

CHAPTER 5

Big Thunder

‘ Damn it, It’s cold ! gotta get more wood in here. Damn snow must be a foot deep out there. ice every where. Don’t need to draw water, just break an ice-cycle hanging from the roof . Gotta get more wood. Gotta get more wood. Yeah, Yeah, get your lazy butt out there and get more wood. Ok, Ok Maggie. I hear you. I’m gonna get more Damn wood!’ Joe suddenly stopped talking. There was no

Maggie! He was talking to himself. Maggie was dead. His wife of thirty years had died over a year ago. Fifty years old and now living alone n his homestead on Hog Mountain, he was former Army Scout for the George Bascom unit originally based at Fort Buchanan Arizona Territory. His name was Lowell Joseph Maynard, always known as Loco Joe the number one Scout for the army during the Indian Wars in the !860’s. Now twenty years older and talking to himself, he gathered an arm load of wood and stomped back into the little Cabin he had built for his wonderful wife Maggie.

Later with a good fire going and coffee on the stove , he reflected back on his exciting life and his only regret was, he and Maggie had no children. He had built her this cabin on the hillside and there they had spent the last five years enjoying the animals and solitude away from the business of army activities there had been no need for his services in a number of years. Indians were still active, but most had taken Reservation life. Only a few scattered bands still roamed around and most of these hung around the Army Forts to get handouts of government food, mostly during the winter. Fort Buchanan was no exception. Every winter saw migrant groups camping around the Fort.

Joe's cabin had a raised floor and he stacked his wood under his porch to keep it dry. Animals commonly made dens behind his wood pile. He sat watching his candle burn down and was not alarmed when he heard scratching and faint bumping noises coming from underneath. He made a mental note to check it out in daylight. There was no way an animal could get in his cabin . He was thinking of turning in when he heard a very faint whimper. It was only for an instant, but it alarmed Joe because it was like a human noise! 'What the Hell was that!' He almost said out loud. Quickly getting his pistol, he lit his lantern and went to investigate.

The wood pile was spilled over where he had been that morning. Something had gone in under his cabin! Pushing wood out his way he got light under there. ' Damn!' he exclaimed, it was a person, ' Hey get outta there! Who the hell are you?' a voice answered in Apache, 'I cold.' It was a woman's voice. Joe said back to her in Apache, 'Get out come inside if you are cold. Why did you not te go tae say hello for help. Come I will help you.' The woman answered, telling Joe she had a bad foot and could hardly walk. Joe helped her to get out and into his cabin. He had her sit by his stove . She was very cold and shaking. He warmed his blankets to wrap her feet, they were turning blue. She was thanking him and he said to her, 'Don't talk, I cannot understand you . Your talk chatters. We will talk later. I will warm a drink for you.'

Joe put more wood in his stove and a pot of water to warm up. He studied the woman. Maybe 25 to 30 years old he was thinking and unusually tall for an Apache. Yeah he was thinking, that foot looked pretty bad. Wonder where she came from and why in God's name was she out here trying to walk through a foot of snow. He cut those deerskins off and shuttered at the look of her left foot. It had to be broken. 'Now what Maggie?' he said out loud. The woman looked at him with a question look. He said to her, 'Your foot is broken. It looks like a horse stepped on it.' She shook her head 'No, white eyes soldier! What your name white eyes?' Joe said , ' All Apaches know me as Loco

Joe' ' Tama said, 'I have heard name, great warrior. I warrior too, I kill Soldier!'

Joe was confused by her angry answer, but later when the woman was warm and had coffee, he heard her whole tragic story .It was not unusual but sadly true. She was Tama the wife of Two Bears, son of Ninja, son of Cochise . His tribe was camped east of the Army Fort and receiving winter rations from the government. Two Bears loved to drink firewater like all Braves and when he had no money to buy, he traded everything for firewater even his horses. He had traded her, his wife, to a Soldier like a cut nose blanket woman . A number of the braves did this. Joe knew it was a common thing , pretty sad because the Indian was a pure breed and it took very little alcohol to get one drunk. The Braves loved Firewater. When drunk the soldiers took advantage of them. Two Bears was worse than most. He had thought nothing of selling his wife, although she was wife of him ,a respected leader and Sub Chief.

When the Soldier came into her tent, and tried to assault her, she fought him and finally grabbed a skinning knife and slashed his arm. He became violent hitting her and grabbing her viscously stomping her foot with his army boots. At this point she put the knife in his belly and grabbing her blanket, ran from the tent. The soldier was screaming for help. Luckily she had been outside cutting dried meat when this occurred and she was dressed warm. Quickly she ran to the Indian horses and mounted one of Two Bears horses, one she knew he had already traded off. The soldier was screaming as she raced away knowing the Soldier would probably die and she would be hung as his killer. Killing a Soldier for any reason was death for an Indian. Another soldier saw her riding away stealing a horse and shot at her. His shot wounded the horse in the stomach .Tama knew the horse would die and urged it on as far as it would go, finally collapsing and lay dying. Tama realized she had a terribly injured foot, but had to keep going because soldiers were coming after her. Snow was falling but her

prints in the snow would easily be seen in fresh snow, especially dragging a foot. Smart thinking saved her as she followed the horse tracks back to a grove of brush and managed to hide when the soldiers rode past her.

