

Jail Break !

Four convicted killers use the clever escape plans written in the top of pages of a Bible belonging to dead inmate Johnny Rivers. Couple this with a Chinese gunfighter and they become the respected Rivers brothers of Tucson. “We will be the Rivers brothers and it would be normal for brothers to stick together.” Morg said “ Yes , but Chang whatta I say about only one brother looking Chinese?” Chang laughed saying, “ Tell’em your parents got lucky and one was handsome.”Then in the end, what message was written in the Bible for Johnny’ wife that proved Johnny’s plan contained more than just an escape?

Yuma Prison Break !

Tuolumne County in 1854, two Chinese companies providing gold mining protection for miners working in the gold fields. Competition was always fierce and conflicting agents became violent which initiated a war between the Sam Yap and Yan Woo gangs. This conflict was fought when the population of the area totaled thousands of indentured Chinese workers.. Many of these disputes wound up destroying a gang as it was absorbed by another. Some of these Tong wars reignited for years.This story begins at the Yuma prison in Arizona territory 1878.

“Hey Chink! Whatta you in for? Kinda rare to see your kind here in Yuma prison. You speak English? Reckon we’re gonna have to share this hole. Hotter than boiling water I bet. You could fry an egg on the rocks out there. Hell’s gotta be cooler. What do they call you Chink ? I’m Bill Ives- glad to meet ya.” He was speaking to a new cell mate; a thirty year old Chinese Man replacing inmate Johnny Rivers that died from heat stroke. He replied in good English. “ Names Chang Lee, Thank you for asking. Most just call me Chink. I don’t belong here. I didn’t kill nobody.”

Bill replied, “ Well, mister Chang Lee Thank You, welcome to the killer inmates ; Me , Morgan and Shell over there. We all claim to be innocent of killing someone. You’re in good company. You can have Johnny’s stuff over there. That’s his ragged blanket, but you’ll never

need it in here. Don't know why he made it. Sure is a nasty looking thing, but the guards let him keep it. I think he was born with a nail missing, he was always working on the damn thing weaving stuff together He slept on it ." Chang said, "' Yeah, I'll take anything I can get . I have nothing, but what I'm wearing and Yeah I talk English .An old man, Smokey Barnes took me as his partner in gold mining up in Sacramento, California."

" I had been indentured to the San Yap Mining company when a war broke out between them and Yan Woo, another company. All records were lost during the fighting and when Sam Yap lost the fight all company property belonged to Yan Woo. I found out about the lost records and risked my life in making myself a free man washing mining clothes for the John Sutter mine in Whiskey town. This is where I met Smokey. We later went on our own and gold mined together on the Calaveras river for years. Taught me his English and to read and write some. He was an old gunfighter and taught me how to use a gun. That's why I'm in here. John Lee, a black man was down the river from us and showed too much gold in Whiskey town Saloons.

A gang of rogues from Coloma town captured him and tortured him for his gold. He tried to tell them all of his gold was gone. What he had spent was earned on the American River, not the Calaveras where we were all working. They didn't believe him and the torture killed him. No one but Smokey and I knew the truth. Our hillside was over run with treasure seekers looking for John Lee's gold. We didn't go looking and this caused a problem. Some began thinking the reason we weren't looking was because we already knew where it was. We were watched and questioned many times. Chad Burgess was the leader of that rogue gang and on many days visited our diggings snooping around. Smokey was worried and we both carried guns with us at all times."

"It was during an argument between Smokey and Burgess when the river was at flood stage. It came to demands by Burgess for the location of John Lee's gold and he wanted to see our poke. Smokey made a great mistake. He turned his back on Burgess and just like that Burgess shot Smokey. I grabbed my gun as he turned to shoot me. I shot first hitting him in the shoulder. Burgess dropped to the ground as I ran to help Smokey, but his dead body slide down the bank and

into the rushing river. I couldn't get down river fast enough to keep his body from being washed away. When I returned, Burgess was gone. The following morning I was arrested for murdering Smokey and shooting Burgess. He had gone to whiskey town for a doctor and accused me of the murder. I had no defense except my word against his. He was a white man. They believed him. Me I'm just a Chink. Burgess died two weeks later and now I was accused of two murders. So here I am to die ."

Bill, Shell and Morgan could all see the honesty in his story and offered what words they could, but just shook their heads in sympathy for an innocent man. Bill said, " We cain't make any claims for innocence Chang. I guess we got what we deserved. I robbed a few and killed a Banker. Shell shot his wife's lover. A cheap bastard of a gambler and Morgan got drunk in Tucson with a knife in his belt. He don't remember the fight, but they buried two cow hands. Morgan still grieves for his knife . It went to Boot hill hung up in the ribs of a dead Bobby Clements.

Chang , you're a victim , an innocent victim, but we cain't do a thing to help you, but give a little advise. You don't make the mistakes we did trying to live in this hell hole. First of all don't complain and follow orders. Solitary confinement is much worse than what you see here. Be a good prisoner and maybe you can get descent treatment. The guards all say there's great plans for Yuma prison, but we had to help build this cell and everyday we haul more rocks to build more cells. It sure didn't help any being the first prisoners here. You think it's crowded in here with four. Guess what? it's built for six. A crowded hell hole that'll be murder for six men and get use to that bucket. It's all they give us for doin our business when we're locked in here. You'll find some personal stuff of Johnny's under his bunk. Throw away what you don't want for yourself. Tomorrow we all start work at sunup . They want a hundred or more cells in Hell hole and we're the workers."

Morgan said, " Better tell him about the solitary dark room Bill. He damn sure don't wanna go there.' Bill said, " You tell him Morg, you were there for twenty days." Morg replied, " Almost lost my mind, Dark with the only light coming from a small hole in the roof and all they feed you is bread and water once a day. It's enough to keep you alive, but you wish you were dead after ten days. I'll die before I go back

there. I'll be a good boy and do what I'm told. You won't see no trouble outta me and I'd advise you the same."

