



Chapter 11: The Face of all the World is Changed, I Think

Miss Mattie

I awake. A hot stream of light pours through the open window, something that never happens until past ten in the morning. And I always rise before the break of day. I'm feeling dazed, somewhere between a dream and a miracle. Have I swallowed the tonic meant for David? The Magic Wizard potion.

The bed is as soft as my feather mattress in San Francisco. It conforms and wiggles and is so unlike the hard-woolen mattress I'm accustomed to, but it's very comfortable. Thoughts of Jason come to mind. He'll be back soon. Perhaps today. Then I remember David. What happened the night before? I close my eyes trying to recall.

The warm sun strokes my face. It's a wonderful feeling I've never had before. When bedridden with the little stillborn girl, Jason had covered the window to keep the sunlight from disturbing my rest.

I'm feeling unusually sleepy and my mind is fuzzy. I suddenly recall David's snakebite and his pain. Wasn't there a knock on the door last night? Had Pedro brought more creosote? Silly man. I hadn't asked for more.

No, I remember. It was Jose returning late from town, warning me and David that the Hortons were acting cock-hammered and stirring up trouble. Threatening to waylay the farm and shoot a certain “blue bellied man of color.”

They’re fixin to hang Mr. David my thoughts roar with recollection. Am I dreaming? I struggle to wake from my stupor. Is David hiding? I can’t remember. Everything is like a San Francisco fog. Fiddleheaded. Why am I in bed so late? Does the baby inside make me lazy? And why is my mattress so soft and commodious? So. . . transmogrifying?

In the distance, down by the river trail, I hear someone shooting a Remington rifle. My heart leaps like a jackrabbit.

Then I hear loud voices. Hellions shouting! A clamor arises and the racket is so boisterous I can’t imagine what’s happening. The Hortons have arrived! I realize. A posse of Bar Double H cowboys are here to kill David!

I attempt to sit up and place my hands on my chest to still my heart and not upset the baby inside me. But this proves to be a cumbersome task in the squirming bed. Then I notice I’m wearing my cotton laced camisole and knickerbocker drawers, rather than my long cotton nightdress. Was I so exhausted the night before that I fell into bed without properly changing?

The strong sunlight obscures everything around the room. But things still appear different and out of place. Is this even my bed? How can it be? Who has changed the mattress?

The shouts and clamor grow louder; it seems the Hortons and their gang are drawing near. They must be in wagons, I surmise and try to brace myself and my baby for the approaching danger.

Before I can scramble from this strange new bed, I notice Jason lying on his side with the quilt pulled over his head. “Jason?” I ask. I don’t recall him returning. Did he even leave? I’m so utterly perplexed.

I call his name again, shake his back, yank down the quilt, and see the smooth, brown skin of a man who isn’t Jason. And this man has long black hair strung in many plaits with colorful Indian beads. I’m seeing a naked man of color. But he’s not a former captive. His back is smooth and not riddled with welts. But before I can contemplate why this man is in my bed, I remember that the Hortons are nearing the house, raring to kill.

Why aren’t the vaqueros stopping them? I’m thinking. Have the hootowls killed them already? What of Mrs. Gonzalez and little Rosita? The mother and daughter I rescued from the Hassayampa flood. Had I saved their lives only for them to die at the hands of evil men? I scream David’s name. I don’t know what else to do. My mind and heart are on fire.

My scream awakens the man from his slumber. He groans but doesn’t move.

I recollect nothing from the night before and can’t imagine how David came to my bed. It’s impossible! I’d never allow such a predicament no matter how strongly he transfixes me. No, I can’t fathom what’s happened and I’m terrified. What if it’s Jason coming home and he finds his pard in our bed, with me?

“David!” I yell while sitting at the bedside and wondering where to run.

The commotion outside the room intensifies. More strange gun shots rip the air asunder. And what’s more troubling is that the shots aren’t from Remington or Winchester rifles or Colt revolvers. Or any kind of gun I’ve ever heard. I don’t know what’s making this gunfire.

I hear someone kick open the front door and a man shouts, “Hey, David!” I jump up and stand frozen at the bedside. Then I notice that feathers aren’t forming the mattress of this new

commodious, transmogrified bed. It's an enormous rubber bubble of sloshing water and the headboard isn't what Jason made from pine poles. It's a massive piece of furniture that has shelves and cabinets made of stained and polished boards with branding iron burns that include the Bar Double H. I hold my head and conclude that I must be elsewhere. I'm not in my own bedroom. But where could I possibly be? In Wickenburg Town? At the Bucket of Blood bordello? It's all too puzzling and my head is spinning.

Then my thoughts return to fear over the impending threat and the loud indiscernible noises. Both men and women are shouting. Even children? I can't determine whether they speak English or Spanish or even Apache. Now I'm certain I'm elsewhere and not on my farm. But then again, the room is so similar, many things are the same as in my bedroom. The armoire stands at the west wall, the east window, where the sunlight is flowing inside, is the same size and in the same place. No. This is my bedroom but someone has refurbished it, somehow. I must have been sleeping for a very long time.