Joe was Thinking, ‘ Her tracks were now wiped out and it would be a spooky mystery at the Fort how she had disappeared. Boy , this was one smart Indian.’ Tama went on with her story as how she had hidden until dark and then walked painfully back to the Fort managing to slip in after dark and get things from her tent and steal another horse. Two Bears was there but passed out drunk. This time no one saw her leaving. Tama rode west through the blinding snow finally reaching Hog Canyon, she didn’t know the name and falling off her horse as it slipped down an icy bank. She tumbled down the slope finally coming to rest in a cluster of sage brush. All she could see was snow falling and walked on hoping to find shelter. There was nothing. Cold, lost, Injured and blinded by the snow, Joe was wondering at the strength and will to live of this woman. She had gone on trying to stay on the hillside but slipping once again , but this time sliding up against a fence. At this time her smart thinking took over saving her life. She followed it knowing it was man made and followed it, hoping it would lead her to shelter. In a moment of heavy wind swirling the snow, she saw a light. Dragging herself forward, she wandered toward that light, but it was no longer there. Blindly going forward, she found the porch and woodpile. Her feet were numb . She crawled underneath and rolled herself in her blankets hoping she wouldn’t freeze. It was here that Joe found her. Joe was amazed at the courage and determination of this woman. Thousands of others would have given up and froze to death. It was a good ten miles to the Fort, and in a snow storm at that.

Later, bathing her foot, he could see by the discoloration that bones on top of her foot were broken. He gave her his bed for the night figuring that come morning he could fix up something for her foot. He had no idea what he might use. The morning brought a crippled Tama.

Her foot was badly swollen and terribly painful. Joe could see the distress and pain in her eyes, but she never complained. The bitter cold of last night had eased the pain and numbness in the snow had helped. Joe explained this to her and put her foot in a bucket of snow while he put together a breakfast . Normally Indians would not eat bacon, but Tama found that she loved it. She insisted that it was not right for man to fix food for woman and kept wanting to get on her feet. She was complaining loud and fast, when Joe told her that he liked her better last night when she couldn't talk; Tama quit.

Joe asked her why she was named Tama. He thought that was not an Apache Girl's name. Tama said, ' Father say's I was born during big lightening storm with much loud thunder.' Joe replied, 'I can understand it as boy name, it means thunder and lightening.' Tama said, "It was my father gave me name for beauty of storm.' Joe had to agree with that, she was a very pretty woman. He said , " Maggie , look what I've got in this cabin. Whatta you think of her?' Tama looked at him like he was crazy, white man talk she didn't understand. She shook her head and Joe laughed saying, ' You can't understand what I said. Sometimes I don't either.'

Tama was not sure she should stay, this was a very strange man, but she couldn't leave, walking she couldn't. Joe was thinking, ' I talk to Maggie because I missed her so when she died. I guess it's just easier to think she might be listening. And it kills the loneliness. I wonder what's gonna happen when Two Bears comes looking for his wife? He's a Sub Chief and commands about fifty warriors. I'd have to have a lotta help to deal with him. I just hope that he doesn't think she was unfaithful to him. Some of these Braves have a real messed up understanding of their Squaws. The Brave sells his wife and that's Ok, but the woman sells herself or blankets with another Brave. They cut the end of her nose off. It's just crazy. I know a lotta Indian, but I'll never understand everything about their customs. Maybe I better ask a few questions."

Later that day, he asked Tama, ‘ What about your husband Two Bears. Suppose he comes and finds you here. I cannot fight him ,too many Braves.” Tama spoke saying, “ He will not come. I told him I would not be sold. He say I do as he says. I say no , I kill if I have to. He go away mad. I his Squaw, but I go back to Father. I come here. No more Squaw. You are good white eyes Loco, but you have no Squaw.” Joe said , ‘ No, too old for Squaw. My wife die. Some times I forget and talk to her like you to Great Spirit.’ Tama replied, ‘No Loco, you get sunshine in your heart for her. It is good that you talk to her. She is with Great Spirit.’

Joe looked through all of his old boots and found one he could cut open to fit Tama’s foot. In his mind ,it would be like a splint for broken bones. He also went about the hillside in the snow looking for tree limbs he could cut for Crutches. Two days later Tama was able to hobble around the cabin. His Chamber pot was necessary for her use. The out house was back a good way from the cabin. Tama was not concerned with any privacy when she used it. She was grateful to have it. Many Indians at the Fort were adapting to the white eyes ways and using a container in their tents for waste.

A number of weeks had gone by and Tama had taken over all of the cooking. Her foot was much better and she insisted that Loco Joe was like a Chief; the woman should do all the work. Joe was surprised that he no longer talked to Maggie and he kinda enjoyed having Tama living there. He had put together a bunk for her and she began making things with deer skins for him. ‘ Yeah’ he said out loud, ‘Maggie I ain’t talked to you lately, but I ain’t forgot you gal. This Indian is really a special woman. I know you can see that and I know you are grateful that’s she’s doin the cookin. No I never was too good at it and you always said, I’d poison myself. I gotta admit since you died , I’ve been sick a lot, but I like her cookin. Had to show her a lotta stuff, but Maggie she’s a really smart woman. Probably the smartest Indian I ever met. Knows how to use all of your stuff now and I’m gonna teach

her to shoot a gun like you did. You were the best. I never had the patience to lay in the brush hiding until the deer got close enough to kill with a pistol. I think you mighta been part Indian. Maggie I don't know what her plans are but I sure like her and this ol'cabin has been mighty lonely since you've been gone . It's a good thing for me . You know how deep the snow is here and she can't walk to good. I told her not to worry, she could stay here until spring when everything thaws and it warms up a bit. I didn't think you'd mind and I let her use some of your clothes. Poor woman didn't have nothing but a couple of blankets.'

