



## Rachel and the Hired Gun

By Elaine Levine

I hope you are enjoying this serialized prequel to my first book, Rachel and the Hired Gun (Kensington Books -- January 2009). Drop me a note to let me know what you think of these clips!

--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 3: There's No Going Home

Eyes of the Wolf mourns his mother's death...

Night was falling. No one had yet come after him. Eyes of the Wolf ground-tethered his horse near a wide patch of grass by the bank of a narrow stream. He bathed, then took his knife and climbed to the top of a nearby sandstone bluff.

Sitting cross-legged on the ground, he stared at the softening vista as the sun behind him slowly



set. Puffy clouds moved slowly across the sky, washed in brilliant hues of pink and orange and peach. His mother loved the corners of the day—dawn and sunset. She said they were gifts from Our Father. Every morning and every evening she would lift her arms to embrace the colors of the sky, thanking Him for remembering her.

Tears began to stream down Eyes of the Wolf's face. He lifted his arms as his mother had done so many times, and the song of his sorrow began. His wails were loud and raw. They filled the canyon below, echoing and dissipating into

the distance. Perhaps the wind carried them back to his enemy--it didn't matter. Eyes of the Wolf cared only that his mother's spirit hear his sorrow.

After a while, he had no more words to sing. The color had left the sky; night had come. He thought of his years in the village, remembering things about his mother--and his sister, too, who was so gravely injured during his abduction. He picked up his knife and sliced a chunk of his hair off, then dropped fistfuls of it into the wind. He repeated this as his mind moved through each story.

When dawn lightened the eastern sky, he had no more hair to trim and no more stories to remember. He had given his mother's spirit his sorrow, but the void her absence left in his soul he would carry with him always. At least she was with his father and the Great Spirits. At least neither of them was alone now.

He went back down to his horse. He dunked the dried loaf of bread in the stream to moisten it, then ate it and resumed his journey home.

Two days later, as he crossed a vast plain of sweet grass, a rider appeared on the horizon. Eyes of the Wolf recognized his brother's horse. The hills undulated in gentle slopes. He descended one, then moved up another. As he neared the top, he saw warriors from his village fan out to flank Blue Thunder. His brother's ravaged hair told of his mourning. It was hard to look at him.

Eyes of the Wolf pulled up facing the men. They didn't wear war paint, which made their purpose in riding with Blue Thunder unclear. Surely his brother was riding for revenge?

"I have come home. I will join you, my brother," Eyes of the Wolf declared.

"No."

No? "We have our mother's death to avenge."

"Our sister, too, died from her wounds that day. But we will not seek more blood," Blue Thunder said. "The deaths of the four are at hand. One will be bitten by the rattler. One will drink too much of the white man's fire water and will fall from a cliff. One will be shot in a gambling disagreement. The fourth will have a riding accident and be dragged to his death. It is foretold. I come to witness these deaths."

"And what of Sid Taggart? He sent those men."

"The one responsible will fight his own mind and lose. You yourself will come to tell me of this event many years from now."

So. There was no vengeance to be had. This did not sit well with Eyes of the Wolf, but he knew better than to disobey his brother. Blue Thunder was a powerful shaman, and his visions were never wrong. “Then I will return to the village now.”

“No.”

A wrinkle of fear knifed through Eyes of the Wolf’s skin. “No?”

“The village is no longer your home.”

Blue Thunder’s calm words bore a finality that terrified Eyes of the Wolf. “It is my home,” he countered, embarrassed by the passion in his voice.

“The People are no longer your people.”

“They are my people. It is my home.” To be a person without people was to be dead while you still breathed. It was the thing Eyes of the Wolf feared above all else.

Blue Thunder held up a hand, forestalling further argument. “If you go back, Sid Taggart will send more men.”

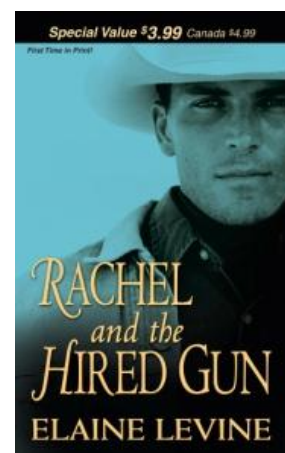
“I will kill Sid Taggart,” Eyes of the Wolf vowed, making a violent slashing motion against his throat.

“Then more men will come. It will not end unless it does so, now--with you.”

Eyes of the Wolf shook his head. “Don’t do this, Blue Thunder. Don’t send me away. I will be alone.”

“Your destiny lies among the white men. It is time for you to meet it.” His brother’s face revealed no emotion. No regret. No anger. Nothing. Blue Thunder kned his pony and moved down the hill in the direction Eyes of the Wolf had come from. His braves stayed behind. A stiff breeze swept through the valley, not quite a wind, but loud enough to make the mournful sound Eyes of the Wolf felt in his soul.

He rode his horse along the line of the men, looking at each one. They were men he’d known all his life. Honorable men. Strong warriors. None of them looked at him. He had become invisible to them. He could ride beyond them and return to the village. They would not stop him. They did not need to--he would be invisible to the villagers as well. Dead, but not mourned.



He turned his horse and looked for his brother, but he was gone. When he looked back to the braves, they were already riding away.

Eyes of the Wolf was alone on the prairie, a man without a people.

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That’s the end of Clip 3. 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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