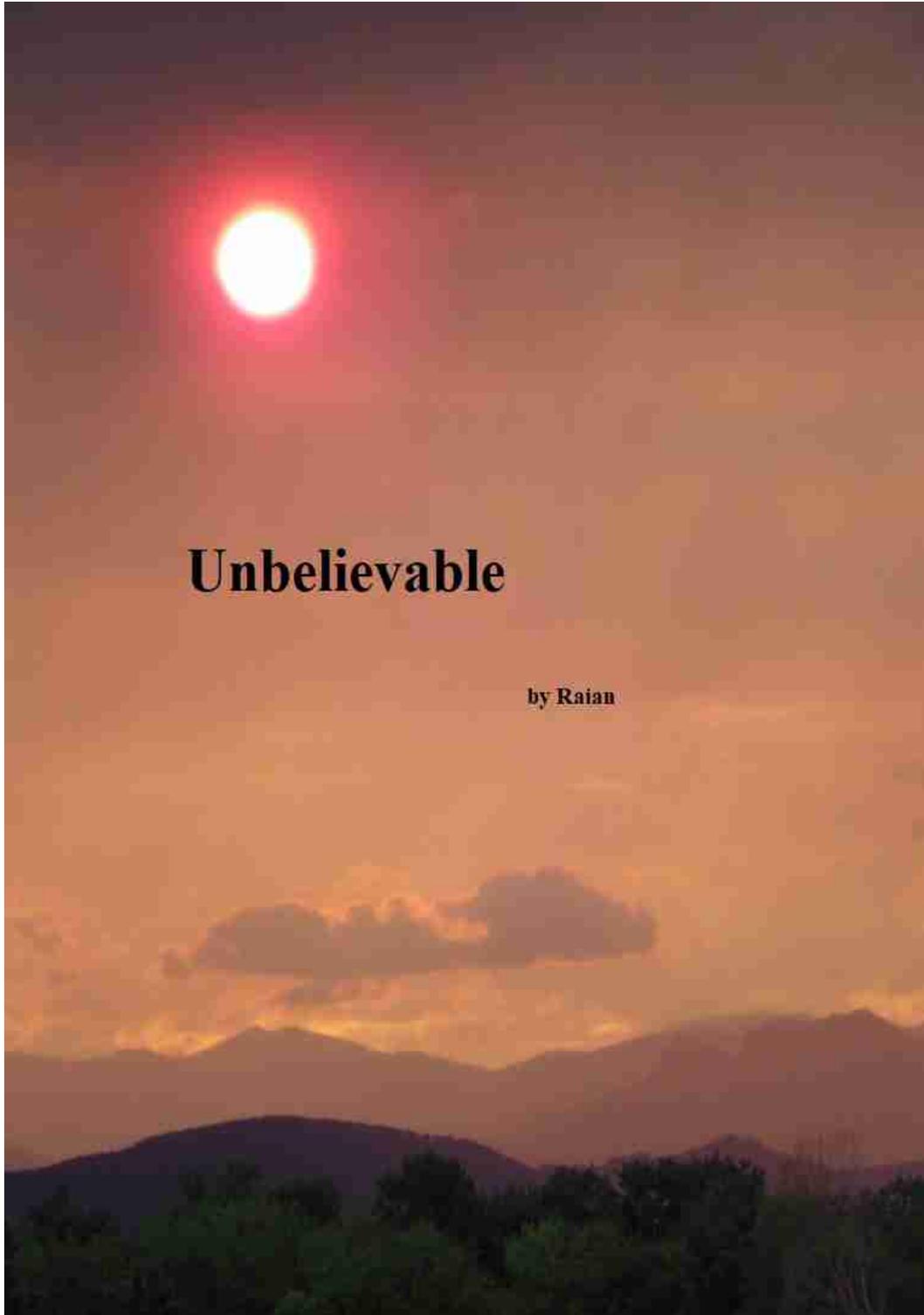


Unbelievable

By Raian

follows “Timbre”



I never cease being dumbfounded by the unbelievable things people believe.

– Leo Rosten

Facts sometimes have a strange and bizarre power that makes their inherent truth seem unbelievable.

– Werner Herzog

We have developed this unbelievable ability to deny.

– Patty Duke

The slapdash way producers used to assemble a show seems a little unbelievable when we talk about them now.

– Ethel Merman

I hate quotations. Tell me what you know.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

A single chapter

Brandy eased frayed nerves, providing a lull which might be temporary but the first he'd had in days. Sitting still seemed strange. The back portico didn't rock and roll under his rump and the view remained serene and static.

