

# *The Teaching of Little Crow*

*The journey of the soul*

*By*

*Angelina Heart*

## **Book 1**

### **Chapter 1**

“Get up, you poor excuse for skin on bones! You knew we were leaving at sunrise. Get down to the stream and fill our containers!” Don Pedro barked his command with his thick Spanish accent, rolling the child over with his dirty boot. “Pack up the camp just as soon as you get back. I’ll leave the jenny and the pack mules and you can catch up with the gear.”

Angel had met Don Pedro’s wrath too many times to hesitate, so he scrambled to gather the skins and head for the stream. If he could fill the skins quickly, the men could get away and he’d be left in peace to break camp without their cruelty and incessant orders. He decided not to take the wooden casks, but to come back later to fill them in order to hasten the men’s departure.



A gypsy named Grendor found three year old Angel abandoned and crying in the streets of Barcelona. The old nomad hoped to please his barren mistress with the gift of a child. Though nurturing and kind, she died prior to Angel’s seventh birthday and Grendor had no further use for the lad. Ten days after his mistress died, Grendor told Angel they were going hunting and then to town to sell their game. Instead of the game, however, the child was presented for sale in the slave market.

By the time Angel turned eleven he had been bought and sold three times. In a tattered and filthy state, he was purchased by Don Pedro—a hard, former captain of the Royal Guard.

A group of Spanish explorers intent on mapping out the Americas employed Don Pedro to act as both guide and protector. He was known to be fearless, but cruel and ruthless as well. Though several members of the team objected to his tactics, the fact that he had made one previous trip to the new world weighed heavily in his favor.

Because Don Pedro received no advance for the journey, he purchased the cheapest slave he could to serve as his cabin boy aboard ship and his attendant on the long and arduous journey ahead. With a little soap and water on the outside, and some food in the child’s belly, he felt sure he could make a useful servant of Angel.

Crow dog-eared the corner of the page, closed the book, placed it on the empty seat next to him, and stared out the window at the wispy clouds. Leaning on the armrest and propping his chin in his hand with forefinger gently placed over lips and thumb resting on the jaw line, his vision zigzagged around the ethereal formations like a slalom skier.

The stewardess passed through the narrow aisle of the puddle-jumper, hoping to offer a non-intrusive smile of recognition. Familiar, however, with the pose of a man deep in thought, she postponed the friendly, “Do you need anything?” interruption.

Crow reached into his vest pocket, withdrew a small silver flask and took a quick sip of his favorite Irish whiskey, followed by a whispered “Ahhh,” as he slid it back into its cache. Adjusting the seatback and unlatching the tray in front, he propped the book far enough away to read clearly. Although bifocals had been recommended by his optometrist, his pride kept him from admitting that a natural aging process had begun. Crow began reading where he left off.

Sixteen months passed as the small group explored and mapped out the new lands. Even though the journey originally commenced in Central America, they now turned their attention to the north with more on their minds than map-making.

On several occasions they heard tales from various Indian tribes about a sacred place—the place of beginning—the heart of the earth where treasures untold were stored—a place of majestic red mountains and valleys so deep, the only way to descend into them was with wings—a place God hid from the sight of man, where only the pure in heart could enter.

The legends drew the explorers to the extraordinary place where they now camped, each of them hoping to prove the legends true. Their relentless avarice compelled them through many physical perils as the expedition turned from peaceful exploration into a mysterious treasure hunt.

The original expedition began with seven men, a cook, and three young men to tend to the camp needs, with Angel being the youngest among them. Nine months into the adventure the cook died when struck by a snake. The other two boys met their deaths at the hands of some curious, hungry Indians. Angel witnessed helplessly from a distance as the young men failed to defend the camp against the intruders.

After their untimely deaths, the sole responsibility for meeting the needs of all seven men was thrust upon the remaining child. This included cooking, tending campfires, laundry, food gathering, hunting, making and breaking camp, and hauling water. Singularly performing the difficult tasks of multiple people made the boy strong and independent.

Some of the explorers demonstrated genuine kindness, but those who had been hired to “defend and protect” the explorers were downright cruel to Angel. Paulo, a particularly foul-smelling creature, proved worse than the others. His unyielding lack of consideration for Angel was exhibited through daily humiliations, large and small. Angel never quite understood why Paulo felt such animosity toward him, for he served all the men with faithful attentiveness.



Angel returned from the stream with the water skins as fast as he could run. Don Pedro, loading his horse with supplies and ammunition for the day, acknowledged the offering with a mere grunt. As the sun peeked over the mesa, the call sounded for departure and without further word to Angel, Don Pedro swung into the saddle and set off with the others.

While the sun filtered down through the trees, the entire camp transformed into a fairy kingdom similar to one Angel's gypsy mother had once described. A meadowlark paid homage to the rising sun with its lilting song. Squirrels and rabbits rustled through the brush unaware he would soon stalk them as prey for the evening meal.

Enormous cottonwood trees, with the majority of their leaves having already donned their bright yellow autumn color, graced the banks of the stream. He remembered seeing these trees further south in the springtime and marveled at the copious amounts of cotton that wafted down from their branches, collecting like layers of fluffy snow on the ground. He wondered if it could be harvested and spun into cloth.

