

In 1854, a mysterious Bronze Bottle comes into the hands of a young Russian boy. Otto Stanoff finds work as a wrangler on a wagon train, hoping to find his brother, Ivan, in California. With the help of the curious bottle, a Sioux Indian and a shy young girl experience adventure and mishap along the trail.

The Amethyst Bottle

by Linda Shields Allison

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BOOK 3

The Amethyst Bottle



Linda Shields Allison

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The Characters ~

Otto Stanoff: The Jewish boy from Russia is cruelly taken from his mother when he is ten to work on a Russian cargo ship. He cherishes his mother's beautiful crest with an amethyst stone as a link to his family. He finds life very hard. At thirteen, he escapes when the ship docks in New York. He makes his way living on the streets of Five Points. While there, he comes in possession of a mysterious bottle. When he is offered a job as a wrangler for a wagon train, Otto finds adventure and mishaps while crossing the country to California. Along the way, an Indian scout and a young girl help him learn about life.

Cornelius P. McAuliffe: As a favor to a friend, the veteran wagon master takes a chance and hires Otto to work as a wrangler on his wagon train. The captain finds the Russian boy eager to learn and takes him under his wing as he guides a group of emigrants across the prairie and over two mountain ranges into California.

Gray Owl: While on a vision quest, the young brave becomes injured and Captain Mac saves him from certain death. He takes the Indian on as a scout, and because he can't speak the Lakota language of the Sioux, he calls him Ghost Walker. When Gray Owl learns that his village has been destroyed and his beloved Little Feather is gone, his life is without meaning. It is a young Russian boy who gives him reason to find life after tragedy.

Little Feather: When the Crow Indians destroy her village, the young girl is captured and taken to live with the Crow tribe.

Victoria Dickerson: The sickly young girl travels west with her family. She spends her days daydreaming and reading books until she meets Otto. The young wrangler asks her to teach him to read and they soon become friends. Through Otto, Victoria learns that life can be an adventure outside of books.

Chandler Dickerson: The lively younger brother of Victoria becomes Otto's friend.

Kirby and Biscuit: The trusted wrangler and cook help Captain McAuliffe guide the emigrants west.

Ivan Stanoff: Otto learns that his older brother is working as a prospector mining gold in California. Otto hopes to find his long-lost brother so they might bring their family over from Russia.

Ruby May: The owner of the Ruby Slipper Palace has made a name for herself as a savvy business woman in San Francisco. A long-time friend of Captain McAuliffe, Ruby uses her connections to try to put Otto on track to find his brother.

Preface

When the American Revolutionary War ended in 1781, a steady flow of people ventured west across the United States into vast and uncharted areas of wilderness. Mountain Men came first to trap beaver and hunt deer. Settlers soon followed to farm the valleys and alluvial plains. The land, rich in natural resources, was home to a host of different tribes of Native American Indians. Each tribe lived in harmony with the deer, bison, and bear that Mother Earth provided for them; but their way of life was soon to change forever.

In 1848 a nugget of gold was found at Sutter's Mill in California and the westward migration exploded. Never before in the history of mankind would any territory become so quickly populated with settlers. In just over one hundred years, thousands of pioneers crossed the continent on horseback, in wagons, and on foot. They settled in the mountains and the deserts, on the prairies, and in the lush valleys of the west coast. They pressed onward until American soil stretched from *sea to shining sea*. These hearty men, women, and children tamed the wilderness and made it flourish. By 1869, the Transcontinental Railroad linked the east coast to the west, which helped transport people and goods across the land in seven days – and the economy boomed. After the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889, the United States Census Director was eager to proclaim, "There can hardly be said to be a frontier line."

Although an unprecedented era of American history was ending, the pioneer spirit continued to take shape in the hopes and hardships of immigrants streaming into America from every corner of the globe who dreamed of a better life. The courage of

The Amethyst Bottle

these early settlers helped define a nation of people who embraced the idea of *the land of the free, and the home of the brave*.

Prologue ~ March 1854 - New York City

Otto Stanoff pressed against the wall of Thomas Simpson's medical office so the doctor could measure his height. The thirteen-year-old Russian boy had celebrated a birthday and grown an inch in the month he had been living with the Simpson family. Dr. Simpson had invited Otto to stay with his family in New York after some runaway slaves named, Esther and Bucky, had taken a group of orphans to their new school in Canada. The former slaves, who worked as conductors on the Underground Railroad, were friends of the doctor.

Together they had rescued Otto and some other homeless children from the slums of a pitiless section of Manhattan known as Five Points. The younger children had gone by train to the school with Esther and Bucky, but Otto stayed behind. He had a yearning to go out west.

As luck would have it, Bucky and Doc Simpson told Otto about a friend of theirs who was a wagon master. He was in Manhattan buying supplies for the men who helped him guide pioneers along the Oregon/California Trail to San Francisco. Bucky had made arrangements for Otto to meet the experienced trail driver, Cornelius P. McAuliffe.