Between checking on Calhoun's group, doing chores and helping Murdoch ferry Indian children from place to place, the past weeks had left no time for Scott to catch his breath. He'd spent days driving wagons hither and yon.

Recent adventures started in a normal enough way. Scott had been tapped to take three palomino mares to a buyer down south. On the way home, he'd detoured for a drink at a spring. The memory of what happened next had never become clear but stomach-churning pain and barely being able to walk through badlands were all too familiar.

Eyes and skin crisped in the sun and wind as he forced his way toward Lancer. He took a tumble down a steep rock face – *Not again!* – following his bouncing canteen to a skidded halt in the dirt at the bottom.

After falling, he lost the canteen and put on his gloves though he couldn't remember how or when. He didn't crawl far before collapsing, feeling like one thousand head of cattle were riding right over him.

When awareness returned, he opened his eyes, expecting to see a strange little boy called Andy Jack. Instead, he lay in a cavernous flickering light filled with pinch-faced people and a girl with eyes untrusting as a scared rabbit's.

Where am I? Who are you people?

He'd been saved twice: by Calhoun staying Rufus's murderous hand and by being brought to the mine's coolness.

Later, Johnny had asked him, *How'd you get caught afoot?*

The spring de Vega told us about? Johnny nodded once to show he remembered. *I found it but the water had gone bad. By the time I stopped being sick long enough to try to stand, my horse had wandered off.* After the last of Calhoun's group were brought to Lancer, Scott and de Vega rode toward the spring. Part way there, they found Scott's bay limping homeward much the worse for wear and missing a shoe, saddle and gear scratched and crooked but otherwise intact. *If I'd been able to reach the*

river I would've been all right.

But you'd never have run into Calhoun.

No. They'd all have gotten sick, most likely, and it would've been worse than that later, if you hadn't found us. Despite the sudden gale outside, Johnny's voice had been miraculously and clearly amplified into the mine at the perfect moment for Sarah to hear what he said. Still, she had to be coaxed to overcome her fears and distrust.

If Jelly hadn't marked your trail we couldn't have followed quick as we did. That thing you did with the wagon...

It didn't work.

It would've, but... Johnny rubbed the side of his chin. I remembered what Cipriano told us about the abandoned mines up there. Sheriff didn't believe it but I know how sneaky you can be. I took a chance and we got back on your trail once we found a way up that hill.

I'd hoped a posse wouldn't include you or anyone else from Lancer. My bad luck. Or, as it turned out, our good luck since you arrived just in time.

Johnny smirked. When I saw how close Rufus came to shooting me, I almost split my britches.

Me too.

I owe you one.

If you don't mind, I'll wait a good long time before collecting on the favor. They'd shook on the deal.

The wanted posters had been rescinded. Scott lifted his glass, giving the Calhouns a silent toast and wishing them the best. He'd gone to Morro Coyo that morning to see them off to wherever the road took them. Most of the group wouldn't continue traveling with Calhoun. Despite proper medical care in town, some had died of illness before hearing they were free. Others wanted to stay in California. Rufus had been shot dead in a bar fight, extinguishing forever the madness in his eyes that had been there long before he'd watched his son die.

Scuffing feet heralded Murdoch's approach. He carried his own drink and a decanter. Scott accepted a refill. "Not ready for bed yet, son?"

"I'm enjoying the peace and quiet." Cattle lowed in the pasture beyond the first fence. The noise made no dent in the cacophony from insects which were more than used to interruptions of that sort.

Murdoch chortled. "Yes, quiet." He sat and stretched his legs with a groan. "I told Johnny I liked having children in the house. I didn't have that with you, what with us being separated. It was kind of nice being a grandfather for a while."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it." Murdoch had walked many miles and gone to great trouble to bring lost

children to Lancer and an education.

“I hope for more grandchildren, though when and how many is up to my sons.”

Scott couldn't stop a smile. “Indeed.” He almost added *Don't hold your breath* but didn't want to jinx himself or Johnny. Both of them were due better luck on the woman front.

Johnny should be in San Francisco by now. Though Murdoch said not to worry about what had been happening to nearby properties, Scott and his brother couldn't shake the notion that an under-the-table land grab could be afoot. In down times, property shouldn't sell as fast as it had been. Before Johnny left, Scott told him what to look for in land office transfer records but Johnny forestalled the recitation with a raised hand.

Save your breath, Scott. I'm not you – I'm not very good at those paper things. He promised to keep ears open for rumors of organized land speculation, grinned his cockiest and poked Scott in the arm. *Come with me and do it yourself.*

I'd rather go with you but Murdoch has filled my dance card here at Lancer.