I reach for my little derringer which I keep fully loaded and cocked under the bed inside my buckskin tote. But the new fandangle bedframe sits juxtaposed to the floor and I find no gun and no tote. I move away from the bed, agape that I'm wearing my undergarments and that David is with me in a bed that isn't mine! I'm someplace else other than where I was before. But why would anything matter now? Kaleb Horton is hellbent on killing and I'm doomed.

From the front room a man's voice calls, "Hey, David, Martha!"

I drop to the floor and grope for my buckskin tote. At any moment, the men will rush in to kill David and maybe even me. Or worse. I have no time to imagine who these women might be other than Horton floozies. But why bring whores on a hanging raid? No matter who they are, I can't let them see David in my bed. In Jason's bed?

I look at the man of color. He's now sitting up and stretching. He appears relaxed, as if he doesn't hear the shouting. As if he's unaware of all the changes and of my presence. Stranger yet, David is no longer clean shaven. He sports mutton chops like my uncle Willie's.

The man grins at me. He has a gold tooth and on his arms are ink drawn religious symbols and primitive art. A three-spoked wagon wheel? Is that a peacock? Sweet Gemini? A raised fist? What does it all mean? How highfalutin and higgledy-piggledy!

"David?" I whisper and grab a quilt off the bed to cover my shoulders and nakedness. "What are you doing here? Have you no shame?"

I then rush to the door and stand against it. What else can I do? I just don't know.

A strange cry with clanking drums and Mexican guitar music suddenly splits the house in twain.

This isn't the Hortons it occurs to me. It may be renegades with white women or with the Mexicans. But they know my name. They speak English. Perhaps the Apache captured the vaqueros and Mrs. Gonzalez.

"Come out you two," a man calls amid the strange rippling music.

David throws the covers off his lap and stands from the bed. He's not wearing a stitch of clothing. Not even his skivvies!

I can't believe the sight of him as I stand against the door, frozen in fear. What have I done? This isn't at all possible. I can only stare at the unshucked man in utter disbelief. His body is so strange, so unblemished by welts from former lashings!

"Come here babes," David motions me toward him, unconcerned about the intruders and completely unaware of how naked he is. I have never even seen Jason fully naked. Never. Even when he bathes in the tub outside the back door, he's always carefully modest.

“Bad trip, that’s all,” the black man holds his arms out to me. “It’s okay. Come to Daddy.” He has a gold hoop in his ear like an old forty-niner.

I can hardly bear what’s happening in this discombobulation. But I pull together my wits and decide that if I’m going to die, I’ll die bravely like a soldier during the War of Rebellion.

I take a deep breath, drop the quilt from my shoulders, and run out the bedroom door screaming, “Stop, stop, stop! What do you want? Who are you?”

I halt at the pinewood table and notice it’s now stained and polished with branding iron burns like the new elaborate headboard. I’m paralyzed in wonderment over what surrounds me. It’s the farmhouse Jason built, but someone’s furnished the rooms differently. My cedar hope chest is missing and that means my uncle’s autobiography and my Audubon Ornithology set are gone along with all of the letters from Constance and the things she sent me including my Lady Pioneer Diary.

In their place are strange candle fixtures, large metal boxes, and fancy glass things that must have come straight from the City, Chicago or even New York. Pictures, Indian weavings, and mirrors hang on refined walls. There are no wooden shelves and nails for Jason’s things. I’m beginning to wonder if the railroad finally arrived. Or has Jason brought me new sundries and notions? And where is Jason? Is he in Prescott? Fort Whipple? I cannot get ahold of myself.

“Why Martha. Congrats!” a man’s voice distracts me from my scrambled thoughts.

I become aware of my nakedness again and bundle my arms around my chest. Everything’s so bewildering, even myself.

“Martha,” the intruder speaks again, looking straight at me. No one cares about my appearance. No one has any shame!

I stare at the him and quickly realize that this stranger's face belongs to Jerimiah Podsworth Snider. But he's not so neatly dressed in a tailor-cut suit. He appears more like a rugged frontiersman in a fringed leather jacket. His bare feet sport some kind of "Indian" footwear of leather straps and his hair hangs halfway down his torso. He's still sporting a thick moustache but now he has a French mouche. The man has taken a tumble down the prairie. Or, is Jerimiah Snider disguised as an Apache scout? Have I overdosed on Magic Wizard's potion? Or has everyone else?

"Sweetie," a woman speaks, but my eyes remain on Mr. Podsworth Snider.

"We heard about the baby," the woman continues, walking over to Jerimiah and snuggling in his arm.

"We're here to party, man," Jeremiah remarks, grinning gleefully and I notice that he also sports whiskers! Two days growth. A preposterous thing for Mr. Snider to do.

I turn to the woman. She's stunning with long golden locks falling like silk over her chest. Her dangling earrings are quite fitting and stylish. Tiffany's? I wonder. But her every finger is bejeweled with silver and turquoise rings, even her thumbs and she's painted her very long fingernails pink. She wears a purple puffed sleeve blouse with a denim skirt hemmed far above her knees, and her eyelids are blue and her lips are a glistening pink. She's a soiled-dove dressed like a captive woman, I conclude and wonder if the Apache have captured Jeremiah Snider and this woman. Have they somehow broken free? There's no other explanation that makes any sense.

