



BOBBI SMITH

DELUXE
ILLUSTRATED
EDITION!

HAIF-BREED'S

Lady

BY THE
BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF
OUTLAW'S LADY

A COMANCHE WOMAN

"You gave up your station for me? Warrior was your pride and joy."

"It was the only way to free you."

She couldn't believe all this had taken place and she hadn't even known about it. "What would have happened if you hadn't paid him what he asked?"

"I didn't want to find out."

"Oh." A tremble of fear went through her as she imagined Crouching Wolf being the one to take her as his wife. It wasn't a pretty thought. The knowledge that Hunt had sacrificed his most prized possession to save her thrilled her; yet she regretted that he'd had to give up so much for her. "I'm sorry."

"I'm not. I wanted you with me, so I could keep you safe. All that mattered was that Painted Horse believed you were my woman." His look was fiercely protective.

She felt the intensity of his regard and knew she had to ask. "Am I your woman, Hunt?" Her voice was soft and full of invitation.

Time stood still.

Was she his woman? Her question, so enticingly asked, sent a surge of excitement through Hunt. He stared at Glynna, thinking she had never looked more beautiful. Dressed as a Comanche maiden, she appeared innocent yet seductive, alluring yet elusive. He was hungry for her.

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HALF-BREEDS

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LEISURE BOOKS



NEW YORK CITY

This book is dedicated to Charles M. Schulz for the inspiration I've received following Snoopy's writing career through the years. Snoopy and Woodstock are the best! Thank you, Mr. Schulz, for making me smile.

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Prologue

"Hunt?"

Hunt McAllister was running an errand in town for his father when he heard someone—a female—call his name. Surprised, he stopped and glanced back to see Jenny Ross standing on the walkway beside her father's general store, motioning for him to come to her.

"You talking to me?" he asked, frowning slightly.

"I sure am," Jenny said softly, and she gave him a particularly inviting smile. Though she was only fourteen, it was obvious she understood the power of her femininity.

"What do you want, Jenny?" Hunt was cautious as he approached her. She was one of the prettiest girls in town. He'd noticed her around, and he was amazed that she'd spoken to him. He knew her father

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and brothers despised him because he was a half-breed.

"I was wondering if you could help me with something." Her gaze was hot upon him. He was only fifteen, but he was already tall, darkly handsome and whipcord lean. Her heartbeat quickened as he walked toward her.

"Aren't your brothers around?" Hunt knew how protective her brothers were of her and wondered why she hadn't asked one of them for help.

"I couldn't find them, and I was just hoping you would do it," she said, gazing up at him, looking helpless and fragile.

In spite of the warning voice in the back of his mind, Hunt found himself agreeing. "Sure, what do you need?"

"It's around back. . . ." She smiled brightly at him and started off down the narrow passage that led to the rear of the store.

Hunt followed along, his gaze on Jenny as she walked before him. Her hips were swaying ever so slightly in an age-old, enticing rhythm, and he felt a stirring within him that he knew he had to ignore. He was there to give her a hand—nothing more. When they reached the back of the building, Hunt discovered that the area was deserted.

"What was it you wanted me to do?"

"I want you to kiss me, Hunt McAllister," Jenny said boldly, moving to brazenly link her arms around his neck.

Hunt stiffened at her ploy. He put his hands at her waist to move her away from him.

"Jenny . . . this isn't a good idea." He had to extri-

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cate himself from her embrace immediately—there would be hell to pay if anyone found him touching her this way.

"You're wrong," she said, her eyes aglow. "This is a very good idea."

She moved even closer.

At the feel of Jenny pressed so intimately against him, Hunt went still. He looked down at her and saw the open invitation in her eyes.

"Hunt . . . please . . ."

He couldn't believe it. Jenny Ross wanted him to kiss her! A shudder racked him as he fought to maintain his usually strong self-control. He knew he should get away from her—for her sake and for his own—but she was in his arms, gazing up at him with such open adoration that he felt ten feet tall. He felt invincible.

Suddenly, the sweet scent of her and the softness of her body pressed close to his were just too enticing. Any thought of the ugly repercussions that might follow this encounter vanished. All that mattered was Jenny.

Unable to resist, Hunt wrapped his arms around her and crushed her to him. He kissed her hungrily. The need she'd created within him drove all logic from him.

Hunt's father had cautioned him to take care when dealing with whites. He'd warned Hunt that living in the white man's world wouldn't be easy, but Hunt thought that maybe, just maybe, things were changing—that maybe he could be accepted, that he could fit in. If Jenny liked him, maybe other people would like him, too.

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Caught up in the wonder of Jenny's embrace, Hunt savored her nearness. When she whimpered and moved restlessly in his arms, desire began to burn hot within him. He deepened the kiss.

"Oh, Hunt . . ." she whispered.

It was then that the outraged shout erupted from behind them and shattered the intimacy of their encounter, changing Hunt's life forever.

"Get your hands off my sister!"

"John!" Jenny gasped and jumped guiltily away from Hunt at the sound of her brother's angry command.

"Damn right, 'John,' you little slut!" He snarled, charging forward to grab her by the forearm and drag her farther away from the half-breed. "I should beat you within an inch of your life!"

"Get your hands off her!" Hunt demanded, seeing the terror in Jenny's expression and wanting to protect her.