Since gold had been discovered in 1848, scores of pioneers were itching to grab hold of a new life out west. Mac, as he was known to his friends, had questioned Otto and agreed to take the scrappy Russian Jew on as a wrangler to look after the many horses used by him and his men. Cornelius instantly liked the young boy's tenacity, and he made arrangements for Otto to go with him by train, then catch a boat, and finally go by wagon to

Missouri in three weeks. For Otto, the time had flown by with a flurry of activity.

“Why, I’ve never seen anything quite like it, Otto,” Doc Simpson declared when he measured Otto against the wall of his infirmary for the third time. “It’s true, you’ve had the appetite of wild boar these past weeks, but I’ve never seen *anyone* grow as fast as you. An inch in four weeks just has to be a medical wonder,” said the doc as he scratched his head.

“Must be the Simpson ladies’ good cooking, Doc!” Otto walked over to a chair and carefully placed a loaf of Irish brown bread Granny Simpson had made for him on top of his new clothes and alongside a copy of the Bible – a gift from Mrs. Simpson. Otto looked down at the new canvas satchel that would carry all his worldly processions out west.

Dr. Simpson laughed. “Then the women’s good cooking must also be brain food, ‘because you’ve learned the basic fundamentals of reading faster than seems humanly possible! Maybe I should have the Simpson women donate their fine meals to universities to be studied,” he chortled. “No, Otto, somehow I don’t think it’s just the food.”

“Ain’t that the truth, Doc.”

“You mean, “Isn’t that the truth, Otto.”

“Heck, between your good wife and mother feeding me such fine food, they’ve barely given me a minute to do anything else but learn to read and write.”

In actual truth, Otto had been a willing pupil in the women’s quest to season his education. It seemed his brain was hungry for knowledge. At the end of the first week, he had learned the alphabet and had finished reading all the pre-primer books owned by the Simpson children. During his second week, he had read every fairy tale in the children’s library. Now he was reading passages from the Old Testament in the Bible. The ladies would take turns and read a section to him, then listen as

he would tackle reading the passage aloud. At night, Otto would go over each page until he knew every word and its meaning.

“I think I should write to England to see if there’s a name for this type of extreme brain development,” the doctor declared with a wink. “If you want to know the truth, Otto, I knew you were smart the first night I met you going through a rubbish bin in Five Points.” Simpson looked fondly at Otto, “We’ve enjoyed having you in our home. I wish you could stay with our family, but we know you’re anxious to find your brother.”

“I will miss you, Doc.”

Dr. Simpson heard his wife call his name. “Well, Otto, I’ll let you finish packing. I have another small gift for you in the other room.”

Otto looked down at his new boots and humbly said, “Thanks Doc, but you give Otto so much already.”

Dr. Simpson only nodded his head and smiled as he left the room.

Otto reached for the unusual purple bottle resting inside a leather pouch that hung across his shoulder and sighed. It was true. In between eating, he had been studying like a maniac while living with the doctor and his family. However, Otto felt there was something more going on inside him. Ever since he had been given the mysterious bottle by Esther, Otto felt different – stronger both inside and out. He *knew* it must have something to do with the Amethyst Bottle. Yet, it was confusing. Otto could not explain how the curious bottle began to change from the stunning shades of bronze, gold and copper the minute Esther had placed it in his hands. To his amazement, streaks of violet had raced across the bottle until the colors settled into all the varying shades of purple and gold displayed before him now.

Before Esther left, the former slave told him all she knew about the incredible history of the bottle, and how she had gotten it from an Irish girl named Tara, when according to Esther, the bottle had been emerald green.

Otto thought about the words Esther had said to him just before leaving for Canada. "I understand what you must be feeling, because I was mighty baffled when it happened to me. Just cherish and guard the bottle, Otto, and it may help you find what you're looking for." Then Otto noticed that Esther had turned to where Bucky was playing with the children and whispered, "I know it helped me."

Otto reached inside and pulled the bottle from its neat leather case. The varying tones of violet reminded him of his mother, Natasha, and her beautiful purple enamel crest with a lovely amethyst stone in its center. The pendant, which hung around Otto's neck from a strip of leather, was shaped in the form of a knight's shield. On the enamel, cast in raised gold, was a two-headed eagle with a crown floating above the heads. A large amethyst stone had been skillfully set into the center of the crown. Otto knew that the crest had been given to his mother by a daughter of Czar Nicholas I. The cousins had loved each other from childhood. The cousin had pressed it into her hand just before Natasha had been banished from the Romanov family for marrying Otto's Jewish father. He also knew that Natasha Stanoff treasured it.