'Maggie shes' a real worry wart. Keeps telling me to bring the horses up here from that pasture at bottom of that draw where the grass is so thick and heavy. She's worried about the snow and ice up on the ridge. You reckon I should listen to her?. You know something , I do remember ol'Amos at the tradin Post tell about a big slide in this canyon many years ago. Sure hate to get away from a good fire , but I'll stomp down there tomorrow and bring Tom and Morgan up here to the cow shed. Sure hate to do that. Means I might run low on that hay stack before winter is over.'

Joe turned around and Tama was looking at him and said, 'Loco, you talk to Maggie. She is with Great Spirit. You must listen to her.' Joe replied, ' Tama, she don't talk to me. I talk to her.' Tama said, ' Does Maggie say to catch horses and bring up here.' Joe said, ' No you say to do that ; You fear the snow and ice may fall down the canyon.' Tama said, ' I feel fear when I look at mountain. Some times Great Spirit talks and we don't hear.' Joe said, ' Now you've got me worried. Tama I'm gonna go get the horses.' All afternoon Joe struggled through deep snow and ice getting the horses to climb up to his place . Once up at the cabin both horses wanted to go back down to the leantoo in the pasture and the cow pen needed a little work to make sure the horses wouldn't get out. Joe was dragging poles and cussin a very loud blue streak when Tama came out to see what all the yelling

was about. Joe broke up laughing when Tama asked , ‘Loco you talk to Maggie some more?’

A week had gone by and Joe was beginning to regret moving the horses; they were nothing but constant trouble in that small cow pen. He had moved two calves he was raising into his wagon shed and they had messed up the whole place. All he could see was more work. A few days later, it was almost full daylight and Joe was building up his fire in the stove when aloud rumble of sound began and steadily got louder. The cabin was shaking. Joe rushed outside. The poles on his corral had fallen and the frightened horses were out fighting the deep snow to get away from the noise. Standing in shock and fear he saw a huge river like stream of snow and ice pitching down the ravine west of his Cabin He ran to the porch and joined a frightened Tama as they watched in wonder as the huge river like stream rushed to the bottom of Hog Canyon in a deafening roar that finally diminished. His horse pasture and leantoo were buried. The Ravine was clean of trees and brush and a large ledge was missing that Joe and Maggie had often walked out upon.. The destruction was unbelievable. Joe could only shake his head in wonder as Tama was thanking the Great Spirit for saving Loco’s horses.

The horses were returning though still excited. An armload of hay brought them right back to the corral and Joe went back to putting up poles and talking to Maggie as Tama thought; Joe had to laugh. Maggie would never stand for that language. Joe went about checking everything. It would be spring before the snow melted in his pasture and he’d probably run outta hay. He figured on making a trip to the fort Trading Post and line up some corn, but without money ; it would be a problem. He told Tama his plans and she was frightened. She would not go with him. Joe said, ‘ Yeah, Tama I know you can’t be seen there and I’m not gonna take you with me, but I’m gonna need your help in the wagon shed. I’ve gotta make some white man Wampum. No you won’t have to walk or stand. I’m gonna make horseshoes. The army

needs all I can make and I can trade them for corn and groceries. I'm gonna also get a box of shells for my guns. If I'm gonna teach you to shoot, I'll need a box, maybe two. Come on out here and I'll show you.'

Tama was happy to help Loco. He had her pumping the bellows for the forge and began taking the worn out shoes he got from the Army and melting them together he made new ones. He already had a rack full, but worked out a hundred new ones. Some of those worn too thin, he beat and made nails for building . Both the Nails and horseshoes were like gold and he had been making his living supplying the Army of Fort Buchanan. Any time a broken wagon was abandoned it was burned by the Indians. Joe always took interest and gathered as much iron as possible from them . The army always gave him the locations and many times in the past, he and Maggie had hauled in the iron; sometimes a wagon load. It was this iron that made him a living and had provided for everything he had. There was always the chance that Indians would attack and his wagon would become another desert victim.

Over the years he had been lucky, a few skirmishes with small groups, but most were threats he easily out ran with well fed horses and Maggie's rifle. He never was able to understand her shooting from a bouncing wagon was so much better than his. Thinking about her, he said, 'Maggie,I'm sure you saw that snow slide in the canyon. I was afraid that with that huge rock shelf being taken out our spring would dry up, but Thank God it didn't. You know that was the main reason I built the cabin here. Tama has taken over your job on the bellows at the forge. She's been a lotta help. Probably leave as soon as snow melts. I'm gonna teach her to shoot. Hope she never has to , but out here you and I know there's no guarantee for nothing.' Tama stopped the bellows and said, 'Loco, you talk to Maggie? She is with Great Spirit, very happy.'

Joe was teaching Tama a lot of the white man ways and language. She was picking up more words every day. When shooting

she was a natural and learned very fast to hold her breath and squeeze the trigger. His Spencer rifle was a little lighter, but Tama preferred his 16 shot Henry and she shortly became very dangerous with it. Her eyes were better than his for hitting small targets. Joe was very pleased with her shooting. She was one Indian he was glad that was on his side. Would she shoot her own folks if he was attacked? He knew that he couldn't ask her to do that.

