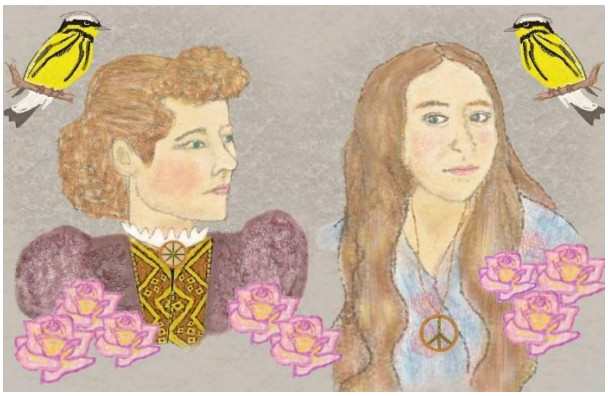
Dreams along the Upside-Down River

a novel by Teri Ekland

Part One



Chapter 1: A Farm along the Hassayampa

April 1876

Miss Mattie Bachman

I act a certain way
Tis sensitivity
And those who watch my drama
Are unaware of me.

I fool them all because
I'm wont to play their game--
A medley of performances
Where not a line is real
Nor the same.

I don't recall my year of captivity after a Kansas tornado killed my folks and brothers when our wagon train headed to California. My first memory is when Uncle Willie fetched me from Fort Leavenworth the year the Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise and frontier settlers could own slaves. This was ten years before the War of Rebellion and the country was a hornet in a beehive over the issue of slavery.

In the rookery quarters at the Government Depot, my widowed Uncle held me on his lap. I pulled at his mutton chops and called him Ipa. It's a Pawnee word that means Great Father because that's who Uncle was when I first saw him. Ipa is the only Pawnee word I recall although Uncle claimed I spoke nothing but Pawnee when he held me on his lap. As soon as he brought me to his mansion on Rincon Hill in Frisco, Cousin Constance insisted I speak only English. She worked hard to erase my recollections about my year of captivity. Constance is Uncle Willie's only child but he considered me his daughter as well. Cousin has two sons, Matthew Lemont and Eugene Scott. When I was growing up in Uncle's mansion, they were naughty boys who called me a little white Indian when the adults were out of the room.

I have only one memory of my captivity. At least I think it's a memory but I can't be certain. It came to me a few months after I arrived at Uncle's mansion. I had this dream about an old medicine man who emerged from a cave to speak to his people. I didn't understand his words because when I had this dream, I had forgotten how to speak Pawnee. Of course, I didn't reveal my dream to Cousin or Uncle or anyone else because early on I learned not to mention anything about that year and nobody ever asks me about it. Folks believe I possess a delicate mind brought on by the trauma of being a captive. Maybe they fear I'll completely lose touch with reality, or some such thing.

Cousin Constance has always been a mother to me. She schooled me and taught me etiquette and Christian morality. She also insisted I play in the backyard with the children of mothers who visited her every day. She believed I needed to socialize with these children to become a normal child. Uncle was generally at the San Francisco Exchange during these times. Whenever he returned home, I'd tell him I didn't like playing with other children

because they called me a little white savage. Uncle relied on the maternal judgement of Constance and he always encouraged me to enjoy the afternoon sunshine with my new friends.

I tried to please Uncle and play with the children and ignore their taunts. Soon enough, I began avoiding them by sitting alone under a towering manzanita tree in the back yard and reciting nursery rhymes to Miss Emily and Miss Bess, the China dolls Uncle gave me on my first Christmas in the mansion. Uncle suggested I name my dolls after the Blackwell sisters. They were the first lady doctors of note. Uncle admired innovative and daring women who stepped beyond their sphere of domesticity. One of his favorite ladies of note was Miss Myra Colby Bradwell. She apprenticed under her lawyer husband and passed the Illinois bar exam with high scores. Law firms rejected her as a woman but she started a legal periodical and fought for a woman's right to serve on juries and attend law school.

Last year, ten years after our dear Mr. Lincoln's murder, Robert Lincoln had his mother Mary Todd committed to an insane asylum but Miss Bradwell engineered her release. "Mary Todd Lincoln is no more insane than I am," Harpers quoted Miss Bradwell as saying. You might say that Uncle Willie was my Myra Todd Bradwell. He always stood up for me and refused to accept the notion that my year of captivity had somehow affected my sanity.

Under that manzanita tree in Uncle's back yard, I took to staring at the distant Golden Gate Bay where ships and boats flew colorful flags at the stern. I felt like one of those boats in the harbor, not going anywhere or coming from any place. I was just there, bobbing up and down. Sometimes I wonder if my year of captivity inspired this habit of

staring off into the distance. Maybe it was something I learned to do from that medicine man in my childhood dream.

Naturally, Cousin Constance objected to my sitting alone and staring at the bay but this time Uncle told her to let me be as I am. “We don’t know what she suffered during that year,” I overheard him say. “Certainly, it was nothing you’ve ever experienced. In my opinion, our little Miss Mattie Comet is doing remarkably well.”

Uncle called me Miss Mattie Comet because during our ambulance ride across the frontier from Ft. Leavenworth to Frisco, under the escort of the First Cavalry Regiment, a great comet was traveling across the sky. Each night Uncle pointed it out to me. The sight transfixed me and the first English word I uttered was comet.

Actually, Uncle called me this name after another lady of note, Maria Mitchell who discovered a comet of her own a few years before my captivity. Folks took to calling her comet Miss Mitchell’s Comet but hers wasn’t the same one crossing the sky on my journey to Frisco with Uncle Willie. I don’t know the name of that comet like I don’t remember the names of my two brothers.

My first foreboding occurred under that manzanita tree. It was a bright afternoon and the fog had lifted. A five-year-old neighbor boy named Timothy McNamee was playing hoop sticks in the yard while his mother was visiting Constance for afternoon tea. Timothy asked me what I was staring at and I didn’t respond so the boy loudly repeated his question.

Suddenly, the sky darkened around me like I was entering the cave of my dream. I felt chilled and sweaty at the same time. My heart thumped and my head pounded as if Pawnee words were filling my mind and I was struggling to sort them out. Then one thought shouted at me and I said to that poor little boy who hadn’t called me an unpleasant name,

“Go home Timothy. Your daddy is taken with gout and is about to die.” The words simply fell from my lips before I even realized what I was saying. It’s rather like how a little ditty pops into my head these days as I go about my chores on our Hassayampa farm.

Naturally, Timothy cried uncontrollably until his mother appeared and gathered him in her arms.

I didn’t intend to frighten little Timothy because I wasn’t mean spirited like the children who called me names, like Mathew Lemont and Eugene Scott. But I couldn’t explain this to Cousin Constance who made me sit in the parlor and wait for Uncle to return home.

A few days later, Timothy’s father succumbed to a serious attack of gout. This put Constance in a dither until she decided I had somehow overheard talk of the illness and that my prediction was a coincidence. Cousin Constance continued to instruct me with dedication, but she became increasingly impatient with my staring at the bay and kept sending me to the parlor to sit and stare at the wall until uncle returned home.

In time, Constance and my uncle couldn’t deny that I had foreboding abilities mostly from dreams that I’d reveal at the breakfast table. My dreams concerned tragic events, such as a fire or a brawl in the City, or a drowning in the harbor. Uncle and Constance would then read about these events in the next day’s newspaper. They realized I was clairvoyant but Uncle didn’t find this too unusual. He had a great aunt back in Prussia who possessed a similar nature. Constance, on the other hand, was convinced that the Pawnee had bewitched me.

I was eleven when lifelong bachelor James Buchanan became president of 31 million people living in the United States. Frisco had a population of nearly 57,000. During that

year, the City held yacht races along the coast, civil engineers finished the railroad from Market Street to the Mission, and the Pony Express brought news of Illinois congressman Abraham Lincoln's presidential campaign for the republican party.

Thanks to Cousin Constance, I was playing the piano by this time. In the evenings, Uncle sat in his rosewood parlor chair before the brick fireplace, drank Port wine from a crystal glass, smoked his pipe of cherry tobacco that scented the room, and listened to my recitals of Stephen Foster songs and other sheet music of the times--Listen to the Mocking Bird, Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair, and O Give me a Home by the Sea. These were the best days in my life except for now on my Hassayampa farm. I felt so complete. So happy. So grounded in where I lived and the young lady I was becoming. All because Uncle Willie was there with me.

In March of sixty-one Harper's Weekly illustrated Mr. Lincoln riding in a carriage before the Capitol on his inauguration. In response to our promising new leader's win, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas left the Union and Senator Jefferson Davis became the president of the Confederate States of America. On April 12 of that year, Confederates shot the first bullet at Ft. Sumter and the issue of slavery finally divided the nation. Harper's Weekly brought the war to life for Uncle and me. The Harper brothers supported Lincoln and the Union Army and celebrated doctors Mary Edwards Walker and sisters Emily and Elizabeth Blackwell for training volunteer Union nurses such as Clara Barton, Louisa May Alcott, Walt Whitman, and a former slave lady named Susie King Taylor.

A month after Mr. Lincoln's second inauguration, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia. Harper's headlined

Lincoln, our Great Leader, is Victorious! We extend an olive branch to our misguided brethren of the Southern States. Everyone believed our nation was at peace, as Thomas Nast illustrated with Ladies Columbia and Liberty in his sketch Our Blessed Victory.

The news of the North defeating the South had barely reached Frisco when I had my most powerful foreboding ever, until the night before Uncle's murder.

I tossed and turned for hours and my night clothes became soaked with sweat. I didn't know if I were asleep and dreaming or awake and thinking Pawnee words. Where am I? I kept asking myself. Who am I? Is it winter, summer or spring? Did we really win the war? I grew so confused in the darkness of my bedroom that I lit a candle. It instantly blew out as if a gust of wind had entered through the window. But my window was shut. I then felt myself tumble back into that cave of my dream, deep into its caverns. My heart pounded. My head nearly exploded from thoughts swirling like the Kansas tornado that killed my folks and brothers.

It was mid-morning when I stood at the threshold to the dining hall dressed in my bed garment and coat. Uncle sat at the head of the long oak table, reading a Harper's Weekly over a strong cup of coffee and a plate heaping with eggs, potatoes, and bacon. Constance was at the table with Matthew and Eugene who were then thirteen and fourteen.

"Guten Morgen, Miss Mattie Comet." Uncle stood and greeted me as was his custom when I arrived for breakfast. Fresh sea-air was drifting through the open windows along with the chirping of robins and the sound of a milk cart wheeling down the street. The War of Rebellion had ended. Victory was in the air. It should have been the start of a glorious day and new era.

But I was wrought with dread from the foreboding of that past night. I gripped the threshold, looked at Uncle, and said, “I had a bad dream. He’s going to die. Ipa is going to die.”

Constance rose from her chair and escorted me to my seat across from the boys. She called for the house girl to bring a glass of milk with a little opium powder. She then tenderly felt my forehead and asked if I was feeling ill.

“No,” I replied, sitting stiffly at the table with my hair tousled. “My dream was about Mr. Lincoln. The South will rise again and kill Ipa, our Great Father.”

“Mattie! Please,” Constance exclaimed. “General Lee surrendered four days ago. The war is over. The Silver Age is upon us. No more talk of doom and gloom. It’s improper behavior for a young Christian lady.”

Eugene and Matthew couldn’t stop giggling. I said nothing more but refused to eat my breakfast. For the rest of the day, I sulked around the house which worried both Uncle and Cousin. But they refused to acknowledge or believe my foreboding until early the next morning when the tragic news cannonballed through the Golden Gate City. It arrived at the mansion on Rincon Hill by way of a Blacksmith named Horatio Flint. He rode his buggy through town yelling, “The President Mr. Lincoln is dead.” April 14 of sixty-five was a dark day in American history. The next issue of Harper’s Weekly headlined In the joyous prospect of coming peace, our chosen leader was stricken down by a coward.

Uncle seemed more stunned by my foreboding than by the assassination itself. But I chose not to discuss it, finding some things were best left unsaid, like my captivity. Like my dream about the Pawnee medicine man. Constance, on the other hand, became distant from

me and uncertain of how to react. Mathew Lemont and Eugene Scott, on the other hand, couldn't hold back from bragging that I had predicted Mr. Lincoln's demise.

Shops draped their windows with black cloth. Flags fluttered at half-staff on ships in the harbor. People wore black ribbons with Lincoln's photograph. Black banners hung across Union, Montgomery, and Washington Streets. Because the South killed Lincoln on Good Friday, churches likened him to Moses who had led his people to freedom but never made it to the promised land. It was not the sentiment of the South. They felt avenged and said things like The man we hated most has met his proper fate!

For a week, I refused to leave my room, fearing taunts from the boys. I kept thinking about the words of my beloved poetess Miss Elizabeth Barrett Browning And mighty beings come and pass away, like the comets. I cried endlessly, desperately trying to control my mind so another foreboding would never touch me. I couldn't help but believe that I had brought about the untimely death of our dear Mr. Lincoln.

Truth be told, I try not to dwell on what's forgotten about my past or even the past I remember. It does no good to fret, as Miss Browning so eloquently wrote The little cares that fretted me, I lost them yesterday, among the fields above the sea, among the winds at play. And besides, I don't want to know what happened during my captivity. Like Uncle used to say, it's a blessing I forgot about that year. I don't even recall the dragoon soldiers rescuing me, a tale Uncle liked retelling in the same way Jason likes describing how those nurses appeared like angels when he lay wounded in that hospital tent outside the battlefield of Nashville.

No. I prefer thinking about my life now, my present situation with Jason and our homestead in the Hassayampa Valley. It lies about ten miles northeast of Wickenburg Town, in Yavapai County, the largest county in Arizona Territory. The other three counties are Yuma, Pima, and Mohave. They're all named for the native people that lived here when Arizona became a territory during the War of Rebellion. I was in Frisco with Uncle at the time and Jason was fighting for our dear Mr. Lincoln.

That was ten years back. After the war, Jason wandered west until he claimed this 160-acres that Lincoln provided settlers like us with the Homesteading Act of sixty-two. President Grant is now offering Union men additional land. It's a benefit Jason rightly deserves. At the Battle of Nashville, he nearly lost his life recapturing the Union flag from the 6th Florida Rebels. The President mailed Jason the Congressional Medal of Honor for his bravery. I've read of late that Mr. Grant is handing out a vast number of these commendations even to soldiers who weren't heroes like my husband. Don't matter though. Not to Jason anyway. The medal is one of his most cherished treasures, like me, his Rib, Miss Mattie Bachman.

Jason settled on this spread because of me. He built me our three-room farmhouse between the Hassayampa and eastern hills where saguaros, ocotillos, and Morman tea grow. They say the Hassayampa originates from springs near Prescott. South of Wickenburg, it joins the Gila which flows into the Colorado and ends in the Gulf of California. Some folks call this gulf the Sea of Cortez after that Spanish conquistador who took from the natives what is now the Republic of Mexico under General Porfirio Diaz.

Twice a year, the Hassayampa's rich and fertile floodplain provides us with a bountiful harvest of pumpkins, barley, potatoes, pinto beans, corn, and tomatoes. What we

don't eat, Jason and his Mexican hands sell at the Mexican market in town and to the Army, prospectors from the Vulture Mine, and emigrants from the States who pass through Wickenburg Town. Most of these pilgrims are going to the Colorado to catch a steamer to Baja and then a ship up to Frisco. They like Jason's cash crop because by the time they reach Wickenburg they're tired of living off nothing but wild game, biscuits, and belly-wash coffee without any sugar.

Hassayampa is a Yavapai word, I've been told. It means "the river that flows upside-down." During early summer, the river dries up in places and the natives must have thought it was flowing upside-down. This changes toward summer's end when the rainstorms arrive and barrancas overflow. From time to time the river stampedes down the valley like a herd of wild mustangs that devastate some of the homesteads. When the storms pass and the river dwindles down, stagnant pools form and smell like a hospital tent from the war, Jason likes to say. These pools attract mosquitos and a sickness that claims a few unlucky folks living in the valley. As if all these natural occurrences aren't trouble enough, settlers like Jason and me are always facing the possibility of renegades or outlaws stirring up trouble.

In spite of all these hardships, I relish our Hassayampa farm especially in the spring when ocotillos bloom with crimson flowers and poppies, lupines, and fiddlenecks blossom along the river road to Wickenburg Town. I love to walk along the river or on the eastern hill in spring and pick wildflowers and watch cardinals and tanagers build nests in cottonwoods and willows and woodpeckers make homes in the tall saguaros. Early last Spring, while I was dipping my toes in the river, I heard an unusual trill and caught sight of a rare bird around these parts. In my Audubon Ornithology set, I identified the little fellow

as a marigold warbler. I'm always hoping to spot him again and hear his sweet tune but as of yet, I haven't seen him.

I press my spring flowers among the pages of this ornithology set which I keep in my cedar hope chest in the front room of my little farmhouse. The chest contains my letters from Cousin Constance and everything she's sent me since Uncle brought me to Wickenburg Town in sixty-seven, including The American Woman's Home, by sisters Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. I've read this book from cover to cover especially the parts about healing.

On the rafters of my house, I hang dried herbs from my gardens for homespun remedies. Jason claims I have a knack for healing and mending but suggests my cooking isn't like his mother's back on the Pennsylvania farm. He calls me a tenderfoot Victorian lady on the frontier because I grew up in a mansion with servants and cooks. Even when I lived in Wickenburg Town with Uncle Willie, a señora did all our cooking. And after Uncle's murder, when Samuel and Rebecca Crawley bought the dry goods and moved into our home above the store, Rebecca did the cooking.

Every day, including when the rainstorms come, I sit on my Lady's Sewing Rocker on the L-shaped porch. It's where I do my sewing and stitching. I enjoy listening to my rocker creak on the pinewood planks while reading a Louisa May Alcott novel or a Harper's periodical. I used to read articles and poems from Harpers to Uncle Willie. Now I read to Jason only when the matter concerns farming, mining, and horses, or bee keeping, a newfangled enterprise he considers taking up. My husband doesn't have the attentiveness for listening to me unless it concerns him. This is no matter. I'm not one to say much anyway.

Sometimes, while on my rocker, I write in the leather-bound diary Cousin Constance sent me. I call it my Lady Pioneer Diary and fill its pages with notes about my life on the homestead or the little ditties that come to mind. In my letters to Cousin, I'm apt to include one of my ditties. She claims that Harpers should publish my poems, they're so good. You must be famous to get printed in Harpers I wrote back. My little ditties are no way near the poetic voice of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Jason and I married when a sin-busting preacher came to Wickenburg Town, as Jason called the man. My husband lodged him at Snider's Hotel and I stitched together a dress for my wedding so unlike the silk and lace gown Constance ordered from Paris for her second marriage. Her first husband, and father to Mathew Lemont and Eugene Scott, was a sea captain and business associate of Uncle. He was also a drinker and got drunk one night and drowned in the harbor. I never had a foreboding dream about his death because it happened about two years before I arrived at the mansion on Rincon Hill.

Jason gave me a twenty-two-karat wedding band that a jeweler in Prescott made from Jason's gold nugget. It's fully hallmarked and engraved from JBS to MBS. We didn't have a shebang hoedown wedding, as Jason might say, or any social event. Wickenburg Town isn't high society like Frisco and my cousin Constance. The traveling preacher held the service in Snider's dining hall and Jason's Mexican hands, Pedro and his brother the Old Vaquero, stood witness to our matrimony before the Almighty.

As I've said, I love our Hassayampa farm and I'm happy living with Jason. He's a brave Union man who faces his battles and allows for my peculiarities such as not cooking for him or sitting on my rocker and simply staring at the river or eastern hills for long stretches at a time.