Otto, shivered as he recalled the day, he lost both his childhood and his family. The ten-year-old boy had been playing with his sisters, Sophie, Anna, and his baby brother Levi, as their mother, Natasha, hung sheets on the clothesline. Five soldiers raced into the front yard on panting horses with steam spewing from their nostrils. Otto watched in horror, as the horses trampled through his mama's precious garden. They

thrust a paper into Natasha's hand and declared that Otto Stanoff was being taken to work on a Russian cargo ship and she had ten minutes to pack his things. Natasha frantically pulled her young son into the house to place some clothes in a bag.

Otto was in a state of panic and asked where he was going.

"You are on the list, my son."

"What list, Mama?"

"The same list that took your brother Ivan from me," she exclaimed.

Large tears streamed from Otto's eyes and he cried, "Please, don't make me go with them, Mama!"

"The czar's soldiers have come and there is nothing we can do," she sobbed. "Listen, Otto, there is so little time."

Otto shook with fear as his mother removed her beloved crest from around her neck. With tears in her eyes, she placed the crest around his neck and carefully tucked it under his sweater. "Guard my necklace well, Otto, and a part of me will always be with you, my son." Otto knew that the crest had been given to his mother by one of her cousins. His mother was a Romanoff and had been raised in a life of privilege. That was before she fell in love with his father and had been disowned by her family. Once, a gold chain held the beautiful crest, but that had been sold many years before to pay for food and rent. Mama had replaced the gold chain with a sturdy leather strip, and she always wore the crest under her clothing, away from the prying eyes of the villagers who might ask questions about it, or report her to the authorities. She instructed Otto to do the same. Otto hugged his mother one last time. He could smell the homemade lilac soap on her neck and feel the pounding of her heart against his small chest.

The crest was Otto's only link to his family, and he never looked at it in the presence of others for fear it would be taken from him. Instinctively, he reached for the medallion and felt its outline under his new shirt. Otto thought, *And now, incredibly, I have the beautiful Amethyst Bottle.* Otto believed that the mysterious bottle was certain to help him find his brother, Ivan. It was too much of a coincidence. *I'm heading out west with a real job as a wrangler on a wagon train. When Mama gets the letter Dr. Simpson helped me send to Russia, telling her that I am on my way to California to find Ivan, she will be so very proud of me.*

Otto remembered the day that soldiers came to his village in Russia and took his older brother Ivan to work on the roads to make the passage into Poland easier. Ivan wrote home when he could. His sad letters described the poor working conditions and miserable food. Then, one day a letter came all the way from Italy. Ivan had fled Russia and miraculously made his way to a seaport on the eastern shore of that country. There, he signed on with an Italian sailing ship that was taking a shipment of wine and olive oil to New York. The next letter came from that city. Ivan wrote that gold had recently been discovered in California and that he had decided to head out west to seek his fortune. That was the last time Otto had heard from him, because that year, he too had been conscripted by the government to work on a ship. It had been two years since Otto had been in contact with his family, but all that was about to change.

"Write to us, Otto. We'll want to know how you're faring." Dr. Simpson said as he entered the room. A slow grin spread across his face. The doctor pulled a leather-bound journal from behind his back and handed it to Otto. The boy was stunned to

see the name **Otto Stanoff** burnt into the leather in fancy lettering.

The doctor coughed. "I bought the journal and burned your name into the leather with a special tool. You'll be seeing a lot of interesting sights, Otto, and I thought it might be a good idea to make a log of your journey. I took the liberty of putting our address here at the back of the book."

Otto felt tears welling in his eyes as he ran his fingers over his name. The wall of distrust that had lived inside him for two years was slowly crumbling. Through the support and love from the Simpson family, Otto had begun to rebuild his faith in human kindness. "I will, Doc. It is special gift. I will use it to record what I see." Carefully, he placed the journal on top of the Bible.

Otto looked at Dr. Simpson. "You have been much kind to me, Doc," murmured Otto as he hugged the doctor and buried his face in his chest. "I can never pay back all you and your family has given me – the books, the new clothes, and. . .well. . .so much more. I desire to say thanks, and hope I can locate right words in my brain. Part of me would wish to stay here, where I feel safe, but I have a powerful longing to make journey west and find my brother. I see this journey as most important to bring my family back together again."

Thomas Simpson beamed with affection. "I identify with your desire, Otto, and, just for the record, you're going to have no trouble making yourself understood out west."

Simpson looked at his pocket watch and said, "Well, I guess we'd better get you to the train station. We wouldn't want to start you off on the wrong foot with Captain McAuliffe by arriving late for your first day on the job."

"What does this mean – wrong foot?" asked Otto as they walked out the door.