Chang sat in despair. Innocent of any crime and sentenced for life. He dug through Johnny's stuff and was surprised to find a ragged Bible. Chang had no knowledge of the Bible and only thumbed through it, before casting it out. Suddenly shocked to see writing at the top of many pages. Bill saw him reading it and said, " You believe that stuff Chang? I gave it up years ago. Never done nothing for me and we cain't read much anyway. My mother had one. Didn't do her much good. Indians killed her. Johnny was a reader. Penciled a lotta stuff in there, but it didn't do anything for him either. Laid right here in his bunk with sweat pourin off him. Guard wouldn't do nothing for him . He died; too much sun. No you're a good one ,readin like that. Don't see many can do that. Johnny read us some stories outta there, but they was mostly killing and stuff. He called it the good book, but I didn't see it that way."

Chang said, " It's what Smokey talked about some, but I didn't understand. Maybe I'll read some of the stories." He didn't want to carry on the talk, because he read some of the writing put there by Johnny and he wanted to see what it said. His three cell mates thought after a week he was going a little crazy on them. Every chance he got , he was reading in the Bible and began asking questions about the chow hall and line up leading to it and which one was the west guard tower. Morg said to Bill. " That damn Chink is nuts. He's been here what? Three months. I've answered a hundred of his questions. " Bill said, "Me the same Morg. Shell was complaining too. Chang must know more about this place than anyone. It's like he's got a picture painting of the whole place in his mind. He does everything without complaint. All the guards really like him. I hope he doesn't get in trouble being too friendly. Some of these guys might turn on him. I think I'll warn him." That evening after supper Bill said " Chang what's going on with you? You get too chummy with the guards and some of these guy'll turn on you bad. So far you've been a good cell mate, we sure don't wanna see you get beat up."

Chang said, "I have Johnny's story I need to tell you about. Maybe he told you he was from Tucson married to a Mexican girl. Juanita. They had two little boys. ' Bill said, " Yeah I'd kill the bastard

that ruined him and his family. He told us a little about it. “ Chang said, ‘ He writes a deputy sheriff Robbins wanted his wife, broke in his house when he was at work , assaulted his wife and in the process killed one of his little boy’s the kid was trying to protect his mother and Robbins slammed him up against the adobe wall banging his head badly. He died a few days later from the concussion . He writes that he was in such a fit of anger , he went to the Jail and called out Robbins. He wanted to kill the man. Robbins wouldn’t come out and Johnny went in shooting. Another Deputy slammed his rifle down as he came through the door and Johnny was charged with attempted murder. Johnny was locked up in a cell when someone put a knife in Robbins. He was drunk and passed out in his bunk at the jail. Robbins claimed it was Johnny with a hidden knife. Robbins died a week later and Johnny was sent here for murder. But Bill I want all three of you to come to my bunk in the rear of this cell . I wanna read to you from the Bible. The guard will think you all got religion.”

Morg and Shell crowded back there with Bill and Chang said, “ Johnny wrote this all down when he knew the heat here would eventually kill him. He left it for you three hoping you Bill could read it. First of all I’ve asked a lotta questions to make sure I knew what Johnny wrote about and yeah I know I’ve got a few of the yard bully prisoners making insulting remarks about my being chummy with the guards. It’s all part of his plan to get outta here. ” Shell exclaimed , “ Damn, I knew it; he was up to something. He asked me a lotta questions about Mexico below the border and if I had friends there. He knew I had lived there for four years and have land there. Go ahead Chang, I wanna hear it all.”

Chang says, ‘ there’s a whole plan here to escape Yuma prison. “ Morg interrupts saying, ‘ No way! too many have tried . four men made it over the wall , but got caught out in the desert, dying from thirst. Two more were injured dropping to the ground and were shot by guards. I don’t think anyone has made it yet. Chink, I don’t care what Johnny planned ,it’s just too dangerous. We’d all be killed.” Bill said Morg we’re gonna die in here anyway. Why not give it a try? Go ahead Chang , read the rest . ” Chang said, “ I won’t read it all, but here is his plan. It talks about the sick room under the west guard tower and the hallway that leads to the chow hall going past the doorway to the sick

room. The sick room is the key to his plan. You know it has an unbarred window that opens and the river is just below. ‘ Morg broke in saying, ‘ yeah , about thirty feet above that rock pile on the river bank; try dropping on that and you won’t even make good coyote feed.’” Bill said, “ Damnit Morg , let him finish! I’m sure Johnny had a plan for that.”

Chang said, “ Yes he did. Did you ever wonder about his blanket or why he served as a barber for the prisoners It’s mainly made of woven hair and hemp. I bet you all wondered why he collected cut hair from all the prisoners and probably never knew he collected every strand of hemp he could get from the ropes you used for moving rocks. You see that nasty ol’blanket on my bunk. I’ll just bet it grew right before your eyes and you didn’t notice . It’s doubled over now on my bunk. You have to take a real close look. Cut loose the strands that make it a blanket and it unravels into a forty foot rope. Yeah Morg, I can see you’re interested now. Ok here’s the rest of his plan. I get beat up by one or two of the other prisoners, in the big yard during afternoon break. That’s why I’m chummy with the Guards to bring about a beating. Hopefully I don’t get slammed around too bad. Not by one of you guys. I don’t want you in the dark room. I’ll be beat up enough, that before lights out, you all three start yelling that I’m dying .