Joe put a pack saddle on one horse and rode the other. There was no way to get the wagon out without moving six foot drifts of snow across the Trail. Horseback , he rode around them. Loaded with over two hundred pounds of iron, he headed down the canyon. He had told Tama to take care of things while he was gone. She wondered at the trust Loco put in her. She was fast becoming very fond of him. He always brought sunshine into her heart. She was very pleased to stay with him if he would let her. Maybe his Great Spirit Maggie would not get mad and bring trouble to her. Joe had no idea that she would shoot anyone that threatened him , including Braves from her own tribe. She kept her rifle near by at all times. She knew she was better than any Brave from her tribe and felt no fear of anything.

Joe was thinking of her as he rode to the Fort and hoped she would have no trouble while he was gone. He was thinking, ' Really a big help having her there. I better not get too use to having her around. She'll be leavin come snow melt.' This bothered him . It had given him a lotta pleasure in helping and teaching her things. He was fighting the deep snow and it was late afternoon when he finally made it to the Fort. The Army was pleased to have the shoes and Joe was happy to receive four double eagles in pay. The Army wanted him to help shoe the horses, but he declined. Told them he was too stoved up for that kinda work. At the Trading Post, he took out the leather bag of nails for construction and asked if he could pay for his groceries and corn with them. No! the clerk wanted gold. Joe asked for the owner. He had never been refused before. The owner was with a wagon train headed

East for more supplies. Joe had planned on keeping his gold for the summer, but reluctantly gave up two of his double eagles. His change was in Lincoln greenbacks which no one liked to use. He picked up his small leather bag of nails and headed for the saloon.

The Sweeney brothers were in the trading post and saw Joe's exchange with the clerk. They saw the gold coin and thought Joe had a bag full. They followed him to the Saloon. That little bag looked pretty heavy to them. Maybe catch Joe outside in the dark, knock him over and steal the bag. In the Saloon they took a table in back and watched for him to leave . it would be dark in an hour. Joe's interest was elsewhere, but he noted the Sweeney's were watching him. A small group of six Indian Braves were seated nearby sharing a bottle . He easily understood everything said and as they drank, their conversation turned to their chief Two Bears. The mystery of his wife's disappearing had everyone in the Fort puzzled. Two Bears was loud in his threat to kill Tama. He had already taken new wife Cocheta, and like everyone else , he thought Tama was dead. Joe had seen the Sweeney brothers at the post and he decided to have a little fun , not knowing they intended to rob him, but felt they were up to no good.

The Indians were surprised when he spoke to them in their language. He asked, 'Who was woman that killed soldier?' two Bears spoke loudly saying, ' She Tama was murderer, but only killed a soldier which was Ok. Maybe she is now looking to kill Two Bears. I kill her first. She steal horses, I kill her!' Joe said, ' Your Squaw was Tama, Big Thunder? You say she is dead, I think her spirit still here. Two moons back there is huge Big Thunder in mountains and the whole mountain came down into Hog Canyon. There is no way to get into canyon. Filled with snow! Maybe Tama is with Great Spirit and very angry. I see woman on mountain.' All six Indians jumped to their feet and left. Their half empty bottle sat there and the Sweeney's immediately claimed it before the Bartender could grab it.

The Bartender asked Joe why they left . Joe said,' They heard that the Indian woman Big Thunder Tama was taken by the Great Spirits and is angry bringing death and destruction to all in Hog Canyon. They have rushed to get a tribal celebration started to offer praise to big Thunder and calm her anger before more death comes to Two Bears tribe. I was there. It was terrible, beyond anything I've ever seen. The lightening flashed all across the sky with a deafening echo booming like heavens artillery and then the whole mountain seemed to jump roaring down toward me and my little cabin there on the hill. I was petrified with fear and then like a miracle, I am suddenly standing beside the Indian woman Tama, and that whole mountain of snow ice , boulders and trees roared into the big Ravine a few hundred feet from my place. I am still Thanking God for sparing me and my place. It was a miracle. I feel that the Great Spirit of Big Thunder is protecting me and will bring death to all who threaten me with harm. He noticed the Sweeney's quickly grabbed the Indians bottle and left the saloon. Joe laughed thinking, ' They were up to no good alright, but my story scared them off.'

Joe traded his bag of nails for a bed for the night. He would need to get an early start to get home through the snow drifts. It looked like the big winter might not be over and he wanted to get home before more snow. His story of Tama and the Great Spirit's anger was told by the Bartender to everyone in the Fort and soon every Indian was praying to Tama, the Big Thunder spirit for safety. Even the ranking members of the Military were hesitant to continue the search for her, fearing an Indian outbreak.

A major snow storm hit the Desert the next day and Joe was forced to stay over at the Fort for three days. He was concerned for Tama ,but not much he could do about it. He figured whatever happened up on the mountain, she could handle it. After all, he said, laughing out loud, ' She is Great Spirit Tama Big Thunder.'

Joe had no idea that Tama at that moment had been shooting wolves trying to kill his calves. A small pack had come in around midnight the night Joe left for the Fort. Tama had heard a calf bawling and grabbed her rifle and lit the lantern. Going outside, she could see the moving shadows in the faint lantern light and began shooting. The pack ran off, but it was too late for one of Joe's calves.. It was dying and Tama immediately cut it's throat. No need to waste the meat. She hung the lantern up and went for knives and buckets to put the meat in. She wasn't gonna let the wolves have anything. Seeing eyes in the brush she carefully took aim and shot. There was no more sound or eyes in the brush. Twice more before daylight she got a shot at eyes in the brush. The smell of that calf blood was drawing the wolves back to wait. They didn't realize their eyes were like beacons in the lantern light and Tama was good with the rifle. There were no sign of wolves at daybreak, but three lay dead in the brush. Now Tama had made herself another job, wolf skins were good wampum and she skinned all three.