Johnny's grin melted away. *Yeah. He has a way of doing that. Done it to me already. I'll be lucky to have an hour to myself on this trip.*

Rebuilding the Indian school and helping the Indians plant their next crop had stretched manpower to the limit despite assistance from neighbors. The ranch hands wouldn't be near the hacienda for days. The women and children would leave tomorrow to help tenant farmers for a few days or to repay neighbors with assistance in kind for what had been given to Lancer either recently or earlier in the year.

Scott had been ready to join the efforts but Murdoch assigned him the task of completing paperwork for taxes.

Numbers held security and comfort. Manipulating them kept thoughts busy and off other subjects. The answers mathematics gave were either right or wrong – no maybes, no gray areas – unlike oaths made to people who'd saved his life.

I swear on this Bible that I'll never tell a soul where you are.

That vow led to cover stories and lies told in an effort to protect the Calhouns from others as well as from themselves. Given the same set of circumstances, Scott would do it again – having once been hunted for a crime he didn't commit, he wouldn't wish that fate on anyone.

Calhoun's group had been small: the event they'd been part of too far away for locals to care. Those who wanted to stay could settle in the area and make new lives.

Indians, however, were too numerous for some and for many a constant reminder of past enmities and deaths. What had happened to Indians who'd lived on what became Lancer? No doubt their slave labor helped the Spanish and Mexicans construct haciendas and other buildings in the valley.

Few could stand up to the violence gold fever brewed, or to claims of ownership when someone declared a piece of ground their own property and had the means to hold onto it. Scott made a mental note to ask Sabina, Fox and the Ebsens – and Murdoch, if it was a subject he'd talk about – what had happened to Indians in early days.

As far back as Scott could remember, the East had rumbled over how Indians were treated. As with Calhoun's group, women and children paid the price for men's actions. Treaties made and treaties broken: the cycle continued to this day.

Not for the first time, Scott drank to his luck at being alive and out of the Army. That thin blue line had been tasked with policing large areas of the country and had its hands full trying to keep the peace these days.

The insects' pulsing song pulled Scott's eyelids down. He watched the sun set over their land, ignoring unease arising from bones the ranch had been built on. Perhaps it was best to let them lie... though the past had a way of working its way to the surface.

Bugs stilled and Murdoch spoke into the momentary silence. "I appreciate your help with taxes. It's good to have it done on time and in order. Not to mention having a smaller tax bill this year." A smile creaked across Murdoch's face as he held up his glass. "A toast to Harlan's grandson."

Scott raised his glass to clink against Murdoch's. It had been easy to refine the ranch's paperwork. Murdoch had been doing things the same way for years, not bothering to fully investigate whether rules and laws had changed to Lancer's advantage.

Murdoch shifted in his chair. The snifter disappeared from view when cradled in his hands. "Are you sure you don't mind doing Johnny's chores? You've been doing a lot of overtime these last weeks."

Scott smiled into the approaching darkness. "He's covered for me many times." As much as he enjoyed seeing numbers balance, at the end of the day he'd rather be outside. "Though I'd prefer to go with him to San Francisco." There was a certain burlesque troupe they both wanted to look up again.

"So you said. You and Jelly can enjoy the bachelor life while I'm in town paying taxes."

Scott sipped his drink to cover a smirk. Jelly would want to take over cooking chores and didn't do them as well as he thought he did. Scott's eyes narrowed and his smile softened and crept across his face. He had a long list of chores that could be done away from the hacienda until Murdoch returned.

Wind gusted and stirred hair on Scott's head. The day had started overcast and promised rain but none came. Scott shivered. The setting sun burned the sky... a sailor's delight but tonight it seemed an omen of more challenging times to come.

The End March 2020

A/N : Some things which caught my attention:

Splinter Group:

It's *déjà vu* all over again. The opening scenes were lifted from *Child of Rock and Sunlight*.

The *Splinter* leader is wanted for murders committed during a miners' strike in Cripple Creek. Cripple Creek became a mining district in 1893 after gold was discovered there in 1891. Before that, it was believed the area was not worth mining. The Cripple Creek miner's strike occurred in 1894 and led to the Colorado Labor wars in 1903.

The grocers want to “unload” their questionable goods on the Indians and welcome the opportunity to sell them to Calhoun's group instead. Later, the grocer says of the canned goods, “They've got... botulum or something in it.” Botulism, which is named after the Latin word for sausage (botulus), was discovered in 1897.

