



Read Rhyme Repeat

## **The Ransom of Red Chief**

Theater Adaptation  
by Jill Craddock

**The Ransom of RED CHIEF**  
**Rhyming Reader's Theater Adaptation by Jill Craddock**

**Characters**

BILL, criminal

SAM, criminal

NARRATOR / RED CHIEF

**SAM**

Flat as a desert, and they call the town "Summit"?

**BILL**

It's Alabama. Don't expect too much from it.

**NARRATOR**

The townsfolk were as harmless a group,  
As could be found dancing around any small-town Maypole.

**SAM**

"Small town" they may be, but which one has the bankroll?

**BILL**

I'll go with the banker, that man, Mr. Dorset,  
The tightwad, who looks like he's shoved into a corset.  
They bellyached about him on Main Street last night,  
Said, his pockets are full, but he's pretty tight.

**NARRATOR**

And therein lies the secret to keeping one's pockets quite thick.  
That, and, of course, knowing your arithmetic.

**BILL**

We can't stay here long: we've business to employ.  
Our "development deals" are primed in Western Illinois.

**SAM**

We need just two thousand more, so Dorset's two grand it is.

**BILL**

How come?  
One word: "philoprogetiveness."

**SAM**

Come again?

**BILL**

“Philo,” meaning love; “pro,” as in prolific;  
“Gen,” as in to generate:  
Parents! They believe that every offspring they create  
Is naturally terrific.

**SAM**

I still don’t get it.

**BILL**

These small towners imagine every child is a miracle of magic.  
So, we just capture Dorset’s kid and ransom him: it’s a simple trick.  
For his precious scion, the banker will happily hand across our two grand,  
And it’s easier for us, even, than knocking over a lemonade stand.

**SAM**

I like your plan—I’m in.  
But...

**BILL**

What?

**SAM**

Did you ever think of just robbing the man’s bank?

**BILL**

You mean we blaze in with guns and just partake?

**NARRATOR**

In those days, bank robbery was too high risk.  
The headlines would emblazon their names on a list.

**SAM**

No, we’ll keep it low-key, go for the small-town snatch.  
Hey! There’s the kid. The one whose hair looks like the tip of a match

**NARRATOR**

Busy throwing rocks at a kitten,  
Who is mewling, scratching, and hissing.

**SAM**

Give the boy some candy; he’ll be easy enough to catch.  
Then we’ll take him to that mountain, about two miles east.  
There’s a cave on the backside I’ve stocked with plenty to eat.

**BILL**

Want to go for a ride? Yes, you, little boy.  
I've got some licorice sticks you can enjoy.

*(A piece of brick hits BILL in the eye.)*

What?! Are you trying to make me go blind?  
Wait 'til I give your daddy a piece of my mind.

**SAM**

Get over here, kid.  
Keep up this conduct, and we'll increase your bid.

*(To BILL)*

We'll head a mile east of the mountain, then walk back to the cave

**RED CHIEF**

I won't go! Are you stealing me to be your slave?

**SAM**

Keep quiet! Understand? And you'd better behave.

*(BILL, SAM, and RED CHIEF arrive at camp.)*

**RED CHIEF**

Ha! Cursed paleface!  
Do you dare to enter the camp of Red Chief, terror of the plains?

**BILL**

Oh, I get it: we're playing a game.  
Then I'm Buffalo Bill, and I hold the reins.

**RED CHIEF**

Whether you like it or not, you'll be scalped at dawn.  
*(Kicks BILL and runs away)*

**BILL**

Get that little wild one!

**SAM**

Sorry, Buffalo Bill, he's gone.

**RED CHIEF**

*(RED CHIEF calls from behind a rock.)*

Hey! Snake Eye the Spy! Once Buffalo Bill is scalped alive,  
You'll be burned at the stake just as daybreak arrives!

**SAM**

Is that so? Well, I'm shaking with dread.  
Let's hear your big talk while you eat your bacon and cornbread.