"The hell with you, breed! You think you can mess with our women and get away with it?" John shoved his sister harshly aside and turned on Hunt.

Hunt squared off, ready to fight John man to man, but he never got the chance. Her other two brothers, Chuck and Will, charged forward from where they'd been hiding and attacked him. Though Hunt was physically bigger than they were and put up a good fight, he was outnumbered. The three of them eventually overpowered him and knocked him to the ground, beating him severely.

"You don't touch our sister or any other white woman! Do you understand that, breed?" John snarled, emphasizing his words by kicking Hunt vi-

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ciously in the side. Then he turned on his sister. "And you . . ."

"Leave Jenny alone," Hunt managed as he saw John advancing threateningly on her. He struggled to get to his feet, biting back a groan as agony sliced through him. He was certain John's kick had broken some ribs.

"You talkin' to me?" John glanced back at Hunt, fury evident in his features. He'd thought his last kick would have kept him down, but it looked like the stupid half-breed wanted more. "Grab him and hold him up!" he ordered his brothers.

Though Hunt tried to fight them off, the pain in his side was too savage. Chuck and Will grabbed him and held him suspended between them. They were laughing as Hunt continued to try to break free. Their grip was iron, though. They had no intention of letting him escape John's revenge.

"John! Stop it!" Jenny pleaded, rushing forward to try to save Hunt from their viciousness. "You're going to kill him! He didn't do anything wrong!"

"Shut up!" He shoved her away, knocking her to the ground this time. Infuriated by her attempt to defend the half-breed, he hit Hunt even harder.

Hunt went limp at the force of his blow.

"He's out, John," Will told him.

"Good, then he won't try to fight us anymore." He brutally continued to batter his unfeeling victim. When he'd taken his pleasure in beating him, he told his brothers, "Strip off his shirt and tie him to that tree."

"What are you going to do?" Tears stained Jenny's face as she ran forward to try to stop him again.

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At her interference, John turned on her. His expression was cold and deadly. "I'm going to convince this boy never to go near another white woman."

"But Hunt didn't do anything wrong! I'm the one—"

"Don't ever say his name again! Do you hear me? And if anybody asks you about what happened today, you tell them that he attacked you! You understand me?"

"But that's not true!"

"You want everybody in town to know you're a slut?"

She gasped at his words. "John! All we did was—"

"We saw what you did!" His temper raged out of control, and he backhanded her, bloodying her lip. "You let a breed touch you!"

Jenny sobbed uncontrollably at being so brutalized by her own brother. "You hit me!"

"I'll do worse than that if you don't get the hell outta here! You just better pray that Papa don't find out the truth of what really went on here today!"

"But Hunt only—"

"I know what the bastard did!" John roared. "Now get outta my sight, whore! If anybody asks you what happened to your face, you tell them that McAllister hit you when he attacked you!"

"I won't! That's a lie!"

"You will." John pinned her with a cold glare. "Don't cross me, Jenny."

"That's right," Chuck put in, never daring to defy his older brother. "John's trying to protect your rep-

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utation. You think any white boy's going to want you after this?"

"Yeah," Will supported them. "It was the half-breed who dragged you back here and tried to rape you. He's the one who hit you and made your lip bleed. Just look at you. You're bruised and bleeding from his attack."

Jenny's eyes widened at her brothers' conspiracy of hate.

"Do what I say, Jenny," John told her. "Or I'll make sure your half-breed here never touches another woman—ever!"

Biting back a terrified cry, she ran, leaving Hunt bloodied, unconscious and powerless before their vengeful hatred.

"Tie him up," John repeated.

His brothers hurried to follow his order.

"I'm going to enjoy this." John smiled.

It was nearly half an hour later when they untied Hunt. He collapsed on the ground, his back bloodied from the whipping John had given him.

John stood over Hunt, feeling quite proud of himself. He was certain the half-breed would never forget the lesson they'd taught him today. He nudged him in the side with the toe of his boot.

"Remember today, breed. Don't ever forget it! Stay away from white women. They ain't for the likes of you."

Hunt didn't answer. He couldn't. He had been drifting in and out of consciousness and was only vaguely aware of what was happening to him.

The three brothers dragged him over to their buckboard and threw him in the back. They drove out of

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town and shoved him out, leaving him unconscious and bleeding in the brush alongside the road.

It was dusk when Hunt slowly regained consciousness. Pain racked every inch of his body, and he barely had enough strength to struggle to his feet. His back felt as if it were on fire, and agony seared his side. He swayed, staring around in confusion, momentarily disoriented. Once he recognized his surroundings, he knew he was a long way from home. Hunt started off across country, wanting to avoid the main road and the possibility of more trouble.

As Hunt slowly headed toward home and his father—his only safe haven, his only refuge—he thought of Jenny. He remembered how she'd tried to stop John from hitting him. The way John had treated her angered him. He hoped she was all right.

As his mind cleared, Hunt silently cursed himself for his weakness with Jenny. He'd been a fool not to remember his father's words of warning. He should never have let his guard down that way. He should never have kissed her. He should have remembered that he was different.

He would never forget again.

"McAllister!" The call came from the street outside Tom McAllister's house.

It was dark, and Tom was puzzled by all the shouting outside. He went out on the porch to see what was going on. He recognized Dale Ross standing in the street, rifle in hand, surrounded by his sons and some of the other townsfolk.