

# Night at the Capitol

## Chapter Eleven

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Charlie followed the Native American tracker, Machk, through the hallways of the Capitol in search of the thief.

“The footprints point in this direction,” Machk said, as the pair hurried down the hall.

Charlie followed the man until he suddenly stopped short. Their path was blocked by a tipped over cabinet in the hallway. Mugs and coffee grounds were spilled across the floor. Papers were scattered all over.

“Signs of a struggle,” Machk said seriously.

He slowly examined the mess and pulled a scrap of torn, red material from the wreckage.

“The thief! He was here!” Charlie shouted excitedly! “The soldiers found a red thread in the Secretary of State’s office where the seal went missing.”

“Shh!” Machk hissed. “Quiet! I don’t think your thief has gone far. And besides, the number one rule while tracking is to keep quiet.”

“Oh,” Charlie whispered. “Sorry.”

In the silence that followed, the two suddenly heard a muffled voice. Machk put a finger to his lips and cocked an ear. The voices seemed to be coming from behind a closed door. Machk nodded toward the door and motioned for Charlie to follow him. They tiptoed forward.

GOVERNOR’S OFFICE, read a sign on the door. The voices were definitely coming from inside.

“Ambush,” Machk whispered to him. “We’ll take him by surprise.”

Charlie nodded. The two made eye contact as Machk mouthed the words one ... two ... THREE!

They burst through the door and found themselves standing in

front of the Governor’s office. It was a large, circular room, with dark wood grecian paneling and a lush, star-spangled carpet framing an impressive wooden desk.

There, behind the desk, Charlie saw them. The four soldiers — Will, Jeb, Tom and Phil — were tied up tightly in rough, lasso rope. Their mouths were bound with cloth and their hands were behind their backs.

Standing in front of all of them

was the thief! Charlie recognized him immediately, even without his cowboy hat.

“It’s you!” Charlie blurted out. “Jesse James!”

Jesse James. The famous Missouri outlaw. Charlie had seen him in the painting that back toward the soldiers. “Never mind that, now. We have more urgent business to attend to.”

The soldiers’ mouths were bound so that they could not speak. They looked at Charlie, pleadingly.

“There’s no more urgent business than getting that seal back,” Charlie said. His hands shook as he spoke. “And releasing my friends.”

“You ain’t never gonna get this seal away from me,” Jesse said, laughing at Charlie’s bravado. He slid the seal out of his front, breast pocket and held it before him, spinning it slowly in circles. “I plan to melt this baby down and sell the bronze. Make a bit of a fortune.”

“You can’t do that!” Charlie cried. “Don’t you see? If you melt it down it will be gone forever, and all of you will too! You need that seal to come alive at night.

There’s a magic voodoo spell on it, and without it, all of you ... all of your history will be lost forever!”

“Need the seal to come alive?” Jesse said. “These bones don’t need nothin’ but a few high speed train robberies to feel alive. I’ll get along just fine without some voodoo curse if you ask me. And I’ll be mighty happy to sell the bronze too. Make a little profit to light the pipe and all.”



“I can see it!” Charlie shouted. A hint of shiny brass was peaking out of Jesse’s front pocket.

“Oh, right,” Jesse said, turning

morning, with the red shirt and the gun in his hand, holding up the men in front of the train.

“You’re a criminal! You stole the seal!” Charlie said. “And now look what you’ve done! Tied up my friends!”

“Stolen the seal?” Jesse said. “Prove it!”

“I can see it!” Charlie shouted. A hint of shiny brass was peaking out of Jesse’s front pocket.

“Oh, right,” Jesse said, turning

Charlie gritted his teeth. He thought of Tom in his foxhole and Phil on his ship. He thought of the men in the paintings throughout the Capitol, charging forward on horseback, and the pioneer women in their wagons turned west.

It was his turn to be brave.

“Give me the seal,” he demanded.

“Son, you’re gonna find yourself all tied up in a lasso in short order if you don’t shut that jabbering hole in the middle of your face.”

Charlie had almost forgotten that Machk was beside him, when suddenly he felt the air move as the warrior raised his bow and arrow.

Just as fast, just as powerfully, Jesse James aimed his silver gun.

## Capitol Ideas

A character trait in this chapter bravery. Authors create character traits by their use of dialogue and action. Look through the newspaper for examples of dialogue and actions that exemplify bravery. How many can you find?

**Learning Standards:** I can read historical fiction to develop fluency and to make text-to-world connections. I can identify vocabulary in context. I can comprehend main idea and supporting details. I can analyze literary techniques and make predictions.

