

*Within the sacred hills known as Medicine Mounds in the land of the Comanche there lived an evil spirit. Hurlled from the heavens for traitorous longings, he became an instrument of punishment for those who hated too much. Cursed to sleep away centuries, he awaited the times when hatred and strife awoke his spirit, and murder bestowed human form.*

## DREAMS OF AN EAGLE

by  
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### Prologue

Night Stalker roused into the heated mystery of eternal night. Still trapped within his mounds, he could see the sky above through a small opening at the precipice of his tomb. Soon the hatred would release his spirit from the cavern in which he slept. Soon, but not yet.

He contemplated past glories. A stunning, gory battle on the plains right below between the Spanish and the Comanche. An equally entrancing bit of bloodshed between the Mexicans and the Texans. And not so very long ago, a smaller battle between the Comanche and the people of a little place called Bakerstown. That last one had not been so stunning, but the hatred between the people had been exquisite. He inhaled deeply, catching a whiff of the past, then laughed his joy. Hatred between

opposing forces always smelled the same.

*Lovely.*

The chant rolled across the midnight sky. He flinched and snarled as the words swirled around him like a fiery wind, scalding his nostrils with the scent of goodness.

“When the white eagle joins with the white woman who dreams of an eagle giving up all for love, their belief in the power of love will strengthen the white eagle’s might. Only when they face what they fear the most and allow love not hate to guide them, will White Eagle triumph over the stalker of the night and save the innocent from destruction.”

He had heard the words before, had thwarted them time and time again. Still the prophecy continued, handed down from Comanche medicine man to Comanche medicine man throughout the generations, keeping their hope alive as they awaited the coming of the savior they called White Eagle. And their faith had been rewarded. The savior had been born. This time when Night Stalker gained freedom he would make certain he ended their hopes once and for all. The puny human’s savior and his woman would die--slowly.

First he must gain freedom, and to do that, the humans must renew their hatred and their strife. Until then, he would sleep.

Weariness assaulted him; awareness slipped away. The words of the ancient prophecy followed Night Stalker down, down, down into the infinite void.

## Chapter 1

*She sat atop the highest of four cone shaped hills. Mist floated about her, cooling her cheeks with dew. An eagle soared through the blue sky. Not a single cloud marred the azure perfection. The only white in this sky existed upon the eagle.*

*A white eagle. Did they exist in reality? Or merely in her dreamworld? What did it matter? The glory of the stark white bird made her catch her breath in wonder. How could anything on this earth be so beautiful?*

*She reached out her hands toward the sky, wanting to touch the beauty, to experience the strength. The eagle circled, lower, lower, ever closer. She could feel the brush of its feathers against her fingertips--a whisper, a promise, nothing more. If she could just touch him she would find joy again on this earth, but he hovered just out of her reach, as attracted to her as she to him, though he did not trust her enough to come closer.*

*The eagle looked into her eyes, and her hands dropped back to her sides. She knew him. Her soul and his were old friends. They would meet again.*

*Soon.*

*A shadow blocked the sun; she looked up. The shape shifted and twirled so fast she could not distinguish the silhouette's source. The white eagle remained poised above her. In his eyes lay the knowledge of approaching death, yet he did not turn to fight.*

*Thunder exploded, shaking the hills beneath her. Hail fell from the roiling, black sky. Evil chilled the mist and she shivered. Despair and hopelessness, deeper than she had ever known, washed over her and a sob escaped her lips.*

*The shadow came closer, bathed the white eagle in darkness, then lightning flared, streaking toward the white eagle, but still he did not fly away.*

*She tried to scream, but in the way of dreams no sound came from her straining throat and then –*

Genevieve McGuire came awake with a cry and a start into the black, pulsing solitude of her room. The cadence of fear in the beat of her heart and the harsh rasp of her breath were her sole companions in the tiny place where she rented a bed.

*Dear God, not another dream. Wasn't the last one enough?*

Genny lifted a shaking hand to her face, unsurprised to find her skin chilled with sweat, a typical reaction whenever she awoke from one of her prophetic dreams.

What had made her think her dreams of the future had ended with the last one? Because the truth of that dream had taken from her all that was good and right in her world? Because now she merely existed where before she had lived? Why should her devastating losses alter her cursed gift in any way?

While a child she had told her parents of her vivid dreams. At first they had laughed and patted her on the head. But when the dreams came true, their laughter had turned to horror. Her French mother and Irish father had sent for a priest to make Satan leave their little girl. The

man performed an exorcism, pronounced her clean of demons and left. That night Genny dreamed the priest's death, and by the time her mother sent a slave to check on the man the next morning, he was, indeed, dead.