Over the past five years of marriage, I've grown to learn that a man from the War of Rebellion is prone to dispositions. At times he possesses a temper coming from deep inside him. He will spew off words of frustration, for example, or retreat into himself, or ride off to town for the day I suspect to drink John Barleycorn at the Magnolia and conversate with Abe or James Grant. He cannot talk with me about what bothers him, or anything really, at least not in the same way he can talk to men.

I call this deeply hidden rage "the Grizz" because when it emerges it's like I've disturbed a grizzly bear hibernating in its cave. Perhaps Jason's being considerate of me by riding off to town because I have the feeling he can't control this Grizz. Leastwise, not around me. I suspect he pays a visit to the ladies at the Bucket of Blood Saloon. I'm not bothered by this, much, if this is the case, because I'd rather whores than me contend with the desires of a man whose Grizz has awoken.

Maybe what happened to me during my captivity wasn't as bad as what happened to Jason during the war. Maybe I was well treated. As I said, I don't remember except for that dream about the medicine man. Sometimes I think he was a great man to me like Uncle Willie. Maybe he was my Ipa and that's why I never forgot this Pawnee word.

I know I have peculiarities from my year of captivity but they are different from Jason's hidden Grizz. I don't tend to snap when I get a foreboding and I don't have nightmares like Jason does. I don't consider foreboding dreams as nightmares. A foreboding dream reveals something bad is going to happen. A nightmare is about something that scares, haunts, and troubles the dreamer. Sometimes, Jason wakes at night and thinks he's back in the war killing men no different from him, he tells me, men who could be his neighbor. I believe he witnessed gruesome sights no one should ever see. At the same time,

Jason claims that when his regiment wasn't fighting for days on end, he became bored and uneasy. It's as if he hated the war but loved to engage in battle. I don't know because Jason never says much about his soldiering days and I don't always understand his way of thinking.

Chapter 2: Smoky Row to Wickenburg Town



1860-1870

Jason Bartholomew Shear

My father and grandfather were Pennsylvania farmers. They had me in mind to inherit the farm where I grew up hunting whitetail deer, turkey, and elk with a Springfield percussion. These days along the Hassayampa, I hunt antelope, jackrabbits, and javelina with a Winchester rifle. Hunting and farming are my heritage which is why I settled with Mattie and gave up my wandering days.

On November 6, 1860 my world changed forever. Mr. Lincoln won the presidency and the South left the Union. War posters everywhere were telling me Volunteer, don't be

drafted. Cash in hand for a few able-bodied men. No boys. No Lily Livers. To Arms for Our Whole Country. Rally for the Union Forever.

I was twenty-one when my heart pressed me to fight for Mr. Lincoln. On October 15, 1861, I volunteered with the 77th Pennsylvania First Division, Third Brigade, under Colonel Thomas Rose. Before my three-year commitment ended, I landed in a hospital tent after the Battle of Nashville. I lie on a cot beside fellow soldiers that was screaming as surgeons sawed off their arms and legs. This was more horrid and gruesome than any battle I ever fought.

I pulled through thanks to the angels who appeared in that hospital tent. I'm speaking of the volunteer nurses who bathed and fed us wounded and dying men, gave us chloroform to help us sleep, and sang hymns that promised an eternity where we'd fight no more battles and wars. One such angel penned a letter to my folks and provided me with an Army envelope stamped with "The Union Forever." I wanted my folks to know I survived the war and would return to the farm. I never received a reply from them because I no longer lived at my regiment's address. Truth be told, I walked away from the war and never sent them another letter and never made it back to Pennsylvania. It wasn't what I had in mind to do. The war had changed me like it changed most every other soldier I ever met.

Unlike Mattie and her fancy hope chest, I'm not a man who keeps mementos except for my Medal of Valor and Army issued Colt 44 which I keep holstered at my hip. Long ago I lost the only picture I had of my mother and sister little Mary Rose Anne. Every day of the war, I carried that daguerreotype close to my heart. The image of Mother holding baby Rose eased the sight of bloody and mangled corpses on the battlefield. It helped me survive and reminded me of who I was fighting for. These days, when wartime nightmares wake me, as

they're prone to do, I look at Mattie sleeping beside me. When I see her pretty face and hear her gentle breath, the nightmares leave my mind and I fall back asleep like my baby sister Rose in Mother's tender arms.

When I left that hospital tent, I was still on the road to recovery. But I was intent on going to Nashville for whiskey and a whore. At the first haberdashery I came across, I bought me a Stetson to cover my wounds and a new set of clothes. Then I headed for a saloon and bordello in an area the locals call Smoky Row.

Outside the Stage Stop Saloon I happened upon the very man who had carried me from the battlefield to the hospital tent. He was a rear echelon soldier with the military occupation of recovering the wounded and burying the dead. I recollected his kindly face and reassuring words Mister, you aren't meant to die today. He woke me from the dead like the redeemer himself or like one of them heaven sent nurses in the hospital tent. David Thompson is the name of that man. I shook his hand and invited him to drink John Barleycorn lager in the saloon. We got to talking about prospects on the frontier. I had a notion to head west ever since soldiers in my unit boasted that on the frontier men paid a thousand dollars for a ten-cent whore with the fortunes they made. Come around to it, I asked Mr. Thompson to ride with me onto the frontier.

"I can't desert my regiment," he said and took a hearty swallow of barleycorn.

"How long have you been burying the dead?" I asked my new friend.

"Nearly five years it's been."

"Then it's time we both head west before there ain't nothing left of either one of us to bury."

That very day, David and I wagered what little money we had between us and bought two horses and gear. We left the saloons of Smokey Row and rode onto Choctaw, Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Comanche land. We crossed the Mighty Mississippi, traveled through Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas all the while avoiding hostile renegades and Rebel bushwhackers the likes of Bloody Bill Anderson and Jesse James. Everywhere we went folks boasted of gold strikes in the territories, most notably the Vulture Mine and the Comstock Lode. The prospect of striking gold was never far from my mind or that of my pard Mr. David Thompson.

In New Mexico Territory we sluiced, panned, chipped at rocks and accumulated a large reserve of gold. After nearly a year, Pard decided to settle on a spread with the Navaho woman who guided us through Rio Chusca.

"I found everything a man could ever want," Pard said to me. "A good woman, a place to hunt, farm, raise livestock, and prospect for gold." He wanted me to settle with a woman of my own on a neighboring spread. But I had a hankering to ride farther west into Arizona Territory.

I bade farewell to Pard, rode to Sante Fe, and joined a cavalry unit traveling Cooke's Wagon Trail to California. I got as far as the boomtown of Tucson. I hated to end my riding days but was rather lonesome without the company of Pard. Besides, I found the territorial capital to my liking. It had twenty drinking and gambling halls and thirty bordellos with a variety of fair and frail sporting women.

Before my gold reserves ran dry, I purchased the Congress Hall Saloon and considered settling down with a good woman, if I could find me one. This notion lasted less than a year. An old prospector arrived in my saloon and spoke about bountiful strikes in the

Hassayampa Valley near the Vulture Mine at the heart of Arizona Territory. I caught the gold fever once more.

I intended to sell the Congress Hall but lost it in a poker game so I stowed what tender remained in saddle bags and joined the 14th Cavalry riding the northern stage route to Camp Date Creek. Before the War of Rebellion, the Army had established this territorial outpost to protect settlers and exterminated the native people or forced them onto reservations. I arrived in Yavapai County six years after these "Indian wars" and there were very few incidents involving renegades on the warpath. About 400 people lived in the mining town of Henry Wickenburg and on homesteads along the Hassayampa. Most folks in town were merchants, furloughed soldiers, Mexicans, and prospectors who pitched tents at the end of Frontier Street. John L. Tylor was sheriff of Yavapai County and Milton B. Duffield was US Marshal of the Territory, appointed by Grant himself. Wickenburg didn't have a local marshal and a committee of townsmen enforced law and order. They chained their prisoners to a mesquite tree until Marshal Duffield, Sheriff Tylor, or a "hanging" judge came to town.

When I first rode down Frontier Street, past one-story adobe shops and two-story pinewood buildings, townsfolk were gathered around a medicine wagon listening to Professor Wizard pitch his remedies. Ladies and gentlemen, I recall his booming voice, My Miracle Tonic cures hair loss, piles, corns, rheumatism, and irritation of the bowels and bladder. It erases freckles, revitalizes memory, and cures stammering. I can furnish you this marvelous patent at one dollar per bottle.

During my second day in town, I encountered Miss Mattie Bachman who would become my Rib. I was outside Snider's Hotel, where I was lodging for fifty cents a week,

and on my way to the local saloon. Miss Mattie was crossing the intersection of Second and Frontier carrying bundles of calico that was obscuring her sight. She knocked into me and dropped a bundle of cloth. I picked it up for her and brushed off the dust. She nodded and smiled then continued to Crawley's dry goods store.

I considered she came from the Bucket of Blood Saloon at the seedier end of town. Generally speaking, Anglo women in frontier towns are either soldier's wives or whores. But then, Abraham J. P. Grant, proprietor and bartender of the Magnolia Brewery and Saloon, on the corner of First and Frontier, explained that Miss Mattie was one of the few respectable and unmarried Anglo ladies of Yavapai County.

"She's a strange one, though," Abe added as he filled my glass with the warm barleycorn he brewed in the back room.

I puffed on my 20-cent cigar, rested my foot on a railing above the spittoon, and gazed at the wood-framed mirror behind the bar. A tall bottle of rotgut whiskey sat on the long pine counter before me. Behind me were smoking coal lamps over dusty poker tables. "Say what?" I asked the old bartender while picturing the finest woman I'd seen since leaving the States for the frontier. I recollected her rosy cheeks, thin pointy lips, long chestnut hair, and green eyes a man could never forget.

"Miss Mattie never says much," Abe replied. "Not even to womenfolk. Especially after her uncle got himself kilt a year back."

"How's that?" I asked and the old bartender recollected the fate of Mattie's uncle.

"William Talbot Bachman was a California dry goods merchant and good friend of Henry Wickenburg," he explained. "They were business associates back in Frisco, before the war. After Henry struck gold at the Vulture, he asked old Billy B to invest in his mine

and help establish his town. Wickenburg needed a merchant jobber like Bachman with connections to San Francisco, New York, and Chicago. Turn around, Billy B established the dry goods store down the street. After old Billy's murder, Miss Mattie sold the dry goods to the Crawleys but stayed in her room above the store where she keeps a seamstress shop."

"What's so strange about the lady," I interrupted Abe. "Ain't nothing wrong with not saying much." I backed against the bar, rested on my elbows, and looked onto the street. A Mexican boy in a broad sombrero rode by on a mule with strings of garlic, onions, and chilies. "Ajo, cebolla, chili piecante," he shouted. It was the sort of dry dusty afternoon that offered a man little else to do but get drunk and stay clear of trouble.

"Folks say Mattie's got Pawnee in her," Abe remarked as he toweled off a shot glass.

"Pawnee? How's that? Never seen a native woman with eyes the color of emeralds."

Abe grinned. He enjoyed my company, a stranger in town and a Union frontiersman at that. He ran his hand over his bald and sweaty pate and said, "Appears Mattie's ma and pa got themselves kilt on their way to California. A tornado in Kansas Territory blew their wagon to smithereens. Cavalry found Mattie's dead folks and brothers but couldn't find the baby daughter as recorded on the wagon train's registry. That's how they located Billy B. His sister had listed him as her next of kin. Turns out Pawnee got a holda little Mattie and held her captive for a year. Bachman traveled across three territories to fetch her. He used to tell me how his niece took right to him like he was her pa. She wasn't afraid of him like she was of everyone else. I don't know why Billy brought her to this God-forsaken desert. Ain't no place for a lady like Miss Mattie, if you want my opinion. But Old Billy B saw things different." Abe shook his head.

I listened intently and recollected stories about captives on the frontier. Folks say some women marry their captors and after soldiers rescue them, they never regain their full mental capacity. Venturing onto the frontier in search of gold, cattle country, or a homestead to farm is a treacherous affair. Some folks live to talk about it. And sometimes, those who die quick and easy are the luckiest of all. Rather like during the war.

"Townsfolk gather that a year of living with them Pawnee made Mattie peculiar," Abe roused me from my thoughts.

I glanced at my reflection in the mirror, drank a shot of gut-splitting whiskey, and asked, "How's she peculiar?"

Abe pulled his horseshoe mustache together at his stubby chin, thought a moment, then said, "Well, young drifter, Miss Mattie gets forebodings before trouble's a brewing. Old Billy B claimed she knew Mr. Lincoln would die. And she knew Mr. Bachman was going to get kilt as well. Billy told me this the night afore his murder. It was raining pitchforks and bullfrogs that next morning when Mattie ran down the street screaming Billy's name. Hours later, me and the boys found him face down in Sots Wash. Shot in the back. Piterful sight. William Bachman was a thoroughbred, a great man of the community. Honest and true. Terrible thing when decent folk get themselves kilt."

I sipped my barleycorn, thinking that forebodings was women's superstitious talk. I thumped my glass on the counter and asked the old bartender, "Who kilt the son-of-a-gun? This Billy B."

"Don't know. Never caught nobody. Rain washed away all tracks. Some folks speculate renegades done it. But nobody knows for a fact." Abe paused a moment. "Don't know why he was out at Sots Wash unlessen someone drug him out there."

Beyond the saloon doors I caught sight of Miss Mattie leaving the store across the street. Without a word, I hastened out the swinging doors and stopped before Snider's Hotel. When she neared, I touched the brim of my Stetson and said, "How do, Miss Bachman, Ma'am? Name's Jason Bartholomew Shear. New in town."

Mattie smiled but continued toward the dry goods store without saying a word.

The sight of her small delicate frame and tiny hands clasping a beaded purse made me dizzy. I couldn't remember such an angelic vision since my sister Little Rose waved to me as I headed off to war.





Chapter 3: Courting Miss Mattie Bachman

Jason Bartholomew Shear

As the summer of seventy-one inflamed the Hassayampa valley, I set out searching for a place to homestead. I had in mind to marry Miss Mattie Bachman as soon as I established her a farm. With the help of Abe's spindly son James Grant, I settled on a promising spread of rich fertile land flanked by tumbling eastern hills and the river.

James is a master of water witching, a trade he learned from his mother. With the forked branch of a desert willow, he quickly located underground water and we dug a well seventy feet deep and reached twelve feet of water. We build a stone wall around the well then headed out prospecting for gold south of Date Creek Camp northwest of Wickenburg Town. By dry-panning the desert soil for dust and nuggets we uncovered enough gold to buy supplies in Prescott. The Granite Creek Mill sawed up my ponderosa pine then me and James hauled the lumber down to the farm on a mule wagon. James helped me built the house and farm structures but I alone made the pinewood table, chairs, armoire, and a pine pole bed with a mattress of sheep-shorn wool from Prescott. On the pine plank floor of the front room, I spread out the cured pelt from the grizzly I shot while mining for gold up in Skull Valley.

All the while I was feeling restless. I had never wanted anything more than Miss Mattie Bachman to be my wife, not even to survive during the war. Heaven had sent her to me, like them angel nurses in that hospital tent outside Nashville.

I bought a buckboard wagon from Patterson Livery and to please Mattie I ordered from LaFayette's store a Westinghouse cast-iron wood stove, oil lamps, and a Lady's Sewing Rocker for the L-shaped porch of the house me and James built with Mattie in mind.

Each time I was in Wickenburg Town I sought Miss Mattie's attentions. No matter how hard I tried she refused to give me the time of day. I'd position myself at the Magnolia and wait for her to appear at her window above Crawley's Dry Goods or I'd visit the store and order me some shirts from Mattie or ask that she stitch my trousers.

"Leave the girl alone," Mrs. Crawley said one afternoon. "She's got the devil in her, living with those Pawnee for a year. I'd stay clear and away from her, Mister."

I paid no mind to Crawley's superstitious talk. I merely tipped my hat and left the store fully intending to return and firmly believing that one day I'd win over Miss Mattie's affection. She couldn't be happy living with the disagreeable Mrs. Crawley. Mattie needed protection and someone to make her happy. And I swore to be that man.

I soon discovered that other men in Yavapai County took a fancy to Miss Mattie. Snider, for one, even James Grant although he was too shy and awkward to even greet her on the street. And then there was that bastard Kaleb Horton, cattleman and owner of the county's largest ranch, the Bar Double H. The Horton cowboys came to town more often than I liked. As cattlemen, they stirred-up trouble for us farmers. They claimed that "sodbusters" and "nesters," as they called us, stole land rightly meant for their cattle to graze. The Hortons had ways of making homesteaders feel unwelcome in the valley. For any fence trampled down, fires set to barley fields or dead sheep tossed in a homesteader's well, folks put the blame squarely on the Bar Double H cowboys.

"Before the war," Abe told me one afternoon, "three Horton brothers, Josh, Kaleb, and Benjamin, worked on their uncle's cattle ranch in Texas. After Texas joined the Confederacy, the brothers enlisted and ended-up in the skirmish of Picacho Pass north of Tucson. The rebels killed three Union soldiers name of Lt. James Barrett and privates

George Johnson and William Leonard. The Union took three rebel prisoners but no rebel died during that skirmish but the youngest Horton brother Josh later died of gangrene from a gunshot to his foot. After that, Kaleb and Ben swore revenge on any 'blue bellied Yankee scrub' who dared cross their path."

"Is that a fact?" I asked already hating these Horten boys.

"Yes sir. But fortune came their way when their uncle died and left his war hero nephews two-thousand head of Texas longhorn. The brothers drove their herd out west and ended up in Prescott where they found high demand for their beef from the Army. They established the Bar Double H east of Skull Valley and their herd grew to three-thousand head. The Hortons prospered and now practically rule Yavapai County, Let me warn you, young drifter. Kaleb is seeking Mattie's hand in marriage."

"You don't say?" I asked feeling wartime anger boiling up inside me.

"It's true. Before Billy's murder, Horton offered him a bundle of cash for Mattie's hand. That made Billy mad as hell. He warned Kaleb to keep clear of his niece. Kaleb paid him no mind. Folks suspect Kal had a hand in Billy's murder. But the coronary's jury cleared Kaleb and Ben of any wrongdoing. That's how it goes when you got money and influence like them Hortons do. Ben's wife has a cousin married to Sheriff Tylor."

A few afternoons later, while me and James Grant were quietly drinking lager at the Magnolia, Kaleb, Ben, and two of their rebel cowboys entered the swinging doors and sat at a gaming table across the room. Each of them was gritty from their long ride to town.

"Stinks of Yankee sodbuster in here," came the gruff voice of a man with bristly black whiskers. I knew him to be Kaleb. Abe had warned me about his imposing appearance, and distinctive twang.

I ignored Horton's remark, not looking for trouble on my afternoon away from the homestead.

"I say, I smell yank liver in here." Kaleb pounded his heavy fist on the table, rattling the entire saloon or so it seemed. His wranglers laughed like they was river toads.

"What do you boys want?" Abe asked from behind the bar. He was eying his six-shooter under the counter. Don't want no trouble in my saloon. Why don't you Hortons boys head back to the Bucket of Blood?"

"I like it here, old timer," Kaleb yelled. "Bring out some of your whiskey with a bumblebee sting. And them cards. I feel like playing me some poker."

Abe pulled out a bottle of his distilled rot-gut and said, "I told you boys, no guns in here."

"Sure, old cuss. Come on boys. Guns." Kaleb stood from his chair.

"Let's head out," James whispered as we stood at the bar. "Don't need no trouble from the Hortons."

