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## 1

“Move, Parker, and you’re a dead man.”

William lay, spread-eagled; the hot, red soil burning his face.

“On your knees,” said the voice – the accent, London, a familiar one – “and don’t go trying any funny business or I’ll be forced to use this.” William felt the end of a gun barrel stabbing at the base of his skull.

The boot on his neck lifted and William coughed, spat into the earth, then turned to look at his captor... *yes, it was Sergeant Smith*. A trickle of blood ran from his forehead and he let it run, knowing that any sudden movement could be his last. He straightened up, slowly, hands aloft. The game was over.

A little way off, a horse neighed and stamped at the ground, impatient to be heading home.

The soldier, backing off, gestured that William should move towards a rough canvas bag, lying nearby. A loop of rope poked out of the opening at the top.

“That’s it – on your feet – slowly. Pick up the rope and put your hands behind your back. Gently now, don’t get no silly ideas. Now, turn away.”

William allowed the sergeant to push his hands through the loop, felt it tighten, then stumbled forwards as he was pushed up the dusty side of the dry riverbed where he had spent the night, out onto the open plain. The rope bit deep into his wrists, and his shoulders jarred, but it was the injustice that hurt him most. The rope slackened as Smith mounted his horse and gave its flanks a sharp kick. It tossed its head and started a slow walk. It knew it was a long way back to camp.

“Right, now it’s *prisoner* Parker again, and don’t you forget it,” said Smith. “So, just keep on walking, and don’t stop till I tells you.”