the Wolf glared at the old woman. It was the same advice he gave children when a stray dog showed up in his village. He walked into the room, his eyes on the frightened girl. Her hands shook, rattling the load of empty platters she carried. He walked up to her, close enough to smell her fear and prowled around her in a slow circuit.

He was not a dog.

The old woman moved to a steaming pot. That caught his attention. “Enough, muchacho. You will stop scaring Rosa. Come, take this bowl of stew. You must be hungry. You are too skinny.”

Eyes of the Wolf crossed the room to the large black iron block where the old woman stirred a pot. He leaned forward and looked into its bubbling contents. He could not remember the last meal he’d had that smelled so good.

Yes, he could. His mother was the best cook in the village. But she would never again prepare a meal for him, or anyone, thanks to Sid Taggart. The old woman handed him a full bowl and

motioned to him with her fingers, pinching them together and bringing them to her mouth to indicate that he should eat. He straightened, insulted she thought he didn’t understand her.

“I am Eyes of the Wolf, son of Bear Talker and brother to Blue Thunder. I speak your language and that of my enemy, Sid Taggert.”

The old woman drew herself up to the fullest height her rotund body allowed, which wasn’t quite to his shoulder. “I am Maria. I keep this house. You will respect me and all who serve here, muchacho--including Rosa.”

Eyes of the Wolf didn’t like being reprimanded. He glared at her, intending to out stare her, but his stomach picked an inopportune time to growl. He gave her the barest of nods. “I will eat your food.”

Eyes of the Wolf took his bowl to the table. The girl brought him a board with a loaf of bread—and a knife. Disliking her persistent fear, he ignored her. She cut a chunk of bread and handed it to him. He took it without looking at her. Soon she and Maria were moving about the room, busy once again with their chores while he ate.

He pulled the bread board toward him. The knife was sharp and would be useful on his journey home. When both women left the room, he slipped it into a sheath sewn in the calf of his pants. When they still had not returned, he took the remaining loaf of bread and walked out of the room.

He moved through the dark house and out the front door, unchallenged. It was easy. Too easy. Where were Sid Taggert’s men? Why wasn’t there anyone to stop him? He walked to the closest corral that held horses. He assessed each of the half dozen geldings, surprised they were all in good health. Any one of them could carry him from here fast. He was glad he wouldn’t have to walk.

One already wore a harness. He found a rope and attached it to the harness, then opened the gate and walked the horse out of the corral. His heart beat grew loud, filling his ears with its noise. Soon he would be free to mourn his mother and return to his people.

He took a handful of mane and vaulted onto the horse’s back. Gentle pressure from his legs set his new mount in a quiet walk across the ranch yard. He kept that pace for a while, knowing the noise of a gallop would raise an alert. And then they flew into the night, heading northwest.

Heading home.

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That's the end of Clip 2. Email me at ellevine@elainelevine.com to let me know what you thought of it! Check out my [website](#) for the rest of the prequel and news about my upcoming releases!

Until next time...over and out!

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