"No." I grabbed my friend's arm, looked at the mirror before me, and watched the Hortons while trying to avoid their stare. To survive the war and life on the frontier, I generally try to tamper my temper. But I'm first and foremost a fighting man ready for battle in an instant with my finger on my war issued Colt.

Kaleb, pungent from sweat and livestock, placed his pistol on the bar. His cold gray eyes pierced my reflection in the mirror. "Hey blue belly," he said to me. "Hear you been bothering my Angelica."

I swallowed some lager to avoid looking at the cowboys placing their revolvers on the counter.

“Hear me, mudslinger?” Kaleb asked as his hand neared his pistol before Abe could place it under the counter.

“I ain’t looking for trouble, cattleman.” I thumped my glass on the bar. “So why don’t you and your boys settle into that game of cards. We’ll be leaving shortly. Ain’t got no business with the likes of you.”

“We don’t care for nesters around these parts. Especially Yanks trying to court Miss Mattie Bachman. She’s marrying me.”

Generally speaking, name-calling never bothers me, much, but Kaleb’s talk of marrying Miss Mattie Bachman made my stomach burn like I was smelting iron bullets.

“Let’s go man,” James urged. My friend may be a good dowser, card player, and even fair at prospecting, but he’s a lily liver at heart, a man more prone to flee danger than confront it. I attribute this to the fact that James was too young to join the Union when the war broke out. He was never a soldiering man.

I kept silent, steady, but my nerves bit like a rattler and my thoughts bellowed blowhard bottom sucking yellow dog. Go boil your shirts.

Kaleb leaned toward me with breath of chew tobacco. He reached in his worn leather vest but before he could remove a hidden Derringer, Abe had his six-shooter pointed between Kaleb’s eyes.

“You and your boys get along now,” Abe told him. “Don’t need the likes of you in this here establishment.”

Kaleb looked squarely at the gun and lowered his hand from his vest. “Well, old timer. I can see we ain’t welcome in your privy hole.” His ugly grin bore stained and missing teeth. “Come on boys, let’s get. Got some ladies waiting up the street. But I ain’t

done with you, sodbuster" He glowered at me in the mirror. "You're as dead as a Mexican card cheat."

I remained at the bar, trying to ignore the cowboys as they left. I knew trouble had started. But Horton's threats weren't going to dampen my spirit for using the land I deserve after battling the likes him. Nor was Horton going to stop me from winning over Miss Mattie Bachman, a fine and proper lady who would one day become my wife.

By the end of October in seventy-one, I completed the farmhouse and its furnishings. But the Westinghouse cookstove from California hadn't yet arrived on a freight teamster wagon from the Colorado steamer. I grew anxious because I wanted the farmhouse ready with all its furnishings and fixings when I brought Mattie to my spread. Abe suggested that the stove might be sitting in a warehouse along the river and I decided to head to Ehrenberg and check on the steamer's shipment and see what Ehrenberg had to offer. I'd heard that its shops brimmed with misplaced supplies and lost orders from California and the States. I figured on finding a Singer sewing machine for my intended.

The day before the stage to Ehrenberg arrived in town, I looked from the window of my room at Snider's Hotel and spotted Miss Mattie crossing the street to LaFayette's General Store. I hurried outside to greet her. Along the way I noticed Kaleb and Ben Horton riding down Frontier from the Bucket of Blood.

As I crossed the street the Hortons stopped at the hitching post outside LaFayette's store.

"Where you heading, Billy Yank?" Kaleb asked.

Tall and lanky Ben Horton belched and bellowed at his brother's remark like it was the funniest thing he ever did hear.

I continued to the store but watched every move the cowboys made. The Hortons were fearless when it came to the law, especially when “half seas over” drunk on liquor, as they was. But I was prepared to draw my Colt and shoot them both first.

Before anything happened, Miss Mattie appeared from LaFayette’s carrying a bundle of cloth. She wore a black silk wrap with violet fringe and a bonnet with tiny pink rosebuds. The sight of her choked me of words and for a moment I completely forgot about the saddle stiff Hortons.

Mattie stopped when she noticed the Hortons and me.

“I’m off to the Colorado, Miss Mattie,” I finally said as I tipped my Stetson and passed by the Hortons dismounting their horses. At the edge of the boardwalk, I added, “Off to pick up a new cookstove from California. A Westinghouse. Finest made.” I hadn’t encountered Miss Mattie for some time and was eager to tell her about the house and farm, especially to spite Kaleb Horton.

“Off to pick up a Westinghouse!” Horton mocked. “More likely one of them Ehrenberg whores along the river.”

Mattie somberly peered at me. “Mister,” she said. “Don’t go. Don’t take that stage tomorrow. I got a bad feeling all of a sudden.”

Mattie’s words left me dumbfounded. This was the first time she’d spoken directly to me and she was warning me not to take the stage. I didn’t know what to make of it. But I felt encouraged.

“Miss Bachman,” I said after finding my tongue. “I got to investigate the shipment on the river and pick up supplies for my new spread up the Hassayampa.”

Mattie looked down, her emerald eyes were sad and tearing. “If you value your life don’t take tomorrow’s stage. That’s all I can tell you. A feeling’s come over me. Just now as sure as I’m standing here.”

I smiled to myself. Miss Mattie’s pretty words filled my heart. Miss Mattie wants me to stay in town was all I could think. In that moment, I knew she’d be accepting my proposal and moving out to the farm.

“Mister, you got to warn those people on the stage, that Boston writer Mr. Loring.” Mattie was speaking about the well-known and well-loved newspaper man from back east who had been writing a series of articles about the ranches in northern Arizona Territory, including the Bar Double H.

“Why, Miss Mattie Bachman,” Kaleb blurted. He stood at the far side of his horse with his arms resting over the saddle. “You ain’t never gave me no warnings. When you going to marry me? I own a real spread up north. Your Mr. Loring featured my ranch as the biggest in Yavapai County.”

Mattie said nothing more and hurried across the street to Crawley’s Dry Goods.

“I’m fixin’ to marry you, Angelica.” Kaleb sniggered a moment then scowled at me. “You ugly son-of-a-gun,” he said. “I despise Yankie nesters, especially the likes of you.”

I closely watched the Hortons stumble around their horses toward the store. My eyes were on Kal’s fingers bent toward his holstered gun.

LaFayette “Frenchie” Martin, a weathered Canadian with shocking gray hair, emerged from his store and asked what the Hortons wanted. He was trying to stop trouble before it got furthered along.

Ben followed Frenchie back inside the store but Kaleb stopped at the swinging doors and pointed his thick finger at me. “You’re a dead cur,” he said and then spat a red stream of tobacco on the planked walkway before entering the store.

Bastard cowboy I thought and ambled over to Abe’s Saloon. I loathe greedy cattlemen like the Hortons as much as I hated Rebels during the war. No, I hate cattle ranchers more. At least Rebels was soldiers and all soldiers are fighting men whether from the North or South. We all live miserably under the command of Captains and Generals. No matter what we believe. No matter the reason for our fighting.

At the Magnolia, I described to Abe my encounter with Miss Mattie and told him about her concerns over the next day’s stage to Ehrenberg.

“We got to warn those people,” Abe said as he wiped down the counter. “And you, young drifter, ain’t a going! Mattie’s forebodings have never been wrong. Besides, I got a feeling them Hortons are up to no good. Been coming to town much too often of late. Raising hell at the Bucket of Blood. I know Horton had a hand in scaring off them homesteaders outside Walnut Creek a month back. Somebody is bound to get kilt. And it ain’t Apache doing the killin’.”

“No. Reckon I ain’t going tomorrow.” I removed my Stetson and rubbed my brow. I never like feeling flustered. It’s not the make of a Union man. But Kaleb’s attentions toward Mattie urged me to stay in town as long as the Hortons were around. Besides, the fact Miss Mattie spoke to me bolstered my nerve to finally propose marriage.

Before midnight that same day, the red Arizona stagecoach screeched to a halt beside the livery station. The six passengers from Prescott spent the night at Snider’s Hotel. They

were weary and dusty after traveling all day and had many hours ahead before reaching Ehrenberg.

Early the next morning, men from Patterson's Stock Corral and Livery hitched a fresh team of six horses to the stage. Loring and an insurance salesman in a gray suit and bowler hat loaded their carpet bags and packages in the boot at the back of the coach. I approached the driver Dutch Lance and said, "Won't be riding along today." The driver grumbled but didn't reply. "And you might want to wait here a day or two," I added while noticing Abe leaving his saloon across the street and heading my way.

"Don't go," Abe said to a middle-age woman who was boarding the stage with the help of the insurance salesman. Nobody knew her although she looked like a rancher's wife. "Stay and rest in town a spell. Take the next stage. Hear there's a band of road agents waiting for this one."

"Hey, mister! Stop frightening the lady," Loring protested.

No matter how persistently Abe made his warnings, the passengers had pressing business in Ehrenberg. Frederick Loring was on his way back to New York and had to catch the river steamer to Panama. Other passengers had to catch the connecting stage to Bakersfield.

"You folks around here loco?" Dutch finally said. "Until the Iron Horse comes along, our stage is the quickest means of travel across the frontier." He climbed on the high box seat and collected the reins from the break lever. All the passengers boarded the coach. "Can't hold up the mail or the Concord Stage. Besides, I've fended off my share of outlaws and renegades. Git up!" Dutch whipped the reins and the stage rambled down Frontier

rousing up dust in its wake. The woman passenger leaned out the window and waved back at the townsfolk she didn't know.

I watched it all unfold while feeling unsettled about foregoing my trip to Ehrenberg and about the concern Mattie had stirred in town.

"I got a sick feeling," Abe said then meandered back to his saloon wringing his hands and shaking his lowered head. I followed him and decided to spend the day getting drunk. I had nothing better to do since I wasn't going to Ehrenberg.

An hour passed, then two. Me and Abe said nothing more about the stage although Abe sweated profusely while I consumed vast amounts of lager and frequently pissed in the gutter out back.

A miner on his way to the Bradshaw Mountains entered the saloon and ordered a whiskey. Patterson arrived for a lager then Samuel Crawley came through the swinging doors. No one spoke about the stage but no amount of liquor could ease the tension felt in that saloon hall.

Eventually, I engaged Patterson and the miner in a game of poker. Shortly after that Abe said, "Hey boys. What do ya say we ride out to Walker Station and make sure the stage got through?"

"First thing tomorrow," Patterson suggested. We all mumbled in agreement and continued playing poker.

When evening dropped upon us, everyone felt sure the stage got through. Then, at about midnight, a courier galloped down Frontier shouting Stage's been robbed! Stage's been robbed!

We all jump to our feet and out of our idle stupors. Townsfolk hurried to the street. I ran to the courier as he was dismounting a gelding sweating blood. “Hell broke loose at Walker Station,” he said panting like his horse. “Appears Apache done it. Mr. Loring. He’s dead. Kilt everyone but that Krueger man and Miss Sheppard. But they’re both in real bad shape. Doc says he don’t think they’ll make it.”

“Let’s head out, boys!” Crawley exclaimed.

“No. Ain’t nothing you can do,” the courier cautioned. “This is a job for Sheriff Tylor and the Army. Don’t want to ride out there at night no ways. No telling the whereabouts of renegades on the warpath. You boys best keep vigil in town, protect the womenfolk and children lest trouble head this way.” We protested but the courier convinced us to stay in town until he returned with the sheriff.

Abe locked the saloon, the men returned to their houses, and I staggered to my hotel room wondering how I might protect Miss Mattie Bachman when trouble arrived.

I recalled terrible stories about Comanches on the warpath killing and torturing settlers across parts of the frontier. I’d heard that the Apache and Yavapai were just as fierce.

My intention was to grab my Winchester and sit outside Crawley’s Dry Goods beneath Miss Mattie’s window. But I collapsed on my bed dizzily pondering, not the horror of the massacre, nor the threat of a raid on Wickenburg Town, but the fact that Miss Mattie’s foreboding had come true.

I took a few swigs of whiskey from a jug beside my bed then swayed into the darkness with my trusted Winchester. Outside Crawley’s I yelled Mattie’s name. No answer came. I heard only the sound of a distant screech owl. Or maybe it was a hoot owl outlaw.

Or an Apache making his call. “Woman,” I yelled, “you saved my life.” I stumbled backward and fell on the walkway by a horse trough. Blood oozed down my forehead and before I could pull myself up, I blacked out for the night.

Over the following week, soldiers, the sheriff, and reporters gathered in Wickenburg Town. Fred Loring’s death was big news telegraphed across the nation. Loring Slaughtered on the Frontier, headlines read in the New York Times, Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, the San Francisco Chronicle, Prescott’s Arizona Minor, and Harper’s Weekly, ALL on full display at Lafayette’s Store.

Townsfolk ceaselessly talked about the tragedy. Most believed that RENEGADES ransacked the stage but some speculated that outlaws disguised as YAVAPAIS had done it. Before poor Miss Sheppard died, she told Captain Meinhold of the Third Cavalry that she saw white men among the robbers. Then folks began thinking that her memory was unreliable. Regardless of who robbed the stage, six new graves NOW occupy the site of the massacre outside Walker Station.

I assumed Miss Mattie would talk to me like she did when warning me about the ill-fated stage. But she avoided me in her typical manner and stayed mostly in her room. It didn’t matter. I was more determined than ever to return to my farm with Miss Mattie Bachman at my side.

On a Sunday morning, I spotted Miss Mattie walking across the street before Frenchie’s store. I approached her and said, “Miss Mattie Bachman, Ma’am,” I paused to catch my balance and hold the post. I had consumed a few barleycorns that morning out of frustration over my lady’s stubbornness.

“How about forgetting all this trouble in town and move to my farm?” I found myself saying like I was back in the war and had shored up courage to win the battle. “I built you a house with a stone fireplace and a large pinewood table I crafted myself. Even got an iron stove arriving on the freightwagon. A Westinghouse. Along with other fixings and notions from California. Notions for you, Miss Mattie.” My own words surprised me. Never before had I spoken so directly to her. So clearly, and so much.

Miss Mattie walked a few steps beyond me. I watched her calico dress sweep the dusty walkway. I felt foolish. Flustered. And considered leaving this headstrong woman to the likes of Kaleb Horton. She was too much trouble. Pure heartache and confusion. I figured on looking elsewhere, maybe staying with Francis, Rosa, or Old Packer Annie at the Bucket of Blood Saloon.

“Dad blame-it woman,” I cursed. “Why won’t you talk to me?”

Miss Mattie stopped in her step, turned, and looked directly at me. For a moment she smiled then she continued to Crawley’s. A powerful shiver rekindled my yearning for her. I stood in the street speechless. Miss Mattie has a dimpled smile as bright as her emerald eyes I kept thinking. She’s as pretty as a shooting star on a moonless night. Like a polished nugget of gold.

Frenchie, who was standing nearby, exclaimed that he’d never seen Mattie smile so prettily since before her uncle got killed.

Later that afternoon I hitched the team to my buckboard at Patterson’s livery stables. I was ready to return to my farm and check on the property. I needed to pay the Mexican hands who were building fences and digging irrigation channels to the pumpkin fields.

Before leaving town I went to Crawley's Dry Goods to fetch Miss Mattie Bachman. This was going to be my final attempt, I swore to myself, although deep inside I knew I'd never give-up on her. How could I? There was nothing I wanted more than Miss Mattie Bachman, not even gold.

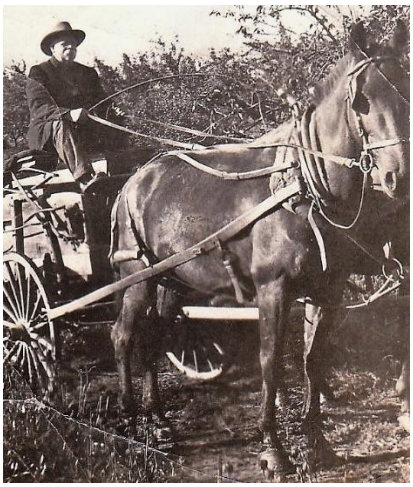
Inside the store I stood at the counter and asked Rebecca Crawley to inform Miss Bachman I was calling on her.

"She'll never come down for you, Mr. Shear," Rebecca sternly replied. She was tired of my pestering her about Mattie, day in and day out. "You just as well stop your persistence. Besides." She waved her hands to clear the air of my breath. "You're clearly fuddled."

I paid no mind to Mrs. Crawley's words and insisted she fetch my intended. But before she budged from behind the counter Miss Mattie appeared at the top of the stairwell in a periwinkle dress with a burgundy velvet wrap that matched her gloves. In one hand she toted a paisley carpet bag, in the other she held a gold pocket watch and chain.

"It's nearly three o'clock, Mr. Bartholomew Shear," she declared, looking straight at me. "We going?"

I stood at the counter like a flummoxed bull ox as Mattie approached and presented her gloved hand while casting her rose eau de cologne. I gently kissed the soft cool velvet then took her bag and escorted her to my buckboard parked across the street. We quietly pulled away from Wickenburg Town and headed up the northeast road to my homestead along the Hassayampa.



Chapter 4: Meeting David Thompson on the Arizona Concord Stage

five years after the Loring Massacre

Miss Mattie Bachman

God Bless this little

Stubborn heart –

(because she won't bless me).

Please take her for a carriage ride,

and keep her company.

"These are good hickory wheels." Jason yanks the break-lever and the wagon screeches to a halt on Frontier Street. "Good hubs, rivets, and spokes. The metal strips around them makes for good traction."

My eyes survey the quiet town as Jason helps me off the wagon. Doves are cooing on rooftops. A furloughed sergeant is trotting down Frontier on a Mustang most likely from the reservation. Mexican boys are chasing a hen that escaped from its crate. They are ranch-hand children at Henry Wickenburg's spread. The Vulture Mine has run dry.

WICKENBURG'S bonanza is over and many townsfolk have moved to Prescott or the new settlements at Maricopa Wells along the Salt River. A few went to Tucson seeking gold. It's do or go bust, die, and dry up folks say. Samuel Crawley, Jeremiah Snider, and Frenchie Martin are holding out for better times TO COME.

Normally, Jason heads to town with either Pedro or the old vaquero from Guaymas, HIS HIRED HANDS. Truth is, he rarely asks me to come ALONG unless I intend to look through the catalogues at Frenchie's store or pick some wild flowers in early spring. But today Jason wants me by his side to welcome David Thompson on the Arizona Stage from Santa Fe. Jason likes telling me that David is the best man he's ever known. Would have died if Pard hadn't come along, he says. Owe him everything I got. Including you, Mattie darlin'. David carried me from the war into the arms of an angel.

Sometimes, after a hearty meal when Jason's in a talkative disposition, he recollects the long hours of riding with Pard across the frontier. He describes the late evenings WHEN they cooked at their campfire and listened to coyotes beneath a shoal of stars. Jason misses those days and I suspect he secretly hopes to prospect with David once again. Since he brought me to the farm, Jason hasn't worked his claims because he won't leave me for more than a day at a time.

I FOLLOW Jason to Snider's Hotel for lunch. As soon as we enter the swinging doors, I notice my Ladd piano on the dining hall floor. Then I see a sign behind the counter that reads Wanted, Piano Player.

I gasp with fury because I never sold my piano TO the Crawleys when they bought the store from me. Uncle ordered it from Worcester's in New York. A postal company shipped it around the Gulf and up the Colorado by steamboat, then a Murphy wagon with a

thirty-six-mule team brought it across the desert from Ehrenburg to Wickenburg Town. Every evening, I used to play MY LADD for Uncle but after his murder it sat silently in the parlor like a memorial to him. The notes seem empty without HIS presence and I had no desire to play any music for Rebecca and Samuel or anyone else in town. Unfortunately, my piano was too big to move to our farm house so I arranged to keep it with the Crawleys until Jason builds a sitting parlor onto our house where I can play my piano.