. Lay me on my blanket and offer to help take me to the sick room. The guards will be concerned because they like me and probably ask you guys to carry me on the blanket. The medic you call Butcher will wanna patch me up. I’ll complain of internal pain and scream a little, enough that they’ll leave me there over night, locked up. The Butcher comes in at breakfast time checking me and goes to get himself and me breakfast. I’m still complaining bad. He’ll leave the room unlocked, because I cain’t go anywhere. You three dally enough to be the last in the chow line. That’ll be easy , because all the prisoners rush to get there before the good stuff is gone. Butcher will eat before he comes back . I’ll try to convince him not to worry, I’ll be fine. When you get to the sick room, come quickly in I’ll have the rope through the window, with one end tied off to that big oak sick bed that won’t go through the window. We’ll lock the sick room from inside, Shimmy down the rope one at a time and jump in the river. The guards

above us can't see directly below and the fog coming off the river will cover our escape. That's the plan. I hope we don't have to deal with Butcher, but I'm willing to hit him in the head and tie him up if I have to. He's the loose end. So whatta you think; do we try it or not? Once across the border we have to make it to your place Shell, but we'll have very little food just what you can carry in you pockets that'll make it through the river. Some jerky would do fine . This old pair of Johnny's work boots are stuffed with some kind of meat dried hard. It ain't a lot but like jerky . He probably stole it over a period of time. We'll stuff our pockets with it and anything you can get. It looks like Johnny was planning for an attempt pretty quick until he had sun stroke. ”

All three convicts sat in shocked amazement at the plan their Johnny had put together without them having a clue what he had in mind. Bill exclaimed in a whisper, “By God! Chang it'll work. Morg whatta you think now ? You with us or wanna stay here. “ Morg said, “ I just cain't believe it could be that easy, but that's why Johnny wanted to know if we could all swim. Darn tootin , I'm in.” Shell said, “ I'll be right behind you Chang. If any of us gets away it should be you , damn this is clever! We'll do it Bill! I know we can!” Bill said, “ Chang it's gotta be pretty quick , that morning fog gets thinner every day with this weather change. Johnny gave me a hand full of old jerky. His boots were probably getting full. I'm taking it if I can.You know I'm with you all the way. I do have a question ? How come you're melting all the candles? I know we can get more but what's up?” Chang said, “ The Bible Bill, I wanna take it with me. The wax around it will protect it some. There's a few other things in it I wanna keep. Put it on the blanket with me when you or the guards haul me to the sick room. Any questions?” Morg asked , “ When do we try it?” Chang said, “ As soon as I can get beat up. I'm ready to go! I came to California risking my life and broke from the Chinese tongs risking my life. This is just another risk , but I don't wanna die in this cell. I'll take a bullet.”

Three days later and no fight in the yard. Chang said ‘ Bill they're afraid of you three guys. I want you to make a few comments to the bullies saying you wanna beat hell outta me for snitching on you to the Guards for stealing food or something. On day four Chang wished he hadn't made himself a guinea pig. Knocked down beaten and kicked in

the ribs, he hoped they weren't broke. Could he climb down that rope? He wasn't sure. His face and lips bloodied and torn, the guards wanted to take him to the sick room right away, but he refused, that would spoil the plan. The blanket had to get to the sick room or it was all off.

It was just before lights out when Bill and Morg set up a ruckus to get Chang to the sick room. They claimed he might be dying and that was a thing the prison officials dreaded above all else. Their reputation was bad for deaths like Johnny's. Chang was hurting and almost called the escape off himself. He hadn't realized that he was dealing with frustrated and desperate criminals that were taking their hate and anger out on him. He really didn't have to fake injury. He would be a couple of weeks before the bruises and cuts healed. The Medic patched him up some insisting to the guards that they should have brought him in right away and he could get to bed at a decent hour. Chang was grateful for the comfort of a real bed, but knew he had to get his blanket stitching cut so it would unravel as a rope. A pair of sick room blunt nose scissors took care of getting it started. In the morning all he had to do was strip it out and tie it around the bed. He tried to relax but the hurting kept him awake off and on most of the night. He tried to take some of his bandages to strap the Bible to his chest He just hoped it would make it. At daylight the medic Butcher came in and Chang almost overdid his condition. Butcher was concerned and it took some urging for him to leave. The chow line was already forming and he wanted to get there ahead of the prisoners. Chang held his breath , hoping his three cell mates were not held up. A breakdown in the kitchen could ruin their plan. He looked for something to hit Butcher with if things took a bad turn. Chang was biting his nails worrying and hoping for the best.

Suddenly the door burst open and in came his cell mates. Bill immediately placed the inside lock bar up. Chang let out a big sigh. It was time for the rope. They insisted he go first and quickly sliding down went Chang, Mogan came next, quickly followed by Shell. Bill was last. Chang couldn't believe how easy things went and said in a whisper almost. "That water's cold but the fog's thinning .We gotta get outta here!" It was some time later, they heard the hand horn blowing . There had been an escape! The four were down river past the border when the alarm went off. All four were swimming hard for a

sandy beach and freezing cold in the water. Once on land Bill asked , ‘ What next Chang we’ve gotta get away. That damn waters so cold . we cain’t stay in it.” Chang said, “ I’ve heard they won’t cross the Border, but the Mexican police will be after us . These striped prison clothes will give us away on sight by any one. We’re gonna try something Johnny was gonna do. . We’ve gotta disappear and stay hidden until nightfall. With these clothes we can only travel at night, but I’ve got an idea. There’s thick brush all along the river. We’ll sit tight right here until dark. Find some dry dead grass and try to warm up. After dark we’re going back to town and steal some clothes . Everyone hangs them out to dry. Whatever they are don’t matter a dress can be cut to fit and there’ll be a lotta those, Grab what we can. We cain’t be choosey.”

Bill said, “ Damn Chang, you been here before? I never would have thought of that.” Chang replied, ‘ When it comes to your life, you better think it all through. Yeah, I’ve done some of this before to escape the Tong work camp and become a free man. Johnny had a great plan, but we’ve gotta be smart if we’re gonna make it. Another thing , we’re gonna split up into two men each. We don’t wanna be seen all four together, Bill you and Shell follow me and Morg when we get near town but No! I guess I’m taking on too much. That beating I took has got me weak as a kitten. Morg and I will hang outta town. You and Shell go in about midnight and steal outfits for us. Just take anything you can get. We’ll have to make do. And Bill , don’t leave any prison clothes in there. Come on back and we’ll go back to the river and change. Tell you why later.”