**RED CHIEF**

*(Comes out from hiding)*

Did you know I'm nine-years old?  
I once had a pet possum that caught a cold.  
Rats ate sixteen of Jimmy Talbot's aunt's speckled eggs.  
I hate school, and my uncle has a real peg leg.  
Do you know that Indians are my heroes?  
Do you think the trees make the wind blow?  
Why is your nose so red?  
We have five puppies that sleep in my bed.  
My father is loaded.  
What would happen if a star exploded?  
I don't like girls, and I whipped Ed Walker Saturday.  
If you want to catch toads, string is the way.  
Do oxen make a sound?  
Why are oranges round?  
Amos Murray has six toes.  
A parrot can talk, but a monkey can wear clothes.  
*(Loudly, in warrior style) WHOOOP!*

**BILL**

How long have we been out here now? Five days?

**SAM**

Five hours, I'm sorry to say.

**BILL**

Hey kid, I bet you're ready to turn around and go.

**RED CHIEF**

These woods are Red Chief's home!  
Don't take me back. This is the most fun I've ever had.  
In town, they just make me go to school, and they're always mad.

**SAM**

All right, you'll stay for now, but it's time to go to sleep.

*(RED CHIEF jumps up repeatedly with an imaginary rifle, yelling, "Hist! pard!")*

**BILL**

Sam, I can't take much more.

**SAM**

Red Chief, go to sleep. Settle down. Not a peep.

*(The three sleep. Suddenly, terrifying screams come from BILL. RED CHIEF is sitting on BILL's chest with his hand in BILL's hair. RED CHIEF is holding a knife and industriously trying to take BILL'S scalp. SAM takes the knife from RED CHIEF.)*

**SAM**

Lie down, you rotten kid!  
Lay another finger on us, and you'll be sorry that you did.

**NARRATOR**

Bill won't close his eyes, for fear of a nine-year-old with red hair.  
Hours pass, and Bill notices Sam is also alert and aware.

**BILL**

Sam, what are you staying awake for?

**SAM**

Eh, I got a shoulder that's a little sore.

**BILL**

Liar! You're afraid! Red Chief was set to burn you at sunrise.  
That's why you're up. You're keeping yourself apprised.

**SAM**

Naw, I think I scared him good. He won't cause another fight.

**BILL**

He'd stick you right in the flames if he had a light.  
We picked the worst possible kid to pull for this scheme.  
Who'd want him back?  
He's the world's youngest certified maniac.

**SAM**

He's the type parents dote on. Don't fret.  
Believe me. They've broken out in a sweat.  
You stay here, while I see what's happening on Main Street.  
They must be panicked that they're missing one of their elite.

**RED CHIEF**

Where's he going? When's he coming back?

**BILL**

Mind your business. Let's eat. Get me a potato from that sack.

**RED CHIEF**

I've boiled it for you.

**BILL**

Well, that was nice.

**RED CHIEF**

*(Shoves the hot potato down BILL'S back)*

Which is worse? This, or ice?

**BILL**

Owww!!! You little—

*(Takes a swing)*

**RED CHIEF**

A swing and a miss. Ready, Buffalo Bill? Watch this!

*(Kicks at the hot potato under BILL'S shirt)*

Mashed potatoes!

**BILL**

*(Jumping up, trying to get the potato out)*

Get over here, you little so-and-so.

*(Grabs RED CHIEF and boxes his ears)*

**RED CHIEF**

Oh, yeah? You'll pay for that. You don't know how far I can throw!

*(Picks up a large rock. SAM enters.)*

**SAM**

What's happening here? Kid, get rid of that rock.

**RED CHIEF**

No man strikes Red Chief. Just wait—I'll put you in another scalp lock.

**SAM**

Bill, are you beating up on the kid? We don't want to take that tack.

**BILL**

Beat him? If I could, I'd shoot him. He put a boiling potato down my back!

