

Elísha Comes to Red Horse

by Louis L'Amour, 1908-1988

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There is a new church in the town of Red Horse. A clean white church of board and bat with a stained-glass window, a tall pointed steeple, and a bell that we've been told came all the way from Youngstown, Ohio. Nearby is a comfortable parsonage, a two-story house with a garreted roof, and fancy gingerbread under the eaves.

Just down the hill from the church and across from the tailings of what was once the King James Mine is a carefully kept cemetery of white headstones and neatly fitted crosses. It is surrounded by a spiked iron fence six feet high, and the gate is always fastened with a heavy lock. We open it up only for funerals and when the groundskeeper makes his rounds. Outsiders standing at the barred gate may find that a bit odd... but the people of Red Horse wouldn't have it any other way.

Visitors come from as far away as Virginia City to see our church, and on Sundays when we pass the collection, why, quite a few of those strangers ante up

with the rest of us. Now Red Horse has seen its times of boom and bust and our history is as rough as any other town in the West, but our new church has certainly become the pride of the county.

And it is all thanks to the man that we called Brother Elisha.

He was six feet five inches tall and he came into town a few years ago riding the afternoon stage. He wore a black broadcloth frock coat and carried a small valise. He stepped down from the stage, swept off his tall black hat, spread his arms, and lifted his eyes to the snowcapped ridges beyond the town. When he had won every eye on the street he said, „I come to bring deliverance, and eternal life!“

And then he crossed the street to the hotel, leaving the sound of his magnificent voice echoing against the false-fronted, unpainted buildings of our street.

In our town we've had our share of the odd ones, and many of the finest and best, but this was something new in Red Horse.

„A sky pilot, Marshal.“ Ralston spat into the dust. „We got ourselves another durned sky pilot!“

„It's a cinch he's no cattleman,“ I said, „and he doesn't size up like a drummer.“

„We've got a sky pilot,“ Brace grumbled, „and one preacher ought to balance off six saloons, so we sure don't need another.“

„I say he's a gambler,“ Brennen argued. „That was just a grandstand play. Red Horse attracts gamblers like manure attracts flies. First time he gets in a game he'll cold deck you in the most sanctified way you ever did see!“

At daybreak the stranger walked up the mountain. Years ago lightning had struck the base of the ridge, and before rain put out the fire it burned its way up the mountain in a wide avenue. Strangely, nothing had ever again grown on that slope. Truth to tell, we'd had some mighty dry years after that, and nothing much had grown anywhere.

The Utes were superstitious about it. They said the lightning had put a curse on the mountain, but we folks in Red Horse put no faith in that. Or not much.

It was almighty steep to the top of that ridge, and every step the stranger took was in plain sight of the town, but he walked out on that spring morning and strode down the street and up the mountain. Those long legs of his took him up like he was walking a graded road, and when he got to the flat rock atop the butte he turned back toward the town and lifted his arms to the heavens.

„He's prayin',“ Ralston said, studying him through Brennen's glass. „He's sure enough prayin'!“

„I maintain he's a gambler,“ Brennen insisted. „Why can't he do his praying in church like other folks. Ask the reverend and see what he says.“

Right then the reverend came out of the Emporium with a small sack of groceries under his arm, and noting the size of the sack, I felt like ducking into Brennen's Saloon. When prosperity and good weather come to Red Horse, we're inclined to forget our preacher and sort of stave off the doctor bills, too. Only in times of drought or low-grade ore do we attend church regular and support the preacher as we ought.

„What do you make of him, Preacher?“ Brace asked.

The reverend squinted his eyes at the tiny figure high upon the hill.

„There are many roads to grace,“ he said, „perhaps he has found his.“

„If he’s a preacher, why don’t he pray in church?“ Brennen protested.

„The groves were God’s first temples,“ the reverend quoted. „There’s no need to pray in church. A prayer offered up anywhere is heard by the Lord.“

Ralston went into the hotel, and we followed him in to see what name the man had used. It was written plain as print: Brother Elisha, Damascus.

We stood back and looked at each other. We’d never had anybody in Red Horse from Damascus. We’d never had anybody from farther away than Denver except maybe a drummer who claimed he’d been to St. Louis... but we never believed him.