Her parents' revulsion and the stares and whispers of the slaves would have been enough to make certain Genny no longer shared her visions with anyone, but once her mother told her of the horrible place insane people must live, Genny never spoke of dreams in any form again. Her parents convinced themselves she had stopped dreaming of the future, but she had not. She kept the future to herself.

Until she dreamed of Jamie and Peggy.

Genny shivered and pulled the thin quilt up to her chin. James McGuire. Dear God how she had loved that man. Enough to give up everything for him. When she had fallen in love with the Protestant minister with marked abolitionist leanings, her wealthy, slave-owning, Virginia family had been appalled. When she eloped, they disinherited her.

But she had given up only things to marry Jamie. She had gained love and laughter and their daughter, Peggy. Jamie was a gentle man, tolerant of everyone's weaknesses, firm in his belief that all men were created equal. Genny, always looked upon as different and strange, had lived most of her life alone despite a houseful of servants and parents who loved her, now relished days with a man who accepted everyone. She at last belonged somewhere and belonging felt better than she'd ever believed it could. The three of them lived a life of wonder, of blessed love and hope.

Genny had not, at first, told Jamie of her dreams. She had not experienced one for years when she'd met him and hoped those days were past. Then came the war. The hatred and the strife. The horrible divisions between families and friends that led to the separation of their section of Virginia into West Virginia.

Jamie led a secret life, she learned. One he had not shared with her. He was a conductor on the underground railroad, slipping slaves to freedom in Canada. Genny admired his courage and his conviction, but she feared the consequences of his actions.

Then she dreamed again. Genny swallowed the thickness in her throat at the memory, then tucked the recollection away at the back of her mind. She had survived the past four years without going insane by refusing to remember the worst of her dreams and what had happened after. She would continue to refuse, since she could not afford to remember.

She had shared her dream with Jamie, believing his tolerance of all people would extend to a tolerance of her gift, but she had been wrong. He had soothed her hysterics, then told her she gave power to her fears by believing in them. If she refused to believe, she would end their power over her, and the nightmares would stop. She had so wanted to believe in his words, to believe in Jamie. So instead of taking Peggy and running away, she had stayed--and made the biggest mistake of her life.

Had she made her dreams come true by believing in them? She lived with that guilt every day. No matter what she did, no matter whom she told or how she tried to change the future, what she dreamed happened.

Now the confusing, mystical dream of a white eagle. What did it mean? Sun then shadow. The promise of joy, then soul crushing loss and despair as deep as any she had ever known. This dream would come to pass. Just the thought made her stomach clutch in agony. She could not live through such loss again. This time she *would* go insane instead of flirting with the possibility. She had to do something to save herself.

Genny climbed out of her bed, shivering as the damp night air seeped through her long cloth nightdress, and lit the stub of candle on her nightstand. She opened the newspaper she had found while cleaning Virginia mansions for the Yankees--something she did in order to survive. There were few jobs for women, and even fewer for a woman known as "sad, crazy Genny, widow of that no account, abolitionist preacher." Instead of listening to the whispers of the taunts she heard each day, she read again the advertisement that had jumped out at her the moment she'd opened the paper earlier in the evening.

*Wanted: Unmarried woman of good background to teach school in Bakerstown, Texas. No prior experience necessary. Private house and board. Small salary. Apply to Jared Morgan, Bakerstown, Texas.*

The advertisement might have been written directly to her. Unmarried now, and forever as far as she was concerned, she met the first criteria and the second, as well. If she had one thing, she had a good background, no matter that her heritage lay in rubble, her parents dead and buried. She had been raised a lady, that would never change, no matter how many people in Virginia and West Virginia counted her crazy.

“But Texas?” Genny rolled the words around on her tongue.

Wild, untamed, dangerous. Could she bear to live there? The war coupled with her losses had left her weakened in more ways than one. Since the night her last dream had come true she had been unable to face implements of war--be they guns, knives, or fighting men--without a near uncontrollable need to retch. Now she thought to start a new life in a country that thrived on the very thing that sickened her.

What had happened to the bright young girl who had eloped with the love of her life, vowing to face life's challenges head on? Genny rubbed her hand over her face. That girl had died with Jamie and their daughter, leaving a pale reflection to live out a lonely existence.

Perhaps the very challenge of Texas would heal her. Perhaps if she left this place of horrible memories she could start anew. She had tried everything she could think of to prevent her dreams from coming true. Except for one thing--running away. She wasn't proud of her cowardness, but she had little choice.