Without saying a word to Jason, I hasten to Crawley's store and find Rebecca behind the counter placing tin goods in the knitted bag of a señora with a baby in one arm. "What's Snider doing with my piano?" I DEMAND.

"We bought everything from you, clear," Rebecca tells me. I CAN SEE FROM her EXPRESSION that She can't believe my rage.

I'm about to give her a piece of my mind BUT the BABY STARTS CRYING and I turn AROUND, LEAVE the STORE, and return to Snider's Hotel. Jason is eating his T-bone with brown gravy and potatoes. I'm no longer hungry for my usual pot pie and instead eat vanilla rice pudding with ginger snaps. I say nothing to Jason about the piano. As I've learned from Cousin Constance and from my own experience, it's best a woman keeps her peace when a man's eating HIS meal.

Jason pays fifty cents for our lunch and we head for Frenchie's well-stocked store. But I can't stop thinking about Rebecca. On the one hand, I pity her. She does little more than strut about town as if she were Wickenburg's First Lady and Wickenburg isn't much of a place for feeling proud. Too much pride and sentiment will be your downfall I recall Uncle saying to Cousin Constance back in Frisco. She had wanted to keep an old termite infested trunk that came from Prussia. Despite her protests, Uncle Willie burned that old

trunk. I felt a little sorry for Cousin but mostly agreed with Uncle. He knew about things that mattered. Sentiment serves very little purpose Miss Mattie Comet he told me. The only thing that matters is the health of those we love. Once they're gone, nothing remains but memories.

With Uncle's advice in mind, I decide to let Rebecca keep the money from selling my Albert Ladd to Snider. Jason's what matters and I refuse to let Rebecca's woes further rile me. Besides, I dread confronting her again about my piano. It might stir up a foreboding and I haven't had one since the Loring Massacre five years back.

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AND SHE DID TEACH ME TO SEW AND BAKE PIONEER BREAD:

Although she DID TEACH me how to bake pioneer bread WHICH I bake on occasion in my Westinghouse cookstove that Jason bought special for me.

Every day, even when the rainstorms come, I sit on my Lady's Sewing Rocker on the L-shaped porch. It's where I do my sewing and stitching. When I lived above the dry goods store with the Crawleys, Rebecca taught me how to sew and turned over her seamstress business to me so she could clerk in the sore. "You need women's work to occupy your time on the frontier," she told me. I bought her Wilcox and Gibbs sewing machine and a sewing box with hooks, hoops, buttons, and lace, reams of fabric, and patterns by Ellen Butterick who developed an improved upon patent to make sewing work easier.

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The aroma of Arbuckle coffee fills LaFayette's store. Frenchie stocks his shelves with tins of peaches, beans, and stew. Wooden rolling pins, funnels, and kerosene lanterns hang on nails on the pine walls among the horse tack, weapons, and sacks of barley and

livestock feed. LaFayette's store fills the needs of all his frontier customers and I have no need to patronize Crawley's store anymore. As Frenchie himself likes to say If I don't have it, I'll ordered it for yee.

"How do, Jason, Miss Mattie?" the old-timer asks from behind the counter. Garters gather his sleeves and his worn leather vest smells musty. Frenchie was born in Montreal where he lived until the cry "Gold in California" pulled him away. Frenchie is a Forty-Niner.

"Your partner arriving today?" Frenchie asks. He knows why we're in town. Everyone in Wickenburg heard about Jason's telegram from Santa Fe. News wired across the frontier rarely remains secret with an old Army cuss like Wilford Jones running the Wickenburg Post, especially when a stranger is coming to town.

"Due in this morning," Jason replies. We're standing at the counter. It's stocked with newspapers, magazines, canisters of lemon drops, jelly beans, and peppermint sticks, and a bowl of freshly-cut apples.

"Guess we'll take some of them apples," Jason says.

"And a dozen Mason jars," I add as I open a canister and remove a peppermint stick.

"Shipment's just came in from Ehrenberg. All the way from Wala-Wala, Washington Territory, mind you." The old Canadian chuckles. "Reminds me of this here shipping fellow back in Frisco. German man by the name of Wallerman . . ."

The front door creaks open interrupting the shopkeeper's story. I nervously turn, concerned I might see the face of sour grapes Rebecca. Or that brute of a cattleman, Kaleb Horton. But a small Mexican boy and his younger sister walk in. The little girl tightly holds a ragdoll as tattered and soiled as the children themselves.

“Out of here you two!” Frenchie yells.

“It’s all right.” I motion to the children, give them each a candy stick and send them on their way. I grab the latest Harper’s Bazar--Repository of Fashion and Pleasure and head out the door to avoid hearing Frenchie’s story. I don’t mind the old man, he was a close friend to Uncle Willie, but I weary of hearing what I’ve heard dozens of times before.

“A halyard caught Old Wallerman’s finger. Yanked it clean off. . .” I hear Frenchie saying as I sit on the plank bench outside his general store. I watch the children with their candy licks wander toward an adobe hut down a deserted street.

I open my Harper’s Bazar and page through the pictures of DRESSES from Paris and New York, FASHIONS I’ll never wear or reproduce on the frontier. Out on the farm, I’ve been using my Wilcox and Gibbs hand crank sewing machine to stitch my own dresses and make Jason’s shirts and mends his britches or those of his farmhands.

I stop at a page titled “Children’s Spring Dresses” and think about my stillborn. If she had lived, she’d be the age of that little Mexican girl. And I’d be sewing her lacy white pantaloons and dresses to her knees. I recall Jason’s words at her gravesite on the eastern hillside beside a saguaro. A child who never breathed we bury and now move onward. Losing the child doesn’t weigh too heavily on me. Like Jason says, women on the frontier have to be as resilient as soldiers in battle. Jason lives by a few simple notions when it comes to life and death. Perhaps it makes life less shocking. MAYBE THIS IS WHAT MAKES JASON’S ANGER SO DEEPLY HIDDEN INSIDE HIM. THE ANGER THAT I TRY NOT TO AWAKEN LIKE AN OLD HYPERNATING GRIZZ IN HIS CAVE.

A movement catches my eye. Across the street is a WOMAN AS finely dressed AS COUSIN Constance EVER WAS. Her gloved hands carry a parasol spoked like the wheels

of Jason's wagon. Her lavender dress has a fancy bustle, crimson flowers embroidered along one side, and puffed sleeves that are shiny from the sunlight striking the boardwalk. Her long golden hair also glimmers as it falls down her back from under a stylish hat with ostrich-feathers. I RECOGNIZE HER clothes from Tiffany's Blue Book in Frenchie's store.

The woman is an unusual sight. It's odd enough seeing any Anglo woman in Wickenburg, but an uptown floozy so finely dressed rarely ventures to this part of town, at least not on the occasions I happen to be here. Her name is Franny McDuff. I learned about her when living with Rebecca who knows about every living soul in the county, including women of misfortune. Franny arrived in Wickenburg Town shortly after Uncle's murder. Rebecca claims she comes from Memphis money but that's all she knows. When women like Franny McDuff end-up on the frontier, they lose their heritage forever.

I return to my magazine but the rustle of Franny's dress makes me glance up for a moment. Franny is looking at me. She nods, not pausing in her brisk walk.

I feel foolish and bury my eyes in the magazine. Six months before, Jason took me to Uncle Willie's grave on cemetery hill west of town just beyond the uptown establishments. As our wagon passed the Bucket of Blood Hotel and Saloon, I noticed Franny peering from an upstairs window. Her smile had been as pleasant then as it is now.

Sometimes I wonder about the uptown women. What do they do day-in and day-out? It isn't the sort of thing I've ever discussed with anyone, not Constance, not my uncle or Rebecca, and certainly not with my husband. But I'm guessing Franny doesn't like doing what she does. In the name of Kingdom Come! How could any woman be happy doing that for a living?

Jason told me that fallen women can be as mean and wicked as Apache or Comanches. But Franny seems lovely and mysterious. Although what they're doing is sinful, I can't find a reason to hate sporting women like I hate Kaleb Horton. While men prospect, run banks and mercantile businesses, or they soldier, politic or sheriff, women do what men permit us to do. This is especially true on the frontier. Rebecca Crawley is a good example. Before the war, Samuel arrived in the Territory as an Army sergeant and Apache fighter while Rebecca remained in Ohio raising her two boys. After the War, Samuel brought his family out here. When the oldest Crawley boy reached twenty, he and his younger brother set off prospecting in California and ended-up cutting Douglas fir in Oregon. Rebecca painfully misses her boys and feels they deserted her. I guess her way of reckoning is to make others feel miserable too. All beer and skittles, she is.

I continue paging through Harpers and find an editorial titled Are women trapped in bondage? It's about suffragists who fight for a woman's right to vote, own property, and venture into the world of men and make monumental changes that improve upon life. UNCLE WAS A SUFFRAGIST AND ABOLITIONISTS BUT HE NEVER ATTENDED ANY RALLIES. INSTEAD, HE SUPPORTED THE CAUSES WITH HIS POCKET BOOK. ALTHOUGH COUSIN SUPPORTS THE ABOLITIONISTS, SHE SUFFRAGIST WOMEN AVOID LARGE FAMILIES AND PURSUE THINGS LIKE SPIRITUALISM, FREE LOVE, AND DIVORCE. THIS IS WHY UNCLE AND COUSIN HAD A LOT OF DISAGREEMENTS ABOUT THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY AND THEIR ROLE IN THE FAMILY AND SOMETIMES IF FELT CAUGHT SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ARGUMENT. I'M ALL FOR PEOPLE BEING FREE TO LIVE THEIR LIVES, BUT I CAN'T SEE MYSELF BECOMING SOME OUTSPOKEN ACTIVIST OR

INVENTOR OR PROFESSOR GIVING TOWERING SPEECHES ABOUT THE TIMES. BESIDES, IT SEEMS TO ME THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT DOES NOTHING TO HELP WOMEN LIKE FRANNY MCDUFF WHO IS CLEARLY TRAPPED IN A LIFE OF DEBAUCHERY. SLAVERY, REALLY. WHAT ABOUT MY OWN LIFE? AM I TRAPPED WITH JASON? WHEN LIVING WITH COUSIN CONSTANCE AND WITH THE CRAWLEYS I FELT TRAPPED IN AN UNWELCOMING WORLD. THEY TREATED ME KINDLY BUT I SENSED THEY feared me because of my captivity and peculiarities. Maybe they were afraid of waking my Grizz because they believe I was touched by the Pawnee. Uncle never felt this way about me, nor does Jason. Uncle loved me for who I am. I was his Miss Mattie Comet and more valuable to him than gold. These are words he often told me. After he died, I felt like I an ethereal spirit not really present in the world. Where would I be if Jason hadn't come along? Someplace other than my beloved Hassayampa farm.

"How do, Miss Mattie?" Jeremiah Podsworth Snider startles me from my thoughts. The owner of the only respectable hotel in town touches the rim of his bowler. He's on his way to Frenchie's store. "Haven't seen you in town for quite some spell. Waiting for the stage?"

I nod at the tall, lean, clean-shaven man WITH a full dark moustache and watch him head inside the store. As the leader of Wickenburg's Vigilante Committee, Snider's ACTS AS our town's mayor although that's not really his title. He believes in women's suffrage and State's Rights, like Uncle. In fact, Jeremiah Snider was a good friend of Uncle Willie. He led the investigation into Uncle's murder and helped me settle the Crawley's purchase of

the dry goods business. Uncle often said to me I put Snider down as a man of his word, a shrewd trader, and a good man to know in this hostile territory.

On the night of Uncle's wake at Snider's Hotel, Jeremiah proposed marriage and promised to take care of me and make me the most respected lady in the Territory. "I'll be Governor one day," he suggested. I considered marrying him, knowing Uncle probably had Snider in mind to marry me one day, but I rejected the notion. Mr. Snider is too outspoken. Too prominent. I could never entertain politicians or unexpected guests at a governor's mansion. If I had accepted his proposal maybe I'd feel differently. After marriage, I've read, a woman takes on her husband's propensities whether they be for farming, ranching or even politics. Perhaps I'd be more like Rebecca if my husband were Jeremiah Snider. I'd prance about town with seven or more children while Jeremiah chased a congressional post. The notion seems ludicrous and I reassure myself that I'm content with Jason on the farm.

Jeremiah Snider leaves Frenchie's store carrying a box of biscuits and a jar of strawberry preserves. Outside the assayer's office across the way, he greets Franny with a charming touch of his hat. What are they saying? I wonder. Maybe she's heading to the assayer's office with gold dust from A PROSPECTOR. Possibly Franny expects something on the stage, or someone. Occasionally, sporting women arrive on the Concord along with salesmen, drifting gamblers, or mail-order brides from back east destined to live on a cattleman's ranch.

Once, when I was living with the Crawleys, a man from Harper's magazine came to town to write a piece on the Vulture Mine. This was when the bonanza was happening. The reporter inquired about me because I'm a rare sight on the frontier. I regret my reluctance to meet him. He was probably an interesting well-educated man who recited Shakespeare and

knew about the railroad stretching across the nation. I've seen sketches of trains in Harpers and wonder how big the iron steam cars actually are. They say that the train takes only six days to travel from New York to San Francisco. But the trainlines haven't arrived in Arizona Territory and when they do, I expect them to replace the stagecoach companies altogether like the transcontinental wires replaced the pony express. It seems no one can stop progress from bringing about all these new and improved upon patents. One thing's for certain, with the laying of track across the frontier, life will never be the same. I have my doubts, however, that I'll be around to see much of that change. It's not bound to happen overnight.

Jason emerges from Lafayette's, greets me, and heads to the Magnolia to quench his thirst. These days James is in town helping his father run the saloon.

The town begins to wake. Barking dogs are chasing a wagon rumbling down Frontier to Patterson's livery. The battered rig belongs to an old prospector from the Black Hills. He's in town for his monthly supplies. Across the street, Rebecca is sweeping the boardwalk outside her store. Samuel joins her. They nod across the way at me as if I hadn't just asked her about my piano. I nod and sit back in anticipation of meeting Jason's pard. If it weren't for Mr. Thompson, Jason would have died and never started his farm along the Hassayampa. And where would I be? I ponder. Living with Rebecca? Married to Kaleb Horton? Or would I be back in Frisco? No, if Jason hadn't come along, I'd have married Jerimiah Snider before returning to the City.

On the flat desert west of town, the red stage appears with a rooster tail of dust. I take a deep breath and recollect a phenomenal sight from a year back. I was sitting on this same bench outside Frenchie's Store watching General George Crook and his cavalry parade

through town on their way to Maricopa Wells. Behind the white soldiers in forage hats, were about twenty Apache, Pima, and Yavapai scouts on mustangs. They wore discarded cavalry shirts with red arm patches that said “Scout US Army.” Each one of them carried a single-shot riffle.

Harpers featured an article about the Army enlisting these scouts to locate hostile renegades. President Grant had ordered General Crook to “force the savages onto reservations or exterminate them and bring order to the frontier.” General Crook is a hero of the War of Rebellion and a seasoned Indian fighter. He killed over 250 Yavapai during the Indian wars of the fifties. Crook suggested to the President that the Army use native scouts because, he argued, If the Army gives an Apache a riffle, pays him, and entices him with a medal of honor, he’ll serve the cause without a problem.

I hadn’t seen many natives before because they live primarily on reservations and don’t wander freely about town like Mexicans and white folks do. As Cooke’s scouts rode in formation down Frontier, one Tonto Apache in particular stood out to me. He was sitting tall on his mustang. Under the scorching sun his long black hair glistened down his back and a leather band crowned his head. His face was smooth, unlike that of bearded frontiersman like Jason. When his dark brown eyes caught sight of me, I saw a look unlike that of any other man who’s ever stared at me like men are prone to do. At first, his blistering gaze made me tremble and I wondered if I were somehow remembering the face of a Pawnee during my captivity. It felt like a spirit was awakening a deeply buried memory from my early childhood. Something like Jason’s Grizz only what awoke in me wasn’t anger. The Tonto Apache drew me to him, hypnotically, as if he were freeing me of all my worries and

concerns. As if I could do anything I wanted to do and never feel captive or trapped because I was a powerful force who feared nothing ever at all.

Across the way the red Concord halts outside Patterson's livery and wakes me from my thoughts. A Mexican vaquero attends the team of six frothy horses. Men from the stables clear the mud cakes under the carriage and on the wheels.

Jason is now standing nearby the stage, at Patterson's. His team is hitched up to our buckboard and tethered to the post. The entire town is gathering at the stage. The first thought on everyone's mind is whether there's been an attack. No one's forgotten the tragic Loring Massacre that happened five years back.

Jason nods at me as he approaches the coach. "Big John," he says to the driver, a short man with a grizzled beard who's been driving the stage for ten years.

"No problem, folks," assures the shotgun rider next to Big John. He holds his Winchester with both hands.

My heart pounds. The time has come to meet my husband's old prospecting pard. I rise from the bench. I can prevaricate no longer.

Snider opens the Concord's door and assists an old woman down the step. She's the mother of rancher Alfonzo Ramirez and will stay at Snider's Hotel until her son receives word of this unexpected visit. She's followed by a prospecting friend of James Grant, a burly man from Norway. Sven Olafson, I remember Jason telling me. Then a Mexican rancher exits the coach carrying packages tied together with piggin' cord.

When the last passenger steps from the shadow of the coach I hear Jason say, "David old friend." He shakes the man's hand and pats his back. Jason's pard is a man of color, I notice as I stand ten feet from them. But he isn't Mexican or Apache, I'm thinking. He's tall

with broad shoulders and has a clean-shaven face under his Stetson. He wears the clothes of a seasoned frontiersman—canvas trousers, army boots, a striped muslin shirt, and a rawhide vest.

This is Mr. David Thompson! I realize. Jason never mentioned that his pard was a man of African heritage. He hadn't even described Mr. Thompson to me, now that I think about it. Why would he fail to mention such an important characteristic? The man probably is a former captive, a slave. And what does one say to a former captive? What does one talk about? I feel embarrassed about myself, so utterly unprepared to greet my husband's old pard.

In the crowd of people collecting packages and letters from the boot, I lose sight of Mr. Thompson's face. I want to run inside Frenchie's store, afraid of becoming transfixed because of his distinctive heritage. I've never met another former captive before. Not in person. Not up close. A time or two I've seen a few men of color passing through town on their way to the Bradshaws, Superstitions, or the Black Hills. And I've also heard tell that men of this distinction have special senses when it comes to locating gold.

No wonder he's here, I realize. Jason is planning to head out prospecting with Mr. Thompson. Suddenly, I'm feeling angry, not liking this surprise one bit. Why had Jason said nothing? What does he expect me to do? And what is he planning now that his pard is coming to the farm?

"Mattie," Jason yells as he loads Mr. Thompson's saddlebags onto the buckboard bed.

I venture toward the wagon and notice that many of the townsfolk are glancing at Mr. Thompson and at me. People know I have forebodings and they know I once was a captive of the Pawnee.

“Mattie, this here’s David Thompson, my pard. Come here woman.” Jason motions me to the back of the buckboard.

I sense Mr. Thompson’s eyes upon me. Then I see his wide friendly grin on a very becoming face. He is happy in his reunion with Jason. And my husband is happy, too.

I summon the courage to stand before Mr. Thompson and he politely kisses the hand I offer. “Miss Mattie Bachman Shear, Ma’am,” he says. “I’m mighty proud to know you.”

