

# MR. TUCKET

## GARY PAULSEN





# Chapter One

FRANCIS ALPHONSE TUCKET came back to life slowly. He didn't open his eyes. He didn't want to open his eyes until he remembered everything that had happened.

Yesterday had been Francis's fourteenth birthday, and he had celebrated it quietly. Usually his mother and father—and even his nine-year-old sister Rebecca—made a big thing of birthdays. They had friends in, and a giant cake cooked to perfection on his mother's huge wood-burning stove, and by



four in the afternoon everybody was so full of homemade ice cream and cake they couldn't move.

But that was how it had been on the farm in Missouri, where they had had the big house and barn. Yesterday they had celebrated Francis's birthday on the tailgate of a Conestoga wagon at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. It was June 13, 1847—a warm summer Tuesday in a new country and they were with a wagon train on its way to Oregon. Francis, on awakening that morning, thought that even without any sort of birthday party, it would be his best birthday yet. How many boys of fourteen had ever seen drawings of the Rockies, let alone the real thing? That was an adventure in itself, not to mention crossing the great Kansas plains and watching the train scout, Mr. Ballard, hunt buffalo for the wagon train.

But then there had been a party—or at least a sort of party. As the wagons had squared away for the day's journey westward, Francis's mother called him from helping his father hitch some oxen to the yoke and tongue of the wagon. He went to the rear, where she was, and there, sitting on the tailgate, was a cake. He had no idea how she had done it—her stove was way back in Missouri, too heavy for the wagon. And he had not seen her doing anything special on the buffalo-chip fire that morning—but



there it was, a cake. And easily one of the nicest cakes he'd ever seen.

"Happy fourteenth birthday, Alphonse," she said, with a smile. She had always called him Alphonse. His father always called him Francis.

For a long moment he didn't answer, just stood staring at the cake. Then he thanked her, knowing it would do no good to ask her how she'd done it. She would just answer, "Where there's a will, there's a way," as she always explained things that seemed impossible to Francis.

"Would you like a piece now?" she asked. "Or would you rather wait until tonight? The train is going to stop early today. Mr. Ballard wants to check all the wagons before we get to the mountains."

He wanted a piece so badly his mouth was watering, but he knew that wasn't what she expected, so he hid his eagerness. "We could have a sort of party," he suggested. "I could ask Ike and Max over and maybe offer them some cake." Ike and Max were the only other two boys in the train. There were five girls, but they kind of kept to themselves after Max threw a garter snake on one of them.

"That's a good idea," his mother said, nodding. "I'll wrap it in muslin and save it for this evening."

He could tell that he had pleased her. In all



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Fourteen-year-old Francis Tucket is heading west on the Oregon Trail with his family by wagon train. When he receives a rifle for his birthday, he is thrilled that he is being treated like an adult. But Francis lags behind to practice shooting and is captured by Pawnees. It will take wild horses, hostile tribes, and a mysterious one-armed mountain man named Mr. Grimes to help Francis become the man who will be called Mr. Tucket.

★“A real knock 'em, sock 'em ripsnorter guaranteed to keep any boy and any girl...enthralled from first page through last....Superb characterizations, splendidly evoked setting and thrill-a-minute plot make this book a joy to gallop through.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred

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