It was nightfall before Brother Elisha came down off the mountain, and he went at once to the hotel. Next day Brace came up to Brennen and me. „You know, I was talking to Sampson. He says he’s never even seen Brother Elisha yet.“

„What of it?“ Brennen says. „I still say he’s a gambler.“

„If he don’t eat at Sampson’s“—Brace paused for emphasis—„where does he eat?“

We stared at each other. Most of us had our homes and wives to cook for us, some of the others batched it, but stoppers-by or ones who didn’t favor their own cooking, they ate at Sampson’s. There just wasn’t anywhere else to eat.

„There he goes now,“ Brennen said, „looking sanctimonious as a dog caught in his own hen coop.“

„Now see here!“ Ralston protested. „Don’t be talking that way, Brennen. After all, we don’t know who he might be!“

Brother Elisha passed us by like a pay-car passes a tramp, and turning at the corner he started up the mountain. It was a good two miles up that mountain and the man climbed two thousand feet or more, with no switchbacks or twist-arounds, but he walked right up it. I wouldn’t say that was a steep climb, but it wasn’t exactly a promenade, either.

Brace scratched his jaw. „Maybe the man’s broke,“ he suggested. „We can’t let a man of God starve right here amongst us. What would the folks in Virginia City say?“

„Who says he’s a man of God?“ Brennen was always irreverent. „Just because he wears a black suit and goes up a mountain to pray?“

„It won’t do,“ Brace insisted, „to have it said a preacher starved right here in Red Horse.“

„The reverend,“ I suggested, „might offer some pointers on that.“

They ignored me, looking mighty stiff and self-important.

„We could take up a collection,“ Ralston suggested.

Brother Elisha had sure stirred up a sight of conversation around town, but nobody knew anything because he hadn’t said two words to anybody. The boys at the hotel, who have a way of knowing such things, said he hadn’t nothing in his valise but two shirts, some underwear, and a Bible.

That night there was rain. It was soft, pleasant spring rain, the kind we call a growing rain, and it broke a two-year dry spell. Whenever we get a rain like that we know that spring has surely come, for they are warm rains and they melt the snow from the mountains and start the seeds germinating again. The snow gone from the ridges is the first thing we notice after such a rain, but next morning it

wasn't only the snow, for something else had happened. Up that long-dead hillside where Brother Elisha walked, there was a faint mist of green, like the first sign of growing grass.

Brace came out, then Ralston and some others, and we stood looking up the mountain. No question about it, the grass was growing where no grass had grown in years. We stared up at it with a kind of awe and wondering.

„It's him!“ Brace spoke in a low, shocked voice. „Brother Elisha has done this.“

„Have you gone off your head?“ Brennen demanded irritably. „This is just the first good growing weather we've had since the fire. The last few years there's been little rain and that late, and the ground has been cold right into the summer.“

„You believe what you want,“ Ralston said. „We know what we can see. The Utes knew that hillside was accursed, but now he's walked on it, the curse is lifted. He said he would bring life, and he has.“

It was all over town. Several times folks tried to get into talk with Brother Elisha, but he merely lifted a hand as if blessing them and went his way. But each time he came down from the mountain, his cheeks were flushed with joy and his eyes were glazed like he'd been looking into the eternity of heaven.

All this time nothing was heard from Reverend Sanderson, so what he thought about Brother Elisha, nobody knew. Here and there we began to hear talk that he was the new Messiah, but nobody seemed to pay much mind to that talk. Only it made a man right uneasy... how was one expected to act toward a Messiah?

In Red Horse we weren't used to distinguished visitors. It was out of the way, back in the hills, off the main roads east and west. Nobody ever came to Red Horse, unless they were coming to Red Horse.

Brennen had stopped talking. One time after he'd said something sarcastic it looked like he might be mobbed, so he kept his mouth shut, and I was just as satisfied, although it didn't seem to me that he'd changed his opinion of Brother Elisha. He always was a stubborn cuss.

Now personally, I didn't cater to this Messiah talk. There was a time or two when I had the sneaking idea that maybe Brennen knew what he was talking about, but I sure enough didn't say it out loud. Most people in Red Horse were kind of proud of Brother Elisha even when he made them uncomfortable. Mostly I'm a man likes a hand of poker now and again, and I'm not shy about a bottle, although not likely to get all liquored up. On the other hand, I rarely miss a Sunday at meeting unless the fishing is awful good, and I contribute. Maybe not as much as I could, but I contribute.

The reverend was an understanding sort of man, but about this here Brother Elisha, I wasn't sure. So I shied away from him on the street, but come Sunday I was in church. Only a half dozen were there. That was the day Brother Elisha held his first meeting.