He’s a gentleman, I’m thinking as I politely nod back. Still, I can’t help but think that Jason should have mentioned David was a former captive and a man of such distinction. It seems an important characteristic to know ahead of time. As important as knowing if the person I’m supposed to greet is a man or a woman, a widow, an old-timer or an orphaned child. Sometimes, it seems to me, Jason is too quiet for his own good.



Chapter 5: The Farm while Jason’s Away

Miss Mattie Bachman

How silly is flesh

Yet flesh I be

(before I make eternity).

I'm bound to flesh

That's bound to me

I wonder why I'm bound to be.

"Mattie darlin'," Jason says one morning five months after David arrived. He's at the head of the pinewood table. With him are David, the old vaquero, and Pedro. They're eating fried bacon, eggs, potatoes, and Jason's Dutch oven biscuits that he learned to make during the war. Only Jason makes these biscuits. He tried teaching me how to make them but mine never turned out as good as his. These days, a young Mexican woman named Juanita helps me with the cooking, washing, and other domestic chores. Juanita is now wiping down my Westinghouse cook stove.

I pause from pouring coffee and look at my husband. He seldom addresses me during meals especially now that Mr. Thompson's around. And whenever he calls me "darlin'" I know something is pestering him.

Jason takes a bite of biscuit dabbled with my attempt at making apple preserves. He chews a few times and sips his coffee before revealing what's on his mind. Over our years together he's become somewhat cautious when it comes to me, like a lot of folks have. He doesn't like telling me his intentions ahead of time because he worries about my having forebodings. In a way, it the same thing as me being careful with what I say to him in order not to waken the Grizz hidden deep inside him.

“Me and James is heading to Camp Date Creek this morning,” Jason announces. “The crops are planted and it’s time I go and file that veteran land patent.”

I continue pouring the steaming coffee in everyone’s cup. Jason’s announcement is no surprise. Early this morning I watched him, by flickering lamplight, fidget with the compass he found on a wartime battlefield. He keeps it under the bed in a tin box that contains his prized cigars and the star flag and eagle Medal of Honor.

“Last time I was in town James said he was riding up to Prescott,” Jason says. “I agreed to ride along and do a little prospecting after I file that land patent.” He swallows a spoonful of eggs probably wondering what I might say. I say nothing. He adds, “Haven’t checked on my claims for quite a spell.”

I take the wooden spoon and begin stirring the eggs in the cast iron skillet on the table. I dish up my own breakfast plate and sit beside Jason and across from David. I glance at Jason and realize why he’s been so preoccupied. I know my husband needs to file this land patent and that he misses his prospecting days with David. Fact is, I expected him to head out prospecting with David.

I take a bite of eggs. The thought of Jason returning to his claims troubles me. Everyone knows that traveling past Camp Date Creek through Skull Valley invites danger. All too often drifting prospectors jump claims, saddle bums kill for gold, and I’ve read news of renegades vandalizing mines for the pleasure of destroying what the “white-eyes” have built. And of course, Kaleb Horton’s Bar Double H ranch is up toward Prescott. There’s no telling what that Rebel Texan will do if he catches Jason alone in the wilderness. Several years back, long before the piano incident, Rebecca told me that Kaleb had stomped into her

store and demanded to know why his Angelica, meaning me, had left town with a worthless Yankee farmer.

"A man like Kaleb Horton can't take rejection," Rebecca had warned me back then. "Especially getting the mitten from a woman like you."

Jason looks at me with biscuit crumbs lodged in his scraggly red beard. I know he's determined to head out, unfettered by thoughts of renegades, outlaws, or Kaleb Horton. "Well?" he growls impatiently, probably thinking I'm being plain ornery. He's already promised to stay clear of the Hortons.

I smile at the large man beside me. Without his hat, his blond locks hang in heavy disarray. He's balding more and more, I've noticed, from wearing his soiled and dusty Stetson day in and day out, year after year.

"Why head out now?" I venture to ask. I don't want him to go but Jason is a man who can't settle in one place all his life without pursuing prospects, like Uncle Willie. Men are restless creatures, driven to seek something new and different. I knew this about Jason the minute I laid eyes on him in Wickenburg Town. And I know that now is a perfect time for my husband to head to the mines. Pard's settled on the farm, the rainstorms have passed, September has brought us cooler days, and in recent months there hasn't been any reports of trouble in Yavapai County.

In Spanish and broken English, Pedro recalls a colt born that week, then silently eats, waiting for me or Jason to speak. Jason says nothing. I've agitated him and he's now itching more than ever to set out for Prescott.

I wash down a crusty biscuit with coffee in a cup that matches the one-gallon coffee pot now on the stove. Since I first moved to the farm, Jason has never been away for more

than a day at a time. And now he'll probably be gone for a month. Maybe two or three. In a last attempt to stop him from going, I say, "Mr. Thompson just got here."

"That's right. David's here. He'll watch the farm while I'm gone. We both can take comfort in that." Jason leans back in his chair avoiding my glance. "Besides, Mattie, darlin', Abe says if I don't file that land patent now, the government might change its policies toward us veterans."

Mr. Thompson is eating and keeping his eyes on his plate. Jason has already discussed this matter with Pard. That's why he's unusually quiet. Generally, he and Jason conversate during our meals about the farm or their riding days.

"Thought you'd be wanting to go with Pard."

"Now how am I going to prospect with David and leave you here alone? Makes no sense woman."

I draw back. I've said enough. Voicing my concern any further will likely anger Jason which isn't something I like doing. I might awaken the Grizz or stir up some kind of foreboding in myself.

Juanita starts taking the dishes out the back door to wash in a tin basin. David and the two Mexican hands leave to attend to their chores for the day. I remain seated at the table with Jason. Before I say anything, he gets up, walks to the front door, and grabs his Stetson hanging from a wall nail. "You can depend on David while I'm away." He looks at me. "As good as you can rely on me." My husband then heads out the door to the corrals and I begin gathering up jerked meat, flour, bacon, beans, sugar, and coffee for his journey north.

Within the hour I'm standing by the front door watching Jason saddle the young bay. As a frontiersman and soldier, he mounts his horse on the left. "Indian broke is a horse mounted on the right, the wrong side," Jason told me when I first arrived on the farm and he tried to teach me about riding horses and shooting guns. I learned to manage the derringer he gave me but I never took to riding a horse.

My husband tips his hat at me then trots toward the Hassayampa trail to meet James Grant near Parker's Grove. I feel helpless watching him leave and wish that, somehow, men could feel satisfied with what they have.

A breeze tousles my hair. The morning is fresh and scented with the lavender in my porch-side garden. I glance toward the barn and spot David brushing down his palomino Ghost, a gelding he bought from Abe Grant shortly after he arrived. He smiles and tips his hat.

I retreat inside to help Juanita finish the breakfast chores. I appreciate David's help around the spread. He's a hard worker and a good soldier and frontiersman; from what Jason's told me. Honest and true. He'll protect me and the farm while Jason's away. I don't mind David's pleasant compliments, now and then. But Pard likes to tell stories and with Jason gone, he might expect lengthy conversations with me, something I've shied away from since first learning English all those years ago. Except with Uncle Willie. We used to talk about telegraph wires, the iron horse, telescopes and outer space, patents described in Scientific American, and the interesting signs of the time. Uncle Willie was a remarkable man and I miss him every day. His company, his compassion, and his understanding of me and my peculiarities. He made me feel connected to his time and place, if that makes any sense. Maybe it was just him I felt connected to.

I don't have the same connection with Jason but it suits me to be with a quiet man. Since David came to the farm, however, Jason talks more than I've ever heard him talk as if David stirs recollections from his mind in ways I never could, maybe because I'm a woman. After I retire to bed at night, I listen to the old partners sit on the L-shaped porch, smoke their rolled tobacco, and reminisce about their prospecting days or discuss the farm. Men talk. Discussions that sound so agreeable to me that it seems sitting on a porch at night recounting stories is the best time a man could ever have. It reminds me of when Uncle Willie talked business with visiting associates in the front parlor in Frisco. Men like to talk about serious matters, about adventures and ideas to improve upon things. It's so unlike the chatter of my cousin Constance and her chuckaboo friends when they sat in the parlor drinking tea and eating tiny cakes. I don't know why there's such a discrepancy between men and womenfolk.

I've never really heard Jason and Pard discuss the war. It's as if both men consider their lives started after the War of Rebellion, like they were born into a new life. One evening I overheard David say he felt at home for the second time in his life, the first time being with his Navaho wife. Might file my own land patent along the Hassayampa I heard him saying.

Then, to my astonishment, Jason asked What about marrying our little Juanita?

A coyote's howl echoed across the desert as I carefully listened for David's reply.

The lady's beautiful he said. But I ain't looking for a woman to settle with. Too soon. You know. She died so quickly. Both did. My poor little boy barely had a breath of life. David spoke so solemnly about his Navaho wife and son that my heart broke and I thought about my little stillborn girl lying in the eastern hills.

A man's got to bury the dead and move on Jason replied with words I'd heard him say many times before. But my husband's suggestion of marriage pestered me. Why would he make such a remark? It seemed disrespectful. Not enough grieving time had passed. And there's the fact that David's Navaho wife most likely possessed a powerful spirit that deeply touched him. And David, in turn, has a powerful spirit because of his distinctive heritage. More powerful than the white people who try to settle the land and often fail to stay alive.

I help Juanita clear the breakfast dishes and decide I won't allow Mr. Thompson to trouble me with conversation. I'll force myself to speak to him when he comes to the table for meals. That way, he won't be the first one to talk and he'll clearly understand that I'm in charge of the house and of myself while Jason's away.

That evening, I cook a chicken stew to go with Juanita's beans and tortillas. Now and then I try my hand at cooking a stew. Awkwardly, perhaps, but the men eat it. I get the feeling they appreciate a change from Juanita's tomalleys, tortillas, and beans.

At the dinner table I find myself feeling uneasy and unable to say much. David is also unusually quiet, perhaps a little unsure of himself too, with Jason gone. The Mexicans gobble down their supper then politely leave. I sit alone at the table with Mr. Thompson while Juanita clears the dishes. If Jason were here, I would sit back and listen to both men recount interesting stories over coffee, for up to an hour. Like the evening Jason spoke of the old grizzly bear he had shot while mining for gold in Skull Valley during the days he prospected without David and before he brought me to the farm. A Prescott tannery had made the grizzly pelt into the rug that now lies on the roughhewn floor of our front room.

"That bear was so mean took five bullets to bring her down," Jason had said.

“You ought not have killed it then,” I couldn’t help but say. The men, of course, laughed.

“Kill or get kilt, Mattie darlin’,” Jason said. “A Grizz is a ferocious beast. I came upon this one unexpectedly and her cub was nearby. Foolish mistake on my part. Never get between a Grizz and her cub.”

“What did you do with that cub?” I had to ask. It concerned me that the young animal lost its mother, rather like I had many years before.

“Grizzly’s good eating,” Jason said, avoiding my question. I looked at him until he admitted that he shot the cub. “Much crueler to die hungry. Sometimes a man’s got to kill to be kind.”

I had looked away without responding. It troubled me terribly that he had to kill the little cub. But men seem to know ways of the wild much better than I ever will.

The backdoor creaks open and Junita walks in and pours our coffee. I sit back at the table, sip the strong brew, and watch the young Mexican woman smile at David. “Gracias,” he remarks. I suspect Juanita likes the man of color. I’m not positive, though. I appreciate Juanita’s help but there’s something about her that disturbs me, something not quite honest. It’s a feeling that I resist, reasoning that no harm could come from someone with such a lovely voice.

Juanita is the granddaughter of Ramon Molina who was a cook on a northern cattle ranch. At age sixteen she fled her parent’s home in Sonoita to work for her grandfather’s rich gringo rancher. After arriving in Wickenburg Town on a Mexican freight-wagon, however, she learned that Ramon had died a year earlier. Fortunately, Jerimiah Snider offered Juanita temporary lodging and when he learned the girl grew up helping her

grandmother, a well-respected midwife in Sonoita, he brought her to our farm. He knew Jason and I were expecting our first child. Juanita quickly proved useful and when I became bedridden, she fanned me and softly sang Mexican lullabies that rang through my mind long after she stopped singing.

During my sixth month with child, I fell into severe pain and Jason fetched Dr. Oren Frye, a traveling doctor who happened to be in Wickenburg Town. Jason later told me that while he was riding back to the farm with the doctor, he fretted he had lost me. He had even contemplated burying me on the hillside beside a saguaro so the moon could gently stroke my grave. He also said that if I had died, he planned to stop farming all together and head out prospecting in California or Alaska.

But as delicate as I often seem to my husband, in the harsh setting, I proved to be as strong and enduring as the hardiest of desert life. When Jason and Doctor Frye entered our bedroom, I was sitting-up and drinking a Mexican brew of cinnamon, ginger, and sage, a remedy Juanita's grandmother gave to women after the birth. Juanita was sitting beside me, fanning me, and singing Dermot, mi Nina de me corazon.

"Hello, Mr. Bartholomew Shear," I had said in a raspy but clear voice, reassuring my husband that I was alive even though we lost the baby. My voice was soft but it had strength, Jason later told me and he said that he knew, as he wiped his sweaty brow, that his Mattie would live another day.

The evening grows cool. Juanita sets the enamelware coffee pot filled with water and ground coffee on the cook stove for tomorrow morning. I go to the stone hearth beside the cot where Juanita sleeps and replenish the fire with mesquite logs. I consider going outside to help Juanita wash the super dishes but don't feel right about leaving David alone at the

table. He's been enjoying his supper with very little to say. If David doesn't speak soon, I'll have to say something, anything. A proper lady knows how to engage in conversation with a gentleman, I remember reading in one of my advice books from Cousin Constance. I glance at David. The flickering kerosene lantern on the table illuminates his handsome face.

"Mighty good meal, Miss Mattie," David finally speaks. He sets aside his enamel cup and rubs his stomach. "I expect to get plenty fat eating all this good food."

I poke the logs with a cast-iron stoker. "Guess it's as good as old Grizz meat."

David chuckles. He has a way of putting me more at ease.

I return to the table and gather the dishes to take outside to the water basin where Juanita is washing plates, pots, and pans. At the back door I stop and say, not looking directly at David, "I'm glad you like my cooking, Mr. Thompson. But you won't get fat working like you do." I then head out the door hoping he'll be gone when I return.

The following week passes slowly. David greets me at meals and talks to me because I'm the only English speaker around. Although he's nearly fluent in the Navaho language, David knows very little Spanish.

With Jason away I begin to feel more acquainted with Mr. Thompson. He has manners so unlike those of Jason. For one thing, David isn't a man of dispositions, as far as I can tell. He's more perceptive. He understands how much to say while slightly pushing the conversation with each encounter as if he's trying to break through my discomfort. It works. Day by day I feel more at ease with Jason's pard. At times he seems wise beyond ordinary folk because of his distinctive heritage, I suspect. Because of his days in captivity. As I know full well, being a former captive is an abomination and not a matter to discuss. Only

once after David arrived did Jason mention that Pard lived in Missouri before he escaped bondage and became a Union soldier in the Colored Regiments. “He joined his regiment to break the chains holding down his people,” Jason told me.

“I’ve read about Africa in Harpers,” I say to David one evening as we sit opposite each other at the pinewood table. A kerosene lantern burns between us. We’ve just finished one of Juanita’s suppers and are drinking coffee. I feel like it’s time I start conversating with Pard. I believe he’ll like knowing I’m aware of where his people come from.

David’s smile brightens even the lantern’s flame. “That’s right, Miss Mattie. I know you’re a well-educated lady. Must be, if you read Harpers.”

I sip my coffee. “The article was about Mr. David Livingston and his missionary work in Central Africa. Livingston wrote about the atrocities of the Arab slave traders.”

“Many thousands were slaughtered,” David says.

“Can be a right ugly world when it comes to humanity.” I glance at David’s deep brown eyes and see the lantern’s wick. It’s rather eerie. As if David were a spirit. The notion leaves me silent for a moment, then I add, “But there are good souls living on Earth. Like yourself, Mr. Thompson.”

“Like you, Miss Mattie.”

I feel myself blushing but doubt David notices in the dim evening light. I think to say, “I also read exposés about slave-hunts. The stories befuddled me with endless questions. How can people enslave other people? How do people live as slaves? How can people tolerate a life fettered and fated to toil for a master? Like a horse or a dog? For me, Elizabeth Barrett Browning best summarized the struggles of life in her poetry. She came from a family of slave owners in the East Indies but she detested the outrageousness of this

institution. While memory waits with twilight mists overcast to mete the lengthening shadows of the past." I notice David listening attentively as if he really understands the meaning behind Miss Browning's words. I feel encouraged. "I don't think anyone can escape memories of the past especially when that past was horrific. Like being a captive."

"That's beautiful, Miss Mattie. Can't say I know much about Miss Browning but I do have a fondness for Walt Whitman. I celebrate myself, and sing myself, and what I assume you shall assume, For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you."

"I like that verse, Mr. Thompson. I've read that Mr. Whitman was a wartime nurse."

"Yes, ma'am. That he was. I always hoped to meet the man who could write such inspired poems about the freedom of the soul."

"You're very poetic yourself, Mr. Thompson."

"And so are you. I bet you write poems out here on the Hassayampa."

"In fact, I do, from time to time." I feel flattered, as if Uncle Willie is talking to me and encouraging me to become a shining star. To be Miss Mattie Comet. "I jot down little ditties in my Lady Pioneer Diary. When one comes to mind. My cousin says my poems should be published in Harpers but I know they really aren't that exceptional, like Miss Browning's or Mr. Whitman's. Would you care to hear one, Mr. Thompson?"

"I'd be honored," he says and I can almost see in David's face that of my uncle's with his mutton chops and caring smile.

"It's one I wrote the day Jason left for Prescott. In silence angry Farmers go, To where unearthly flowers grow. And on their way to heaven climb, By way of their own furrows find."

“Miss Mattie. I do believe Harpers would publish your poem. And I understood the meaning right away. Like I do with Mr. Whitman’s poems.”

“People say I’m peculiar because of my captivity. But I’m not. It’s just that sometimes I get confused about time and place. Maybe because my world turned upside down when I was only three and the Pawnee took me. This is why I know how you might feel. Except, I really don’t remember my captivity like I’m sure you remember yours. But the thing is, people don’t let you forget about it. In other words, like you, I’ve been marked as a former captive. But it’s even worse for me because the Pawnee held me and many people don’t like the native people of this land. They think they’re all savages. It’s hatred and I don’t think you can get to heaven on pure hate.”

“And that’s the meaning of your poem, Miss Mattie. As I see it. The trenches we dig while on earth become our own graves.”

I smile at Mr. Thompson feeling such a kindred spirit with him and I don’t feel like I’m blushing now. But I’ve engaged in enough conversation for the night. It’s starting to feel improper with Jason away. I excuse myself and thank Pard for his charming company and head to bed for the night. But I can’t sleep because I kept thinking about all the thoughts and poetic words Mr. Thompson and I shared. It was something I’ve never before done with a man. Not even with Uncle Willie.

On a hot October afternoon, a few days later, a buckboard rambles onto the farm. The driver is an old prospector with a dark leathery face and a long white beard. In Camp Date Creek Jason gave the old coot ten dollars to stop by the farm on his way to Maricopa Wells and deliver me a crate of peaches grown near the Date Creek settlement. I offer the

prospector a meal and a bed for the night in the bunkhouse. But the old man wants to make it to Wickenburg Town before nightfall.