"Are you feeling all right?" I finally ask Mr. Snider.

"Bitchen as always, Babes." He takes a long drag from his rolled cigarette and passes it to the woman.

“We have groovy news ourselves,” the woman says. Still clinging to Jeremiah’s arm, she smiles glowingly at me with stunningly white teeth and deep blue eyes.

I grasp the pinewood table as if holding on for my life like I’m on the raft of planks shooting down the raging Hassayampa. Then I begin to recognize the woman, but can’t place her.

“Well sister, aren’t you curious?” She approaches me and reaches for my hands. I pull away.

Undaunted, she grabs my hands and says with excitement, “I got the salon, girl! Signed the papers yesterday. Isn’t it a gas? And you can have the works, on the house--pedicure, manicure, braids. It’s my shower-gift to you.”

“Shower-gift? How preposterous!” I break my silence and yank my hands from the woman’s grip, squinting at her face in disbelief. *Why, it’s Franny McDuff. The sporting woman indeed.* My head begins to pound so violently I grasp it and think Indians have held these people too long and they’ve gone loco. But why are they here at the farm? Has Jason brought them to the farm? Of course, that’s it. I would be the best person to help them recover. I was a captive myself and have many homespun remedies and a medicine box with tinctures and lotions, ointments and powders. Old rags for bandaging and making a sling. . . For David’s arm! After the snake bite! Yesterday, it happened. Why is there a great period of time missing? Where have all the moments gone since Jason left home?

“Where’s Jason?” I say, remembering that David is in Jason’s strange new bed. Perhaps it’s all a misunderstanding and I’ve been sick with child for days, weeks, and I lost consciousness. I look around the room, still holding my head, mesmerized by the change of décor.

“Turn down the fucking volume,” Jeremiah yells at two boys about eleven and twelve who are holding a black box that wildly beats drums and makes dreadful cries. Through my pounding head, I recall a portrayal in *Harper’s Weekly* of an Edison phonograph.

One boy fiddles with the box and the music dwindles but the Edison patent is so powerful, I hear *dream on, dream on. . . the good Lord will take you away*. I repeat the words in the manner Pedro repeats his English phrases during his lessons.

Jeremiah laughs. “Martha,” he approaches me, takes me in his arms, holds me tightly, and kisses my forehead. “You’ll be okay, dig? It’s a fine day. We’re here to party!”

Franny also takes hold of me as if to comfort me. “Bad trip, honey?” she asks.

“Stop it, stop it!” I push her away. “I’m no whore!” I suddenly notice the kitchen beyond the dining salon. It has a counter and sink with piped-in water and a stove of yellow metal beside a tall yellow metal box. A Jim Bowie knife sits on the counter and I leap to grab it.

“Boys, outside,” Jeremiah commands. “You’re tripping Martha out.” He keeps his eyes on me as he pounds on the bedroom door. “David, man. Your lady’s tripping. Big time!”

“No,” I scream, gripping the knife. “Stop. No one’s in there. I’m alone. And Jason’s back. Right?”

Jeremiah eyes Franny then shakes his head with a sigh. “Stop it, Martha. You have to let Jason go.”

Just then David appears at the door bare chested and wearing baggy trousers made from a colorful fabric with swirls of green and purple. I recognize the paisley fabric I recently ordered from LaFayette’s.

David yawns and stretches. “Hey mother-fuckers!” he says, “What’s happening out here?”

“Your lady’s flipping out,” Jeremiah nods toward me.

I’m by the kitchen counter holding the knife, prepared to battle for my life. I can feel the spirit of Jason filling me with courage. I know he’s here. Protecting me and the baby.

“You better cut back on the Purple Haze now that she’s pregnant, man, know what I mean?” Mr. Snider adds.

I brace myself at the counter and whisper the words coming from the Edison music box.
Maybe tomorrow the good Lord will take you away.

“Turn off the fucking radio,” Jeremiah yells at the boys who are still in the room.

David approaches me and holds out his hand. Slowly, cautiously, I take hold of it. Who else can I trust in this topsy-turvy matter? This life-like dream.

To my surprise, I find enormous comfort in the black man’s strong embrace. It feels like an old habit, as if I customarily fall into his arms. And that simply isn’t the case. It’s the same kind of warmth I found in my uncle Willie’s arms, years ago.

“There, there Babes. It’s okay. Daddy’s here.” He smells good. Manly. An unfamiliar *eau de cologne*.

“You look like a court jester,” I whisper in his ear. “Such funny britches of paisley fabric.”

“What?” David jests. “You make these groovy harem pants.”

Just then the front door again bursts open. Three other outrageous people scramble inside, ending the tranquil moment I found with David.

“Hey Bro, congrats!” a man exclaims.

I glance at the newcomers. It’s the Tonto Apache scout, sure enough, who rode through town with the cavalry led by General George Crook as I was sitting outside Frenchie’s store.