There must've been three hundred people out there on that green mountainside when Brother Elisha called his flock together. Nobody knew how the word got around, but suddenly everybody was talking about it and most of them went out of curiosity.

By all accounts Brother Elisha turned out to be a Hell-and-damnation preacher with fire and thunder in his voice, and even there in the meeting house while the reverend talked we could hear those mighty tones rolling up against the rock walls

of the mountains and sounding in the canyons as Brother Elisha called on the Lord to forgive the sinners on the Great Day coming.

Following Sunday I was in church again, but there was nobody there but old Ansel Greene's widow who mumbled to herself and never knew which side was up... except about money. The old woman had it, but hadn't spent enough to fill a coffee can since old Ansel passed on.

Just the two of us were there, and the reverend looked mighty down in the mouth, but nonetheless he got up in the pulpit and looked down at those rows of empty seats and announced a hymn.

Now I am one of these here folks who don't sing. Usually when hymns are sung I hang on to a hymnal with both hands and shape the words and rock my head to the tune, but I don't let any sound come out. But this time there was no chance of that. It was up to me to sing or get off the spot, and I sang. The surprise came when right behind me a rich baritone rolled out, and when I turned to look, it was Brennen.

Unless you knew Brennen this wouldn't mean much. Once an Orangeman, Brennen was an avowed and argumentative atheist. Nothing he liked better than an argument about the Bible, and he knew more about it than most preachers, but he scoffed at it. Since the reverend had been in town his one great desire had been to get Brennen into church, but Brennen just laughed at him, although like all of us he both liked and respected the reverend.

So here was Brennen, giving voice there back of me, and I doubt if the reverend would have been as pleased had the church been packed. Brennen sang, no nonsense about it, and when the responses were read, he spoke out strong and sure.

At the door the reverend shook hands with him. „It is a pleasure to have you with us, Brother Brennen.“

„It's a pleasure to be here, Reverend,“ Brennen said. „I may not always agree with you, Parson, but you're a good man, a very good man. You can expect me next Sunday, sir.“

Walking up the street, Brennen said, „My ideas haven't changed, but Sanderson is a decent man, entitled to a decent attendance at his church, and his congregation should be ashamed. Ashamed, I say!“

Brennen was alone in his saloon next day. Brother Elisha had given an impassioned sermon on the sinfulness of man and the coming of the Great Day, and he scared them all hollow.

You never saw such a changed town. Ralston, who spoke only two languages, American and profane, was suddenly talking like a Baptist minister at a Bible conference and looking so sanctimonious it would fair turn a man's stomach.

Since Brother Elisha started preaching, the two emptiest places in town were the church and the saloon. Nor would I have you thinking wrong of the saloon. In my day in the West, a saloon was a club, a meeting place, a forum, and a source of news all put together. It was the only place men could gather to exchange ideas, do business, or hear the latest news from the outside.

And every day Brother Elisha went up the mountain.

One day when I stopped by the saloon, Brennen was outside watching Brother Elisha through his field glasses.

„Is he prayin’?“ I asked.

„You might say. He lifts his arms to the sky, rants around some, then he disappears over the hill. Then he comes back and rants around some more and comes down the hill.“

„I suppose he has to rest,“ I said. „Prayin’ like that can use up a sight of energy.“

„I suppose so,“ he said doubtfully. After a moment or two, he asked, „By the way, Marshal, were you ever in Mobeetie?“

By that time most of that great blank space on the mountainside had grown up to grass, and it grew greenest and thickest right where Brother Elisha walked, and that caused more talk.

Not in all this time had Brother Elisha been seen to take on any nourishment, not a bite of anything, nor to drink, except water from the well.

When Sunday came around again the only two in church were Brennen and me, but Brennen was there, all slicked up mighty like a winning gambler, and when the reverend’s wife passed the plate, Brennen dropped in a twenty-dollar gold piece. Also, I’d heard he’d had a big package of groceries delivered around to the one-room log parsonage.

The town was talking of nothing but Brother Elisha, and it was getting so a man couldn’t breathe the air around there, it was so filled with sanctified hypocrisy. You never saw such a bunch of overnight gospel-shouters.

Now I can’t claim to be what you’d call a religious man, yet I’ve a respect for religion, and when a man lives out his life under the sun and the stars, half the time riding alone over mountains and desert, then he usually has a religion although it may not be the usual variety. Moreover, I had a respect for the reverend.

Brennen had his say about Brother Elisha, but I never did, although there was something about him that didn’t quite tally.