Lamp in the Wilderness:

In previous episodes of *Lancer*, Indians were cast as baddies or marginalized (*Homecoming*, *Warburton's Edge*, *Man Without a Gun*, *Cut the Wolf Loose*). The message for Indians in *Lamp* is, “You must assimilate,” which is true to history.

In my stories, *Lancer* is near the south end of the San Joaquin – though in *Devil's Blessing* Murdoch says Sacramento is closer to *Lancer* than Stockton, a more northern location doesn't make as much sense when other things from the series are taken into account.

Lancer is chock full of tropes and this episode is no exception. Besides the Indian ones, here's a schoolmarm who has given up and can find no ability to teach until a man intervenes. She wants to teach the Indian boys – the girls are sent home and/or chastised when they try to contribute to the class (*Hopeless Female Teacher* and *Belittle Female Students* also occur in *Measure of a Man*).

Where is Teresa during these episodes? She makes a token appearance in *Splinter* and is nowhere to be found in *Lamp*. Maria is seen pouring coffee in *Splinter*.

Murdoch rescues three Indian children who have been living in a mine shaft for who knows how long on questionable food. What does Murdoch want to know? Whether they've ever been to school.

When Murdoch first talks to the teacher, she tells him to take the three children to a white school (she says his “squaw” won't mind). Murdoch says there are no white schools in the area. By the 1870's there should be – the California Department of Education traces its existence to 1852. Whether an Indian school would have existed at the time is a good question: forced removal of Indian children from their families to boarding schools happened closer to the turn of the century.

If an Indian school existed during the time frame of *Lancer*, it's possible the *Lamp* school is on the Tule Reservation (first established in 1857). However, the distance of that location to *Lancer* makes it improbable that children could be ferried by wagon to and from every day.

There may be another more logical location for the Indian school but I gave up researching when the next nearest proved to have been established after 1900. According to a California court web page: *there are currently 109 federally recognized Indian tribes in California and . . . nearly 100 separate reservations or Rancherias.*

It's said in the episode the Modoc children “wandered down out of the lava beds.” There are lava beds

in Northern California which were part of Modoc territory. What's the distance from them to the Tule Reservation? About 500 miles. There are other lava beds farther south. I addressed the location of them in "Song Sung Blue."

When Trailing the Enemy sees the children with Murdoch, he knows they are Modoc. What tribe(s) did the other children at the school belong to? Was the costuming correct? Were the "fables" the teacher and Murdoch read correct for those tribe(s)?

The children are shown emerging from the landscape when the teacher rings the bell. Are there Indian adults around besides Trailing the Enemy? Why aren't they shown? Have they all assimilated and gone to day jobs, leaving their children to learn that "My Country 'Tis of Thee" is part of their "heritage?" The episode writer did pick a song which was around at the time – it was written in 1831 and first performed in that year by a children's choir in Boston.

Which tribe did Trailing the Enemy (aka Curley) belong to? He says he'd been a cavalry scout for five years. The Army was allowed to enlist and employ Indian scouts in the Territories and Indian country after the Army Reorganization Act of 1866 (one of the most significant measures in the act was that Indians would receive the same pay as white cavalry soldiers). The enlistment papers in the National Archive records show no scouts from California.

Trailing the Enemy says that while on leave he was injured in an attack and massacre by cavalry on his village. In what I've read to date for the US Regulars, I haven't run across such an event for a village that had scouts serving. I did find one account where Apache scouts mutinied and fired on the Regulars they were with rather than act against one member of their own people (the Regulars had been sent to an Indian camp in Arizona Territory to arrest someone). According to the National Archives, this is the only recorded 19th century incident of such a case.

As for people vs. Indians: fights were initiated (and retaliated for) by all sides before, during and after the Civil War. Indians, Spanish and Mexicans, American settlers, miners, militia units/volunteers, the Regulars... all did their share of killing.

Trailing the Enemy refuses to answer to Curley ("A white man's name for a white man's Indian"). Curley is how he's listed in the credits.

There was an Indian scout named Curley. From a wiki article: *Ashishishe (c. 1856–1923), known as Curly (or Curley), was a Crow scout in the United States Army during the Sioux Wars, best known for having been one of the few survivors on the United States side at the Battle of Little Bighorn [June 1876]. He did not fight in the battle, but watched from a distance, and was the first to report the defeat of the 7th Cavalry Regiment. Afterward a legend grew that he had been an active participant and managed to escape, leading to conflicting accounts of Curly's involvement in the historical record.*

There's more... but enough is enough. For those who read this far: I thank you!