When was that? How long ago? The scout wears an Indian headband, a raw muslin frontier work-shirt, open at the neck, and maroon denim britches tucked in rawhide fringed boots up to his knees. Some kind of vanguard fashion, I note, for an Apache scout.

And with him, incredibly, are Ben Horton and Juanita. Yes, Juanita returns to my farm dressed in denim and underclothes. It's too chaotic to believe. Has the entire town gone wild and wooly? Are they all here to punish me for having a foreboding? Yes, all this madness has something to do with my forebodings. I turn to Ben Horton and ask, "What are you doing here?"

"That's not friendly, Martha," Horton replies. His shirt is a graduated orange and yellow dyed cotton and his denim britches flare out at the bottom. "Thought you'd be glad to see me."

"You're not welcome in my house. You or your lowdown brother Kaleb."

"Kal? Why he's still in Nam."

"I pray he gets himself killed. If it weren't for him, Jason would be back by now."

Ben gazes at me then at everyone else in the room. They're all looking at me like I'm the one who's gone loco. "Sorry Martha," Ben says. "Dude's not likely to get himself killed. Kal's just a rear echelon mother fucker. He'll be home in two months."

I push away David because I'm feeling out of my mind. How can a Horton be in my house without pointing a rifle at David's head? And what is this Nam? I never read about it in Harper's. Neither Uncle Willie nor Jason ever mentioned such a place. "Where's Jason?" What else can I ask? Nothing is making any sense except that Jason's gone.

David shakes his head and looks at me with pity. "Baby," he says and glances at Jeremiah then back at me. "You're having a flashback, that's all. Our friends are here to party. We're going to barbecue that old pig today. Get High. Live in the moment."

I fall back in his arms and bury my face on his chest because I don't want to look at the people around me. They're all strangers really. Dressed wildly, behaving like half-cocked addle heads. And what about my rearranged house. Certainly, Jason brought me these cutting-edge gifts. I'm dreaming, I realize, although there's nothing so real as David holding me and stroking the back of my head with his warm, strong hand. Around his wrist are several rawhide piggin' cords. Must be a snake bite remedy, I'm thinking. And why doesn't Jason hold me tightly like this?

The loud black Edison box rattles *Mama told me not to come* because the boys never went outside. What's happening in the room must be too amusing for them to leave. They are naughty boys rather like my cousins Mathew Lemont and Eugene Scott were as children!

"Let's all boogie outside. Get the pit and pig ready. We're having a fiesta!" Jeremiah says and ushers everyone out the front door. They're all gleefully laughing and singing along with the voices coming from the Edison box. Everyone seems drunk and jovial. As if Lincoln just announced Victory because the South has surrendered to General Grant.

I want to ask David about the monumental stories of the time just to confirm where I am and who I am. But instead, I ask, "What have we done?"

"Got married," his hand caresses my back. "And we're *fi'hin* to have a baby."

Shivers charge through me like an Edison electrical pulse as David kisses my lips. I'm overpowered with love. For David. "Thy soul has snatched up mine all faint and weak," I utter the words of my favorite poetess. I've never had such feelings for Jason. Everything dissolves around me, all the confusion and chaos and all the newfangled decorations in the room. If this is a dream, I hope to sleep forever.

But no, I then think *My future will not copy fair my past*. This is not a dream. It's too real. Too powerful. A person doesn't feel physical sensations like this when asleep and dreams are all in the mind.

"Come on Foxy Mama. Our friends are here to celebrate. Let's join them. And, oh hey," he rubs my belly, "let's not upset Junior."

I'm not showing yet. So how does David and everyone else know about the child? It was my secret, one I planned on keeping to myself until Jason got back. Or did I confess the news to David last night?

David's lips find mine again. We kiss at length, softly and tenderly.

"No, on second thought," he lifts me off my bare feet and carries me to the bedroom door. "Everyone can wait. My Baby needs a little lovin' from Daddy."

I giggle uncontrollably as David playfully plops me on the commodious water mattress. He makes me feel like a child Christmas morning in the house of a wealthy man. Like I'm riding on my rocking-horse Thunder with Miss Emily and Miss Bess. But that was long ago, when I was under my uncle's care. Now. . .

David lies beside me. He unbuttons my white cotton camisole, unveiling my breasts. "So soft and lovely," he whispers. "It's time for a love revolution."

Jason never behaved in such a manner, I'm thinking as David kisses my exposed flesh, making my body sparkle. But what of Jason? What if he should suddenly return amid all this confusion? Or, has Jason allowed this to happen?

Thoughts of Jason soon fall apart as David's soft moist lips kiss my belly. "I'm loving you too," he says to the baby inside. He then stands and pulls off his paisley britches and removes my knickerbocker drawers. I don't want to look at him, at his throbbing manhood. It

frightens me. It's far beyond customary manners. And so, I gaze at his handsome face sporting mutton chops and wait for him to enter my soul.

He's not quick, like Jason, he's easy because of my condition. And the moment feels more wonderful than anything I've ever imagined. Nothing matters now but the man stroking my body and bringing enormous rushes I never dreamed possible, for a woman. Certainly, not for me. After he issues his seed, I think to myself, *He has known me before. Many times. He knows my body far too well.*

He kisses my cheek and neck. "I love you, Queen Bee," he whispers, moistening my ear with his tongue. "I need you boo-coo boom boom."