Then the miracle happened.

It was a Saturday morning and Ed Colvin was shingling the new livery barn, and in a town the size of Red Horse nobody could get away from the sound of that hammer, not that we cared, or minded the sound. Only it was always with us.

And then suddenly we didn’t hear it anymore.

Now it wasn’t noontime, and Ed was a working sort of man, as we’d discovered in the two months he’d been in town. It was not likely he’d be quitting so early.

„Gone after lumber,“ I suggested.

„He told me this morning,“ Brace said, „that he had enough laid by to last him two days. He was way behind and didn’t figure on quitting until lunchtime.“

„Wait,“ I said, „we’ll hear it again.“

Only when some time passed and we heard nothing we started for the barn. Ed had been working mighty close to the peak of what was an unusually steep roof.

We found him lying on the ground and there was blood on his head and we sent for the doc.

Now Doc McDonald ain’t the greatest doctor, but he was all we had aside from the midwife and a squaw up in the hills who knew herbs. The doc was drunk most of the time these days and showing up with plenty of money, so’s it had been weeks since he’d been sober.

Doc came over, just weaving a mite, and almost as steady as he usually is when sober. He knelt by Ed Colvin and looked him over. He listened for a heartbeat and he held a mirror over his mouth, and he got up and brushed off his knees. „What’s all the rush for? This man is dead!“

We carried him to Doc’s place, Doc being the undertaker, too, and we laid him out on the table in his back room. Ed’s face was dead white except for the blood, and he stared unblinking until the doc closed his eyes.

We walked back to the saloon feeling low. We’d not known Ed too well, but he was a quiet man and a good worker, and we needed such men around our town. Seemed a shame for him to go when there were others, mentioning no names, who meant less to the town.

That was the way it was until Brother Elisha came down off the mountain. He came with long strides, staring straight before him, his face flushed with happiness that seemed always with him these days. He was abreast of the saloon when he suddenly stopped.

It was the first time he had ever stopped to speak to anyone, aside from his preaching.

„What has happened?“ he asked. „I miss the sound of the hammer. The sounds of labor are blessed in the ears of the Lord.“

„Colvin fell,“ Brace said. „He fell from the roof and was killed.“

Brother Elisha looked at him out of his great dark eyes and he said,

„There is no death. None pass on but for the Glory of the Lord, and I feel this one passed before his time.“

„You may think there’s no death,“ Brace said, „but Ed Colvin looks mighty dead to me.“

He turned his eyes on Brace. „O, ye of little faith: Take me to him.“

When we came into Doc McDonald’s the air was foul with liquor, and Brace glared at Doc like he’d committed a blasphemy. Brother Elisha paused briefly, his nose twitching, and then he walked through to the back room where Ed Colvin lay.

We paused at the door, clustered there, not knowing what to expect, but Brother Elisha walked up and bowed his head, placing the palm of his right hand on Colvin’s brow, and then he prayed. Never did I know a man who could make a prayer fill a room with sound like Brother Elisha, but there at the last he took Ed by the shoulders and he pulled him into a sitting position and he said, „Edward Colvin, your work upon this earth remains unfinished. For the Glory of the Lord... rise!“

And I’ll be forever damned if Ed Colvin didn’t take a long gasping breath and sit right up on that table. He looked mighty confused and Brother Elisha whispered in his ear for a moment and then with a murmur of thanks Ed Colvin got up and walked right out of the place.

We stood there like we’d been petrified, and I don’t know what we’d been expecting, but it wasn’t this. Brother Elisha said, „The Lord moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.“ And then he left us.

Brace looked at me and I looked at Ralston and when I started to speak my mouth was dry. And just then we heard the sound of a hammer.

When I went outside people were filing into the street and they were looking up at that barn, staring at Ed Colvin, working away as if nothing had happened.

When I passed Damon, standing in the bank door, his eyes were wide open and his face white. I spoke to him but he never even heard me or saw me. He was just standing there staring at Colvin.

By nightfall everybody in town was whispering about it, and when Sunday morning came they flocked to hear him preach, their faces shining, their eyes bright as though with fever.

When the reverend stepped into the pulpit, Brennen was the only one there besides me.

