

Scott O'Dell and Elizabeth Hall



Thunder
Rolling in the
Mountains

by the author of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*

One

THAT DAY we dug roots in Deer Meadow. Now we were riding fast for home.

There were seven of us on good horses. I rode in the lead, pulling a travois filled with cous roots. We were on a trail of fallen trees and rock slides, but a storm was coming and it was the shorter way to our village.

I had not ridden the trail for many moons. It had changed a lot in that time. We came upon row after row of fallen trees, trees too jumbled for the travois, and I was forced to go around them.

We came to a treeless spur on the mountain. A north wind blew down from Hawk's Peak. It was spring but the peak was covered with snow and the wind whipped the snow down upon us in wet clouds. It was hard to see the trail.

"I am freezing," Little Lark, one of my cousins, said. "I think we should go back and take the long trail."

The other five riders, two of my cousins among them, agreed with her, but the girls sat on their horses and said nothing.

"There's no hurry I know about," Little Lark said. "We told our mothers before we left to dig roots that we would be gone three suns. The third sun is somewhere in the mist. It will be above us when we reach home."

I gave her my blanket and we rode on and left the mountain spur. The trail dipped down out of the wind into a place of tall grass and a winding stream. It was a beautiful meadow. I remembered riding through it at the beginning of winter when the aspen trees had turned to gold.

The aspen trees were gone. Their branches were lying around, but the trees were gone. They had been sawed off close to the ground.

I saw smoke rising at the far end of the meadow. It came from a cabin made from the aspen trees.

We pulled up our horses and sat staring. The horses were nervous. They raised their heads and sniffed the air. We were more nervous than the horses.

"What is it, Sound of Running Feet?" asked my friend White Feather.

"White people," I said. "Indians do not build cabins."

Many times when our chieftains talked I heard them speak of the white people. They had not set foot

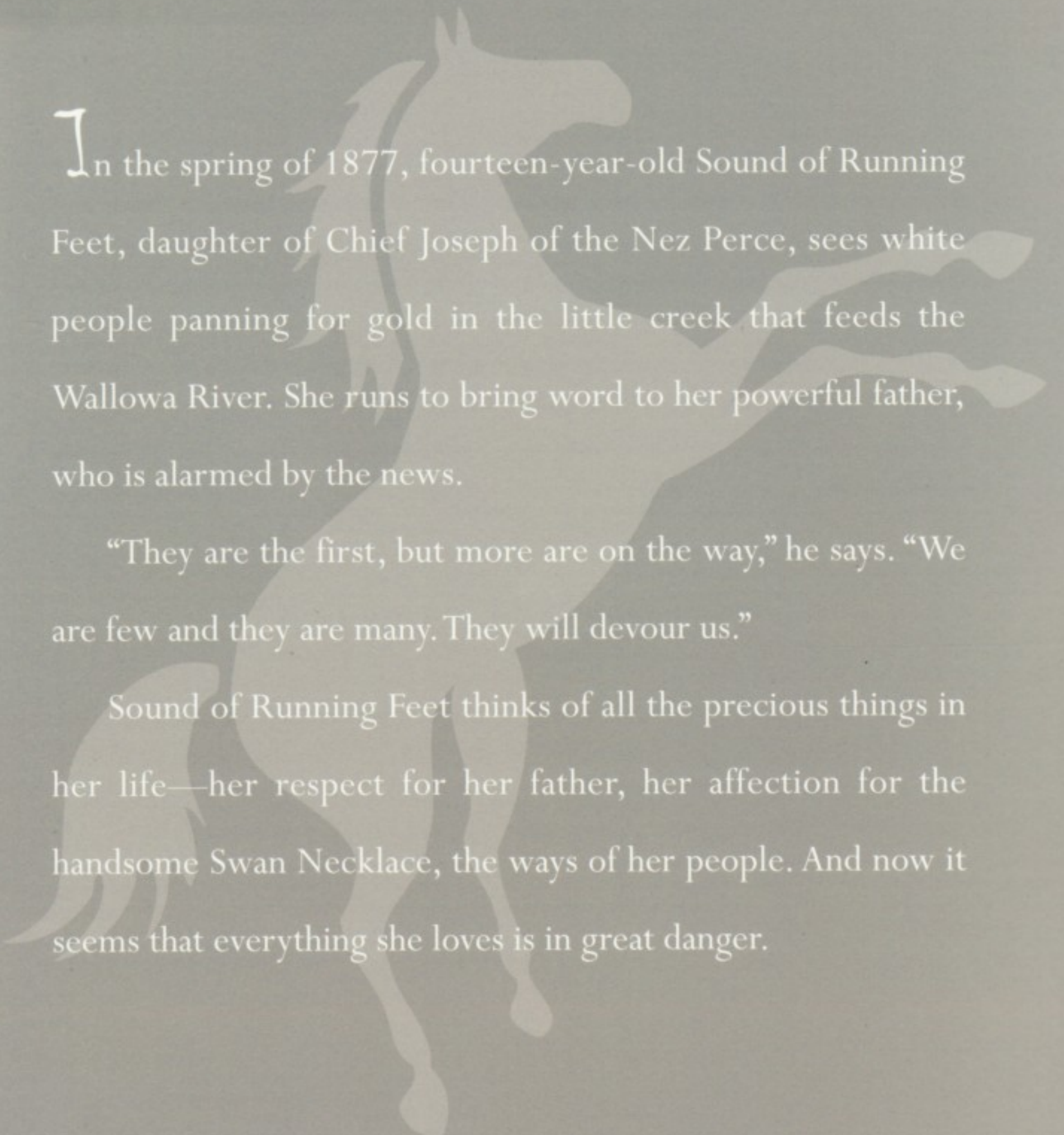
upon our land, only on the land that belonged to a part of our tribe, those who called themselves Christians, those who had sold their land to the Big Father, who lived in a faraway place called Washington. The white people were called settlers and they came to plant seeds, but mostly to dig gold out of the streams and the rocks.