"I love you, sure," I muster a whisper. It's not something I'm used to saying. And my voice is nearly spent. I don't think about Jason when resting in David's arms. When he strokes my hair across my naked body.

After a quick nap I wake up in shock, remembering my wild dream on a mattress that wiggles. I look around the room. Again, my bed transmogrifies. It isn't a dream. Everything *is* changed somehow, with new furnishings and fixtures like the strange things I remember seeing in the front rooms.

David, not Jason, lies in bed with me, as if *he's* my husband. The dream is as real as the black man smiling back at me. I have no choice but to let him lead me through this strange experience. He is wise and my chest aches with love at the sight of him. He has truly snatched my soul.

David climbs from bed, puts on a wildly colored cotton shirt, and slips on his baggy trousers and old leather boots. His appearance makes me giggle.

Suddenly, I remember Jason. He'll be riding back shortly. If David isn't in his proper attire, Jason will know something's happened between his Pard and his Rib.

"What about Jason?" I ask David. I hate to spoil the tranquil moment between us, but I feel pressed to reach the bottom of matters. "He'll be coming back soon. Oh David, what'll we do? He'll know about our sinful deed. I feel so ashamed."

"Come on, let's go party with our friends," David says as he leads me into the front room. "No more talk about Jason. Not today, Baby. Not today."

As I pass through the room, everything appears upside-down, turned around, and unexplainable. "Where did it all come from, David?" I can't help but ask. What I'm seeing is simply too magnificent to keep silent about. "This can't all be visions from the medicine. Jason must have brought me these gifts."

"Medicine, sister?" the Apache says. He's sitting slouched on a large pillow chair in the front room. Juanita, young and beautiful, is on his lap holding a colorful glass pipe half filled with water and emitting herbal smoke.

A peace pipe, I surmise. Stranger yet, however, is the box of flickering light on a table before Juanita and the Apache. The box is making moving pictures with words and music.

"The face of all the world is changed, I think," I remark. "That's the strangest windup music box I've ever seen."

The Apache scout and Juanita glance at me then burst into explosive laughter.

"Wind-up toy!" David repeats, breaking from his own laughter. "Can't help it, Honey Bee. Here, man. Give us a toke." He takes the glass pipe from Juanita.

“I saw you before,” I say to the scout who’s wiping his eyes made wet from his laughter. “You rode through town with Crook’s cavalry. I know you spotted me at the dry good’s store. Only a few white women live in Yavapai County.”

“You mean when I rode in the Round-up Parade last week?” the Apache questions.

I stare at him in wonder. What is he doing in my house and why is Juanita sitting on his lap like the whore she is? I thought she was with Ben Horton! My thoughts never seem to quit stirring.

“Here Babes,” David deeply inhales smoke from the pipe, causing bubbles to burst through the water. It’s mesmerizing to watch. Then, to my astonishment, he holds up my face and kisses the smoke into my mouth. “Only weed for you and Junior today. No more dropping or popping.”

I attempt to hold in the smoke, afraid of the meaning behind the scout’s peace pipe and everything else for that matter. Am I doing what I’m supposed to be doing? Is this some kind of Indian ritual involving me? Am I once again a captive? Or are my thoughts born from my traumatic year as a captive of the Pawnee?

The abrasive smoke causes me to cough. “Weed tobacco,” I suggest. “As potent as Jason’s after supper cigar.”

Everyone laughs uproariously. Especially Juanita. And this angers me. Of course, the woman’s laughing at me because I sent her away. She has no right to return to my farm. Especially, to laugh at me despite all these strange goings on.

I clear my throat with small successive coughs. “Why are you laughing?” I ask, staring at Juanita. “I sent you away for good.”

“Mellow out, Martha!” David says. “What’s gotten into you? We’ve all been on bad trips.”

“Oh, forget it,” Juanita says, taking hold of the pipe. “She’s still mad at me for balling you first. Thought she’d be over that by now.”

David says to the scout, “Come on Cookie, let’s go help with the roast.” He opens the front door. Juanita and the scout, with the pipe, follow him outside and not knowing what else to do, I lag behind them.

Thank Jesus in Heaven, I’m thinking as I stand on the L-shaped porch, my rocker is in its place. I also see my nasturtiums in their clay pots. And my lavender and mint gardens beside the porch. Then I espy, at one end of the porch, a large wooden swinging bench. I certainly didn’t agree to this, I’m thinking. It obstructs my view of the Hassayampa. Jason would never have put it there unless I had asked him to.

I sit in my rocker and watch Juanita join Franny arranging dishes of food at a long wooden table beneath a new ramada. David and the scout approach the men standing at a fire pit roasting a pig. A woman stands with them and I quickly recognize that she’s Rebecca Crawley! My piano stealing nemeses is wearing baggy denim trousers that hang from below her belly and her navel shows! What an extraordinary day this is!