Reverend Sanderson looked stricken, and that morning he talked in a low voice, speaking quietly and sincerely but lacking his usual force. „Perhaps,“ he said as we left, „perhaps it is we who are wrong. The Lord gives the power of miracles to but few.“

„There are many kinds of miracles,“ Brennen replied, „and one miracle is to find a sane, solid man in a town that’s running after a red wagon.“

As the three of us walked up the street together we heard the great rolling voice of Brother Elisha: „And I say unto you that the gift of life to Brother Colvin was but a sign, for on the morning of the coming Sabbath we shall go hence to the last resting place of your loved ones, and there I shall cause them all to be raised, and they shall live again, and take their places among you as of old!“

You could have dropped a feather. We stood on the street in back of his congregation and we heard what he said, but we didn’t believe it, we couldn’t believe it.

He was going to bring back the dead.

Brother Elisha, who had brought Ed Colvin back to life, was now going to empty the cemetery, returning to life all those who had passed on... and some who had been helped.

„The Great Day has come!“ He lifted his long arms and spread them wide, and his sonorous voice rolled against the mountains. „And men shall live again for the Glory of All Highest! Your wives, your mothers, your brothers and fathers, they shall walk beside you again!“

And then he led them into the singing of a hymn and the three of us walked away.

That was the quietest Sunday Red Horse ever knew. Not a whisper, all day long. Folks were scared, they were happy, they were inspired. The townsfolk walked as if under a spell.

Strangely, it was Ed Colvin who said it. Colvin, the man who had gone to the great beyond and returned... although he claimed he had no memory of anything after his fall.

Brace was talking about the joy of seeing his wife again, and Ed said quietly, „You’ll also be seeing your mother-in-law.“

Brace’s mouth opened and closed twice before he could say anything at all, and then he didn’t want to talk. He stood there like somebody had exploded a charge of powder under his nose, and then he turned sharply around and walked off.

„I’ve got more reason than any of you to be thankful,“ Ed said, his eyes downcast. „But I’m just not sure this is all for the best.“

We all glanced at each other. „Think about it.“ Ed got up, looking kind of embarrassed. „What about you, Ralston? You’ll have to go back to work. Do you

think your uncle will stand for you loafing and spending the money he worked so hard to get?"

„That's right," I agreed, „you'll have to give it all back."

Ralston got mad. He started to shout that he wouldn't do any such thing, and anyway, if his uncle came back now he would be a changed man, he wouldn't care for money any longer, he—

„You don't believe that," Brennen said. „You know darned well that uncle of yours was the meanest skinflint in this part of the country. Nothing would change him."

Ralston went away from there. Seemed to me he wanted to do some thinking.

When I turned to leave, Brennen said, „Where are you going?"

„Well," I said, „seems to me I'd better oil up my six-shooters. There's three men in that Boot Hill that I put there. Looks like I'll have it to do over."

He laughed. „You aren't falling for this, are you?"

„Colvin sounds mighty lively to me," I said, „and come Sunday morning Brother Elisha has got to put up or shut up."

„You don't believe that their time in the hereafter will have changed those men you killed."

„Brennen," I said, „if I know the Hame brothers, they'll come out of their graves like they went into them. They'll come a-shootin'."

There had been no stage for several days as the trail had been washed out by a flash flood, and the town was quiet and it was scared. Completely cut off from the outside, all folks could do was wait and get more and more frightened as the Great Day approached. At first everybody had been filled with happiness at the thought of the dead coming back, and then suddenly, like Brace and Ralston, everybody was taking another thought.

There was the Widow McCann who had buried three husbands out there, all of them fighters and all of them mean. There were a dozen others with reason to give the matter some thought, and I knew at least two who were packed and waiting for the first stage out of town.

Brace dropped in at the saloon for his first drink since Brother Elisha started to preach. He hadn't shaved and he looked mighty mean. „Why'd he pick on this town?" he burst out. „When folks are dead they should be left alone. Nobody has a right to interfere with nature thataway."

Brennen mopped his bar, saying nothing at all.

Ed Colvin dropped around. „Wish that stage would start running. I want to leave town. Folks treat me like I was some kind of freak."

„Stick around," Brennen said. „Come Sunday the town will be filled with folks like you. A good carpenter will be able to stay busy, so busy he won't care what folks say about him. Take Streeter there. He'll need a new house now that his brother will be wanting his house back."

Streeter slammed his glass on the bar. „All right, damn it!" he shouted angrily, „I'll build my own house!"

Ralston motioned to me and we walked outside. Brace was there, and Streeter joined us. „Look," Ralston whispered, „Brace and me, we've talked it over. Maybe if we were to talk to Brother Elisha... maybe he'd call the whole thing off."