Chapter 1 ~ April 1854 - Elm Grove, Missouri

Otto Stanoff sat on the stump of a tree and sniffed into the breeze. Through a haze of dust that seemed to linger everywhere in Elm Grove, Otto could smell spring in the air. The spring rains were late in coming, and Otto knew that rainfall was vital to supply the prairie grass for the many horses, mules, and oxen that would carry Otto and about sixty other folks two thousand miles across the wilderness to the gold fields of California. Some of the pioneers planned to pan for gold, but others would make their living by farming. Others planned to open businesses as merchants to cater to the growing towns.

When Otto had arrived at Elm Grove three days before, he had chuckled at the name of the place just outside of Independence, Missouri. From Otto's viewpoint on the stump, he could only see one or two trees. They didn't look like elm trees, and they definitely were not like any grove he had ever seen as a young boy in Russia. Otto shifted on the stump and looked over his right shoulder. Ramshackle buildings and tents formed a makeshift city that housed the hundreds of people waiting to head west to California, Oregon, or Salt Lake City. The dwellings tilted at odd angles and reminded him of some of the rickety houses he had known when he lived in the slums of Five Points in Manhattan. Although he had been away from that horrible place for only a month, the memory of the year he had spent there trying to stay alive made him shiver with dread. As horrible as it was in Five Points, Otto knew it was better than the years he had spent being forced to work on a Russian cargo ship. He also knew he had been smart to jump ship in New York and try and make it on his own, as his brother Ivan had

done. Otto washed the thoughts from his mind. Carefully, he closed his new journal, and stored his pencil in the pocket of his new flannel shirt.

Otto soaked up the warm afternoon sun and smiled at the scene before him. He watched toddlers playing at their mothers' heels, as the women washed clothes or peeled potatoes for dinner. The children made him homesick for his own brothers and sisters, and the mother he had been so cruelly taken from in Russia when he was only ten. He gazed at the men, huddled in groups, arguing over what animals were best for pulling wagons across the prairie – or how much salt, coffee, and flour would be needed for the six-month journey, and Otto wished his father was still alive.

His heart began to quicken. In the distance he saw the wagon master motion for Otto to join him near the horses. Cornelius P. McAuliffe was not a mean man, but he was a natural born leader and a bit gruff around the edges, as leaders sometimes are. The tall lean man with russet-brown eyes and a ruggedly handsome face commanded the respect of others, and usually got it with his quiet no-nonsense manner. Born the third son of a southern aristocratic plantation owner, Mac, as he was known to his crew, knew that he would never inherit his father's land and that suited him just fine. He had always had a peculiar feeling about his father owning the slaves who worked on his plantation. To him, it just seemed wrong. Besides which, he never liked to stay in one place too long. McAuliffe had been a wagon master for eight years. At forty-five, he had never married and the wandering life of a trail master suited his lifestyle. Otto admired his rugged good looks, and was grateful that McAuliffe had hired him on as a wrangler. Otto desperately wanted to please his new boss more than anything.

Otto leapt off the tree stump and brushed the dust off his new pants. "I'm coming, sir!" he shouted.

Otto ran over to Captain McAuliffe and waited as the trail master gave instructions to a cowboy named Kirby. The man had been on many trail drives, and the captain trusted that Kirby would do whatever he asked to get the job done.

McAuliffe flipped to a page in his ledger and said, "Check on the Dickerson family next. Inventory a list of the supplies they've laid in and make certain they have the right number of provisions for the trip. Look over their oxen to see if they're fit enough for the long trek west. Oh, and Kirby, mention that I'll stop by later to answer any questions they might have. Tell them to have two hundred dollars ready as my fee, and that I'll collect the remaining two hundred when I've safely delivered them to California. Check back with me before you move on to the next wagon. I think we'll inventory Isaac Wise and his family."

"Sure thing, boss," declared Kirby. He tipped his hat to McAuliffe and headed in the direction of the Dickerson's wagon.

Otto had met the Dickerson family on his first day in Elm Grove. Tony and Julia had invited him to share lunch with them and meet their children. Chandler, a hearty sandy-haired boy was two years younger than Otto. He was full of life and had an impish gleam in his intelligent blue eyes. Otto knew that they would get along fine. The Dickerson's daughter, Victoria, was thirteen – same as Otto. He thought the girl seemed pale in color and a bit shy. She had thick reddish-blond hair and a smattering of freckles that dotted her nose. Otto could not tell what color her eyes were because Victoria spent most of the afternoon with her nose buried in a book. Otto was already wondering how he might persuade her to let him have a crack at reading it when she was finished.

The Dickerson's farm had been sold in Springfield, Illinois and they were heading to California to join Julia's brother and his family, who owned a farm in the Sacramento Valley. It was a risk to sell everything and move, but after watching Victoria struggle with a series of illnesses that had left the girl bedridden the last few winters, Julia thought the milder climate in California might improve their daughter's health. Two toddlers, Jessica and Christina, completed the members of the family.