When Joe returned Tama was smoking calf meat and three wolf skins hung from the roof of his shed. Tama was afraid Loco would be angry because the calf had been killed. He was amazed at the ability of Tama and said to her, ' Tama don't fear anger from me. You are good woman, good warrior. We can get more calves. Three wolf skins are very good wampum. We trade for three calves when snow melts. I am very proud of you.' He told her of the fear at the Fort of Great Spirit woman Tama . All of her tribe now honors her as Big Thunder and he told her of Two Bears taking a new wife. Tama replied, ' Two Bears take cut nose woman Cocheta for wife. He can sell to soldiers for Firewater. Cocheta is without husband. She cheat with other Braves and husband cut end of her nose off. It is the Apache way. She blanket with Two Bears while I visit Father. Very bad woman, when she die, burn face down, can never see Great Spirit.'

The heavy snow lasted for weeks and Joe taught Tama to speak the white man tongue and how to write the letters in some common words. Joe realized one afternoon that he had not talked to Maggie in quite a while. Tama was there to listen to his stories and try to tell him of her life. He found that she was 30 winters old and had never had children. Tama believed it was Two Bears fault . He had refused to go through the manhood ceremony as a young brave and she believed the Great Spirits had found dishonor with him. He would never bare fruit. Joe said, ‘ I never thought of it that way. Maybe I should have been a better man as a youngster. Too much hell raising and wild ways. The good Lord knew what he was doing. Didn’t need any more like me around. Maggie was never disappointed . She accepted things like the Indians do. The good Lord has his reasons. In the Indian life ,it’s the Great Spirit.’

The snow finally began to melt and Joe was thinking about taking another trip to the Fort. It looked like he might make it with the wagon and he had been making horseshoes and nails all winter. He would need the wagon to haul everything in to sell. Three wolf hides would go with him and he’d halter his calf behind the wagon. That calf was ready now for sale and Joe wanted to sell it before the wolves made them another visit. There was no way to know when they might return and it would be too late for the calf or for them to protect it. Tama was upset losing her pet, and when Loco mentioned spoiling the baby, she began to wonder, ‘Why does Loco not see me as a woman, he is still much of a man. Maybe he needs a woman to make him forget his Maggie. I’ll see if I can open his eyes.’ Joe was blissfully unaware that Tama was now wearing a feather for him. He had become the greatest thing in her life and she didn’t want to leave. Joe was also not looking forward to her leaving, but knew that she would leave at snow melt. That had been the plan all along. His trip to the Fort included a lotta thinking about Tama and the empty loneliness she would leave in his cabin when she was gone.

At the Fort ,Joe made some very good trades and sold out of everything. This time his bag of nails became a bag of gold coins. He shortly became aware that he was being watched. Frequently he found the hair on back of his head standing. He hurried his purchase of food and grain in order to get home quickly. While at the Trading Post he heard that Two Bears and his new wife Cocheta had mysteriously died. The Fort doctor had examined them and had no answer for their death, there were no marks on the bodies. The truth was they had both passed out from Firewater just outside the Fort gates on their way back to the Indian camp and froze to death. A report that placed the blame on the Fort saloon for their deaths was not what the Commanding Officer would accept. When the news went through the Indian camp, it was believed by all that the Great Spirit Tama had killed them. Soon there were Indians in camp that got recognition by telling stories of seeing Tama Big Thunder at the gates of the Fort. The legend got bigger with each telling.

The Bartender at the Post said, ‘Joe, it’s a hell of a note. None of the Indians will go near the gates after dark and Joe that’s killing me I can’t sell a drink after sundown. I’m going broke if this keeps up. Killing that Tama woman has killed my business. I don’t mind her scaring hell outta the Indians, but I ain’t done nothing to her. Joe she’s ruining me!’ Joe laughed saying, ‘Burt, you’ve been going broke every since I met you ten years ago. What was it last time ? yeah, it was that dead mule that stunk up your place when evening came and the night wind blew it in here. Burt, this’ll all blow over, just drink a little bit of that rat poison you call whiskey and the Great Spirit of Tama Big Thunder will be your blood brother.’

Joe was still laughing as he left the Saloon. Suddenly a bullet splintered the porch post as he stepped past it! Throwing himself to the ground he stayed down as figures ran outta the alley toward him. Three would be killers reached to roll him over and faced Joe’s pistol as Joe exclaimed, , ‘ Drop the gun! One move and I kill all three of you

scum. !' All three threw their rifles down and jammed their hands in the air. Joe said, 'I should a known, the Sweeney's and who's this with you? The other man said sarcastically, 'Names Roberts, maybe you heard of me.' Joe said ' No cain't say that I have but I'll want your full name for your grave marker if you're gonna shoot at me. Since it took all three of you killers to try shootin me in the back. I'll bury all of you in the same hole together, you can go to Hell in a group!'" The Sergeant on night duty rushed out of the Military Jail after hearing the gun shot. Quickly the three killers all claimed they didn't do the shooting. Some one else had shot from the alley, they were innocent . Joe said, " No Sergeant check their rifles. One of these poor innocent boys, out for a night stroll, tried to kill me. It wasn't no accident they were in that alley. I've had a feeling all day that someone was following me. Looks like they caught up with me.'