Angel spent the next hour breaking camp and loading the mules before he set off into the high grasses to flush out their dinner. The hunt took but minutes and after he slit the throats of the rabbits, he hung them by their hindquarters on the side pack of one of the mules so their blood would drain before he began the journey. He didn't like killing anything and never killed more than necessary to sustain their little party.

Aquada, his best-loved mule, had been assigned the task of bearing the heavy weight of the water casks. Leading his friend to the stream to fill the empty containers, he stopped short at the sight of two small cougar cubs. Where there were cubs, there was bound to be a mother. Quietly, he waited for her to join them. The cubs appeared scrawny, as if they hadn't eaten well for quite some time and Angel wondered if their mother had abandoned them.

The sun rose higher and the boy knew he must depart soon to make camp for the explorers in a timely fashion. Waiting another quarter hour, he watched the cubs play. Their attempt at hunting lizards by the stream met with failure time and time again. They're starving, he said to himself.

Quite certain no mother stood guard, he ventured forward to fill the casks a goodly distance upstream from the frolicking duo, though they were still in sight. At first they appeared nonplussed by his presence, then unexpectedly sprang with enthusiasm up the bank of the stream heading straight for him. The wind had shifted and the scent of rabbit blood on his hands drew them like magnets. They approached like domestic kittens, licking his fingers and nudging them with their foreheads. Patting them tentatively, Angel scanned his surroundings again. One cleverly discovered the jerkey in his shirt pocket and snatched it greedily.

Aquada suddenly whinnied and brayed loudly as he bolted down the pathway toward the camp. Angel looked up just in time to see a snarling giant of a cat leaping through the air toward him. With nothing but his hands with which to fight off the beast, the cat tore and ripped at his arm

and neck while he struggled to release himself from her enormous weight. An expert at dropping her prey, she went directly for his throat, which she tore so deeply that he fell unconscious.

The threat to her cubs now eliminated, she considered burying the intruder for a later meal. However, the smell of the creature offended her. The cat found the scent and flavor of her daily game more appealing, so she abandoned the trophy with a distasteful growl. The three cougars headed toward the camp where something smelled infinitely more promising. The female easily found the rabbits Angel had hung on the tethered mule and while the tied beasts brayed and kicked, she managed to tear part of the rabbits free. Smarting from a well-placed blow, she called to her young ones to follow her away from the striking hooves.

By sunset the explorers realized the boy had not followed, so the chore of determining the problem fell to Paulo. The farther he traveled, the angrier he became. Long after darkness fell he understood a return to the beginning point of the day's journey would be required. With each plodding step of his horse he conjured up new ways to make "that lazy boy" pay for this inconvenience!

Because the moonless night made travel difficult, Paulo camped and waited for morning to complete his task. By the pre-dawn light he set off again. His empty stomach complained bitterly, but he knew when he located Angel an easy meal could be supplied from the stores of food.

He approached the campsite only to find all the mules packed and ready to go. The water mule, however, grazed nearby without any tethering at all. Dismounting, he hollered, "Hey, you stupid boy, why haven't you left yet?"

When no answer came Paulo began investigating more closely. One of the mules had parts of a rabbit tied to it, though most of the game had been torn away. The poor animal had large gouges on its side and had bled a great deal during the night as evidenced by the pool of blood beneath its feet.

Heading toward the stream with his rifle in hand, cocked and ready for action, he yelled again. "Boy!" Still, no one answered. Keen awareness piqued every sense as he gingerly moved toward the water, rotating his head from side to side.

There, along the stream, lay the torn and mutilated body of Angel in a puddle of blood. The child still breathed, but Paulo believed he would surely die. Unwilling to let the others get ahead of him, the greedy man had no intention of nursing the boy. Probably just get eaten by whatever killed him, he thought. With his foot he rolled the boy partially into the stream and abandoned him without ceremony.

He marched back to camp, led the water bearer to the stream and filled the casks. After freeing the mule that had lost so much blood, he tied Aquada to the end of the line. Gathering the reins from the lead jenny, the foul smelling man made his way to his comrades, certain Angel's death would throw the camp care to him for the remainder of the expedition. He angrily cursed the stupid boy as a plan to abduct a young Indian to perform the chores slowly formulated in his thick brain.



Crow laid the book down on the tray so he could stretch a bit. It always helped him to read the book from which the screenplay had been inspired. Although the screen version would utilize pictures to replace hundreds of words, he believed there were things he could not portray about his individual character without knowing the whole story. In the early 1900's Richard Eckerhardt wrote *The Teaching of Little Crow* as a gift for his son. It had not been published until after Eckerhardt's death, but once in the public domain the story received great praise for depicting a moral rarely portrayed in writing or on screen. Crow felt the writers had done a bang-up job of the rewrite.

Earlier that afternoon Crow caught a flight to Las Vegas from Los Angeles where he transferred to the small twin-engine, turbo prop Brasilia which now sped him to his final destination. He was probably the only Oscar-winning movie star who did not travel in his own jet with a full entourage—a luxury he could surely afford, but considered ostentatious. The plane would deliver him to the little town of Kanab in southern Utah where filming of his scenes in the movie version would ensue. He'd check in and let them know he'd arrived a couple of days early to get a feel for things. The trick, of course, would be achieving his goal without being accompanied by the security task force assigned to him by the studio. Due to a death threat a few years earlier, Crow's employers insisted on watching over him. Although similar to being incarcerated for one's own protection, he had become adept at sneaking away unnoticed.