McAuliffe turned his attention to Otto. He stamped the butt of his cigarette into the dirt and immediately began to roll another one from a cloth bag filled with tobacco and a tiny square of white paper. "How are you getting on, Otto? Is everyone treating you, okay?"

Otto glanced over at Bull. The burly cowboy was repairing a section of fence that held a dozen horses penned inside a make-shift corral. "Sure, Captain McAuliffe, everyone treating Otto okay," he lied.

In actuality, Bull, who also worked as a wrangler, had made Otto's life uncomfortable over the past two days. Otto thought that maybe it was some kind of prank that cowboys inflicted on all newly hired hands. Being a cabin boy on a Russian ship, Otto knew first-hand about being the object of some of the sailor's jokes and torments. He was used to it, but still he found it annoying to wake up on his second morning in Elm Grove to discover that water had been poured into the brand-new boots Dr. Simpson had given him. Otto knew it hadn't rained overnight. Then Otto noticed Bull snickering at him as he poured the water out of his boot. Otto knew that the wet ankle boots would give him blisters, so he decided to go barefoot that morning and give the shoes time to dry out. This was really no hardship for him. His feet had grown calloused from going

without shoes living in the slums of Five Points after being beaten by a pair of thugs who stole his only shoes.

When Otto went to check on the boots that afternoon, he noticed that sand had been poured into the boots clear up to the top. He tried to dump it out, but a fair amount remained stuck against the sides of the wet interior of the boots. Otto knew to outwit his tormentor; he would have to use his brain. So, he took the shoes over to the Dickerson's wagon and found Julia kneading bread dough. He told her that he had been the victim of an unfortunate mishap by the creek and wondered if he could please dry his boots on the seat of their covered wagon. Julia said she would be only too happy to oblige.

Funny thing though, the next morning when Otto went to get the boots, they were not only dry, but cleaned of all traces of sand and had been shined with polish as well. He walked over to where Mrs. Dickerson was making biscuits for breakfast to say thanks, but she had only shrugged her shoulders and said, "Oh my, Otto, I plum forgot they were there. I'm glad you remembered where you put them." She then invited him to stay for breakfast, but he told her he had already eaten and was needed by the trail master.

McAuliffe expertly rolled his cigarette and licked the end of the paper with his tongue. The captain lit it with a match and turned his attention to his new wrangler. "Are you getting enough to eat?"

"Yes, sir, cook's food is good."

"There's nothing fancy about Biscuit's cooking, but there'll be plenty of it. Every once in a while, he'll make a pie from some wild berries or apples, and that'll bring the boys running to his dinner bell."

Otto made a mental note to ask Mrs. Dickerson what a pie was.

“Tell me, Otto, what do you remember about what I showed you yesterday?”

Otto cleared his throat. “You told me that horses are smart and useful animals but need to be groomed by people so they won’t get sick. You showed me how the body, tail, and mane must be brushed every day. I should check horses for cuts when I’m brushing and clean cuts with liniment so horses won’t get sick. Then you showed me how to check the hooves for stones with the hoof pick and to tell you if there is any swelling in horses’ legs.” Otto wrinkled his brow and said, “Oh, and I should check saddles and blankets for stickers and burrs each night, ‘because that could cause horses...let me think...a darn sight of misery.’”

The trail driver laughed. The boy had repeated his lesson almost word for word. “That’s good, Otto. For a boy that’s only been in America for a year, you speak English better than a lot of emigrants I’ve taken west”

“In Five Points it was learn English or starve,” said Otto.

Mac laughed again. Then a hacking cough erupted from his lungs. The wagon master frowned as he looked at the smoke rising from his cigarette. “Smoking is a filthy habit, Otto. Do yourself a favor and never take it up.”

“Yes, sir.”

McAuliffe liked the Russian boy and had a feeling that Otto was going to make a good wrangler. Driving a group of green-horn easterners west was hard work. Most folks had never been more than twenty miles from their homes. He needed a good wrangler to take care of the horses his men rode. It was important to rotate the horses each day, and give them a rest. A two-thousand-mile trek across the wilderness could wear a horse out. Mac had a good feeling about the newly hired hand and thought he would make a fine addition to the two cowboys,

an Indian scout, and one victuals and provisions' wagon cook already in his employment.

"You've not only grown like a fungus since we first met in New York, Otto, but you seem to have the right bits and pieces to make a good wrangler. Not only that, you're smart. You take to learning like a fish to a worm. Now you gotta realize, Otto, it's not enough to know how to care for a horse. To understand horses in general, you must also learn to become a good rider."

Otto opened his eyes wide in disbelief. It had taken Otto a few days to understand the unusual southern drawl of the trail master. His manner of speaking was different from Dr. Simpson – as though the vowel sounds were drawn out like a sleepy yawn. Although he did not always understand *every* word, Otto generally got the idea of what was expected of him thanks to McAuliffe's slow way of talking. So, when Otto heard Mac's unhurried accent sputter out the words, *good rider*, he nearly choked. He knew that he would be responsible for the care and feeding of the horses; he did not know that he was going to be allowed to ride them. Otto's heart pounded in his chest with a mixture of excitement and fear. His mouth went as dry as the dust on his boots, and he could only nod.

