

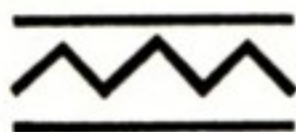
Scott O'Dell



YEARLING

S i n g
D o w n
the M o o n





ON THE HIGH MESAS above our canyon spring came early that year. The piñon trees shook off their coverings of snow in the month of the deer. Warm winds melted the snow and blue water gathered under the trees and ran through the meadows and down the steep barrancas. Far to the north, where the stone walls of the canyon stand so close together that you can touch them with your outstretched hands, the waters met and flowed toward the south, past Spider

Rock and Lost Sheep Mountain, at last in a big loop past our village.

The day the waters came was a wonderful day.

I heard the first sounds of their coming while I lay awake in the night. At first it was a whisper, like a wind among the dry stalks of our cornfield. After a while it was a sound like the feet of warriors dancing. Then it was a roar that shook the earth. I could hardly wait until the sun rose.

When the first light showed in the east, I hurried out to see the river running. My father and mother and my sister, Lapana, had seen early springs many times before, so they were sleeping.

I stood alone in the orchard, where the peaches grow. It was a miracle. Yesterday there was nothing to see save bare trees and wide stretches of yellow sand. In one night everything had changed. The trees had begun to bud and the sand lay deep under blue, rushing water.

I felt like singing. I wanted to leap and dance with joy, yet I stood quietly and watched the river running between the greening cottonwood trees, for I knew that it is bad luck to be so happy. The gods do not like anyone to show happiness in this way and they punish those who do not obey them. They punished my brother. They let the lightning strike him when he was coming home from a hunt. My brother had shot

a six-pronged deer and was singing because it was the first deer with six prongs that anyone had shot that summer. The lightning struck him and he died.

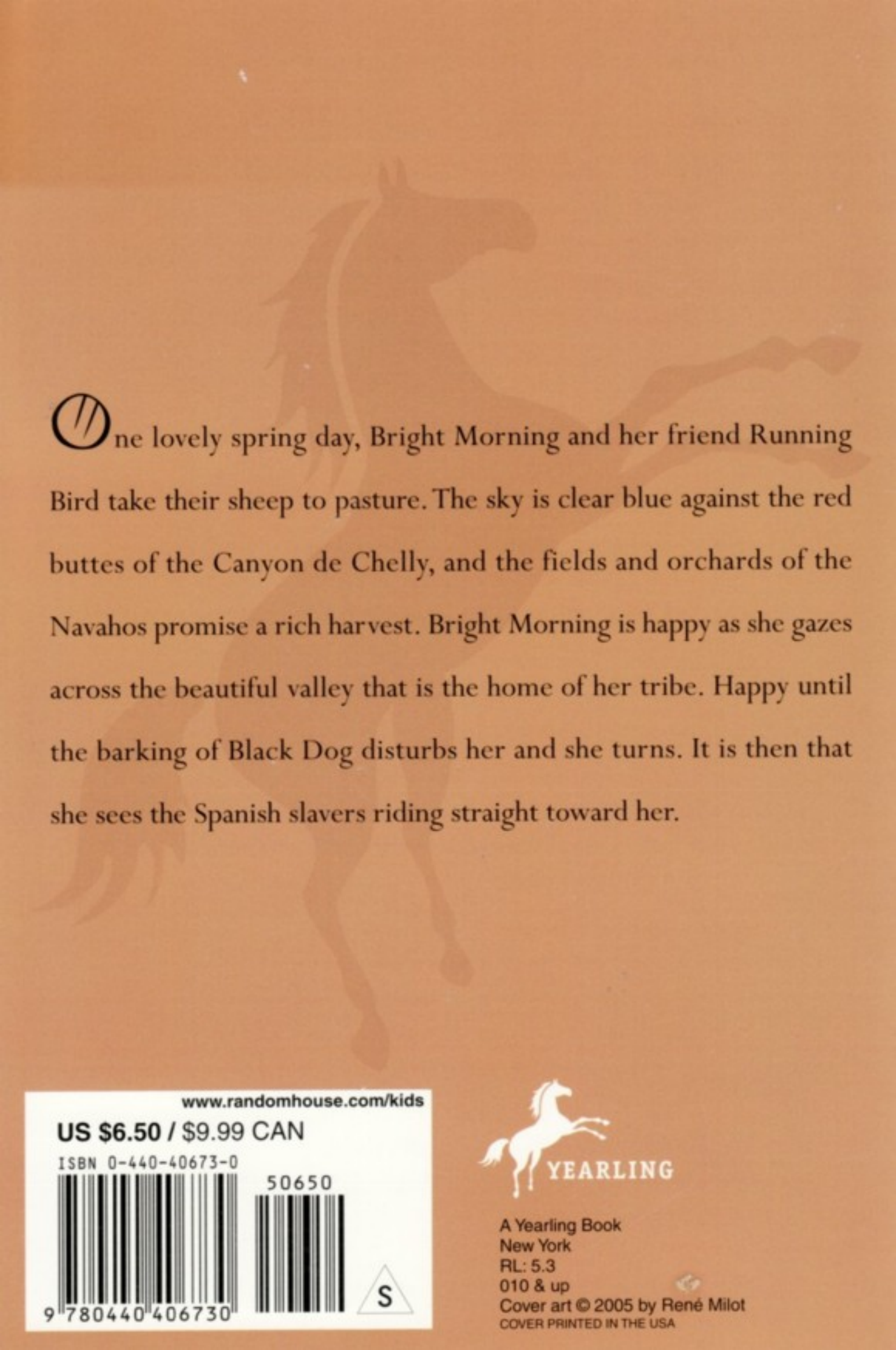
Thinking of my brother, I stood quiet. No one could tell how I felt. Yet it was hard for me to do. It was very hard because now that spring had come I would have another chance to take our sheep up the long trail to the mesa.


I had driven them there once before, last year on the day the waters began to run. But it was a bad time for me. I thought of that spring now. It was not so hard any longer to stand quiet and think about it.

I was happy going up the trail that day last spring, with sheep bells ringing and the sheep white in their winter coats, hungry to reach spring pasture. When we left the trail it was fun to see them scatter out over the meadow to crop the first young grass, as though they had never eaten in their lives.

It was fun all morning and some of the afternoon. Then white clouds came up, but after a while they turned black. It was then that I should have left the meadow and driven the flock down the trail to home. This I should have done, as any good shepherd knows. What I did was wrong. I waited, thinking that the black clouds would go away or that if a storm came it would be a small one.

The storm was not small. At first it only rained



ne lovely spring day, Bright Morning and her friend Running Bird take their sheep to pasture. The sky is clear blue against the red buttes of the Canyon de Chelly, and the fields and orchards of the Navahos promise a rich harvest. Bright Morning is happy as she gazes across the beautiful valley that is the home of her tribe. Happy until the barking of Black Dog disturbs her and she turns. It is then that she sees the Spanish slavers riding straight toward her.

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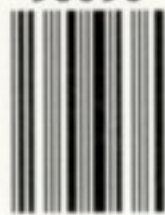
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