It was way past midnight when Bill and Shell returned but they both had arm loads of clothes, Mostly women’s things. Chang and Morg were glad to see them and get moving. It wasn’t so bad for Chang that way. Chang said , “ Daylight Bill we’ll get dressed. These prison outfits are probably warmer than a dress.” After a cold hungry night in the brush, and seeing the clothes . Bill said, “ Chang, how about we go as two couples. You and Shell will make motherly women at a distance. The rest of this stuff Morg and I can use for shirts and pants.”

Chang said, “ Great idea Bill. Lets get dressed up and pile those prison clothes over here. We need to help the prison officials out.” The others looked at him like his mind was slipping. Later he began pulling

the prison pants and shirt's apart saying ,” Bill you and Morg take these ragged pieces and hang some on a dry log that'll float and throw it out in the stream Do that with all the pieces. Some will be sighted down stream . Those four convicts escaping Yuma prison probably drowned in the cold water.”

Bill was laughing saying, “ I ain't never met a man slick as you Chang. Do they teach you these things in China?” Chang said, “ No, but China is a very poor country. You have to work and fight for every grain of rice. Kids learn to survive early or they don't. You have to think long what you do in anything. I've been thinking while you and Shell were stealing our clothes.” We can travel in day light now, but still a part. Morg and I will follow at a distance. Shell, you speak their language , so you'll have to do the talking for your gringo friends. We'll stay below the Border, but close to it just in case the Mex police get onto us. Shell where are you known, where do we go?’ Shell replied “Santa Clara over a hundred miles through some terrible desert. Not too many want to travel that distance, its tough, mostly oxen wagons and it's slow. I think there is a stage maybe every two weeks, but no money . Anybody got an idea. Morg said , “ Yeah Shell, Take my outfit , It'll fit you . I know how these supply wagons work. They'll be lookin for drivers especially for across that desert. Take a job and maybe get an advance for food. We'll stay outta town on the trail south. Oxen are pretty easy and I can sure help you on the trip. I've worked them all my life except when I was in Jail. If they take you tell'em you wanna leave right away. You've got woman trouble and gotta get outta Yuma.” Shell was chewing on Bill's jerky and said, “ Great idea. You're right they're always hurting for sober drivers and if you're gonna dress as my wife . I damn sure know I've got woman trouble.” Chang said , “ Shell we'll be about a mile out on the south trail. Your wagon water barrel would sure taste good. Maybe one at a time we can get to that community pump here in town before we head out. If you cain't leave until tomorrow , we're gonna be really hurtin for water and something to eat. Do the best you can. We don't wanna rob anyone . That'll bring'em down on us right away. It's bad enough we had to steal clothes.”

Two hours later Shell came walking down the trail to a tangle of brush and Bill went out to find a disappointed Shell who said, “ They want me to come back day after tomorrow. Two wagons are due in

and will be loaded out in the morning. I might get on as a helper. I told them I'd take the job. We may have to tangle with a driver, but there's two wagons. I don't wanna hurt anyone ,but I ain't going back to prison. Morg said, " I'm with you there Shell, we just might have to do some dirty work.' Bill agreed and Chang said, " I'm sorry guys, but I've gotta leave it up to you. I cain't do much, the shape I'm in.' Morg said , " Little man you've done more than any man I've ever met. You try and rest up , we'll think of something if this don't work." Chang was glad to find a place to lay down in the shade.

Facing another bad and hungry night, but Chang felt a little better. Bill told him, " Man you look like hell, can you see out of those eyes ? Man you're black and blue everywhere. I don't see how you can talk with those busted lips."Chang said, " Bill I feel much better, but you gave me an idea. Shell you take the job as a helper even as working for keep only. Bill, Morg and I will have to change our way of dressing to look like men again. Here's what we'll try. We'll go down the trail as far as we can before the ox wagons catch up with us. We three are gonna be victims of a robbery. I was supposed to be a businessman carrying big money and they beat me trying to get it. I'm Chinese and can't talk English. Bill and Morg tried to help and were robbed of everything too, we must get to our families in Santa Clara, Bill and Morg will work for keep, I'll do what I can, but I don't speak nothing but Chinese. Shell you don't know us at all. It will be your job to convince these drivers to give us a ride or at least to go along with them. Me the Chinese man may need a doctor pretty bad. " Bill said, ' you're the damnest man I ever saw Chang. That ought to work for us. the drivers won't expect us to have anything , not even descent clothes and it won't cost them anything for us to tag along. The drivers will have more help than ever; The company pays for the food and there'll be barrels of water." Shell was rubbing his hands together as he laughed. He said ,' I don't know how you do it but Chang you're a miracle." Chang replied, "I no speak English" they all laughed even though desperate as things were. Chang was hoping this ruse would work. They had no more jerky and all four needed food. Hopefully tomorrow their empty bellies would see some. It was another long and hungry night.

Morning and Shell was gone. He was hungry and wanted to share some of the driver's breakfast if he could and maybe get a little something for his comrades. It was almost sun high when the Oxen wagon was stopped by three victims of robbery and assault. The drivers gave them food and water, but refused to let them on the wagons . Shell was able to finally get a ride for the seriously injured and beaten Chinese business man. That afternoon all four had hard tack to eat and supper was a feast of dried meat and sea biscuits. It was all the help that Bill and Morg provided that convinced the drivers to take them along. It would be much easier on them hitching and grazing six oxen for each wagon. That night the four convicts slept .