"Listen careful-like, Otto. Now, a good rider will get the best out of his horse with the least amount of strain. Horses are smart, and they'll try a man's patience if the rider will let them. A horse needs to know who's in charge. By nature, horses will lash out through fear or anger in three ways. They'll rear up and run off, then again, they might bite, or they'll kick you with their back hooves. Always let them know you're in charge. But at the same time you should be gentle but firm, and the horse will serve you well. Are you ready to learn how to ride?"

Otto was too scared to speak, and all he could do was nod.

Sensing the boy's fear, McAuliffe bent down so he was eye level and lowered his voice, "Look, Otto, a horse can smell fear

in a man, so you best shake off those feelings with a couple of deep breaths.”

Otto swallowed a gulp of air.

McAuliffe laughed. “You’re gonna be just fine. Now go over there. My Indian scout is waiting to show you how to saddle up. There’s no one on this wagon train that’s a better rider than Ghost Walker. Listen to him and you’ll become a good rider too.”

Chapter 2 ~ April 1854 - Elm Grove, Missouri

Over the past three days, Otto had seen the Indian around camp. In truth, he continually found himself staring at the scout they called Ghost Walker. Otto had never seen a real Indian. In Five Points, there was a drunk who hung around the bars begging for money. He was supposed to be from a tribe of Indians called the Iroquois, but that cheerless man in dirty clothes looked nothing like the imposing figure that Otto was walking toward.

This Indian was tall with shiny black hair parted down the middle and worn long like a horse's tail. A thin strip of rawhide tied the hair at the back of the head. Several blue and white beads had been fastened to the ends of the rawhide. A small single white feather had been cleverly tied to the rawhide and hung loosely facing downward against the back of the hair. His face was handsomely set off with high cheek bones and piercing black eyes. The Indian scout had skin the same warm golden-brown color of the teakwood that Otto had polished as a cabin boy on the Russian ship. Otto noticed that Ghost Walker also wore a beautifully polished arrowhead fastened with rawhide around his neck. He had observed the Indian stroking the superbly crafted stone with his right hand when he thought no one was looking at him. For some reason, the arrowhead reminded Otto of his mother's crest that was so dear to his heart, and Otto wondered if the stone had a special meaning for the scout.

Each morning, Otto had seen the Indian bathing down by the stream in his loin cloth. He was lean with not an ounce of fat on his body – yet his arms and legs were muscular and strong.

Otto felt like a small insignificant beetle compared to this perfect specimen of health. Otto noticed that Ghost Walker did not dress in the clothes of the white man. He wore buckskin pants and a matching shirt made of pale soft leather. Instead of boots, the Indian wore leather moccasins on his feet, and he moved gracefully in them like a tiger Otto had once seen prowling near his village in Russia. Otto wondered how old the Indian was. It was baffling, but he thought that Ghost Walker looked both young and old at the same time. It was almost as though the Indian had the body of a young man but the spirit of an old man. Otto felt certain that he and the Indian could have a lot in common, and he desperately wanted to get to know him better.

Only yesterday, Otto had tried to draw the quiet young scout into conversation by asking him where McAuliffe stored the extra brushes for the horses. But the Indian had only pointed to three brushes resting in clear sight on an old wooden table, and Otto had felt foolish and small.

Otto let out a long slow breath of air as he walked up to where the Indian stood whispering softly into his horse's ear. "Good morning, Ghost Walker. I am Otto." Otto groaned inwardly at the silly sound of his words.

Ghost Walker moved his head a few inches away from his pony to look at Otto, but the frisky mare wanted the Indian's attention, and she nuzzled him with her nose and flipped her white tail in the air. Otto smiled thinking the horse acted just like a child who wanted the full attention of its mother.

The animal was the most unusual horse Otto had ever seen. The mare was reddish-brown with large white spotted markings on her body. In contrast, the horse's face was completely reddish-brown with the exception of one strange mark on the forehead in the same white color of the tail. Otto thought that the mark reminded him of something, but he couldn't quite

piece it together in his mind. Ghost Walker whispered something to the mare in his native tongue then turned to the boy. Otto noticed that the horse obeyed the Indian by standing completely still. Otto had never seen anything quite like it.

“Trail Boss tell me teach boy to ride horse. You ever ride horse?”

Otto gulped, “No...sir.”

“Before boy ride, first must know how to put saddle on horse.”