Sergeant said, ' Joe, you know I can't Jail'em on your word; with no witness you know what'll happen.' Joe angry exclaimed, ' Sarge, I know what you're sayin, but you give'em their guns and the next time I might not be so lucky. So listen to me you three bad boys, I'm driving outta that Fort gate tonight. If you follow me the Army can't help you and I'll shoot you on sight! I'll do unto you the way you done unto me. Anyone that knows me, knows that Loco Joe shows no mercy and gives no quarter. Sarge if they leave the Fort after me, notify everyone that they won't be coming back. If they owe you money better get it now!' He fired his pistol into the ground at their feet!; turned and went to his wagon. The Sarge said, ' I think he made his point.'

There was very little moonlight, but Joe drove out the gate at a nice clip and drove to a low sink east of the Fort. From there he could skyline the gate and within the hour three riders came out. Joe said, ' Well Maggie, looks like I can't ever put this gun up. I know I always told you that I would, but you see what happened. If I didn't have a gun, I'd be dead meat by now. Everywhere you go , your life is in danger. I always said, you gotta be ready for the worse case and if

that don't happen just thank the good Lord and keep good count of your bullets.'

Now Joe had a real problem , the killers were in front of him and they would make much better time than he would. Once they hit the muddy trail to his place on the mountain, they'd know he was behind them. The only advantage he had was that he knew they were after him but they didn't know that he knew it. What would they do when they hit the muddy trail? Some how he was gonna have to outsmart them or get shot going to his place. He decided to pack it in for the evening and take his chances in daylight.

Overnight Joe had worried long and hard how he might defend himself and Tama. The killers would no doubt know the road to his cabin. It worried him that Tama was alone and would have to face three killers. While making coffee the answer came to him. he had purposely used dry wood to hide the tattle tale smoke from his fire. At this time ,he knew Tama would be outside trying to locate a place to tether his horses where they could paw through the melting snow to the grass underneath. He was short on hay and her help locating feed was a big help . Quickly grabbing his blanket he secured one side with rocks and taking a hand full of the new green grass , he threw it into the fire dense smoke came immediately and he spread his blanket across the small fire and let it billow slightly, then quickly releasing a short puff of smoke into the morning air. Five minutes later he did the same . he was getting impatient waiting and watching. He had hoped Tama would recognize that he was trying to get her attention using the Apache way of talking with smoke signals. About to give up , he was ready to give it one more try, when suddenly there was two puffs coming up from the direction of his cabin about eight miles away! Thank God! Tama had answered him ! two puffs meant she was OK. Breathing a sigh of relief he grabbed another hand full and sent up three puffs of smoke. Then he sent up a distorted puff and then three distorted puffs together. Two puffs answered him. Now he had a plan.

He had warned Tama that he was in trouble with the three puffs, then one longer distorted puff to tell her Enemy approaches Many quick puffs meaning a number of enemies are coming. As a former Apache Scout, he knew their smoke language. Thank God!

Having warned Tama, he now had one less thing to worry about. He knew that she would leave the cabin and find a good defensive place to hide. He had no doubt that she would take her rifle and a box of shells with her. He hoped to get in a position to settle up with three killers, but he had to be careful of an ambush. No plan would stop a forty four bullet and there were three killers out there.

It seemed an hour had gone by, since he made the smoke warning. Rearranging his feed and groceries in the wagon , he was able to get behind the wagon seat and drive from there. He was protected on both sides and back from rifle fire. He had no cover for the front except the wagon seat and knew that if any of the killers were sharpshooters, he might take a hit. He hoped his luck was better than theirs. Unfortunately it wasn't.

As he approached the muddy road leading to his cabin, the killer's horse tracks were plainly in the road ahead of him. When one turned off, he whipped his team into a dead run knowing that a moving target was difficult to hit. Bullets were zinging around his as a barrage of rifle shots echoed through the hills and canyon. Joe knew that he was lucky and his quick reaction may have saved him from a bullet head on. He was still two miles out but it appeared that he would make it to safety. Wrong!

Morgan his right pulling horse dropped in his tracks. Tom, his other horse, stopped immediately and just as soon was killed by a number of bullets plummeting into his side. The killers had him caught. Sitting in the wide open with no chance to get away and nothing around him but snow drifts. They began hammering his wagon with gunfire. He had to stay down or chance taking a bullet when he returned fire. Shooting at maybe would be worthless. He would never

have time to see a killer to shoot at. 'Save your bullets', he said to himself and try to figure a way outta this. There was no way to escape that he could see. 'Wait a minute' He was thinking, 'The shooters are all up hill shootin at the right side of the wagon. my only chance would be to leave the wagon and drop down hill behind a snow drift. That's not a good thing a snow drift don't stop bullets, but if things get worse, I might have to try it. Pretty risky, but it's the only chance I've got.'

Pinned down and trapped in the wagon Joe didn't present much of a threat and the killers moved closer. Joe could hear them calling to each other, but there was still no way he could see one to shoot at. Finally knowing that the closer they got to the wagon, the better chance they had of killing him. He had no choice, but to jump from the wagon and make a run down hill when he thought one or all three were moving. He waited for them to start calling each other again and while they were calling he rolled out of the wagon and raced down hill diving behind a snow drift. All three killers opened fire on him, but shooting down hill it's difficult to be accurate. Joe knew this and laying flat on the ground he rolled down another thirty feet this time protected from view by the snow drift. He desperately wanted to throw a few shots at the killers but feared it would give his location as they thought he was still by that big snow drift. Taking every cover possible ,he hurried through the drifts on the snowy hillside getting ever closer to his cabin. The killers spotted him and ran for their horses. there was no way they could catch him on foot and he was outta range for shooting.