As his wagon pulls away, I stand on the front porch looking for Juanita to help me wash and can the fruit. Canning isn't my favorite chore but preserving food is a necessary part of life on the frontier. I see only David mending a corral fence. His cotton jersey hangs over a post. David never wears a shirt when he's working outside unlike Jason who can't tolerate the sun on his pale skin.

David's sweat makes his skin and muscles glisten but I notice his back bears welts from a horsewhipping during his days of captivity, no doubt. He sees me looking his way and politely touches his Stetson. This time, I don't turn away because I have Juanita on my mind. "Mr. Thompson. Have you seen that girl of mine?" I wipe my hands on my apron.

"No, ma'am." David slips on his shirt. "Haven't seen her since breakfast."

Concerned, I walk across the yard to the barn. Jason's dogs Red and Blue bark excitedly behind me. They think I'm setting out for a short walk by the river.

The large barn doors hang slightly ajar. As I near them, I hear a whimpering that sounds like Juanita.

An Apache Attack! Is my first thought as I push open one door and survey the cobwebbed interior. I smell manure and see nothing but buzzing bull flies, hay stacks, bags of feed and fertilizer, a rusty iron plough, and rolls of Gidden barbed-wire that Jason and his hands use to fence-in the property and keep out roaming cattle. I see my garden tool box that Jason ordered special for me a few years back. The box includes a hoe, rake, spade, and garden fork with a long handle.

A milk cow moos from behind its stall then I hear Juanita whimpering again. Her voice escalates in torment. I gasp and stand frozen at the door. I hear no other sound and am fearful that some scoundrel has left her to die. Have hoot owls tortured the girl? Or renegades? Why didn't I have a foreboding? Why didn't I hear whooping war cries or the rumpus of rabblerousing outlaws? Why hadn't David?

I nervously enter the barn and slowly walk toward the far stall, prepared for the worst. My concern is to help Juanita and I don't worry about my own safety if renegades are still lurking. They are sneaky, devilish in their ways, people say. Everyone knows about the horrible wounds they inflict. And what they can do to a woman is unthinkable. Things worse than scalping or gouging out the eyes.

Juanita shrieks from behind the far stall. My heart pounds. The milk cow loudly moos as if calling out in alarm. Should I run for David, I keep thinking, or run and retrieve my derringer? I decide I must tend to the poor girl before she succumbs to her injuries.

As quiet as a door mouse, I inch my way to the far corner of the barn feeling certain the perpetrators have fled. I hear only Juanita. Before the stall, I peek behind stacks of feed, not knowing what to expect.

After momentary shock, I understand what I'm seeing. Juanita is on a horse blanket. Pedro, the old vaquero's younger brother, lies on top of her and moves his body into hers. Both are much too involved with what they're doing to notice me standing at the stall, stunned in disbelief.

"Go!" I scream at the top of my lungs. "Both of you leave my farm. At once."

Pedro stands and pulls up his britches. Juanita pulls down her skirts and slaps Pedro's extended hand, as if she's angry at him, her Don Juan.

David rushes into the barn, startling me even further. “Miss Mattie.” He stops at my side. “Is everything all right?”

I look at David and feel baffled. “Make them leave my farm,” I yell.

Juanita flees the barn in tears while Pedro buttons his trousers. He looks at David for a sign, it seems, and David chuckles. “I’m sorry, Miss Mattie,” he says at last. “Can’t help myself.”

“Señor?” Pedro pleads with David.

David motions Pedro to leave. “I know you’re upset, Miss Mattie. But nothing is wrong here. No harm done.”

“No harm! This is immoral behavior. I don’t want them around anymore. It’s a bad omen. A foreboding about Jason.”

I storm from the barn to the house, unsure of why I’m so agitated. Janita’s behavior is wrong, I keep telling myself, and such behavior doesn’t belong on my little farm. How can I trust Juanita or Pedro anymore? Leastwise, they behaved uncivilly when they need to be doing their chores. No, I’m thinking, I’ve always sensed something odd about Juanita. And now I know what it is. She’s a soiled-dove. A fallen woman. This is why I’ve never felt close to her. A whore has no shame, no pride. It seems women sometimes fall and fall like Franny McDuff from that uptown saloon.

Later that day Mr. Thompson greets me on the front porch. I’m rocking in my chair, stitching a shirt and feeling rattled over the day’s events. Juanita stands alone at the corral, weeping and awaiting her fate. “Who’s going to do the cooking, Miss Mattie, if you send Juanita away?” David asks.

“I can cook fine. You said so yourself.”

“I’m sure you can, Miss Mattie. I mean, you can cook. And real good too. But you need to pull in your horns. Nothing terrible happened. Pedro and Juanita are getting married, I expect.”

Although I’ve grown very fond of Pard and respect his spirit and mind, his words have no effect now. I’ve already decided that Juanita must leave. With such a rude display of debauchery, I’m now afraid that trouble is somehow brewing on my Hassayampa farm, while Jason’s away.



Chapter 6: When Mind Met Matter at the Eternal Call

David Thompson

At the Bucket of Blood Saloon, Wickenburg Town

“At twenty-eight, I never think about what I’m doing to survive,” Miss Franny McDuff tells me as we lie together on her soft feather mattress on a large poster bed. Her upstairs lodging room smells of a man’s musty leather and her rose eau de cologne. “To think on such matters makes a difficult life impossible.”

“But I love you, Miss Franny,” I tell her because she seems so downtrodden and frail. Even after a very pleasurable time together.

“I have hopes and dreams just like everyone else,” she says as her soft fingers run down my chest.

I inhale her scent and ask, “What do you dream of Miss Franny? I know all my dreams have come true. We won the war and I’m a free man in bed with a fine-looking woman.”

Franny smiles brightly and pinches my cheek as she likes doing. I squeeze her hand affectionately, encouraging her to tell me what’s on her mind. Rather like I got Mattie to doing back on the farm. It pleases me, although I’ll never reveal this, when women folk find me soft enough to confide in. I’m still mesmerized by how much closer Mattie and I have become after she opened up to me. For a while, I thought Mattie was different from all the other women I’ve ever known. But even dear Mattie has a typical female side to her. Why else would she run off Juanita? And for no good reason.

“One day I want to own the saloon and call it something other than the Bucket of Blood,” Franny tells me.

“Why that’s a remarkable notion,” I say to bolster her self-esteem.

“I know darling. But here’s the problem. Mr. Calloway refuses to sell it for less than five thousand dollars in gold. And Calloway demands fifty cents of every dollar I make, for my room and board.”

I tighten my hold on Franny and affectionately say, “Well, Miss Franny, you’re by far the most popular whore in this here establishment. Certainly, you can accumulate enough to buy the saloon with all those rich prospectors giving you gold nuggets.”

Franny sits up and pours into a crystal shot glass on the bedside table some pure Kentucky bourbon that an old prospector gifted her. “Truth is,” she says. “I don’t like being sad which happens most of the time. Instead of accumulating enough gold to buy the saloon, I spend my extra money on things from Tiffany’s Blue Book’s merchandise catalog. I like

the fine things of a lady, like a Belgian lace parasol with embroidered panels, brooches and cameos of opal and garnet, hat pins with pearls, hair pins made of tortoise shell, dangly earrings with matching necklaces, and cut-glass spray bottles of orange blossom, violet, and rose mist eau de cologne. Some of my things come from customers who say they're in love with me. Maybe they are. Like you David. I'm still young enough and know I'm more than a fair looking woman. But no man wants me to bear his children."

"Is that one of your dreams? To have children?" I sit up beside her at the edge of the soft feather bed and draw her against me in the way women like.

"No. Not really. I'm long past any notion for that. Other than my dream of owning the saloon I really have no other hope except that you come see me or Jeremiah Snider visits me like he used to. A fine woman like you doesn't belong at the Bucket of Blood Saloon he said during the few evenings we spent at his hotel. He treated me to restaurant dinners, like a real lady, before he took me to bed. Such times mean a lot to me. I can talk to Jeremiah about owning the saloon and he listens like a true gentleman, a rarity in Wickenburg Town, until you came a long, Mr. David Thompson."

"I love you Miss Franny," I say. Don't know what else to tell her. And besides, I believe I really do love Franny. I think I love Mattie too. I love women in general and have ever since I became a free man. I love their delicacies, their peculiarities, complexities, and their beauty. No man could ever bring me the pleasures of a beautiful woman like Franny McDuff.

"I love you too, David Thompson. I know you to be a fair and honest man, good at heart, and a straight talker. You listen to me and consider what I'm saying and encourage me to pursue my dream." She sets aside my glass of whiskey and plants a deep kiss on my

lips. Then she backs away to look at me and says, “Mr. Thompson, you are as handsome as any man can be and I’ve known men of color before—Mexicans, Africans, and even a man from China who once passed through town on his way to California. I never care much about who a man is or how he looks as long as he deals fairly with me.”

“Truer words have never been spoken,” I say. “But there’s nothing like the pleasure of a beautiful woman. Like you Miss Franny.”

“Why’d you bring Juanita to town this morning? I’ve never known the girl to come to town while she’s been living on Jason’s farm.”

Franny’s question surprises me and I wonder why she asks it. “Mattie made her go.” I pick up my tumbler and take a stiff drink. “Rebecca agreed to take her in as a cleaning girl at the store.”

“Made her go? What kinda trouble went on out at Jason’s spread?” Franny asks while slipping on her white laced petticoat. Her long golden locks glisten like gold in the sunlight streaming through the open window.

I reach for my trousers and boots on the floor and say, “Yep, trouble, you might say.”

“I bet I know why Juanita left the farm.”

“Why is that? Miss Franny.”

“Well, my being around whores for a good part of my life tells me that there’s only one kind of trouble when it comes to womenfolk. Jealously. My mother was jealous of the affections Mr. McDuff showed me, his only daughter, before he abandoned us all. I hated my childhood. My mother was mean, my father disappeared, and I had three older brothers

who used me for their sinning ways. At fifteen, I left Memphis with a gambler who offered me a promising life on the frontier."

"What happened, Miss Franny?"

"The cud abandoned me at a bordello in Tucson and I had no place else to go. At the Bucket of Blood all of us whores squabble over the customers. Each man must choose one of us as his steady girl. Josie, Rosa, Packer Annie and me are the ladies at the Bucket of Blood. We speak to each other during meals and chores, about men mostly and never about our backgrounds. And I never mention to the girls my dream of buying this saloon."

"Why not?"

"Because, Mr. Thompson. If I owned the saloon, Annie, Rosa, and Josie would work for me and that arrangement would make them laugh. I don't take kindly to anyone laughing at me especially lowdown whores."

"No. I reckon not, Miss Franny. I don't like folks laughing at me neither."

"About a month before you came along, there was another whore lodging at the Bucket of Blood. She was a sad creature who slipped too much laudanum in her whiskey. Her death was big news in town even though she was a soiled-dove and nobody but us whores attended her funeral. The poison should have made her die in peace, I remember thinking as I dabbed the woman's forehead with a cool wet cloth. But as her eyes rolled back, just before she passed on, she didn't look happy and I suspect she wanted to die. No one even knew her name. She was just 'the new girl' who showed up at the saloon less than a month before she died and hadn't told anyone her name. And no one had bothered to ask her what it was. No one even knew where she came from. She just showed up and old

Calloway put her right to work. Mr. Calloway's looking for a new whore, by the way. Maybe he should talk to Juanita," Franny mutters under her breath.

"Maybe," I say but say no more.

"Folks won't like you and Miss Mattie out there alone on the farm. Now that Juanita is gone and Jason's away."

I look at Franny standing in the sunlit stream of dust motes, shaking her long blond hair over her laced camisole. Her body is well proportioned and her skin is pale, smooth, and silky. She looks young for being nearly thirty and the sunlight fades any signs of her age. "Don't care much about what folks think," I remark from the bedside where I'm pulling on my boots. "You of all people ought to know that, Miss Francis. Besides, we got two other hands out there working the farm and stock. It ain't just me and Miss Mattie. And Jason's due back any day now, I expect."

"Wonder what Jason's apt to say about Juanita being gone." Franny approaches the bed and strokes my cheek with the back of her hand. "Jason took on Juanita to help Mattie. He told me so himself. Juanita saw Mattie through a bad childbirth?"

I make no reply.

"How could Miss Mattie turn on Juanita? How could you let something like that happen?"

"Can't help but do what Miss Mattie wants, now can I Miss Francis? I ran for my life to be a free man and I buried the dead for Mr. Lincoln. But I never wage war with a woman."

"No, you're right. I've heard that Miss Mattie is touched by the Pawnees. Never met her up close. Guess I never will. But she smiled at me once. She's got a pretty smile, don't

you think?" Franny looks for my reaction as I sit at the side of the bed buttoning my shirt. I wink at her, realizing she's pained with disappointment because no one can ever really love a whore.

Franny playfully pushes my shoulder. "Truth be told, Kaleb Horton won't take kindly to you being out there alone with Miss Mattie. I know Kal hates you because of who you are as much as he hates Jason for being a Yankee farmer and for taking Mattie Bachman from town. Kal told me this himself. Men are that way, pestered not so much by women but by other men. That's the real trouble in life, the disputes among men. Some can't leave others alone until they kill or get killed. I hate the large Texas cattleman and hope someone like Jason does kill him although I accept Kal when he comes to town. I have no choice. I'm his favorite. His steady girl. If I were to refuse him there'd be trouble with the other girls. Mr. Calloway would horsewhip me if I disrupted his cash flow. Then I'd never end-up owning the saloon."

"I best be going now, Miss Francis," I say as politely as I can. I place a silver Double Eagle on her nightstand. "Got to get supplies and head back to the farm. I never stay overnight in town while Jason's away and it isn't safe for me or any man to travel alone at night."

Franny takes a seat before the mirror at her bureau, combing her yellow hair, her finest asset. "David," she says. "You're a man I feel akin to. Like me, people treat you poorly. I know you hate it but you live with it. But unlike me, you know what it means to be free, to rule your own life without someone lording over you and telling you how to live or what to do. I doubt I'll ever know such freedom until I finally own and run the Bucket of Blood Saloon.

Back at the Hassayampa farm

It's dusk when I trot up to the corrals by the barn and dismount from my gelding Ghost.

"Got some wild turkey stew," Mattie calls from the front porch. "The old vaquero shot a fat Tom this morning, by the river. You and the boys come on and eat now."

During supper, Mattie says nothing about Juanita and quietly serves everybody large helpings of stew and sweet potatoes from her garden.

I say very little during the meal. I'm weary from the long ride to and from town and the long discourse I had with Miss Franny. The Mexicans, however, deluge everyone with Spanish and laughter because they're trying to forget the unfortunate incident involving Juanita. Pedro had begged me for his job, saying that if he leaves so will his brother, the old vaquero. And that would make life on the farm almost impossible to manage, while Jason's away. I persuaded Mattie to let Pedro stay. Besides, Pedro seems less blameworthy than Janita because he's a man and men do have their needs. That's all understandable even to a lady like Miss Mattie.

After the Mexicans leave the table, I remain to drink coffee, as I customarily do. Tonight, I'm feeling especially obligated to remain at the table in case Miss Mattie has anything to tell me concerning the incident involving Pedro and Juanita.

I quietly sip my coffee awaiting Mattie to speak. I feel strange, stirred from having sent Juanita away and from Franny's suspicious talk about me and Mattie. I've never felt so uncomfortable with Mattie's silence and strange mood and wonder if she's still upset because of what happened in the barn. That's too simple, I conclude. Too much like a

typical woman and Mattie isn't an ordinary woman. No, I'm certain Mattie's uneasy mood stems from something more important.

"There's going to be a killing," Mattie says at last, startling me from my thoughts. She sits across from me, staring at her silver vase from India before her. It's filled with fragrant sage and nasturtiums. It sits beside the pungent kerosene lantern.

I gaze at Mattie, further burdened by the day. By women. I well know about Mattie's forebodings but she hasn't had one since I've come to the farm. Jason claims that Mattie's premonitions are just coincidences. He even asked her to predict where to find gold but she told him she only gets feelings about tragic events.

"Now why do you say there's going to be a killin'?" I ask Mattie with concern. Unlike Jason, I take Mattie's abilities quit seriously.

"Don't know, just got a feeling about trouble, about a killing. It's how my forebodings happen. My heart starts beating fast, my head pounds and fills with too many notions. Sometimes everything grows dark. That didn't happen this time but the words tumbled from my lips without my even thinking about them. Like one of my ditties. The feeling is fainter than it used to be so perhaps it really isn't a foreboding. Perhaps I've just come up with something severe to keep from thinking about the reckless incident in the barn. About Jason being away. He's been gone for over a month now and I'm beginning to worry. I'm sorry, Mr. Thompson, that I uttered such words to you. You already seem unusually somber tonight. But I couldn't help it. Deep inside I know the killing has something to do with you and I had to tell you about it."

An owl screeches in the distance. I stare at the glittering silver vase then drink my coffee. It's not that I'm afraid of dying, if that's the matter at hand. But I hate to see tragedy

strike those I love and I deeply care about Jason and Mattie. I've been thinking about staking out my own homestead near Jason's farm and settling into a new life. I might even ask Franny to live with me although I can't imagine how townsfolk would react. The thought riles me with disgust and to calm my nerves I begin singing "Roll Jordon Roll." In a moment, I excuse myself from the table, uncomfortable sitting alone with Mattie, a feeling I've never had before especially after we connected so well with our poetic thoughts and notions.

Mattie nods as I leave perhaps thinking about what she's said.

The next morning Mattie's mood has changed. She's cheerful while she prepares eggs without Juanita's help. During breakfast I urge her to stay around the house. Her foreboding from yesterday worries me but I say nothing about it. I don't want to remind her of what she said and I don't want to talk about a killing because I'm concerned it has to do with Jason.

Mattie doesn't speak of the foreboding either. Perhaps she's forgotten about it. Instead, she talks about planting a new garden beside the barn.

"We'll dig those beds first thing after breakfast," I suggest.

Mattie stands from the table and takes from her apron pocket a gold chain and watch to check the time, as is her custom at the end of breakfast. It's how she likes to start the day.

"Been meaning to tell you, Miss Mattie. That's a fine watch you got there." Her smile warms me. I like seeing a woman smile; it's like a sunny morning with song birds. Or, as my Auntie would say A smile is a spiritual hymn to the Lord.

"It came from my grandfather," Mattie says. "Uncle Willie gave it to me. Did you ever hear tell about William Bachman? Never found out who murdered him but I think it

had to do with Kaleb Horton and his Bar Double H cowboys. I grew up believing that one day I'd be taking care of my uncle, when he was old and gray."

"Never know the time we got until the good Lord takes us to heaven or sends us to the Devil in Hell." I'm pleased Mattie's freely talking again.

"Uncle Willie liked it when I played my piano music."

I get this feeling that something inside Mattie has sprung forth, something closed for too long, maybe for all her life. Her mood has shifted back to where she seems to like talking about things important to her, like gardens, piano music, and her dear uncle Willie. "I heard he was a fine gentleman, a man of import," I respond. "You must be very proud of your uncle."

She puts the watch back in her apron pocket. "He was the only person who understood me and loved me before Jason came along. It feels good to talk about my uncle, something I rarely do, even with Jason. I can't talk so freely to Jason about sentimental matters."

"Family is a good thing," I say, feeling a sense of relief between us. I like the change in her mood.

"You never knew your family, did you Mr. Thompson? Pard." Mattie asks. "I've been curious about this since you arrived."

"No, not really. Just my Auntie. And my Navaho wife of course. Otherwise, I consider friends like Jason and you, my family. Family's what you got in the present moments of life."

"Those are beautiful words." Mattie blushes. She seems flattered that I consider her family. "I guess we're a lot alike. In some ways," she continues. "Calamity left me orphaned

too, and held captive. Or so people tell me. I don't remember any of it. And we both found Jason. Well, I guess he found me. And you found him on the battlefield."