**SAM**

Well, no one in Summit is missing him yet.

**BILL**

I'll bet.

**RED CHIEF**

Whoop! Whoop! Aye!

*(A rock hits BILL, and he is knocked out.)*

**SAM**

Look what you did. Get me cold water to pour on his head.

**RED CHIEF**

Get it yourself. He hit me first. That's payback. You heard what I said.

**SAM**

If you don't behave, I'll take you straight home. Now are you going to be good or not?

**RED CHIEF**

I was just funnin'. Don't send me back. I didn't mean to hurt the old sot.

**SAM**

That's it. You're going back. The time has come. Get out!

**RED CHIEF**

No, no. I'm sorry. But he hit me! I'll behave. Can I just play Black Scout?

**SAM**

That's for you and Mr. Bill to decide when he wakes up.  
If I were you, I'd steer clear. When he sees you, he's going to erupt.

**BILL**

*(Rouses and sees SAM making preparations to go to Summit with the ransom note)*

Sam, I'm begging you. Don't leave me with this little imp.  
You and I have made it through earthquake and flood, without so much as a limp.  
Poker games, police raids, train robberies: I never lost my nerve.  
But this kid, Sam, he's off the bell curve.

**SAM**

If it will make you feel better,  
Let's write the ransom note together.

**BILL**

We'd better lower the price. Nothing against parental affection,  
But take a good look at that kid and his freckled complexion.  
He's a forty-pound chunk of freckled wildcat.  
No one will pay two grand to get him back.

**SAM**

All right. Let's begin.

*Dear Sir,  
We have your boy, hidden far from Summit.  
There is only one thing you can do to overcome it.  
Do not search or send detectives to restore him to your family  
Or waste your time with invective to provoke my partner and me.  
Just put two thousand in large bills—*

**BILL**

No. Fifteen hundred. Two thousand is too much for that kid.  
He's lost his market value, after everything he did.

**SAM**

*Fifteen hundred in large bills put at midnight in a box,  
Where you find three trees together on the road by Owl Creek.  
The spot will be marked by three rocks.  
Put your reply to us first in writing for our guarantee.  
Then get back to Summit; don't breathe a word of this deal.  
Should you fail to comply, your son's fate will be sealed.  
Pay the money we demand, and you'll see your boy in three hours.  
Otherwise, the kid is ours.  
Signed,  
Two Anonymous Men.*

**BILL**

Two desperate men

**SAM**

A-men!

**RED CHIEF**

Snake-Eye, you said I could play Black-Scout while you was out!

**SAM**

Play! Play! Mr. Bill likes that game.

**BILL**

You lout. It's your turn. I bet ol' Red Chief here would put you to shame.

**SAM**

How does it go?

**RED CHIEF**

I'm the Black Scout, and I ride to the stockade to let the settlers know.

**BILL**

Let them know what?

**RED CHIEF**

Well, I'm a scout. So I've been scouting. For Indians? There's a war.  
Really. That's it. There's nothing more.  
I just don't want to play all alone.

**BILL**

Fine, Red Chief. What do I have to do?

**RED CHIEF**

Get on your hands and knees; you're the hoss.

**BILL**

Kid, please.

**SAM**

See you later, you two.  
Buffalo Bill, keep Red Chief amused.  
You're looking good with your tail and a mane!  
It's only 'til midnight . . .

**BILL**

Red Chief? How far to the stockade?

**RED CHIEF**

Ninety miles. And we've got to be on time.

**BILL**

Sam, we should have lowered it to a thousand. Good grief!  
Kid, kick me again and I'll toss you so far off course—

**RED CHIEF**

Well, then move it! Giddy up, horse!

**SAM**

*(SAM returns.)*

Red Chief? Buffalo Bill?  
Did you two find some Indians to kill?

**BILL**

The kid is long gone. I couldn't take another minute.  
I'm drained and have reached my absolute limit.  
If a martyr is what you seek, go back to Biblical times.  
Sorry I'm not a better renegade in crime.

