

MORGAN SINCLAIR AND THE BANK ROBBERS

CHAPTER ONE

Thursday Morning:

By six-thirty in the morning the Sinclair household was bustling with activity. Esther had just finished putting breakfast on the table when she called out, “Morgan, Dan, Evan, Katie, breakfast is on the table! Hurry up or you won’t get any!”

The first to arrive was eleven-year-old Katie, followed closely by sixteen-year-old Evan. As she sat down, she turned to her brother and said, “Hurry up, Evan, I don’t wanna be late today; Mr. Watkins said if I’m late again he’ll make me stay after and write, ‘I must be on time for school,’ a hundred times on the blackboard.”

Just then her father, Morgan, and her eldest brother, Dan, walked in. As they sat down, Morgan said, “If you have to stay after again, it’ll be the sixth time this year.”

Around a mouth-full of food she replied, “It’s not my fault, Papa, Mr. Watkins hates me.”

Esther was passing around the fried potatoes when she said, “Oh, honey, I doubt that. And don’t talk with your mouth full.”

Katie swallowed and said, “It’s true! I heard him tellin’ Mrs. Fabian that, ‘Those Sinclair children are nothing but trouble. Why they’re possibly the least disciplined students I’ve ever tried to teach.’ He hates all of us.”

Morgan took a sip of coffee and said, “Well, maybe I should have a little talk with Mr. Watkins; seems he’s got the wrong impression of our family.”

“Oh Papa, could you? I’m sure that’d make school so much more pleasanter.”

Esther interjected, “Just pleasant, Katie, not pleasanter.” Turning toward Morgan she said, “And you just mind your own business. The reputations our children have are what they deserve, and you stickin’ your nose where it doesn’t belong won’t help things one bit.” She turned back to Katie and added, “You’ll just have to deal with it as best you can.”

“But, Mama,” she whined, “It’s not fair. Mr. Watkins is judging me by the actions of the boys; I ain’t nearly as bad as they were.”

“But Mama nothing, you’ll just have to deal with it. There’ll be a lot of things in life that you’ll have to deal with that weren’t your doing; that’s just the way it is. Now, hurry up or you’ll be late again. And if you are, I’m not waiting supper for you, that’s for sure.”

Katie got a pouty look on her face and said, “Yes, Mama.”

Esther looked over at Dan and said, “So what have you got planned today?”

“Charlie and I’ve got about a dozen horses that need breakin’. That should take most, if not all of the day.”

Next, she looked expectantly at Morgan. He smiled and said, “Me and a few of the boys are going to herd Shepherd’s cattle back over to his spread. Somehow, they always seem to get mixed up with ours. I swear, I think I spend half my time returnin’ other people’s cattle to them or goin’ to get ours from someone else.”

“Sounds like I’m not going to have to worry about you for lunch then?”

“Nope, Pete’s gonna rustle up some sandwiches from the cookhouse for us so we won’t have to come home till supper time.”

Katie gulped down the rest of her milk and stood up. “Come on, Evan,” she said, “let’s get goin’.”

As he stood up, Esther said, “Hurry back, Evan, I’ll be ready when you get here.”

“Why can’t you just go with us? It’s a long way to town and back just to go back to town again, ya know.”

“And just who is going to do the dishes, make the beds, and straighten up this pigsty of a house while I’m in town with you?”

Morgan chuckled as he wiped his mouth and stood up. “Better quit while you’re ahead, boy, she’ll make you look silly if you keep goin’. Come on, I’ll help you hitch up the wagon.”

Within seconds, Esther found herself alone, surrounded by nothing but dirty dishes, pots and pans. She sighed as she wiped her mouth, stood up and began clearing the table.

Mr. Watkins was still standing next to the schoolhouse door, ringing the bell, when Katie and Evan pulled up in front. He stopped and said, “Well, well; if it isn’t Miss Sinclair arriving in her chariot, just in time. Hurry up, Katie or you’ll still be late.”

She jumped down and mumbled, “Yes sir, Mr. Watkins,” as she hustled into the school. All the while, Evan glared at Mr. Watkins and he glared right back. After a few seconds, Evan jiggled the reins and started for home and Mr. Watkins walked in the school door to start the morning lessons.

It was about eight-fifteen when Sheriff Roy Howard walked out of the diner and lit a cigarillo. He took a long drag and slowly exhaled the smoke as he looked around the little town of Willow Crossing, Nebraska. It was a bright, sunny, late

autumn morning. But, as pretty as it was, he could feel a chill in the air that was the first precursor of the upcoming cold winter. Still, it promised to be a warm day.

As he stepped off the sidewalk, the sheriff watched as a half a dozen men rode down the street and stopped at the diner. He nodded to them as they dismounted and stepped inside. When none of them acknowledged him, he thought, *'no doubt they're just hungry,'* as he continued on his way.

