



## Rachel and the Hired Gun

By Elaine Levine

This is the fifth installment in my serialized prequel to my first book, Rachel and the Hired Gun. You can catch the earlier installments on my website, [www.elainelevine.com](http://www.elainelevine.com) or on [www.MySpace.com/ElaineLevine](http://www.MySpace.com/ElaineLevine). I'd love to hear from you--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!

--New York Times bestselling author, Joan Johnston

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### Clip 5: Defiance

The Town Gives Sager Its Own Warm Welcome...

Wind sheared a layer of snow from the overhang above, dusting Sager's neck with ice crystals. He crossed his arms and braced his legs as he leaned against the roof support, refusing to acknowledge the cold as he glared at the door to Jim Kessler's general store. Sid Taggert and Logan were inside, selecting gifts for the holiday they would celebrate in a couple weeks.

They had tried to get him to join them, but Sager disliked being in buildings. What he wanted most wasn't something anyone could give him; he wanted his life back--



his mother and his sister and his People. His vision blurred. He turned to look up at the brilliant blue sky, its color vivid against the fresh snow blanketing Defiance.

“Well, lookee there,” a man’s voice sneered, drawing Sager’s attention to a trio of the sheriff’s men heading his way. “Guess Jim don’t let crazed Injuns in his store either.”

“Hear Joe was mighty shook up after his run-in with the breed at the barber shop,” another of the men said. “He’s been shaking ever since. A man can’t get a good shave there no more. I reckon we ought to return the favor.”

Sager remembered that day; it wasn’t one he was especially proud of. Taggart had brought him into town and left him at the barber’s for a haircut shortly after his encounter with Blue Thunder. Sager hadn’t understood at first what was expected of him. He sat in the barber’s odd chair and turned it around a few times, enjoying its strange mechanics. Joe, the barber, made him sit still and started clipping his hair. Sager stopped him. His hair was the way it was to show his mourning. He hadn’t wanted it trimmed.

Joe didn’t take his response the right way. He’d summoned a couple men to restrain Sager. That’s when Sager broke. The next thing anyone knew, he had Joe on the floor with a straight razor at his throat.

No one ever again attempted to trim his hair.

Sager eyed the sheriff’s men as they came up the boardwalk and fanned out around him. He straightened, regretting the white man’s coat he wore. It was warmer than a blanket, true, but a whole lot less flexible for situations like this. He had a knife in a sheath at his hip that Taggart had given him. It was the one gift he’d accepted from his mother’s murderer, one he would likely use to end Taggart’s life, when the time came.

He flexed his hands, ready to pull the knife. He’d learned much of the way white men fought from the many scuffles he’d had at Taggart’s ranch. Though three against one were bad odds, Sager didn’t strike first. He deflected the first punch and struck the throat of one of his attackers. But the other two were on him quickly. In no time, they had him down. The third kicked at him, jamming his cowboy boot into Sager’s side.

Sager wrapped his arms around the ribs of the one who was trying to strangle him, rolling him over to use as shield against the kicks of the other. He unsheathed his knife and shoved the blade into the man’s groin, just far enough to cause him a little pain and interrupt the choke hold he had on Sager’s neck.

Pinning him this way was the only thing Sager could think of to hold the other men at bay.

“Jaysus! Stop! Goddammit, stop!” the man screamed against the hold Sager had on his Adam’s apple. “He’s got a goddamned knife in my balls,” he shouted to his friends, making them pause,

one with his fist raised to batter at Sager's head, the other readying for another kick. In the quiet that followed, the two took note of the third man's precarious position.

It was at that moment that Sid Taggart hurried out of the general store. He shoved his way through the suddenly still men. Sager looked up at him, wondering if now would be the time to kill the man who claimed to be his father.

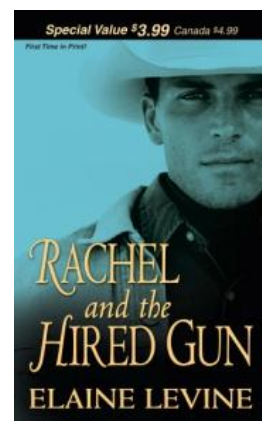
Taggart began cursing. He shoved one of the men off the boardwalk. The other quickly retreated. The third lay prone, utterly still beneath Sager's knife. "Son-of-a-bitch, Taggart! Call your breed off me!" he squealed.

Taggart crouched down, coming level with Sager, who watched him warily. Slowly, as if there were something feral about Sager, Taggart reached a hand out to his shoulder. "Let him go, son. It's over."

Sager drew a ragged breath as he stared into his enemy's eyes. He released his grip on the man's throat at about the same time he withdrew his knife. The man leapt to his feet, cupping himself with one hand and shoving a finger at Taggart with the other. "You better keep that crazy Injun outta town, Taggart. Keep him in a cage if you have to."

Taggart lurched at the man, backing him into a support post and leaning against him. "He's not an Indian, Hank. How many times do I have to tell you? He's my son. His mother was my wife. My white wife. He's having a hard time adjusting to his new situation. You and your boys need to lay off him. Give him a chance to settle in."

The man named Hank pushed free. He twisted his head to the left and then the right, then shrugged his shoulders. "We were just walkin' by, Taggart. We didn't do nothing to him. Ain't a body safe in this town when he's around. Leave him home next time you come this way."



Taggart sighed as Hank rejoined his friends. He grabbed the door handle to the Kessler's shop and opened the door. "Get inside, boy."

Sager wiped his blade on the sleeve of his coat, then sheathed it. He crossed his arms, braced his legs, and stayed right where he was, glaring at his enemy.

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That's the end of Clip 5. 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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