The corral fencing is gone, I notice, although the new barn stands where Jason and David had built it after the flood. It’s weathered and tattered, for some reason, and I don’t see any bunkhouse. Tall mesquites tower over my lovely vegetable gardens that I replanted after the flood. They are full and lush beyond anything I’ve ever produced and neatly fenced-in to keep out rabbits. Who has tended my gardens while I’ve been sick in bed during the passage of

missing time? I ask myself. It wasn't Jason because he's away. David could have done it. Gardening isn't much different from farming cash crops.

I watch David at the pig roasting pit. Rebecca hands him a rolled weed tobacco cigarette, which he deeply inhales. He too seems different now, and not just because of his elaborate muttonchops and hairstyle. He's more brazen, more self-assured around these other people. Townsfolk who cavort and frolic. No one behaves as they behaved before. Everyone has lost all manners and self-respect.

Now I'm feeling more befuddled than frightened by my present situation. It appears there is no danger, like I originally thought when I first awoke. Just confusion due to a lapse of time. And this isn't new to me. Many times before, my world abruptly changed into something strange and unexplainable. It's why I stayed in the desert where my uncle brought me instead of returning to the City. It's why I went with Jason to his farm. I love the desert's simplicity, its quiet beauty, its gentle sounds of cooing doves, clattering quail, tweeting wrens, and howling coyotes. But now, it seems, the desert itself is playing slight-of-hand parlor tricks with my mind. A charlatan's game at the medicine wagon.

Suddenly, from behind the barn, a clamoring blast accosts my thoughts. Could there possibly be more to come?

The boys run toward a curious wagon approaching the house. Jeremiah follows them.

I step off the porch, entranced by this new invention presumably arriving from the Old States. Although, it's not incredible. Steam engines and self-propelled carriages have been around since the beginning of the 1800's.

The boxy wagon of tungsten steel lumbers into the yard and stops near the long picnic table. A side door opens and more yawling music blasts into the air. The wagon has a white top

and sides painted in colorful flowers and the words “love,” “peace,” and “make love not war” and pictures of the wagon wheel with odd spokes, David’s token of the War I’m now putting together in my mind. It seems to be everywhere.

“Here they are,” David greets the new arrivals as the two Snider boys run to the van to greet two other boys about their age and a girl about seven.

James Grant appears from the wagon and with him is Mrs. Gonzalez wearing riveted britches and a leather fringe vest over a man’s shirt. Her hair is long and metal earrings dangle from her lobes, the same sort that all the women seem to be wearing.

I stare in amazement. “The Iron Horse has arrived in Arizona!?” I venture to say. Everyone laughs. “How can it be.” I look at Franny.

“How can what be, girl?” She sounds annoyed as she heads to the wagon. As if I’m the one who’s behaving outrageously.

I decide to hold my peace. These new goings on are simply too strange to grasp all at once. The next thing I expect to see is a man flying, or appearing in a puff of billowing San Francisco fog. These are matters for Jules Verne, maybe Darwin. Men of vision, Prophets who see far beyond the day’s style of order. Edison, Livingston, Pasteur, Miss Nightingale, Lincoln, Rockefeller of Standard Oil, and Herschel at the telescope with his sister Caroline Lucretia Herschel beside him recording his observations and discovering many comets by her own accord. Like Miss Mitchell’s Comet. And I’m Miss Mattie Comet, I smile to myself. What times these are!

As David helps James Grant carry boxes of rattling bottles to the L-shaped porch, Mrs. Gonzalez approaches and gives me a hug. I’m taken aback. The woman has never hugged me before, except during the flood when we survived by hanging on to each other and Little Rosita

on the raft and on the sandy river bank. Otherwise, hugging is as uncharacteristic as everything else.

“Congratulations chica,” the large woman smiles. Another new kind of aroma emanates from her. Perhaps it’s a scent from far away India. I ask Señora what fragrance she wears.

“It’s patchouli oil,” she tells me. “Masks the odor of grass.”

“Mrs. Gonzalez?” I utter, hoping my kitchen help can explain what’s going on.

“Mrs. Gonzalez?” she repeats. “Are you jibbing? I’ve been Mrs. Grant for more than a year. I’m his first wife. He’s my third husband. A year back, Jim wanted to marry me even though I’m twelve years his senior and have three kids. He was happy to have an instant family and I was happy to marry a quiet, hard-working man like James.”

“Hey, Wynona,” Franny calls to the large Mexican woman whom I know as Mrs. Gonzalez. “Give us your opinion on the salsa.”

I cautiously approach the wagon, feeling more curious than afraid. I’ve read about the Iron Horse in Harper’s and I even saw a caboose and engine in the City. But this is an impractical wagon. I walk to the front of it and don’t see any hitches for horses. “How’s this?” I say aloud. “No horses! No steam! What kind of self-propelled wagon is this?” I look to David who is now standing with me before the curious vehicle.

David laughs, “You mean horse power? This is Jim’s Volkswagen van.”

“A Folks Wagon?” I repeat.

“That’s right.” David puts his arm over my shoulders. “A Volkswagen. Now quit tripping and take a chill pill, Honey Bee.”