Otto spent the better part of an hour putting on and taking off the blanket and saddle – cinching straps and attaching the bridle and bit to the head. It was only when he had done it for the fifth time that Ghost Walker was satisfied that the horse was properly fitted and that Otto was ready for his first lesson. Ghost Walker had chosen a small and gentle brown mare for Otto to ride. From where Otto stood, the horse seemed as tall as the mast on a ship.

“Rider must always mount horse from here.” The Indian pointed to the left side of the horse. “Put foot in stirrup and pull up with hands on saddle horn.” Ghost Walker pointed to Otto’s left foot and a leather handle sticking up from the front part of the saddle.

Otto noticed that the cowboy, named Bull, had finished the repair on the fence and was scratching the heavy crop of whiskers on his chin. The amused cowboy was chuckling under his breath from where he sat watching on the top rail of the corral. Otto looked up at the horse and prayed that he could even get his hands on the saddle horn. It seemed so high up, but he was determined not to fail in front of the oafish cowboy. The Russian boy adjusted the leather case at his side which encased the bottle. Gritting his teeth and rubbing his two hands together, he carefully placed his foot in the stirrup. He wrapped the tips of his fingers around the saddle horn and grunted aloud as he

pulled the weight of his body up into the saddle. For an instant, Otto thought he was going to topple over the other side of the horse and fall to the ground. But thankfully, the horse only took a few steps forward and then stopped, and Otto was able to steady himself in the saddle. Ghost Walker adjusted the stirrups to the length of Otto legs.

“Yer lookin’ like a real cowboy now,” teased Bull. “Maybe ya can learn to ride Injun style like yer red-skinned teacher.”

Otto looked at the Indian and thought his skin looked nothing like the color red. He wondered if Ghost Walker was annoyed, but the scout did not seem to be bothered by Bull’s taunting comments. In fact, he never even looked over in the direction of where the massive cowboy sat.

Otto watched Ghost Walker mount his horse. The Indian did not have a saddle on the brown and white pinto, and he seemed to spring off the ground with his left foot as his right leg swept over the back of his pony in one fluid motion. Otto was in awe of the effortless way the brave ascended the back of his horse.

The motion caused Otto’s mare to skitter a few paces sideways. The muscles in Otto’s thighs tightened against the saddle. He prayed that he would not fall off, and as if in answer, the gentle brown mare settled to a stop. Otto gripped the saddle horn until the knuckles in his hands turned white. His stomach tossed like the rocking motion of a ship, as he adjusted his position on the horse. Then he remembered McAuliffe’s words. *A horse can smell fear in a man.* Otto drew in several deep breaths with his nose to relax his body. *I can do this, thought Otto. Heck, I’ve faced storms at sea that would scare the feathers off a chicken.* Otto relaxed his grip on the saddle horn and looked across to where the Indian sat facing him comfortably astride his pony.

All of a sudden, it came to Otto, and he smiled. *The unusual marking on the horse’s forehead that I wondered about earlier*

looks like a small white feather! He glanced closer at the mare and it became as clear as water to him. The white mark on the Indian's pony looked exactly like a delicately curved feather suspended weightless in air just as if it had been tossed there by the wind.

Ghost Walker interrupted his thoughts by declaring, "Today we walk horse. Rider must have good balance." He guided his horse over to Otto. "Shorten reins...hold here. This movement tells horse to go slow. No...not like that. Bit is too tight. Relax hands. Let fingers move reins in and out with motion of horse's head. Boy must be one with horse."

Otto wished to make an impression on the Indian, so he willed himself to relax as Ghost Walker guided Otto and his horse away from the corral and the snickering sounds of Bull.

Chapter 3 ~ June 1851 - Indian Territory

The young fifteen-year-old brave known as Gray Owl, to his Sioux tribe, had been sent into the wilderness alone. On the verge of manhood, the young boy was on a mission to discover his vision-quest. It was a ritual all Sioux boys went through before entering into manhood. During this time alone, a boy would fast, meditate, and pray to his ancestors until he reached a trance-like state. Gray Owl was told that a dream would come to him. It was believed that this vision would determine and guide him in taking his place as an adult member of the tribe. Gray Owl had been taught from childhood that all his success in life would depend on having a strong vision. It was especially important to Gray Owl because his father was a shaman. The medicine man held a key position as the spiritual and healing advisor for his tribe, and the young warrior hoped to follow in his father's footsteps. He needed a worthy vision to ensure his place as the future shaman for his people, the Sioux.

Gray Owl had been surviving with only a little food and water for two days. He had called his ancestors for guidance but to his dismay, no vision had come to him. The young brave, though weak from hunger and thirst, was determined to stay alone in the wilderness until his great Sioux ancestors came to him with a vision of such magnitude that his family would burst with pride.

From the yellow grass of the prairie, Gray Owl looked up and noticed a bald eagle circling the cloudless sky. Thinking that the graceful bird might be a sign from Mother Earth, he decided to climb up the face of a large outcropping of rocks to get a better view of the majestic bird. As he climbed up the side

of the granite, Gray Owl admired the beautiful wingspan of the eagle and thought of his friend – a young Sioux girl known to his people as Little Feather.