Ten to twelve miles per day was average for oxen ,but with all the help, the drivers were making fifteen. The Chinese businessman recovered quickly and worked putting meals together. It was a great trip for the drivers. They were out five days when trouble came. A band of five Mexican raiders blocked the road and demanded to search the wagons for anything they could take. As most of the cargo was heavy mining equipment , they would take all the food and any guns the drivers had. Shell was explaining to Chang what was being said and Chang wasn't Ok with the fact that the drivers were gonna give up. Both of the cowards wore guns and there was a rifle in each wagon. These raiders could easily kill them all.

He said to Shell, " Get the rifle , I'm getting a gun. " Shell looked at the little man like he couldn't believe it ,but Chang moved up behind the driver and carefully hidden behind took his belt gun from his holster. The driver quickly looked at him , but kept his hands up. Chang could see the Raiders were confident they'd get no opposition and he jumped down from the wagon with the gun in his belt and his hands shoulder high. He was watching the leader and saw that he was a gringo, a white man. Chang , being Chinese was not a common figure in Mexico and the leader was holding a rifle pointed at him. Chang spoke in fast Chinese and the leader was surprised as Chang walked up closer. The leader asked. One of his men. " What the hell did he say?" Chang stepped closer and once again babbled off a fast bunch of Chinese talk. The leader turned once again to his man behind him and when he looked back at Chang, there was a cocked gun in his face. Chang said , " One move and I'll kill you. Drop the rifle! Tell your men

to shuck their guns; they don't, you die! ” He yelled at his men to drop their guns. He was in a hurry to get rid of his. Shell came running holding the rifle. He was ready to do some shooing. Chang said to him, ‘Gather up all their guns , make'em get off their horses and drop their saddles; then tell'em to jump on their horses bareback and get gone before we start shooting.’”

Both drivers were shocked at what took place. Neither spoke English so Shell simply told them that the Chinese businessman man got angry. The bandits were lucky to get away alive. The driver told him that the bandits leader was a son of Carlos Ramon the Nogales bandit. The China man would be big news in Santa Clara.

It was late that evening when Chang said to Bill, ‘ Now we all have guns and saddles. I didn't want the horses .They're probably stolen and we don't need attention.” Bill said, “ Chang with you every day is a surprise. I had no idea you were a gun fighter. Why didn't you shoot? He had you under his gun.” Chang said, “ I'm not a gunfighter, I don't believe in killing, His rifle wasn't cocked, the hammer was down. He would never make a good bandit, but he would make a dead one. They'll be weeks getting more guns and he'll probably lose half his men. He might even turn honest after this.” Bill laughed saying, “ That Chinese jabber of yours sure shook him. “ Chang said, “I counted on that to get close to him. It worked.”

The two drivers were amazed by Chang's action and stayed clear of him, but were happy to have him with them. Morg said to Bill, “ I've never seen a man like him . I don't think I'd wanna face him in a fight.” Bill said, “ Morg, you'll never have to . I guess it's a Chinese thing. He refers to all of us as his brothers. Shell says he's not too well liked in Santa Clara, but has property there. He was married to a Mexican girl with family here. She took up with a gambler and Shell killed him up in Tucson in a gunfight. His wife claimed it was murder, which put him in Yuma prison. Shell intends to sell all he has and go with us to the Territory . He's asking what your plans are.” Chang replied, “ We need to have a conflagration as Smokey would say and get a plan together. I have some thoughts, I need to tell you about.”

They were approaching Santa Clara when Morg asked about Chang's plans and that evening they gathered near the camp fire and

Chang said, “ I’ve still got Johnny’s Bible. It’s been water damaged some , but that wax helped keep it sealed some. I want to deliver it to his wife in Tucson. There’s last words written in there to his wife. He owned a Ranch east of town about four miles , the circle J brand. Maybe I can do something for her and the boy. He’d be about eight by now. Seriously, I feel that I owe my life to Johnny and anything I can do for his wife, I’ll gladly do. Morg said, “ Chang that’s a great plan, I’ll go with you, but we’ve all gotta have new names. Those four convicts all drowned in the river , remember? What’s yours gonna be ?” Chang replied , there is an ancient saying,” The friend that dies saving your life lives on in you. My new name will be Chang Rivers. Morg said, “ That’s a hell of a good idea. Rivers is a great name. We all owe our life to him.” Bill and Shell agreed. Chang said , “ We are all brothers, we will be the Rivers brothers and it would be normal for brothers to stick together.” Bill said, “ You always come up with the good answers to everything.” Morg said “ Yes he does, but Chang whatta I say about only one brother looking Chinese?” Chang laughed saying, “ Tell’em your parents got lucky and one was handsome.” Bill laughing asked , “ Shell, will you be recognized in Tucson? We could all go and see what we might do for Johnny’s wife. Shell replied, “Good thinking Bill, our debt can never be paid, and recognize me? Not now , Yuma and that dark room added thirty years to my looks. Chang , I’ll sell my place here, do some trading for horses and a wagon. We’ll stock up supplies and go to Tucson. No one’ll bother us we’ve got that Chinese gunfighter with us.” Chang laughed.

Now with wagon and a pair of cheap horses, the four well armed River’s brothers headed east for Nogales where they intended to cross into American territory . The four brothers were now beginning to relax and enjoy their freedom. Shell said, “ We all have a history that’s behind us and we now have a mission to aid Johnny’s wife, Juanita. This close to the larger towns, we may be questioned by the Rurales Mexican police in Nogales or even rogue groups we may meet on the trail , so we need a good story so we can all tell with tales that match.”