Suddenly the killers got a real break. Joe was looking behind him seeing them mount their horses when he hung up in snow covered brush and tripped catapulting him down the slope. His rifle went flying into the snow. Joe had no choice but to push on hoping Tama was at the cabin with her Henry to meet these killers. He was wrong.

Tama had been up early, having heard wolf howl's at night. She was looking to kill more if they were any where in sight. Her Loco had been gone much longer than he planned and it was a great surprise when she saw the smoke puff from the direction of the Fort. She thought nothing of it at first, but shortly there was another. She quickly gathered fire wood and got a small fire going in the yard . Getting more worried she finally got two large puffs of smoke to rise. Right away Joe had returned her signal and she knew danger was coming and Joe was in trouble. He needed her help. She quickly got her rifle and headed down the mountain trail while cautiously staying in as much brush as possible. She had walked about a mile from their cabin when she heard shooting. The crack of rifles seemed to come from the mountain side above the road and Tama made an almost fatal error. Low pinion pines grew all along the slope she traveled and while hurrying and fighting her way through the brush she caught her rifle in a tree limb jerking it from her hands. In trying to turn and grab it she slipped on the ice under the trees and went skidding down the hill. Desperately she tried to grab limbs and anything, but what limbs she managed to grab broke in her hands. Suddenly she hit a tree trunk and stopped over two hundred feet below the trail. The shooting above her stopped for awhile , then suddenly another barrage of rifle fire.

Tama was at that moment, fighting her way up the mountain side below the trail. She was desperately trying to get back to her rifle. Joe was almost in the yard when the killers had dismounted and began shooting again, trying to kill him before he reached the safety of his cabin and possibly a gun. All three killers were shooting and with bullets dancing around , he rushed for the cabin. He didn't make it! A bullet caught him in the leg knocking him from his feet as he made the corner of the cabin. The killers ran to their horses and mounted racing to the cabin, but wary that Joe might still be alive and dangerous; they cautiously approached, but there was no Joe There was blood on the ground with some showing on the edge of the porch, but no Joe. The

cabin was empty. All three searched the ground every where , but there was no sign of blood in or around the cabin.

The killers were confused by this mystery, but ransacked the cabin looking for money and anything else they could steal. Finally deciding that there was a load of food in Joe's wagon, they decided to go take what they could and there was the strong possibility that Joe's money bag was still there in the wagon. Dismounting all three made a run for the wagon, each wanting to be the one getting his hands on the gold. They never made it to the wagon and their rifles were in their saddle boots . A mud covered apparition with a rifle appeared out of a low growing pinion pine grove below them. Fortunately for them Tama was in no condition for accurate shooting and peppered the ground around the wagon with forty four bullets. The killers couldn't get to their horses and protected from Tama by the wagon, they took off running down the trail back towards the Fort.

Tama was heart broken ; her Loco Joe was lying dead some where out there in the snow. Suddenly she realized that she didn't feel he was dead. She knew that he was alive! The Great Spirits would tell her if he was dead. She had to find him! Quickly grabbing the horses , she rode back and tracked Joe as he had left the wagon, hidden behind the big snow drift then rolled down hill. She followed his path as he struggled through the snow and saw where he had tripped and tumbled, then rushed to the cabin, blood on the ground; Loco had been shot! She saw the drag marks to the porch. He was losing blood! There were no other marks or blood going into the house. Looking at their porch Tama suddenly realized where Joe was! Feverishly she began throwing fire wood from under the porch. Yes! There he was behind the wood stack lying unconscious from shock and loss of blood. Tama quickly drug him into the cabin Joe had managed to crawl under the porch and tie a sleeve of his shirt around the bullet wound. There was no longer any bleeding. Tama had no knowledge of treating a wound like his, but knew that he needed to stay warm and kept his stove fire

burning. She took care of the horses bringing the killers guns inside and sat by the window with her rifle. She was sad that her shooting had been so bad

It was hours later that Joe woke up and saw Tama sitting watching him. He said, ‘Maggie, is that you?’ Tama said, ‘Yes my Loco, I your Maggie.’ Joe looked at her and said, ‘Yes Tama you are my Maggie you are everything she was to me. Thank you, I was dying under the cabin. What happened?’ Tama said, ‘we talk later my Loco. now fix your leg. What you want do?’ Joe said, ‘Cut my britches off and we can see the wound.’ Later he said, ‘Pretty bad hole but missed the bone. Gotta put some of that burning salve I use for horses in it and wrap it up tight. Maybe in couple of days a little axel grease and it should come along pretty good. If not we’ve gotta go to the Fort and get that Army sawbones to fix it up

Joe had trained Tama well in using the horses and driving the wagon. She had needed little training with horses, having lived with them her whole life. The three killer’s horses were not trained for pulling a wagon, but Tama packed all their foodstuff on their saddles and riding one led the other two back to the cabin. She would have to wait for Loco to work the horses with the wagon. All three horses were branded US on the right shoulder. They were or had been army horses, but there were many around that the Army had lost in fights with the Indians. These three were a little old for heavy use. Joe figured they were his now and if challenged for ownership, it would be by one of the killers and he would personally see to it that the claimed horse was used for that killer’s hanging. He said ‘Tama we’re gonna use your name for lightening and brand our horses with the Apache lightening sign.’

