

WHICHEVER WAY THE ROAD LEADS

by J.A. Boulet

EXCERPT

Jesse walked confidently to the group as the man spoke commandingly to him in the Arikaran language. Jesse looked at him in bewilderment.

“He said that he would take everyone into the village and save our lives in exchange for the bear pelt and the canoe,” the woman translated slowly.

The Arikara guard spoke again, quickly, almost jumbling over his words with passion.

“He also says that this is not a free stay. Everyone must work once they are healthy enough.” The woman explained the rest of the agreement and looked at Jesse for confirmation.

Jesse looked back at the stranded Overland Astorian group. They were probably three more days away from dying, he thought. Losing the bear pelt was nothing, but the canoe would be a huge sacrifice. “Tell him we will give him what he wants,” Jesse replied, rubbing his long beard. “But he must allow us to rebuild a new canoe with the surrounding trees. It is our only survival to return to St. Louis.”

The woman frowned, turned to the Arikara guard, and relayed the message in their native tongue.

The Arikara man’s mouth frowned in deliberation. Then, a half smile graced his face. He spoke rapidly to the woman, then turned to his group of guards, gesturing for them to grab the canoe and bear fur. They began approaching the Astorians as the native woman spoke to Jesse. “They have agreed,” she translated, with a funny grin on her face. “He also said that you are stupid and young.”

Jesse laughed and patted her on the shoulder. “Thank you,” he said. “You saved our lives.”

“No,” she replied. “You did, Jesse.”