I cautioned my cousins and the other girls to ride at a trot and to keep their eyes to themselves. None of them had a weapon, but I carried a rifle. My grandfather Old Joseph had given it to me more than six snows ago, as he lay dying. Until my fourteenth birthday, three moons ago, it had hung in the lodge. Then I took it from its place, for I, Sound of Running Feet, was then a woman.

In this short time I had learned to use it. At first it was too heavy to lift and I had to prop it up on a branch or on my horse's back before I could shoot. Now I could handle it and shoot straight. My father did not like the rifle. But Old Joseph had given it to me. It would be bad to speak against the gift now that Old Joseph was dead. He could come back and make trouble.

Three children sat in the cabin doorway. When we rode by, they were as quiet as mice when an owl is around.

Our trail crossed the stream a short way beyond the cabin. A man and a woman with her hair piled on top



In the spring of 1877, fourteen-year-old Sound of Running Feet, daughter of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, sees white people panning for gold in the little creek that feeds the Wallowa River. She runs to bring word to her powerful father, who is alarmed by the news.

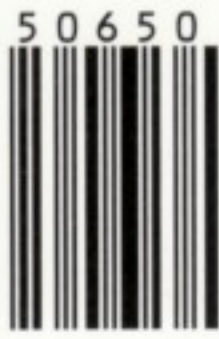
“They are the first, but more are on the way,” he says. “We are few and they are many. They will devour us.”

Sound of Running Feet thinks of all the precious things in her life—her respect for her father, her affection for the handsome Swan Necklace, the ways of her people. And now it seems that everything she loves is in great danger.

www.randomhouse.com/kids

US \$6.50 / \$8.99 CAN

ISBN 0-440-40879-2



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YEARLING

A Yearling Book

New York

RL: 5.6

009-012

Cover art © 2006 by René Milot

COVER PRINTED IN THE USA