Two weeks had passed and Joe’s leg was taking a long time to heal he said to Tama, ‘I’m afraid there is something inside that bullet hole. It’s gotta come out. We must go to the Fort and get the Army Doc to fix it. I can’t and you don’t know how. Tomorrow we put

harness on each horse and teach them to drag a log. They're army horses and may have been used before. We'll see how it goes, but I can't ride yet. This leg will kill me in a saddle, we have to go by wagon. Tama , you're gonna have to do all the work training. I can only tell you how. We'll take the best two and hopefully get them trained well enough to make the trip. It might get a little exciting.' Tama asked, 'Can your Maggie do horses?' At Joe's No headshake, she said, ' I ride horses for Father, sometimes bad horse, but soon make good Wampum.' Joe said , ' Good, we'll get at it right away. Sooner the better.'

Tama lived up to her words. She was not afraid and though it got a little risky at times, the horses soon learned to pull a log . Tama hooked up two horses to a fairly large log and mounted one of them . The horses got the news real quick. That thing they were dragging was hard to pull and since a stable mate was right next to each they learned to work quite easy. Joe knew that the wagon noise behind them would cause frightening and a possible run away so the log was hooked to the wagon. There was no runaway. Jumping a little and kicking some but soon all three horses could pull the wagon. It was time to go get that leg worked on.

Going down hill was a little scary but Joe locked the break when things got a little too fast. He was really enjoying the work that Tama was doing and watching her, he knew that he would be a mighty lonesome man once she left. The snow was almost all gone and she had said, she would be leaving at snow melt. Tama had brought a bright and happy light into his life. He would miss her just like he did Maggie. He was not looking forward to it. Tama , on the other hand , was not planning on leaving, ; she wore a bright red feather every day. Joe thought it looked nice, but with all the Apache customs he knew , a girl wearing a feather was not in his library.

The trip was easy, but Joe was wondering if bringing Tama to the fort was a good idea. Looking at her on the wagon seat under a

bonnet, she looked just like his Maggie. It would be difficult to tell she was an Apache Indian. He had told her to remain in the wagon and don't talk to anyone. If anyone spoke to her, just nod and put her hand to her throat like she couldn't talk. They had left at daylight hoping to get Joe's leg tended to without staying over night.

The Fort Doc said, ' Joe, you're crazy . How many bullet holes do you think you can live through. How many does this make? Three or four ; seems like every year I have to patch you up.'" Joe replied, ' Had a run in with the Sweeneys and Roberts, Almost got me Doc. I'm gonna shoot'em on sight the next time I see'em. I'd like to hang'em ; shootings too good for them and a waste of gun powder.'

Doc replied, ' Joe you're too late. Hate to have to spoil your fight with them, but the way I heard it, they stole three horses and shot up the wrangler. He didn't die and was able to identify all three. You know Roberts was one of those Kansas Red Legs left over from the Big War between the States. Those Sweeney's have never been worth a damn, but they sure picked a loser throwing in with Roberts. Our Sergeant Peters took a detail out after them. Roberts wanted to fight. They're all three buried in the Fort Boot Hill. Reckon you can rest easy Joe. How's Maggie doing? I heard she died.' Joe replied, ' Yeah, Doc, the fever got her. A wonderful lady, I really miss her.' Doc said, ' Joe you're still young by most folks standards now days; why don't you take on another woman. Must get pretty lonesome up there on that mountain.'
Joe replied , ' Been thinkin about it, whatta you think of my leg?" Doc replied, 'Gotta cut it open and let it drain out and heal from the inside out. It'll be a little painful, but it really is looking pretty good, for three weeks old. Here it'll only take a minute , bite down on this rag, .This is gonna hurt.'
'Yeah it hurt like hell' Joe was willing to exclaim a few cuss words after the lancing, but thanked the Doc and took medicine with him to help the healing.

'Hey now! Hold up. What are you doing? I can take my horses to pasture and water. I know your foot has healed well but taking care of

my animals is a man's job, there ain't a thing wrong with my leg.' Tama smiled looking at him and said 'Loco Joe. You much honored Scout and great warrior but you take me in your Hogan and I take your horses to food and water. You forget? It is Indian custom. We now married. I your Squaw!' Joe exclaimed, 'Well I'll be damned ! You mean it don't you? Tama , I'm an old man. Yes I need you . It is much easier with you living here, but you need a young man. “ Tama said, ‘ No you not old Loco Joe, you much strong warrior. I make you young man again. Yes Joe, I you Squaw Maggie. Joe replied, ‘ Ok Tama, yes you are my Maggie. Maybe your Great Spirit Maggie sent you to me. I have as you say Big Sunshine in my heart for you. I really Thank God for you, but Maggie Tama, we must be white man Married. I need the white man paper for you to own this cabin. If I get killed or die. You will have this as your home.’ Tama said, ‘ Loco we don't need paper. I now your Squaw, I share your blankets.’ Joe replied , ‘ No!, No! Tama, we go to Fort. Captain Rogers can Marry us.’ Tama said, ‘White eyes crazy Loco, you take me in your Hogan I feed your horses. We married! I your Squaw. That Apache way. ‘ Joe said, ‘Maybe so, but we get paper, signed by Captain. That is white man way. You said you visit Father last year. Do we send for him?’ Tama replied , ‘ No he in Mexico. Army look for him.’ Joe asked ,’ Tama I know most of the Apache chief's and I know some have been driven to Mexico Maybe I can Help him. Who is this father that named you Big Thunder?’Tama replied, ‘White eyes call him Geronimo!’”

The End