“ Chang, I think for this trip , you remain the Chinese gunfighter we call Smoky Rivers. Word has probably spread like wildfire, how you took down the Carlos Ramon gang. It’s probably reached ten Raiders

you stopped by now. I don't think we'll be bothered. The rest of us will be cowhands from the Circle J ranch in Tucson. Why are we in Mexico? Money, of course! We were invited to join the Guardia Rual in Mexico City because of our history as gunfighters, We are now on an urgent trip back to Tucson where our sister Juanita Rivers has been assaulted . We will be doing some killing and quickly return to Mexico City. We will not appreciate any delays. That will be our story and if I know anything about the police down here, they will be looking for a bribe. I could offer a little money but we don't have a lot. It'll take all I have for supplies"

Chang said, " Shell if we get stopped, I want you to talk for me. I will jabber a little, but tell you what to say in English. My Chinese tongue surprises even me. Some things I know may help us get by. Since I'm such a dangerous gunfighter I want you to pour some of our bacon grease on the front corner of our wagon. It should look pretty nasty in a couple of days. If we get stopped ,it just might be blood stains." Shell laughed saying, " I think you might be right ."

They were almost into Nogales without an interrupt ot their trip. Shell was surprised that they had not been stopped and it looked like they would have no trouble crossing the Border and heading north for Tucson. Wrong! A squad of Rurales were at the edge of town and demanded to inspect the wagon . Shell after going out and talking to them said,' "The leader there is Captain Florez. I think he's just a policeman, but he claims to have been appointed by President Benito Juarez as Commander of this district which includes Nogales. He's demanding a two hundred Paso guardian fee as he calls it for the protection we receive in Nogales. If we can't pay the fee he will commander food and guns to equal the fee. I have the money , but that's about all and like I said, we need supplies. I think he's bluffing , but wants our guns badly. His men are practically unarmed with those old muzzle loaders. Chang whatta you want to do?"

Chang replied, " Tell him we need no protection. We are a well armed part of the Guardia Rual Our guns are not for trade and we have very little food and no money. We thank him for his concern. We will relay his generous offer to President Juarez personally upon our return to Mexico city Also tell him that I am Smokey Rivers , the well known Chinese gun fighter. I do not speak Spanish or English and the

wagon is my personal home . You must remove your boots if you wish to go in a Chinese home. It is a fighting insult to go in with shoes on and could very easily cost one a leg. At that time Shell , point to the nasty stains on our wagon, and nod your head “Yes”

Later Bill was laughing saying, ‘ It sure was nice of that Captain Florez to offer us an escort through the wicked and dangerous town of Nogales.” Shell replied, “ From the looks he was getting from the folks on the streets, I’d say he needed protection. The only thing I’ve seen that might be dangerous was accidentally stepping on one of the sleeping dogs”

It was a slow trip getting to Tucson. One of the horses began favoring a leg and ten miles out they had to stop. Shell said, “Sorry Chang, but these horseS are both pretty long in the front teeth probably twelve or better. I couldn’t afford younger ones. They’ve done pretty good getting us this far. We’ve got one horse left. I could ride in and rent a wagon horse but we’re broke. I’ve only got two or three Paso’s left and I doubt that I can rent one on my looks.” Chang said, “ Let’s get the wagon off the trail and plan on camping out for a couple of days. I’ll ride in and locate the River’s ranch , go out and meet Johnny’s wife. I’ll take his Bible with me. This will show her I’m a friend and see if she has a horse we can use.” Bill said, “ Good thinkin Chang, we’ve got plenty grub and water.” Morg said, “ Yeah brother , we run low and we’ve always got a horse we can eat.” Chang said, “ No Morg, ol’Charlie brought us this far. Don’t shoot him. He just needs new shoes and a rest. I ain’t never killed a horse.” Morg laughed and replied, “ Just kiddin Chang. You know for a feared gunfighter you’re awful gentle.” Shell said, “ Yeah Moma grizzlies are like that too until you hurt’em.”

Chang rode in asking for the sheriff’s office figuring he’d know how to locate Juanita if she were no longer on the ranch. Donaldson , the sheriff answered Chang’s question with, ‘ Who’re you and why do you wanna see Juanita. ? That little lady has been hit pretty hard. I don’t need to be sending more trouble her way.” Chang said “ No sheriff, I’m a brother of Roy. My name is Chang Rivers. Me and my three brothers have come to help Juanita .One of our horses went lame just ten miles out. I rode in to see if she had one we could use. Didn’t wanna leave the wagon. I gotta letter saying Johnny had died

and she needed help. My brothers Shell, Bill and Morg plan on getting her ranch on it's feet again,' Donaldson said, " Never knew the man had any brothers and you sure don't look family." Chang said , "No. I sorta got adopted, my three brothers took me in and I've been family ever since."

Donaldson said, ' Sure relieves my mind, that poor woman needs help out there. She's a beautiful young woman and since we all got word that Johnny died, she had every cowhand in Tucson trying to spark her. Bennie King has always been a bully around here. He put word out that she's spoken for and stay away from Circle J. He's scared off most , he's pretty handy with a gun I reckon . Hasn't been a fight yet. I've tried to keep things at the fist fight level, but Bennie is asking for trouble. Junita don't want anything to do with him or the men around here. I'm sure she'll be thrilled to have you men around. Her little boy Timmy needs a man around too. Just take the road east that you passed coming in, it's about three miles. That's a pretty good size Ranch, but I think she's down to just a few hundred cows now. She oughtta sell the place, but keeps hanging on trying to make it with her small herd. She does pretty good hiring local cowhands for roundup work, but gets cheated a lot I'll bet. Her being a Mexican woman don't help none. Me and my deputies stop any time we're out that way. She makes the best bear sign and coffee in the County."