Genny put pen to paper.

*March 25, 1868*

*Dear Mr. Morgan:*

\* \* \*

“Stage lit out for Bakerstown nigh onto an hour ago.” The ancient clerk at the stage stop spat a stream of spit and tobacco juice into the Dallas dust, narrowly missing Keenan Eagle's boots. The old man glanced into Keen's eyes and shrugged by way of apology. “I sold a ticket to the man you's lookin' for.”

"He got on the stage?"

"Yep. Watched him myself. He helped the two ladies in real nice like."

"I just bet he did." Dapper Dan Radway was nothing if not a gentleman. Too bad he was also a white slaver. "He was alone?" Keen persisted. "Neither of those women came in with him, did they?"

"No. Leastways not so's I could see." The old man squinted against the sun glaring behind Keen's head, then dipped low so he could see beneath the brim of Keen's battered trail hat. "Say, is you a Comanch?"

"Half," Keen snapped, hoping his tone would put a stop to the questions, but the old man was not one to be put off by a mere tone.

"Bounty hunter, are ya? And half Comanch." The man scratched the chest beneath a shirt as dirty as his fingernails. "You'd be the one called Eagle."

"Yeah, I'd be the one."

The old man quit scratching and grabbed his hand, pumping it up and down, nodding and smiling as if Keen had just admitted to being his best friend on the earth. "Well, why didn't you say so? You've got quite the reputation in Texas, son. Quite the reputation. They say you're out for justice not money. That true?"

Keen rescued his hand, then thumbed his hat in farewell. "They say a lot of things about me."

When Keen turned away, the man followed. "Yeah, they say you're the best bounty hunter in Texas. You never stop until you get your man."

"They're right." Keen swung up onto his horse and left the old man behind.

He should be used to the attention by now. In the six years since he'd become a bounty hunter he *had* earned a reputation. It was getting so he couldn't enter a town and not be recognized. He'd begun tucking his long, black hair beneath his hat to avoid some of the attention, but, eventually, someone always recognized him. He was the only half-breed Comanche bounty hunter in Texas, and though his skin was lighter than most Comanches and his face not so sharply defined as those of his father's people, he could not be taken for anything other than what he was--a man who did not belong in either of the two worlds that had begat him. Soon he would be unable to continue in the only world where he did belong, since every criminal on the run would know him on sight.

Keen sighed and pulled his horse to a stop in front of a sign that marked the road crossing just outside of Dallas. His horse snorted and stamped, eager to get on with the chase. Keen patted him on the neck and made nonsense noises to calm his old friend. Even his horse gave him away these days, a Comanche warhorse Keen had inherited upon his father's death. A deep and striking russet, the horse left an impression wherever they traveled. His father, Red Horse Warrior, had called the gelding *tuka+ekapit*<. Keen merely called him Red. Despite the attention the horse garnered, Keen could not bring himself to sell the animal. Red was all he had left of his father--except for memories.

*Memories.* He had spent the past six years on the run from them, and here he was almost right back where he had begun. Memories in the form of one word stared

him straight in the face.

*Bakerstown,* the sign read.

*Hatred, evil, death,* his mind whispered.

"Sarah," he said aloud.

The wind picked up and threw dust into his face. Keen blinked at the sting, which brought tears to his eyes. He should know better than to speak aloud the name of the dead. A true Comanche would never make such a mistake. A true white man would not even know the difference. But then Keen had never been considered a true anything.

Red shifted and twitched, anxious to get on down the trail--any trail. Keen looked back toward Dallas, then glanced longingly down a road that led to New Orleans. Music, whiskey, women who would make him forget for a little while everything he had, in truth, never forgotten.

The old man's words came back to him. *They say you always get your man.*

Keen thought of Dapper Dan Radway and the girl who had been stolen away from her family in Corpus Christi, then he urged his horse down the road that led to Bakerstown.

The wind swirled about him, ripe with dust and tears and the sound of chanting.

\* \* \*

Genny sat up with a start. Her entire body tingled with the incessant rumbling of the stage. That was nothing new. She had been traveling so long she heard wheels rolling even when they weren't.

Richmond to Lawrenceburg, Indiana on a stage. Indiana to St. Louis on a train. A steamer from St. Louis

south on the Mississippi River to New Orleans. Then a stage once more, west to Dallas, and, finally, this last stagecoach ride from Dallas to Bakerstown.