**SAM**

Let me get you some stew. What happened to you?  
I don't know how playing horsey could have been so bad,  
But you look like you've been run over by a caravan.

**BILL**

I practically have.  
Playing horsey is one thing.  
The kid rode me every inch of ninety miles.  
That's unadulterated suffering.  
He tried to feed me oats, but instead made me eat sand.  
Then with his endless questions, like a page from Wonderland:  
*(Mocking)* "Why are holes empty? Why is grass green?  
What does a road that goes two ways mean?"  
Sam—Snake Eye—there's only so much a being can stand.  
You gotta forgive me. I dragged Red Chief back down the mountainside.  
He bruised me and bit me—my hand's got to be cauterized.  
I know we lose the ransom tab,  
One more minute, and you'd have had to put me in a hansom cab  
Headed straight to an institution for the mad.  
But the kid is gone, and thank heavens, now I've got some peace.

**SAM**

Have you got any history of—um—heart disease?

**BILL**

No, just accidents and chronic malaria in my family tree. Why?

**SAM**

Turn around.

**BILL**

*(BILL turns around and sees RED CHIEF. Cries out in anguish.)*

Whhhhhyyyy?

**SAM**

Hold on, Bill. Keep going.

**BILL**

I don't know. My temper is growing.

**RED CHIEF**

Can you play the Russian in Japanese War?

**BILL**

Right now, I can't take any more. Wait 'til I feel better.

**SAM**

I'm off to the general store. I'm going to get the reply to our letter.

**RED CHIEF**

What letter?  
How long till you can play?  
Who wrote you a letter?  
What does it say?

**BILL**

Listen to me closely, Red Chief.  
I have already resorted to violence with you.  
Now I need your complete and utter silence.

**RED CHIEF**

Silence! You sound like my schoolmarm. Ah, what's the use?

**BILL**

Have you not suffered enough abuse?  
Be quiet! Just try it.

*(RED CHIEF does not speak, but makes tapping noises, noises with his mouth,  
stomps around the campground, etc.)*

**BILL**

I'm not going to play if you can't abide my request.

**RED CHIEF**

I haven't said a word! This is my personal best!

*(SAM returns.)*

**BILL**

Hey, there, Snake Eye. You want to play with Red Chief a while?  
Maybe he'll only ride you eighty-nine miles.

**SAM**

Oh, Buffalo Bill, read this missive and weep.

**BILL**

What kind of malarky? He can't mean it! That creep!

**SAM**

He can; he does; he says it with verve.

**BILL**

The gall. The moxie. The unmitigated nerve!

**SAM**

Downright impudent.  
But not at all imprudent.

**BILL**

Yes, Sam, I know what you mean.  
And I guess we can't blame him.  
In all my years, I've never seen—

**SAM**

I know, we can't maintain—

**BILL**

It would be different if he were the slightest bit tame.

**SAM**

Kid, great news. Your father wrote ol' Snake Eyes a letter,  
About a game that will suit you much better.  
Says he bought you a rifle and a new pair of moccasins  
He wants to take you hunting tomorrow for bearskins!

**RED CHIEF**

Really? Really? Did he write that? Oh, golly! I can't wait!

**SAM**

Phew. He took the bait.

**RED CHIEF**

A silver rifle! Moccasins! Bearskins! This is the best. Let's go. Hurry!!

**BILL**

Yes, indeed. We'll get a move on. Down the mountainside we'll scurry.

**SAM**

Here you are home, kid.  
And a little gift for your dad: One hundred. Two hundred. Fifty.  
He's proved himself quite thrifty.

**SAM**

There's no thanks in not robbing that bank.  
We kept a low profile, and still our crime tanked.

**BILL**

It's worst than a bust.  
It actually cost us.

**SAM**

And did you notice Red Chief's pa never offered his thanks?

**BILL**

Next time, let's just rob the bank.