„Are you crazy?" I asked.

His eyes grew mean. „You want to try those Hame boys again? Seems to me you came out mighty lucky the last time. How do you know you'll be so lucky again? Those boys were pure-dee poison.“

That was gospel truth, but I stood there chewing my cigar a minute and then said, „No chance. He wouldn't listen to us.“

Ed Colvin had come up. „A man doing good works,“ he said, „might be able to use a bit of money. Although I suppose it would take quite a lot.“

Brace stood a little straighter but when he turned to Colvin, the carpenter was hurrying off down the street. When I turned around there was Brennen leaning on the doorjamb, and he was smiling.

Friday night when I was making my rounds I saw somebody slipping up the back stairs of the hotel, and for a moment his face was in the light from a window. It was Brace.

Later, I saw Ralston hurrying home from the direction of the hotel, and you'd be surprised at some of the folks I spotted slipping up those back stairs to commune with Brother Elisha. Even Streeter, and even Damon.

Watching Damon come down those back stairs I heard a sound behind me and turned to see Brennen standing there in the dark. „Seems a lot of folks are starting to think this resurrection of the dead isn't an unmixed blessing.“

„You know something?“ I said thoughtfully. „Nobody has been atop that hill since Brother Elisha started his walks. I think I'll just meander up there and have a look around.“

„You've surprised me,“ Brennen said. „I wouldn't have expected you to be a churchgoing man. You're accustomed to sinful ways.“

„Why, now,“ I said, „when I come into a town to live, I go to church. If the preacher is a man who shouts against things, I never go back. I like a man who's for something.“

„Like you know, I've been marshal here and there, but never had much trouble with folks. I leave their politics and religion be. Folks can think the way they want, act the way they please, even to acting the fool. All I ask is they don't make too much noise and don't interfere with other people.“

„They call me a peace officer, and I try to keep the peace. If a growed-up man gets himself into a game with a crooked gambler, I don't bother them... if he hasn't learned up to then, he may learn, and if he doesn't learn, nothing I tell him will do him any good.“

„You think Colvin was really dead?“

„Doc said so.“

„Suppose he was hypnotized? Suppose he wasn't really dead at all?“

After Brennen went to bed I saddled up and rode out of town. Circling around the mountain I rode up to where Brother Elisha used to go to pray. Brennen had left me with a thought, and Doc had been drinking a better brand of whiskey lately.

Brace had drawn money from the bank, and so had Ralston, and old Mrs. Greene had been digging out in her hen coop, and knowing about those tin cans she buried there after her husband died kind of sudden, I had an idea what she was digging up.

I made tracks. I had some communicatin' to do and not many hours to do it in.

I spent most of those hours in the saddle. Returning to Red Horse the way I did brought me to a place where the trail forked, and one way led over behind that mountain with the burnt-off slope. When I had my horse out of sight I drew up and waited.

It was just growing gray when a rider came down the mountain trail and stopped at the forks. It was Ed Colvin.

We hadn't anything to talk about right at the moment so I just kept out of sight in the brush and then followed. He seemed like he was going to meet somebody and I had a suspicion it was Brother Elisha. And it was.

„You got it?“ Ed Colvin asked.

„Of course. I told you we could fool these yokels. Now let's—“

When I stepped out of the brush I was holding a shotgun. I said, „The way of the transgressor is hard. Give me those saddlebags, Delbert.“

Brother Elisha stared at me. „I fear there is some mistake,“ he said with dignity. „I am Brother Elisha.“

„I found those cans and sacks up top of the hill. The ones where you kept your grub and the grass seed you scattered.“ I stepped in closer.

„You are Delbert Johnson,“ I added, „and the wires over at Russian Junction say you used to deal a crooked game of faro in Mobeetie. Now give me the saddlebags.“

The reverend has a new church now, and a five-room frame parsonage to replace his tiny cabin. The dead of Red Horse sleep peacefully and there is a new iron fence around the cemetery to keep them securely inside. Brennen still keeps his saloon, but he also passes the collection plate of a Sunday, and the results are far better than they used to be.

There was a lot of curiosity as to where the reverend came by the money to do the building, and the good works that followed. Privately, the reverend told Brennen and me about a pair of saddlebags he found inside the parsonage door that Sunday morning. But when anyone else asked him he had an answer ready.

„The ravens have provided,“ he would say, smiling gently, „as they did for Elijah.“

Nobody asked any more questions.