Ivy Andersen was clearing off the sheriff's dishes when she saw the six men walk through the door. She gave them a quick smile and nodded at the table, saying, "Give me a minute and I'll have this table ready for ya to sit at."

The leader nodded and the group walked over to the table. They sat down and watched Ivy wipe the table off with a soapy rag. The men all took off their hats while she straightened up and asked, "Can I start you all off with a cup of coffee?"

They all nodded and she hustled off while they looked at the menu that was written on a chalkboard next to the kitchen door. When Ivy came back, she handed out the cups and poured the coffee. "Would anybody like cream or sugar," she asked. They all declined. Putting down the pot she got out her pad and pencil and she asked, "Have you boys decided what you would like?"

After they ordered their eggs and bacon, toast and hash browns, Ivy hustled off to the kitchen. The clock was striking nine o'clock when they paid their bills and walked out into the warm sunshine. Three of them lit cigars, ambled over and

untied their horses. They didn't mount them, however. Instead, they led them down the street to the saloon that was in the middle of the next block.

Sheriff Howard strolled unconcernedly into the stagecoach station and up to the post office window. He smiled and said, "Mornin' Buck."

The postmaster nodded and said, "Mornin' Roy. How's Elizabeth and the boys doin' this beautiful mornin'?"

"Lizzy's doin' good, Buck. Gettin' a little antsy though; can't wait for the baby to come so she can get back to doin' her normal chores instead of trying to tell me and the boys how to do 'em."

"How much longer she got?"

"Doc Curtis says about two weeks or so; maybe less." He laughed and added, "She said, once this one's born, there ain't no way in hell she's ever gonna let me back in her bed again; said five babies are enough for any woman to give birth to."

As he handed him the mail Buck laughed, "Well, I'm sure the time'll go pretty quick. And, don't worry, she'll change her mind after a bit, they all do. You must be gettin' excited too, ain't ya?"

He took the proffered letters with a smile and said, “Sure am. I got four boys already; I’d kinda like a girl this time. Still, long as it’s healthy, I’ll be happy. Well, gotta head over to the office and start the day. Be seein’ ya.”

“Take care, Roy. Give my regards to the family.”

He turned and headed for the door as he said, “Will do, Buck.”

While the sheriff was walking across the street and into the jail, the six strangers were walking into the saloon. Soon they ordered their first shot of whiskey; also known as “courage in a bottle.” It was nine-fifteen in the morning.

Sheriff Howard walked into the jail and saw his deputy, Ricky Moore, had made coffee and was sweeping up. “Mornin’ Sheriff, had a good night?”

He nodded as he dropped the mail onto the desk, reached over and poured himself a cup of coffee before he sat down. Roy picked up the mail and began rifling through it as he said, “It was alright; yours?”

“Purdy good, Sheriff. Beautiful day today, ain’t it?”

He nodded and said, “Can’t be too many more comin’, it’s purdy late in the season. Cold’s gotta be comin’ soon. Still, we should enjoy ‘em while we can, I ‘spect.”

As he was shuffling through the pile of mail, Roy pulled an envelope out of the pack and used his knife to open it. Unfolding the paper, he said, “New wanted poster. This fella looks kinda familiar.”

Ricky stopped sweeping and moved over to look at the wanted poster. It said:

**WANTED
DEAD OR ALIVE
FOR MURDER AND ROBBERY
JAMES ‘JIMMY’ SMITH
\$10,000.00 REWARD**

After a few seconds of looking at the drawing of a man in his late 20s or early 30s, Ricky said, “I don’t think so. I ain’t never seen him before in my life. Where do ya think you seen him?”

Roy shook his head. “I don’t know. After a while all these things start lookin’ alike to me.” He walked over and pinned the new poster on the bulletin board. “No matter,” he added, “We’ll probably never see him around here anyway. Still, it’s gonna bother me ‘til I figure out where I seen him before.” He returned to his desk and the rest of the mail while Ricky went back to sweeping out the jail cells.

While he saddled his horse Morgan glanced over at Dan and the others breaking the new horses. He laughed with the others when the first cowboy went flying off a bronco. As the other cowboys rushed in to control the horse and help the cowboy get up, he mounted his horse and headed out for the day.

He rode over the crest of the last hill. Looking down, he saw Pete and the boys already working on separating their beeves from Shepherd's. Morgan continued riding toward the cowboys when he saw Pete waving at him and loping in his direction. He waved back.

Pete rode up and said, "Mornin' boss. Got nearly twenty-five head culled out so far. Ain't sure how many more there is but hopefully not too many more."

He nodded and they both headed back to the herd. Deep in his heart Morgan knew they didn't need the help of an old man, they were just humoring the boss. Still, they did their best to make him feel needed and that made him feel good.