Little Feather was soft and delicate like her name. She possessed lovely brown eyes and a full mouth that always held a happy smile. She had been born two summers after Gray Owl. He and Little Feather had played together as children and Gray Owl had loved her for most of his life.

The young brave knew that she loved him too. *When my vision-quest is completed, I will be strong in body and in spirit,* he thought. *I will take my place in the tribe. I will hunt and kill a hundred bison. I will ride my pony well and take part in many coups of our enemy. Then, my ancestors will help me find the courage to ask Coyote Tail whether Little Feather might become my wife.* With a worthy vision-quest and Little Feather at his side, Gray Owl felt confident that he would secure his place as an important man in his tribe.

Gray Owl was surprised at how much effort it took to climb up the steep face of the rock. The lack of food and water made even simple tasks hard. He had climbed almost to the top of the rock when, from out of nowhere, a large black crow flew straight at his head. Black feathers slapped against the boy's face. Gray Owl loosened his hold on the rock with one hand to drive the bird away. His feet slipped out from under him, but he held firm with one hand which was gripped tightly inside a crevice in the rock.

"Go away pesky crow! Have I disturbed the nest where your babies sleep? If so, I am sorry, but I will not harm your children." Liberated from the attack by the black bird, Gray Owl reached up with his free hand to better secure himself to the rock. Abruptly, the crow swept in again and began to claw at his head.

The sudden movement unnerved the young Indian, and for a second time caused him to lose his grip on the rock. Feeling already weak and dizzy from lack of food and water, Gray Owl could not hold on. The boy's hand inched away from where it was anchored, and he felt himself slipping.

Gray Owl was angry with the crow. As gravity took hold and the boy began to fall from the rock, he had the odd sensation that he was descending slowly – as if in a trance. He reached for the branch of a small tree, absurdly trying to grow out of a crack in the granite. But he only felt his skin scrape cruelly against the bark as it broke off in his hand, and he slithered helplessly thirty feet down the face of the rock. He landed hard – breaking two ribs as he smacked against the yellow grass. Gray Owl lay unconscious for the rest of the day.

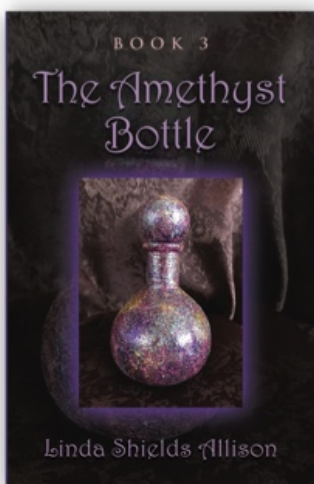
When he awoke, it was dark. From his position on his back Gray Owl saw thousands of stars in the sky. The night was warm, but the boy shivered from shock – not only from the jolt of the fall, but from a strange and unsettling dream – so real that it filled his mind with terrifying visions. The horrified boy shook when he remembered fierce angry men with faces streaked in brightly-colored paint riding into his village on horseback. Gray Owl realized that his cheeks were drenched in tears. At first, the young brave was ashamed to have been crying in his sleep. Suddenly, he wrenched from a sharp pain in his lungs as he attempted to wipe the tears from his cheeks. The sudden pain pushed the dream from his mind.

Gray Owl remembered the crow flying into his head and his fall from the rock. He thought that he had broken his ribs, but decided that he must try and make his way back to his village to get treated by his father. If he remained wounded on the prairie, he would become easy prey for a mountain lion or a pack of coyotes. The boy tried to sit up. He nearly passed out in pain,

but forced himself to his feet. Slowly, he began to stumble across the dry prairie grass toward his village.

The boy walked all night. His lips were swollen from thirst. Try as he might, he could not concentrate on the task of finding his village because the strange dream kept popping into his thoughts. The disturbing images had been so real – so lifelike, and suddenly he gasped as he recalled the worst of it.

In his vision, Gray Owl had seen the enemy of the Sioux, a tribe of Indians called the Crow, riding into his village to kill his people, to steal their horses, to burn his village. He grimaced as he recalled the high-pitched yelps of the painted warriors as they set fire to his parents' tipi as they slept. Gray Owl choked back a scream as he remembered the flames that engulfed his village, and the sight of a lone white feather floating skyward with the rising of thick black smoke.



In 1854, a mysterious Bronze Bottle comes into the hands of a young Russian boy. Otto Stanoff finds work as a wrangler on a wagon train, hoping to find his brother, Ivan, in California. With the help of the curious bottle, a Sioux Indian and a shy young girl experience adventure and mishap along the trail.

The Amethyst Bottle

by Linda Shields Allison

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