"Yes ma'am. That's a fine watch," I say. "But you don't need to tell much time around here, I reckon. Not like in Frisco. No. On the frontier, the sun, the moon, and stars tell me the time about as good as any watch. But don't get me wrong, Miss Mattie. That's a fine family heirloom you got there."

"All the same, Mr. Thompson, it appeals to me to view it, from time to time. It reminds me of the people I never knew and helps me feel connected to the world when peculiarities overcome me, when I lose my perception of time and place. When I wonder where I am who I am and why I am. Does that make sense, Mr. Thompson?"

"Yes, of course, Miss Mattie. But I really think that losing touch with time and place isn't all that uncommon. Especially when you've experienced the kind of trauma you had as a little child. I understand your appreciation for the fine-looking watch. I myself have no heirlooms, except for the wartime medal awarded to colored troops for acts of bravery. We ain't allowed to wear the silver medal that proclaims our 'Freedom by the Sword' and I keep it in my saddle bag. I'd be happy to show it to you, if you like."

"I would indeed, Pard." She pauses a moment then asks, "If you don't mind my prying, Mr. Thompson, how did you come to be so poetic with words?"

"I was born a house boy. Master was a wealthy educated man. He was also my father." I suddenly feel as if Miss Mattie has opened the flood gates that hold back my own traumatic childhood memories. I've never related my story before, not even to Jason or other soldiers of color in my regiment. But now I tell Mattie about my childhood and she seems keen on my every word. "He named me David Thompson after himself and educated

my spoken words and even taught me to read and write which I took right to doing. My mother was a house cook for the Mistress. The day I could walk and talk, Mistress forced Master to sell my mother because she knew her husband was my father. When I was eleven, he sold me to a plantation in Missouri where I lived with plantation slaves. We worked the cash crop fields of cotton, hemp, tobacco, and barley. For several years, Auntie took me under her bosoms. She was old but still worked the fields from dawn until dusk then tended animals and watered gardens, rather like you do." I look across the table at Mattie. She politely giggles.

"Auntie also cooked for the colored folks living in the shanties," I continue my story, pleased to reveal my life to Miss Mattie. She pulls my childhood from me like Auntie used to do. "And my old auntie always found time for singing, telling stories, and speaking about the Lord. She was a wonderful force of nature, a pure hearted woman."

"She must have been a blessing in your life, like Uncle Willie was in mine."

"Yes ma'am. That she was. I hated white folks back then, as a boy, especially my father, and I pitied the colored folks around me. But I always remembered what Auntie said on her deathbed. Hatred never got nobody nowhere. Keep a hymn in your heart for the Lord and for yourself. Auntie was right but a life without vengeance doesn't come easy. Not for a man who soldiered in the War of Rebellion."

"Your story is truly a poem by Miss Browning," Mattie says. "Or maybe Walt Whitman."

"The way of the Lord is mysterious, Auntie taught me. She said that some truths the Lord reveals to all folks but there are certain things He reveals to only a chosen few. Like you, Miss Mattie. Auntie called it being given to mazes. It means having spiritual

tendencies. My Navaho wife called people with the ability to forebode Earth Seers. She was an Earth Seer too. She knew she would die and that I would leave Santa Fe."

"Mr. Thompson," Mattie says. "I believe you also possesses spiritual tendencies and that it was more than mere fate that you found Jason on the battlefield. As Miss Browning put it 'Mind met matter at the eternal call.' Jason told me many times how you saved him that day in Tennessee. He says that during the war he always thought he'd die in battle. Knew it, he's said to me. But he didn't die during the war. At sunrise he lay in that battlefield, thinking he was already dead. Did he ever tell you that, Mr. Thompson?"

I am beaming inside and out. Miss Mattie is retelling a story I've lived. My silence prods her to continue. "Jason told me he looked at his hand in front of his face and realized he wasn't dead. But he thought he was dying 'til you appeared like the redeemer, he likes telling me. Then didn't you say to him You're all right now mister? This isn't your day to die." Mattie spoons the remaining eggs from the skillet onto my plate. "I'd love to hear you tell the story, in your poetic words. It seems important now with Jason still away."

"Happy to," I tell Miss Mattie. "Two years into the war I heard tell of Mr. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation that slaves are forever free. That's when I ran for my life to be a free man and fight for Mr. President. I enlisted in the Tennessee 12th US Colored Infantry, a regiment of former slaves. Contrabands they called us. We were infantry support. Our mission was to bury the dead and tend to the wounded. Jason is a good man, Mattie. I knew this the moment I stirred him awake and saw the Union flag in his arms. Saw in his eyes that he wasn't meant to die. No ma'am. God had him in mind to make Miss Mattie Bachman a farm."

Mattie glows at my words. “Jason remembers it so well,” she says. “It’s one of the few stories he tells me about the war. He doesn’t like to recollect the killing and dying. Can’t blame him. All those poor boys.”

“Jason’s a brave honorable man,” I say. “Medal of Honor recipient. Only wish I fought hand to hand with pistols and bayonets. For the abolition of slavery. For Mr. Lincoln. But I was lucky to help bury the brave men and carry the wounded to our hospital tents. After the war, Jason found me in town. Remembered me. And we took to riding together. Funny how it all happened. Now that I look back on it.”

Mattie grins, “I always did like hearing about how you and Jason rode west, away from the war, and prospected for gold.”

“I’m afraid we found a lot more than gold,” I say.

“You mean your Navaho wife?”

“Her name was Mai. It means Bright Flower. I called her Maria.”

Mattie daintily eats her scrambled eggs.

I eat mine while deep in thought. Mattie has stirred memories. I miss my Navaho family but I’ve met with loss before. Many times.

Mattie stands, takes hold of the empty skillet. “I’m sorry she died, Mr. Thompson, your Navaho wife. Maria. And I’m sorry that boy of yours died too. Life doesn’t seem fair much of the time.”

“No. But sometimes someone nice comes along,” I say, with Miss Mattie in mind though I don’t tell her explicitly.

She picks up the skillet to take to the wash basin outside the back door but she pauses at the table. I imagine she’s thinking about my last comment when she says, “I’ve

met a few nice people, although not too many. Sometimes I can't understand my own feelings about folks. But I'll always be grateful you carried Jason to the hospital tent like you did. And now I'm grateful you're here at the farm, while Jason's away."



Chapter 7: Jason up in Prescott

Toward the end of 1876

Jason Bartholomew Shear

Prescott is Territorial Capital again and the town is bustling and booming. At the post office, I file my veteran's land patent for fourteen dollars. Then me and James Grant spend some of our gold at the saloons along Montezuma Street. We drink whiskey, gamble, and enjoy restaurant food and dancing women. We even frequent the saloons along Granite Street that lodge Chinese women on their way to California.

James comes to marry a widow woman twice his age. She owns the Prescott Pine Hotel where we are lodging. When we first entered the boardinghouse, the widow took ahold of my lanky friend, squeezed his biceps, and said, "Why Mister. Let Mama put some meat on them bones." James is smitten over this woman, the first one to ever pay him any mind. He married her within the week.

While in Prescott I buy me a new wagon, one hundred head of cattle, and five horses. To make Mattie smile I buy her cameo brooches, a lacquered rosewood jewelry box, and reams of cloth and lace for her sewing.

With gold in my pockets and the additional acreage officially mine, I hire two wranglers in town name of Russel and Stanly Buckholtz. They're young brothers who came west working for Mr. Gunther Peabody on the California Wagon Train. They cowboyed for a rancher outside Yuma and brought his cattle up to Prescott. They were working for room and board at Huckaby's Livery Stables when I met them. Now that James is hitched, I figure the Buckholtz brothers can help me run my new livestock to the farm and stay on for the year. I'm planning to build an extra room to Mattie's house and need help to sell the livestock and plant animal fodder and cash crop. I've been considering this idea Mattie read about in her Harper's periodical. Beekeeping. Certainly, there's cash to be had in selling honey to the shops in Wickenburg Town and parts of Yavapai county.

At the Palace Saloon on Park Street, I come across Jose Gonzalez who was working on a ranch near Prescott until the owner sold his cattle to the Bar Double H and headed south to Tucson. Gonzalez is desperate for work, any odd job he tells me. I talk about my farm and Jose asks me to hire him and his wife. "My señora is a good cook and midwife," he says. "We can make our own adobe house on your farm."

Jose seems to be a hard worker and his English is far better than my Spanish so I offer him a job even before meeting his señora. On the street outside Randal's Hardware, Jose introduces me to his wife. She is sitting with a toddler and baby and selling steaming tomalleys that prove quite tasty. The señora is a stalky woman, scrupulously clean, and she wears a low-neck camisa that reveals her heavy bosom.

She'll make a good wet nurse for Mattie I'm thinking when I hand her a dime for the tomalleys. Now that my Rib is strong and fit, she'll be needing a midwife soon after my return to the farm.

It's early November when I arrive at the homestead with livestock, a wagon full of lumber and goods, and all my newly hired hands. Before they build their adobe house, the Gonzalez family lives in a canvas tent near the corrals. The Buckholtz brothers stay in the bunkhouse by the barn along with David, Pedro, and the old vaquero.

"These are the best days of my life," I whisper to Mattie AS WE LIE IN BED ON THE NIGHT OF my RETURN. I'm not angry that she sent Juanita away. "I see no reason to interfere with your decision," I tell her. "I'm eager to start a family now and that consumes any agitation I might otherwise feel."

"It seems divine providence that you came across Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez like you did," Mattie suggests and we say nothing more about it.

My Rib is so pleased with my safe return and my many gifts that she willingly accepts my favor. She's not so distant when I take her, like she was before. Her mind is more with me and this makes me certain that I'm planting my seed in her fertile womb.



Chapter 8: The Hassayampa Flood

Miss Mattie Bachman

How deeply falls a hidden tear
When heedless voices cry.
Left amid all that we hear,
How aimlessly we try.

If waters only could flow free
Out from the wells dug deep,
Alas, but then we just might be,
Unbound by what we keep.

In the late summer of 1877 Jason receives a wire at the Wickenburg Post. It tells him his official land patent document has arrived in Prescott. I'm still without child.

"You need a rest from me for a while," Jason suggests when we're alone in bed. "It'll do you good if I head to Prescott to get that document signed, stamped, and sealed by the federal government. I want David to come along this time. Heard about untouched gold

in the pine forests of Cheno Valley. You'll be safe with the vaqueros and wranglers working the farm. And you have Mrs. Gonzalez here to help you along. We'll be gone no more than a month. Two at most."

I politely give my blessing and keep my peace. It's not that I really have a choice in the matter. A woman can't rope and tether a man from his ambitions and intentions. Not men like Jason and David or my uncle Willie. And besides, Jason is right. I can use the break from his nightly favors. A woman can take only so much of a man and his desires. My body needs a rest and I want to focus on the things I love doing like gardening, tending my animals, sewing, and writing in my Lady Pioneer Diary. I haven't had any ditties come to mind since Jason returned with all this yearning to make us a child.

It's early morning when Jason and David ride up river to Prescott. As I watch them leave from my rocker, I wonder who I'll miss more now that I've grown accustomed to David's company. I can talk to David about spiritual matters that Cousin Constance imbued in my childhood mind. Things like divine grace and providence and Satan's powerful influence over the mortal hearts of men.

Jason rarely speaks about spiritual matters. He has no Bible and he says praying is for womenfolk to do. I have a Bible in my cedar hope chest, from Cousin Constance, but I've rarely read it since moving to the frontier. My uncle preferred I read him stories and poems from Harpers because he wasn't a religious man, rather like my husband. Truthfully, the only religion in our house occurs when AT SUPPER I recite THE grace COUSIN CONSTANCE TAUGHT ME TO SAY For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly grateful, Amen. I had felt content with this quiet manner of life until David came along and awoke the hymns of my heart.

About a month after Jason and David have left, toward the end of summer, a storm rolls into the valley and pelts the desert with torrential rains. Usually, I don't mind the summer cloudbursts. They're not like the cold drizzle of Frisco which lasted for weeks at a time and consumed everything including my disposition. In the desert, rain assaults the earth quickly, overnight at most, and nourishes my gardens, fills the rain barrels, and processes the air like a pan of gold. After a rainstorm, the desert wafts the sweet medicinal aroma of Morman tea and sage. From the shelter of my L-shaped porch, I love sitting in my rocker and watching the rain fill the gullies. And I love hearing the pitter patter on the pinewood rooftop.

But this storm is unusually long lasting. After two days the ceaseless downpour and dark skies bring me melancholy, as Cousin Constance called my gloomy moods. I spend hours rocking in my chair thinking about Jason and worrying about his ride home from Prescott. I struggle to put him out of my mind so I won't have a foreboding like the one before my uncle's murder. I don't want to know Jason's fate. I want to believe he'll stay with me all of my life. It does no good to think about bad things anyway. It does no good to worry and fret.

On the third morning of the downpour Mrs. Gonzalez slips on the porch steps as she carries a steaming coffee pot to her adobe hut. The coffee scalds her legs quite badly and she breaks her ankle. Through the pouring rain, the old vaquero helps Jose carry the large señora to the adobe hut as she wails in agony. She drinks Dr. Wizard's remedy to stop the pain and her husband rides through the storm to a neighboring homestead for a Mexican curandero. At the same time, the Buckholtz brothers and Pedro ride off to check on the levees and dams up river.

“Three days of downpour is a mighty long time,” Russel exclaims. “The dam up by Walnut Creek is bound to crack. I fear homesteaders have neglected checking some of them levees.”

Until Jose returns, the old vaquero stays with Mrs. Gonzalez and her two young children in the adobe hut. I hazard walking through the rain, from time to time, to check on her and apply an aloe poultice to soothe her burns.

For most of the day, I’m sitting on the porch, listening to the howling storm, and watching rainwater stream off the eaves. My thoughts are as turbulent as the desert washes rushing to the Hassayampa. I kept wishing Jason and David were here to secure the animals and the farm before the angry river washes everything away. But not even Jason’s dogs lie on the porch. Jason took them on his trip to Prescott to hunt along the way.

At one point, in the late afternoon, as lighting flashes and thunder cracks, I stop the creaking of my rocker on the pinewood planks. A thunderous eruption comes from the northwest where the river enters our farmland. I stand with my hands clasping my pounding heart when, nearly a hundred yards away, a wall of muddy water taller than the house charge toward the corrals. It devours mesquite trees, fencing, my gardens, and everything else in its path. I don’t see anyone fleeing from the adobe hut and I’m paralyzed with fear.

“Mrs. Gonzalez!” I scream in confusion. They will all die and I can’t do anything about it. I can’t run to their hut because the river will swallow me too.

I bolt inside the house then back to the yard below the porch. Through the dark and relentless rains, I run as fast as I can up the nearest slope of the eastern hills. All the while the wind is wailing like thousands of screech owls and howling coyotes.

Halfway up the hillside, I stop to glance back at the river. “Señora Gonzalez!” I scream as the Hassayampa buries everything in its wake. There is no hope for anyone. Not the old vaquero, not Mrs. Gonzalez and her small children. And the milk cow and the horse in the stables are all dead, I fear. My head spins Why didn’t someone move the livestock? But I know why. Because no one expected a flood to ever reach the corrals and barn.

Behind the wall of crashing water, the river swells and spreads over the land.

I shamble up the muddy slope near the grave of my stillborn baby. In my haste I slip but quickly pull myself up because I have no time to catch my breath. The rushing river is at my feet, running up my legs, pulling at me, wanting me to die.

Finally, I collapse onto the sodden earth and wait for the river to pass by or take me with it. Either way, I’m exhausted and can’t flee any farther. When the water covers my legs, it begins to retreat but the rains never stop pelting the slippery earth. I clear my muddy face with my apron and nervously peer at the brown eddies and furrows surrounding the house and covering the L-shaped porch. The barn stands against the Hassayampa but the adobe hut is nowhere in sight.

Could it be possible? I’m thinking, shielding my ears from the noise. Have they survived the flood? Poor Mrs. Gonzalez couldn’t, I’m certain, because of her broken ankle. She’s helpless to save herself and her small children.

Shivering, I pull my skirts around my waist and maneuver through the strong current along the river’s edge for a better glimpse of where the adobe hut ought to be. It seems the river waited until Jason and David were away. It wanted me alone, all to itself. I begin crying harder than I think possible and through my tears and the rain, I see the barn swaying in the unyielding current.

I rub my eyes. When I open them what I see swells my drenched spirit with hope. Mrs. Gonzalez has made her way to the top of the barn. But at any moment the roof will break apart and plunge the poor, wounded señora into the turbulence. And she will die a horrible death.

As quickly as possible I wade and swim back to my house. The muddy river is covering the floors inside, burying Jason's bear rug, ruining his pine slab floors and the bottom of my cedar hope chest. But I have no time to worry about what's inside. Although, I assure myself that my Audubon Ornithology set sits at the top of everything else and isn't damaged. I'm positive the river is now receding and that there won't be another wall of water crashing down the valley. The river has already given everything it has.

I grab Jason's fifty-foot hemp rope hanging from a post, sling it over my shoulder, then knock everything off the pinewood table and drag it outside the front door. I manage to set the table afloat on the river. I push it along then hop aboard as the current catches hold and sweeps me toward the barn. My own survival is uncertain but I must try to save the others.

While lying on my belly I paddle with my hands through the swift currents until the table pounds against the wall boards below the barn's roof. Peering through the loft window, I gasp at the sight of the old brown saddle horse. It has somehow trapped its head between lumber posts in the stables and to my horror its brown eyes are wide open. It seems to be looking at me with horror. Panic. It's dead, I'm thinking, it must be dead.

Mrs. Gonzalez is on the other side of the roof and I can no longer see her. "Señora Gonzalez, can you hear me," I holler through the gushing rain and the river's thunder. I yell and yell until my throat pains like a scorpion sting.

“Si, Señora Mattie,” comes a faint but familiar voice. “Estoy aqui.”

For a moment I remain on the table bobbing up and down as the surging river plugs it against the barn. I’ve never felt so helpless and unable to think about what to do except maybe for when I was a small child who just lost her family in a Kansas tornado. But of course, I don’t remember that incident. I only remember Uncle telling me what had supposedly happened. Now I’m living perhaps that same kind of fear and helplessness. Somehow then, and now, I must push myself to stay alive, remain calm, and summon the courage and strength to help Mrs. Gonzalez and myself to safety. I think about little Mattie Johnston, daughter of Conrad and Frederika, surviving the tornado and enduring a year of captivity. I did not die then and I will not die now! My mind holds this thought and a burst of courage grasps me. I wobble to my knees and secure the rope over my shoulder. With a hefty jump, I land on the roof and crawl toward Mrs. Gonzalez while each piece of lumber quivers beneath me. But the boards miraculously hold together.

At the top of the roof slope, I see the drenched and bruised Mrs. Gonzalez in tattered clothes. With torment on her face, she pleads for my help.

“I’m here, Señora,” I yell, lying flat and easing myself toward the Mexican woman. She is precariously near the edge of the roof. “Grab my hand,” I shout, stretching my arm as far as it will extend.

Mrs. Gonzalez reaches for me. As she catches hold of my hand, she begs, “No, no, no me. Save my baby.” She points to the flat roof of the adobe hut, some forty feet away, visible to me for the first time since the river crashed over our homestead.

I grasp the woman's hand as tightly as possible and pull her from the roof's edge to a more secure position on the wobbling timbers. While doing so I spot a movement on the adobe roof. "My God Jehovah!" I yell when seeing the Gonzalez child crying for her mama.