“I just can’t reckon everything, that’s all,” I say and look pleadingly at David, relying on him to help me through these remarkable circumstances. Although I’m not sure why or how it

overcame me, I love David now as much as I ever loved Jason and trust him like I trust Jason. I just don't understand what's happened to Jason, to me, and to everyone else from Wickenburg Town.

"Hey Baby," David nudges me. "Go help the ladies make the salad."

I nod, happy to occupy my mind with an activity, and walk to the long table and stand across from Juanita who's cutting tomatoes and greens.

"Hey girl," Franny says as she stands at the table beside me. "Don't be a bummer. It's Miller time."

"Ah, she's mad at me 'cause I balled David first," Juanita repeats what she's already said just to further irritate me, I believe.

"Big deal," Franny says. "I slept with him too. It's no secret. Make love not war!"

"It don't matter now, girl," Juanita adds smiling at me. "He's all yours."

"You mean Pedro, don't you Juanita," I scoff.

"What?" Both Juanita and Franny look up from their tasks.

"Pedro. Your man. Before the flood, I caught you doing shameful things in the barn. Don't deny it. That's why I ran you off."

"You *are* fried today, girl," Franny laughs.

"Who's Pedro?" Juanita asks, not as amused as Franny. "And what's gotten into you? Lighten up, sister."

"This is all so curious I suppose it doesn't matter anymore what you and Pedro did."

"Well thank you. And thank this Pedro, too. I hope he was a good lay." Juanita laughs and throws a piece of tomato into a large salad bowl.

“Hear about that chick that OD’d in town last week?” Franny asks probably to change the subject.

“Chick traveling alone to Vegas?” Juanita remarks.

Franny nods. “Shot up too much smack in the Greyhound bus station. They found her dead on the toilet. I think it was a suicide and not an OD. It’s sad no one seems to know much about her. Not even her name.”

“That’s pitiful,” I say and recall Jason mentioning a woman in Wickenburg who had died after ingesting too much laudanum. Now I wonder if this was the same incident. “Didn’t that happen half a year back? At the Bucket of Blood?”

Franny gives me a puzzled look. “Bucket of Blood? Heavy! No, sister girl. It happened last week.”

I’m surprised, although the entire day has been off, timewise. And I don’t want to argue about matters I can’t grasp anymore.

“David,” I call, feeling uneasy with these two women. I don’t know them, who they are or what they do, not anymore, and they’re acting like I’m their dear chuckaboo friend. And I don’t like their odd discussion about that poor whore who died months ago, not a week before, of which I’m quite certain.

David approaches, hugs me, and grabs a pouch from the center of the table and proceeds to stuff green tobacco in a pipe. “Let’s smoke to peace.”

I sit at the table’s bench, watching everyone smoke the pipe. But I refuse it when it’s passed to me and no one insists that I smoke it.

At one point, Juanita begins playing a guitar and singing a lovely sonnet with the sweet lulling voice I remember. “*If you’re going to San Francisco be sure to wear flowers in your*

hair.” Juanita’s ballad is so pleasing, especially in contrast to the booming black box, that I wonder why I ever got so angry at the girl who helped me through a stillborn birth. I myself just had sinful congress with David. I feel in a tizzy, all of a sudden.

“You’re awfully quiet, Martha,” Franny says as David heads over to the barn where the men and boys are playing catch with a red dish.

“Hard to take it all in?” Juanita teases me, pausing from her song.

“Reckon that’s it,” I say, staring off at the distant floodplain. “That’s exactly right. It’s hard to take this all in. My future will not copy fair my past.”

“That’s far out,” Franny says. “Did you just come up with it?”

“Oh goodness no,” I say. “It’s a favorite verse from my favorite poetess. Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Do you think all these strange happenings have to do with my forebodings?” I ask. It’s not a question I take lightly because I know how people fear my ability to predict things, but since everyone here is part of this strange experience, they must know what’s occurring, that it involves my forebodings and the fact that Jason’s away.

Franny glares at me and sets down the pipe. “Forebodings?” she asks. “What the hell is that psychedelic shit? You got cravings, honey? Need some dill pickles? I think Wynona has some in her van.”

I look at the colorful Folks Wagon and see James Grant unloading another box of clanging bottles. *He’ll know*, I tell myself. *Mr. Grant surely knows the whereabouts of Jason Bartholomew Shear.*

“Mr. Grant,” I say when I reach him at the wagon. “You of all people must know where Jason is. What’s happened to him?”

“Martha, you’re baked,” James says and stops what he’s doing. “Go lie down and take it easy.”

“Mr. Grant,” I plead, my eyes are beginning to tear. “Where is Jason? When’s he due back?”

The spindly Mr. Grant stares at me and his face turns ashen. “Hey Becky,” he shouts. “Come here will you.”

Rebecca Crawly, who has been braising the pig on its spigot, puts down the brush and approaches James and me. She looks so silly in her clothes, her hair dangling down like an Indian woman’s, her breasts large and clearly visible under her shirt. And, unbelievably, she’s painted her lips that sparkly pink color!

“Could you help Mattie,” Mr. Grant says then returns to carrying the box to the porch.