The driver slowed the horses and the stage jerked, sending a sharp slice of pain through her neck. Genny winced and rubbed at the sore spot. Stiff, every last inch of her. She glanced out the window. All that met her gaze were miles upon miles of brown grasses and flat land.

*North Texas. My new home.*

A flash of movement, the sound of hoofbeats, and she looked up into the face of a man who slowed his horse to keep pace with the stage. He threw a glance at the stage, his gaze meeting hers for a long, unsettling moment.

Dark eyes, black in color and mood, set in a bronzed face--a face as untamed and wild and beautiful as the eagle in her dream. Genny blinked at the memory, then shut the image away with her other unacceptable memories. She had vowed not to believe in this last dream, and maybe by not believing she could keep it from coming true. At the very least, she had left Virginia, putting distance between herself and the future she had dreamed of all those months ago.

Genny forced her attention back to the mysterious rider. He no longer stared at her but had turned his concentration to the road ahead. His hat, pulled low over his forehead, concealed the color of his hair. But from the slant of his high cheekbones and the slash of his strong nose, Genny knew beneath the hat lay hair as black as coal. The man was Indian. If not all, then at least a good

part.

He had not been with the stage when they pulled out of Dallas. Did he plan to rob them? Or murder them all?

A sudden shift of his body revealed a well-used pistol strapped to his hip. Genny's gaze locked on the gun and stayed there. Her stomach roiled and her vision clouded.

"Ma'am?"

Genny blinked. The Indian's lips had not moved. Not that she could have heard his voice above the rumbling of the wheels even if he had spoken. The voice had to have come from inside the stage. How long had she been staring at the gun and fighting the nausea?

Genny turned her head and met the concerned gaze of the man in the seat across from hers. Young, handsome, dressed as a gentleman, worry lurked in his blue eyes. She recalled him helping her and the other occupant of the stage, an elderly woman who snored lightly on the seat next to Genny, gallantly up the steps in Dallas.

"Are you all right?" he asked, the emphasis he put on each word revealing he'd already asked her the question more than once.

"I-ah-yes, I'm fine," she stammered.

The young man didn't look convinced, but he leaned back in his seat and left her alone.

The stage slowed even further, and Genny returned her gaze to the terrain, just in time to view a small, dusty town rolling past the window. Relief flooded her. A town meant safety, at least from a bandit, if he had been a

bandit.

“Bakerstown,” the driver shouted from the box above them.

Her new home. Her new life. She closed her eyes and wished for a strength she didn't believe she had. Could she do this alone? What choice did she have?

Genny opened her eyes and studied the town she had traveled so far to see. Bakerstown was small, yet, but if Mr. Morgan's letter was to be believed, the town grew larger each year. Though at the base of the Texas Panhandle and near the edge of Comanche territory, the town stood on a stage route leading to California. Genny could see from her window a saloon, a church and several other businesses she could not identify along the somewhat dusty main street. Piles of cut timber stacked at the end of the street indicated Bakerstown did not plan to get any smaller.

She *would* find a place here. Having nowhere else to go, she must. No one on earth cared whether Genevieve McGuire lived or died--except, perhaps, the parents and children living in this town where she'd chosen to start a new life as their schoolteacher. No one in Bakerstown knew the Genny of old, the woman who had strange visions of death and disaster, who had lost all those she loved to violence, and she swore no one would.

As if in challenge to all her fears, the door to the stage opened, throwing bright sunlight and dust across her shoes. Genny didn't give herself a chance to hesitate. Instead, before the old woman or the young man could even shift forward in their seats, she grabbed her carpetbag along with the bonnet she'd discarded when

the heat climbed to unbearable levels and stepped into her future.

That step was further down than she expected, and she pitched into empty space. Strong arms grasped her shoulders to steady her. She looked up, and the words of thanks froze within her throat.

The Indian stared back at her. Genny's shoulders burned where his hands rested. He removed them slowly, holding them up as if in surrender, then thumbed the brim of his hat in an almost insolent gesture of farewell and strode toward the small building that constituted the stage office. Her earlier fear he was a thief or murderer seemed silly in the face of his stoic manners.

"Here, let me help you with your bag, ma'am."

The young man who had spoken to her earlier stepped down from the stage and reached for her carpetbag. Since her hands were shaking, Genny allowed him to take it. "Are you getting off here?" she asked.

"Yes." He threw an engaging grin over his shoulder as he led the way toward the stage stop. "I have some business to attend to in town."