Chang said his thanks and took the road east. He hadn't gone half a mile when a rider came racing past him pulling up and demanding, " Mister , Where you headed? This is the road to Circle J." Chang replied, " Glad to hear that mister that's where I'm headed. Gotta see Juanita Rivers, I'm one of Johnny's brothers ,names Chang Rivers. Thanks." The rider , exclaimed, " You're a liar mister! Johnny had no brother. You're a damn Chink. You just turn your butt around and git." Chang said , " Just a minute." He got off his horse. The rider exclaimed ' Whatta you think you're doin. I want you to git." Chang said 'Mister, you got a name?" The rider said, "yeah I'm Ben King, maybe you heard of me." Chang didn't want a gun fight , but it looked like he would have no choice and needed to get to Jaunita. Ben was getting mad and sharply said, ' Git on your horse, before I git down. What's your problem Chink?" Chang said very calmly, " Bennie, little man, I've never killed a man on horseback , you'll be my first. Some

folks call me Smokey and there's no man alive that ever called me a liar. You touch that gun and you're a dead man." Bennie now shocked to realize he had met the man that could kill him quickly stammered, "No! you're not a liar! No sir I'll git. I'm sorry , I thought you were some one else." Chan said, " Stay off this road. I see you out here again and I'll start shooting' Bennie raced back to town. Chang laughed talking to himself said, " Mister gunfighter, you just broke your own record. He called you a liar and you let him go. Yeah that's true ,but no one ever called me a liar before."

Later he was met at the house door by Juanita as he jerked his hat off. For a long few seconds he couldn't get over the beauty of this woman, before blurting, "Ma'am, my name is Chang. I brought you this . I came from Yuma, it's Johnny's Bible . may I sit down?" Juanita shocked and speechless waved him to a chair on the porch. He noticed she wore a belt gun. Chang said, "Ma'am, it's a long story that I have to tell, but Johnny wrote you a letter in this Bible before he died. You'll probably want to read it in private. Me and my three friends owe our lives to him. We've come to pay that debt if we can. One of our team broke down and I came to give you Johnny's Bible and ask for the loan of a horse if you have one. We wish to give you our service in whatever task you may have at no cost as long as you'll have us. I know you're shocked, but without Johnny's help, I couldn't possibly be here. Juanita said, " Mister Chang, I don't know what to say. You're right! I thought I was dreaming . Johnny died and I couldn't believe it. It's been very hard to go on. You say there are four of you. I don't have that much food. I can't feed you, but I do have horses . I have eight and some are wagon pullers. Mister Chang, I don't know you at all, but I'm gonna trust you. I don't think you would come hundreds of miles to hurt me. I need supplies badly. I can pick up some on the way back, but some of the men in town are very rude. I want to hear your story. I'll hitch up my buggy and we'll get a team for your wagon. Your horse looks pretty tired. Ten miles out . Maybe we better hold off till morning, can you do that? " Chang said, " Call me Chang please and yours is a beautiful name for a beautiful lady. Yes, We can wait till morning. I'll grab a spot in the barn."

Jaunita said, " After dinner Chang . Timmy and I were about to sit down. Come on in and meet my man of the house." Timmy was nine

and like most boys quiet in the presence of strangers. Chang made friends with him right away and it was an hour later when Chang had completed his tale of escape to Juanita. Timmy had gone to bed. Juanita said, “ it’s unbelievable Chang and you all four claim to be Johnny’s brothers. Maybe you don’t know, but Johnny was an orphan. I didn’t know he had four brothers, but I think it’s wonderful.” Chang said, ‘ Juanita you can’t believe just how wonderful it is and I don’t think you’ll be bothered again by anyone in Tucson.” She laughed as he walked out.

Morning of a beautiful blue sky day and Juanita couldn’t remember when she had felt so good. Timmy was excited to go to town and Chang said, “ Juanita , I hope we and the brothers can keep that beautiful smile on your face.’ She replied , “ Chang, you have already given me a new life. How can I ever thank you.” He replied, “The debt is ours, not yours and I can see the laughter and fun you’ll have with the four brothers. We’ll make sure of that.”

Town was a strange site when they drove through. People came out to stare at them as they headed south trailing two horses. Chang said, ‘ Reckon Bennie, I told you about, done made a killer gunman outta me Those folks all wanna see what I look like.” Juanita said, “ You’re the talk of the town , there’s no doubt. I wonder what they’ll be like when we stop at the Mercantile on the way back?”

That afternoon Juanita was overcome with feelings . She couldn’t believe the honest concern all four of the escaped convicts felt for her. All of them rugged and dirty, but she felt so much relief at having them so happy to meet her. They all agreed Johnny’s Juanita was a dream come true and they all looked forward to helping her. At the Mercantile that afternoon Juanita had her wagon loaded by the four River’s brothers. Sheriff Donaldson came to her saying, “ Juanita, are you sure about them? They look like a bunch of outlaws to me; a pretty hard looking bunch. I just hope you know what you’re doing taking up with them.” Juanita said, “ Sheriff, They’re some of the finest men I’ve ever met. Johnny would be so happy to know his brothers traveled hundreds of miles giving up everything to come help me. Timmy is just thrilled to have four Uncles. How long they may be here I don’t know, but I’m ‘so grateful for anything they can do.” Donaldson asked, “Whatta you know about that Chinese looking brother. I’m told

he's Smokey Rivers , the gun fighter that stopped a Ramon Gang Raid in Mexico. " Juanita replied, " Oh, he was adopted as a young boy and one of the sweetest men you'll ever meet." Donaldson replied , "I don't think Bennie King would agree with that and I don't think you'll see him out your way again. I guess your Smokey put the fear of God in him. Good luck with that bunch."

As Chang and the brothers looked over the ranch, there was a ton of work needed. Supplies for repairing anything had to be bought and Juanita had very little to work with. It was here that she told them of Bart Hasting's cattle auction yard and shipping pens at the railroad.

Bill being more familiar with cattle said to the others, "Juanita say's Hastings sent his crew out to take her herd for shipping. She counted five hundred or better. Hasting's only paid her for three hundred head. Said she had miscounted, maybe counted two hundred of them twice. Being a single mother and Mexican at that, he's probably been cheating her all along. Whatta you think Chang? we can deliver, but Juanita say'she can only send him three hundred .He wants us to load'em too. Chang said," Morg, we need to see the place. Get Bill and Shell. We'll all go take a look at Hasting's set up and see if we cain't run'em through the counter ourselves and then do the loading. That way we'll know for sure Circle J gets an honest count and all of you don't make mention of what number we're bringing in. I don't think Jaunita knows herself just yet."