“Come on girl. You and the baby need your rest,” Rebecca says and takes my hand. “It’ll be all right. Trust me. We’ve all had bad trips.”

I jerk from Rebecca’s grip. “Why do you care so much? And what about my piano?”

“Piano?” Rebecca asks as if she’s suspicious about what I’m saying. She smells of the roasted pig.

“I never gave it to you,” I tell her. “You had no right to sell it to Mr. Snider.”

“David,” the woman yells. “She’s freaking out. You’d better help her.”

“How can you deny it?” I insist, feeling overwhelmed with anger at the woman before me. A woman who wronged me. A woman I’ve no reason to forgive.

“Deny what, Sweetie?” Rebecca asks.

David arrives and takes hold of me but my anger is strong and I push away the one man I thought I could trust in this bizarre situation. “No. Stop. Don’t touch me anymore.” I back away

from David and Mrs. Crawley. The other townsfolk start approaching; their expressions are ghostly pale. That's it! My mind suddenly swirls with one thought. I've died. The Hortons *have* killed me and I'm now living among spirits. Even David is dead. That explains the changes in his appearance. Everyone but me is a doppelganger! Or am I one too?

The townsfolk encircle me, entrap me. "Leave me alone. All of you!" I scream as loudly as I can, probably damaging my vocal cords. I become speechless and don't allow anyone near me, not even David who looks distraught. Tears stream down my cheeks. I can no longer bear the strange events surrounding me, regardless of whether I'm dead or alive.

"When is Jason coming back?" I again yell with a raspy voice.

No one moves. They just glare at me.

"Where's Jason?" my voice quivers. "I want to tell him about the baby." I cover my face with my hands and sob uncontrollably, then crouch onto the ground.

David takes me in his arms and carries me inside the house to the commodious water mattress. He covers me with a quilt. Despite the warmth of the day, I'm shivering.

Mrs. Gonzalez soon brings me some valerian root tea and insists that I take a drink. It tastes bitter but quickly calms me and makes me drowsy. I want to sleep, more than anything else, to sleep and dream of a peaceful familiar day. Maybe even of Jason's coming home. But I can hear the men talking outside on the L-shaped porch like I used to hear Jason and his pard talking when everything was normal, before the flood, before Jason went away.

"What's up with Martha?" I hear James Grant asking David.

"I don't know," David replies. "Everything was groovy till this morning. Then she started rapping about Jason coming back. It's just that her mentioning Jason, over and over again, on a day of celebration, is jolting."

“Whoa, heavy. It has been three years now, right?” I hear the Apache scout asking. “She should be over her grief by now. I mean, especially with your baby coming and all.”

“I saw guys in Nam wake up all dinky dau, like she did this morning,” I hear David say. “All irrational. Not remembering where they were, even who they were. Battle fatigue, the medics called it.”

“But why would she be suffering battle fatigue?” Mr. Grant asks.

“Don’t know, Jim. Can’t figure it, man.”

“It’s the LSD, dude,” I hear Mr. Snider say as I picture him drinking his bottle of malt lager that Mr. Grant brought in all those boxes. “And a pregnant woman gets weird, acid or no acid. Doesn’t Wynona help her with that psychic stuff? Tarot readings?”

“My wife’s a social worker,” James pipes in. I can hear the pride in his voice. “And a registered midwife nurse.”

“Dream notes,” David interrupts. “Wynona has Martha keep a journal about her dreams that she calls her dream notes. I thought it was helping, until this morning. For several months she hasn’t mentioned Jason, let alone ask when he’s coming back.”

I cannot sleep or stop listening to the men on the porch so I get up and surprise them by appearing at the front door. They are sitting on the wooden steps, in my rocker, and on the swinging bench. All of them are drinking malt lager. Across the way, I see the women sitting at the long table engaged in their own conversation. I believe I’ve distressed everyone. But as these people keep saying, they’ve seen bad trips before. Whatever that means.

“Who’s Wynona?” I ask. “What help are you talking about? Dream notes? Tell me the truth about you, us, about Jason.”

“Don’t you remember?” David stands from my rocker, holding his lager. “Taking notes about your dreams. Wynona is helping you understand your dreams. Helping you face. . . Reality.”

“Goodness sakes alive, I suppose.” I sigh. “If I’m taking notes, I’m sure it’s got to do with my dreams. My dream about the medicine man emerging from his cave.” I smile at David, ignoring the other men. Unabashed now by my improper attire. I remember telling David about that dream when he and I were conversating at the pinewood table while Jason was away in Prescott with James Grant. Who is here with me now, sitting on the swinging bench with the Tonto scout rolling cigarettes. But I don’t relate this. It’s simply too complex.

David is smiling back at me like he remembers me telling him about this dream.

I suddenly want him again. I’ve never felt happier than when David’s body and spirit joined mine. Loving me, making my body come alive. Making me happy in this disjointed situation. In my delicate condition. In whatever this place happens to be.

David seems to sense my desire and approaches me. “Make yourselves at home, boys.” He winks and walks with me inside the house to the commodious transmogrifying bed in the room that once belonged to Jason and me.