Genny couldn't help but return his smile. The young man possessed a slight Southern accent, like her own, reminding Genny of her cousins, all dead now, but she remembered them well--polite, refined gentlemen, reflections of a world that had died.

The young man wore a frock jacket over an impossibly white shirt, a low crowned felt hat and boots shining with polish. His attire and demeanor served a startling contrast to that of the Indian, whose coarse brown shirt and buff colored trousers had been covered

in trail dust. Even the red neckerchief that had hung about his neck, no doubt to keep the dust from his nose and mouth, had been coated with dirt. Genny's nose tickled with a sneeze just remembering it.

She would not think of the other man now and the fear his presence had engendered within her. She must get used to the rough west. The sight of Indians, full blooded or part, would be common place. She no longer lived in Virginia, where women had once been treated as fragile flowers, nor West Virginia where, for a time, she had been the honored wife of the town's minister. In truth, neither place no longer existed. Even if they had, there would be no going back east for her.

The young man halted in front of the stage stop where a puddle of mud blocked the way to the steps. He smiled at her again and removed his hat. Red-gold hair streaked with sunlight had been combed back from a smooth, unlined forehead. Twinkling blue eyes stared back at her from a face flushed pink with the heat. "I apologize for my rudeness, ma'am. I'm Daniel Radway. At your service."

He bowed in a charming manner, and Genny returned his smile. She couldn't remember a young man ever flirting with her. For her there had been only Jamie McGuire--and he was dead.

"Genevieve," she blurted, banishing the image of her young, smiling husband from her mind. "Genevieve McGuire."

"Miss McGuire--"

"Mrs." Genny interrupted. "I'm a widow."

His face fell. "Oh, forgive me. Mrs. McGuire, allow

me to assist you over the mud.”

Before she knew what he was about, he grasped her at the waist, swinging her over the puddle and onto the steps of the stage stop. Genny caught her breath. The West was rough, but she still doubted it acceptable for a young man she'd just met to touch her in such a manner.

As soon as she stood steady on the wooden porch, he released her, stooping to pick up her bag from where he'd dropped it. Genny's words of protest died upon her tongue. She'd made her first friend in Bakerstown. She would do nothing to ruin the relationship so soon.

“Do you have relatives meeting you here, Mrs. McGuire?”

“No, no relatives. I--I'm the new schoolteacher.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Oh, I see. Then you're as alone as I in Bakerstown. Perhaps you'll allow me to call upon you once you've settled in?”

“I-ah-- Well . . .” Genny fell silent. Did he mean what she thought he meant? She had never been courted in the true sense. She had encountered Jamie by chance, met him in secret and eloped to wed. Nevertheless, she would not allow any confusion in this relationship. She had come west to forget her past, to find a place to belong, to make a new life on her own. Flirting, courting, love or marriage were not in her plans. Ever.

“I'm afraid I must be blunt, Mr. Radway. I've come to Bakerstown to teach. I have no interest in anything else.”

He raised sandy eyebrows above still twinkling eyes. “Any man worth his salt could change your mind.”

Genny had to smile in the face of such brash

confidence, but she shook her head. "Not mine, I'm afraid."

"As you wish," he said with a good natured grin. "We'll just be friends. And friends help other friends settle in." He handed her the carpetbag. "Someone is meeting you?"

"I believe so." She glanced around the platform. The only person who seemed to be waiting was the Indian who had rode in with the stage. He leaned against the wall of the station, arms crossed, hat pulled low. Still, she could feel his gaze and it frightened her. "Who is he?" she asked.

Radway turned and followed her gaze. He stiffened, then turned back, putting his body between Genny and the man who watched her. "He is someone you would do well to avoid. He's dangerous. Deadly. Anyone who crosses him winds up dead."

"But who is he?" she insisted.

"Half-breed Comanche. Bounty hunter. Earned quite a reputation for always getting his man. His white name is Keenan Eagle."

A strange feeling crept over Genny. The world narrowed to the small, dusty platform. She couldn't breathe. The sun beat upon her uncovered head, so hot she could hear its sizzle. She canted to the side so she could see around Daniel Radway.

Keenan Eagle straightened away from the wall and took a step forward. He pushed up his hat and met her startled gaze head on. Try as she might, Genny could not break the contact of their eyes.

"He might call himself Keenan Eagle. He might

have learned to talk like an educated white man from his mother, but that doesn't make him one," Radway stated in a low voiced hiss. "He's still Comanche. And the Comanche call him by another name."

"What name?" she whispered, though she already knew, even before her companion spoke the words.

"White Eagle," he said. "They call him White Eagle."