At the corrals and loading dock Chang asked a lotta questions of Hasting's and his two lot workers. Bill and Shell were both old cow hands and thought Chang was wasting a lotta time . The operation seemed pretty simple to them. Bring the cows in run'em through.the counters and load'em on the cattle cars. Chang though was busy making a sketch of the whole set up and said , "Hasting's asked if we would load his other corral also while we were there. That way he could send them all out the next morning." Shell and Bill both assured Chang that it would be easy and Chang asked, ' Suppose we had to do this in the dark? Can we do that?" Bill replied " Yeah, it's done all the time. a couple lanterns to make the count and a little moon light for loading. But Chang we're not that far out, we can easy move that herd in here by noon." Morg said, " Bill, I've got a hunch that brother Chang is cooking up something."

Later that afternoon, Chang said, 'Brothers let's get our heads together. We wanna move our cows to Hastings's as soon as possible, but we wanna get there at sundown or twilight if we can. Here's what we're gonna try. Look at this drawing. We're gonna push our three hundred into this outside corral and run'em through the counters. Bill you and Shell work inside and push our cows down to the loading corral. There'll be a lotta dust, so when you reach the train loading corral, open this gate here and send them back in the outside corral Morg or I will be there to push'em back up for more counter training. I think there's about two hundred that need training. Whatta you think?' Bill exclaimed , " Chang I gotta hand it to you. Training cows that way. Is this the way they do it in China. " Chang said , "I no speaka English." Shell and Morg were both laughing. Bill said, " Slick, really slick, Anyone can make a mistake in the dark , cain't they; and one gate looks like another. We'll load the whole bunch when we mill'em together. Mister Hastings will quit sucking eggs and cheating folks maybe when he is two hundred short on pay day from the buyers.

One week after the night operation, Junita was buying building and fencing supplies. Bart Hastings was complaining that the buyers in Globe Arizona had cheated him on the count, by over two hundred and fifty head. Bill blamed the extra fifty on Shell saying, "He don't have good night eyes like me." Shell said, ' Bill it's your fault. You cain't count, twenty nine doesn't come after forty. It should be fifteen, I think." Morg laughing said, ' It's from being in that dark room in Yuma. It messed up my countin too."

It was a month later when Hastings returned from Globe claimed the brands in his last shipmen showed Two hundred and fifty Circle J cows missing. Where were they? Chang said, " Mister Hastings , according to your own men we sent five hundred and fifty head through your counters . Mrs Rogers says she was missing a big number on her last shipment. I think some body is stealing your cattle. Did you report your losses to the sheriff?" Hastings stomped to his wagon and shouted , "Donaldson better do his damn job. I lost a bundle of money!" He raced his wagon out of the yard!

Chang and the brothers were busy repairing a roof when Sheriff Donaldson and three heavily armed deputies Rode into the yard . Morg said, " Better git ready for some shooting. I ain't going back to Yuma!"

Change said , “ Take it easy Morg. We ain’t going nowhere.”

Donaldson said, “Mister Rivers we’re looking for anyone that may have witnessed a horrible event at the grave yard on Boot hill. The Clement family is outraged and have posted a two hundred dollar reward for the grave robber. Three of their family’s graves were torn open. The Clements being gold miner’s may have triggered this grave robber thinking there may have been treasure buried with the bodies. This whole town is in shock and disbelief. The town Council demands that I find the thieves before more graves are robbed. We’re out asking everyone for any information. Chang said , “Sheriff , me and my brothers have put a few in Boot Hill, but never taken any out. Sounds like a job for the coyotes. Sorry cain’t help you.” He and his three heavily armed Deputies rode off down the road as Bill said, “ Morg that’s a beautiful belt knife you’re wearing. Where did you get it?” Morg replied, “ Took me awhile to find and get it back again. My Grandfather gave it to me on my twelfth birthday, he made it in Germany , handle is elk horn and the blade made from Damascus steel

I lost it about six years ago. Broke my heart. My eyes are gittin bad. Couldn’t read names. Bobby Clements took it to Boot Hill with him. He gave it up pretty easy.”

The End

Epilogue:

The circle J was to become a very successful Ranch and no one ever threatened the Rogers brothers. They were all devoted to Juanita and Timmy. It was almost a year later that Chang said to his Brothers., “I know you’re all taken with beautiful Juanita. I’ve never been one to believe in fate or fortune , but Juanita is a dream come true . You’re welcome to our wedding.” Morg clapped him on the back and laughed saying, “ I guess she preferred the handsome brother.” Chan laughed and said, “ Thanks but I owe it all to Johnny because he was a man of the Bible and it was what he wrote in the Bible that delivered us from prison, but it is his note to Juanita that really convinces me that our escape is just part of a bigger plan. In his loving good bye to Juanita, maybe one of you can explain this last message. In the Bible, he said for her to read and circled 3John 1;5 “ Beloved, it

is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are!"

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In the 1800s jailbreaks from the local jails in the Arizona,territory were very common. To solve the problem,in 1876 the Yuma Territorial Prison was built on the banks of the Colorado River one of the hottest spots in the south west desert On July 1, 1876, the prison accepted its first inmates into the strap iron cells and solitary chambers, which they were forced to build themselves. The prison ran for 33 years, and during that time, a total of 3,069 prisoners lived within its walls. Jailbreaks were attempted with most escapees killed or captured. Those escaping down river were never heard from again, all presumed drowned. Four convicted killers use the clever escape plans of a dead inmate and a Chinese gunfighter to become the respected Rivers brothers of Tucson. "We will be the Rivers brothers and it would be normal for brothers to stick together." Morg said " Yes , but Chang whatta I say about only one brother looking Chinese?" Chang laughed saying, " Tell'em your parents got lucky and one was handsome."