"Help my little Rosita," Señora Gonzalez pleads as she struggles up the roof with my help.

I'm completely defenseless. How can I possibly help the child when I can't even save myself and Señora? When the boards of the roof are wavering and about to break asunder at any moment? And the flat roof of the adobe hut will soon crumble and collapse and the river will wash away the stranded child.

I make it to my feet and keep balance in an impossible situation. I loop the end of the rope with a knot and toss it to the child in a heave ho. But the loop falls under the muddy river.

The lumber beneath my feet shakes as I keep steady and reel back the rope. I toss it again and again as quickly as possible. I'm not target shooting with my derringer while Jason's standing at my side saying Take your time Mattie darlin'. You'll hit the tin can if you remain steady. Then, as if Jason himself is actually with me, bolstering my aim, the rope lands on the adobe roof near the crying child. Almost dead-on spot! I hear Jason say. But it's Señora shouting for her baby girl. Her niña Rosita.

"Tell your baby to put the loop around her waist," I holler at the panicked woman beside me.

Mrs. Gonzalez screams to her child in Spanish.

The barn roof jolts, knocking me on my seat. I struggle back up fearing that the adobe hut's about to disintegrate into the raging river.

The child crawls into the loop and grasps the rope.

While prone on the barn roof, I tug the rope with the help of Mrs. Gonzalez. The child hits the water and goes under for an instant—a shocking sight, but she quickly bobs to the surface and we pull the rope until Rosita reaches the barn roof and falls into the arms of her mother.

I sigh in exasperation and shake my head. The rescue is only partly over. Now we three must make it back to the pinewood table and I must paddle us safely to shore. Just when I'm finding some confidence and feeling Jason's spirit pushing me onward, the barn roof lurches and breaks apart beneath us. We all three grab one another and tightly huddle as the boards we are lying on become our raft heaving us downstream away from the farm.

Thunder clashes and I embrace the child and woman with one arm and grip onto the lumber with my free hand. We shiver from fear and cold and I desperately want to plug my ears from nature's deafening fury. But I dare not move or I'll lose hold of the others and we'll all tumble to our deaths.

Our raft careens downstream for what could be ten minutes or an hour, I can't tell. Nor can I see anything because my face is affixed to the pinewood. When I look up the rain and splashing waters blind me.

All at once, the lumber beneath us falls to pieces and I tumble underwater. With what strength I have left, I fight against the current heaving me downstream and dragging me under. Time and time again I struggle to the surface, gasping for air each time. All the while I think about Rosita and that she is the same age I was when the Kansas tornado killed my family. As soon as my head darts above the surface I look desperately for the little girl or her body but see no one.

At last, I catch sight of the riverbank and clamber ashore. I shake my sopping hair from my face and plop onto the muddy earth. With what little life remaining in me, I buttress myself and look up and down the river. But I don't see Rosita or her mother nor any of the lumber from our raft.

Then I hear the little girl wailing so loudly she could push back the river. Along the bank, twenty feet downstream, little Rosita lies in the arms of her mother. I clamber to where they lie in the mud and fall to my knees before them. We all embrace and pant with exhaustion.

"The old vaquero help my Rosita onto the roof," Mrs. Gonzalez stammers between her breaths as if she must tell her story in case she doesn't make it. In case she dies. I see that her leg is badly bleeding where she had scalded it that morning, so very long ago, and her ankle is swollen twice its normal size, perhaps rebroken. In truth I'm fearing that she may die after all.

"Oh, Mrs. Gonzalez," I sob. "We made it. We didn't let the river take us under."

"Then he help me catch the corral to the barn, with my baby," Señora continues. She hasn't finished the story she must tell me. "I see the old man one last time. The river take him, Miss Mattie. My baby dead too. The river take my baby from my arms. I cannot keep hold of my baby. But God was good. He gave me my Rosita and keep me to take care of Jose."

"Shhh," I quiet the woman, rubbing her arm for warmth while the child cuddles between us. I carefully cover Señora's leg and ankle with her tattered skirt. I don't want her to see her injuries and fall into shock. "Rest now," I whisper.

I think about the old vaquero. He's gone, I know. The river took him and the poor helpless baby. I picture the old man and baby as I had seen them both this morning, so very, very, long ago. Then my thoughts blur and fade into the clamoring river.

Russel Buckholz and Pedro wake me from a deep dreamless slumber. I shakily sit and steady my spinning mind and aching muscles. Have I drunk pineapple cider? Or did I take a Brandreth pill to prevent sudden death from a dizzy spell?

"Miss Mattie," I hear Buckholz utter. "We're here now and you're safe. So is Señora and her daughter. We're here to take you back to the farm. What remains of it."

As Russel helps me to my feet, I rub my eyes to focus in the light. The sun has broken through departing clouds in the western sky and light is swathing me and the horse Pedro helps me mount. From all around I feel the light spreading, burning away clouds, and calming me. I am overjoyed the rains have subsided, the flood has passed, and I have survived the torrents and torments of the raging Hassayampa.



Chapter 9: Bushwhacked

David Thompson

After Jason got the federal deed for his homestead, we took to prospecting once again like in the old days across the frontier. The assayer is NOW placing value on our gold.

All of a sudden, we hear twelve-year-old Jedidiah Huckaby riding down Main Street shouting, “Dam’s broke on the Hassayampa!” The sheriff’s son regularly announces Prescott’s news in this manner. But today’s revelation isn’t the boy’s typical news.

Jason runs from the assayer’s office to where the boy is tethering his horse at the jailhouse. I’m following close behind carrying saddle bags with our hallmarked nuggets FROM THE few weeks WE SPENT panning and sluicing for gold in the forest creeks of Prescott Valley

Towering over Jedidiah, Jason grabs the boy’s shirt. “What’s this you’re saying, Jeda? Dam’s broke? My wife lives along the Hassayampa.”

“Sorry mister.” Jedidiah hesitates. “Killed at least ninety homesteaders outside of Wickenburg Town, wire says. All that rain. Middle dams couldn’t hold. Dam at Walnut Creek broke.”

“Who died?” Jason yells as if the boy’s responsible for the calamity.

“Really, Mister,” Jedidiah quivers. “That’s all I know ‘til Wilford Jones dispatches the next wire.”

Jason and I deposit part of our legal tender at the New Bank of Arizona and by late afternoon, we hasten to Jason’s farm. We lope the horses at a dirt-cutting pace with Red and Blue trailing behind. Every few hours we rest at watering holes praying to reach Mattie inside of two days and that no harm has come to her. We try not to think the worst. Fact is, we hardly speak at all.

The Hassayampa is flowing beyond its natural boundaries for this time of year. Along the banks we pass upturned trees, logs tossed against boulders, and drowned animals.

The first homestead we reach lies in crumbles. No one is around and we hustle on, unable to stop and look for any poor settler who might be injured or dead.

"The flood may have taken her," Jason starts saying. In the passing hours his worrying increases. "Me and James Grant carefully choose the location of Mattie's house far beyond the floodplain," he says. "Even the corrals and the adobe hut are safe from the water's highest spread."

I don't say anything to alarm my partner but deep inside I'm fearing that Jason's dead wrong. That the flood reached clear to the eastern hills and destroyed everything. I keep playing in my mind what Mattie said to me, about a killing. It seems her foreboding's come true and the river's the one doing the killing.

"I hate myself for leaving her alone at the farm," Jason tells me down the way. "A hallmark of gold don't have that much value."

We ride steadily in the moonlight and harbor no thoughts about looming dangers along the trail. Jason has nothing but Mattie on his mind. And so do I each time Jason brings up her name. Fact is, I care about her as much as I care about Jason himself.

Several hours after nightfall, when the moon's approaching the western horizon, Ghost begins to limp. We stop riding to check my horse's leg and I feel a swollen muscle. "Looks bad," I say and suggest Jason continue on while I let my horse rest a spell. "Won't make it to Mattie any faster on a dead horse."

"No, I reckon not," Jason replies, still on his horse and eager to keep riding. I tell him to hurry on, that I'll be all right for the night, and Jason lopes down the trail with Red and Blue close behind. In his saddlebags are his land deed and certificates of legal tender. In mine are both Jason's and my ingots of gold stamped for value and purity. In his haste to

reach Mattie, Jason forgot to take the gold and I forgot about it myself. But there's nothing I can do now.

I locate a grove of cottonwoods and willows away from the Hassayampa and all the flood debris. I secure Ghost for the night. The gelding will be all right, I feel sure. He just needs to rest until morning.

I place my saddlebags at the head of my bedroll, lie down, cover myself with a canvas slicker, and hold my Remington across my chest cocked and ready in case someone happens upon me. I doubt I'll find sleep in the chill of night. But I drift off and begin dreaming that I'm back in the war between the north and south, lying low and listening for signs of enemy fire. My regiment is on ambush patrol . . .

Leaving the wire. Pushing to a checkpoint on a moonless night in a plantation of trees. The rains begin. A downpour drenches me. I listen to the howling wind, water falling from leaves, and the river rushing down the valley. Lightning illuminates the treetops and enemy faces peering from the brush, their rifles aimed at me and my comrades in arms. Their percussion shots flash and pop in the darkness. They have the upper hand advantage. I plunge into a muddy ditch.

I am point man but didn't see the ambush coming . . .

Morning light is breaking when I jump awake. Ghost is quietly looking cockeyed at me from the side of his face, as horses do. My horse is not a wild mustang from the reservation. Ghost has a partnership with me. He's letting me know that the swelling on his leg has gone down and I can take the reins.

I roll up my bedroll, saddle Ghost, and eat a chew of jerk beef, sensing all the while that someone is watching me like I'm the point man and don't see the ambush coming. I

know the enemy is out there lurking. It's a feeling in my gut. An instinct like the communication between me and Ghost.

The chilly morning darkens with clouds as I ride downstream keeping Ghost at a brisk but easy pace. I'm hoping to give my enemy the slip.

In a short while, the sun peers from parting clouds and light angles across the trail beside the chalky river. A Gila monster trundles from the topsy-turvy debris. As I near, the deadly creature stops its slow pace and gazes at me then slowly moves on, unaffected by the flood. It's getting fat eating all the bugs and grubs stirred up along the river.

A strange sensation consumes me, a wartime feeling. Someone, the enemy, is out there. Waiting.

To cool my agitation, I start singing Roll, Jordon, Roll but can't get this feeling out of my head that the enemy is setting me up.

I stop singing, rein Ghost to a halt, and quietly listen. All is silent for a moment then a shrub rustles. There is no wind. No rain. A blackbird caws and lands on a nearby ocotillo.

The rustling returns and a twigs snap.

I break Ghost into a gallop and burn the breeze down the valley trail. From behind I hear several men yelling "Yahhaaa!" followed by the clomping of horses in pursuit.

In my haste I glance back and see a band of five Apache or they could be Yavapai renegades or even Army scouts. I look ahead, tear down the trail, then veer into an arroyo from the canyon hills.

I ride with skill, speed, and avoid snags and branches. At every turn I nearly tumble from my horse. But I can't get away, the stampede of horses is on top of me.

The renegades whoop and holler. They fire shots. I know I'm a dead man.

At a turn in the barranca I halt Ghost beside a boulder, jump off, and reach for my Remington in the saddle scabbard. Before I can even swing my rifle to a firing position, I feel a blow at the back of my head.

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It's nearly dusk when I awake with a pounding headache. I'm not shot. Rather, someone hit me with a rock. Why did they leave me alive? Are they afraid a man of color possesses special powers? Why are they on the warpath just after the flood? It makes no sense. There hasn't been renegade trouble along the Hassayampa since before I came to the Territory.

As soon as my head stops spinning, I stumble up and look for Ghost. I find horse tracks in the sandy wash but don't spot the familiar tracks of my palomino. I gather my hat off the nearby earth then realize that my rifle is gone and my pistols are missing from my holster.

I limp down the wash toward the river, thanking the Lord for sparing my life and praying that Miss Mattie is safe, that the flood hasn't damaged Jason's homestead too much, and that Jason and his hands will be looking for me.

I stop at the canyon wall. My head is throbbing and my heart is thumping from my chest. I need a moment to steady my breath. Then I hear a familiar whinny and see my palomino feeding on a toppled willow in the middle of a wash.

"Whoa boy." I slowly approach the gelding not wanting to startle him any more than he already is from the bushwhacking. Ghost looks up. It's miraculous he didn't run to the farm or that the natives didn't take him. The horse remains steady in the wash as I near him. I grab the reins hanging from the bridle and reassuringly pat his neck. "That'a boy. We've

sure been through something, haven't we fellow?" My presence calms him as much as his appearance calms me.

I glance around and see that the saddle bags with the gold ingots are gone, stolen. Perhaps, I'm thinking, someone in Prescott knew me and Jason were carrying gold south along the river. Who were these thieves? Were they really natives? And who's going to believe a colored man's story about his being bushwhacked and robbed? Jason will believe me, I reassure myself. He knows me to be a true and honest man, a hard worker.

Feeling dizzy and unable to walk any farther, I climb on Ghost's bare back, trot toward the river, and head for the farm as the sun is about to set over the ridge edging the floodplain. I feel sick but not from the pain in my head and my every muscle. The thought of telling Jason that his ingots are gone makes my heart ache. Jason is a true friend. A brother. And I feel like what's happened to me is a betrayal to him. He left me in charge of the gold and now I'm going to let down the best man I've ever known.

In the darkness of night, as I near the farm, the silhouettes of three figures ride toward me. I recognize them as Jason and the Buckholtz brothers.

"What happened man?" Jason yells as he lopes up to me. I almost fall from my horse. Jason dismounts, grabs me, and carries me on his horse back to the house.

Miss Mattie, alive and well, runs out the front door onto the porch asking what's occurred.

"I've been bushwhacked," I mutter then nearly blackout. Jason helps me into the house and onto the cot in the front room where Juanita used to sleep.

In the morning when I stir, the room smells dank and I see JASON'S bear pelt outside the open door, drying on the porch railing.

“It’s been three days since the river receded and left the farm in shambles,” Jason tells me. “Only the house and bunkhouse remain standing. And a few hardy cottonwoods along the Hassayampa. Pigs, goats, and Mattie’s chickens are running loose in the desert. One horse died, so did the Gonzalez baby, drowned and buried in the river along with the old vaquero. His guitar music is forever muted.”

I smell mesquite logs burning in the fireplace and drying out the dampness of the room. Mattie fetches Jason’s canteen of water and a wet cloth. She dampens the wound at the back of my head and applies a medicine wagon’s remedy of iodine and potassium. “Not too bad,” she suggests and fetches me some coffee.

Jason has brought her rocker inside so she can sit beside me as I lie on the cot. I rise up to drink some of the much-needed Arbuckle then Mattie bandages my head.

Slowly AND in a daze, I recount the ambush to Jason and Mattie.

“Apache?!” Jason exclaims from where he sits by the stone fireplace. With gun lubricant, he’s oiling his Colt and WINCHESTER like he does most days. “Ain’t been trouble around these parts since the Loring massacre. I believe hoot owls dressed as renegades bushwacked you. Mattie, what do you think? Got a foreboding?”

“Don’t know.” Mattie looks at Jason then at me. “Can’t seem to get feelings about this trouble, not like I used to.”

“The gold,” I utter with shame. “I’m sorry, partner. Whoever bushwacked me took the hallmarked ingots of gold. All of it.”

“Never mind, Pard,” Jason insists. “We’ll prospect for more. And I still got legal tender in the New Bank of Arizona.”

I lie back down to sleep for the night. Mattie promises to watch over me in case I take a turn for the worse. “If your eyes should open and roll or your flesh turns ashen,” she tells me. “I’ll be right here at your side.”

The next morning, I awake to see Jason at the fireplace stoking the flames. Mattie is sitting beside me in her rocker with a peaceful look on her face. She opens her eyes and regards me with a smile.

“Sorry to trouble you, Miss Mattie,” I say. “You don’t have to keep vigil over me.”

She rubs her eyes and looks out the front window. “Morning is breaking. How you feeling, Mr. Thompson? You did a whole lot of snoring through the night.”

“I slept peacefully, had no dreams.”

We look at each other and I’m not thinking anything specifically. It’s early morning and there’s a feeling of relief. The flood has passed and Jason and me are back at the farm. With the passing of trauma comes a quiet reassurance that life will continue, at least for the present.

“I’m heading to town with the boys,” Jason suggests. “Got to get soldiers to investigate your bushwacking.”

“I’ll come along.” I try to sit up but am suddenly dizzy and flushed.

“No, you stay with Mattie. Señora Gonzalez is recovering with her surviving child in the bunkhouse. Lost your guns too, I seen. I’ll leave you my pistol and buy you one in town. At Lafayette’s.”

I shake my pounding head and collapse on the cot as Mattie lights her Westinghouse stove to boil coffee.

Later that afternoon, Jason returns from town and tells me he met with the visiting deputy marshal, Fletcher Fairchild. “He’s heading to Fort Whipple to involve both the sheriff and Army. We’re not sure who did the bushwacking. Sheriff Tylor takes care of rustlers and road agents and the Army tends to renegade matters. That’s how the marshal put it.”

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A few days later, US Army soldiers and Sheriff Tylor arrive at the farm to assess the flood damage and investigate my bushwacking.

Feeling halfway recovered I ride with the sheriff, soldiers, and Jason to the barranca upstream where the band of men ambushed me according to my best recollection. In little time, soldiers find derringer bullet shells.

“Derringer!? Don’t look like renegade work to me,” says the captain of the cavalry. His name is John Brown Kerr and he wears a forage cap with a cross-sword insignia and a dark frockcoat with two rows of brass buttons down the front and three buttons at each cuff. “This bushwhacking happened too quick. Must be rustlers looting survivors of the flood.”

“You got enemies, son?” Sheriff Tylor looks squarely at me from his horse. I’m sitting on Ghost. “Anyone know you was riding down the river trail?”

Jason suggests the Hortons but they are cousins by marriage to Sheriff Tylor and everyone knows the sheriff won’t look into matters concerning the Hortons and their Bar Double H GANG OF cowboys.

After a day of scouting the vicinity, the soldiers find no sign of Yavapai or Apache trouble and decide to follow the sheriff’s lead in the investigation. They conclude that a dust storm kicked up the river trail and erased all tracks and evidence.

In the days to follow these same soldiers visit the reservations and conclude that natives aren't behind my bushwhacking. Captain Kerr and the Yavapai sheriff close the investigation until someone uncovers further evidence.



Chapter 10: Jason Heads to Fort Whipple

Jason Bartholomew Shear

By the summer's end in seventy-eight, me and my hands, including David, have rebuilt the farm, our cash crop is growing, and I've been noticing a change in my Rib. During mealtimes she conversates with me and David, something she seldom did before the flood. Fact is, we rarely talked at all except over what needed to be said. Now Mattie seems happy, curious, and not inclined to silence. She tends to ask questions about me and David's prospecting days, about the mines, and even about the War and David's Navaho wife.

Although puzzling at first, I soon welcome the change in my Rib. I feel like Mattie is strong now and ready to bear me a child. And I don't mind the attention she shows David, in conversation. I trust them both with my life. They are my God-given family and friend.

During my trips to town to sell our cash crop and buy supplies, no trouble stirs until one afternoon in late September. I'm eating lunch at Snider's Hotel. Benjamin Horton walks through the front swinging doors. Kaleb follows behind with Miss Franny McDuff at his arm. Two other Bar Double H wranglers trail in after them.

Pull in your horns. Keep your shirt on I tell myself. I have Mattie to think about. I remain silent but my hand is inching toward my Colt.

"Why lookie here," Kaleb says as he bumps my chair. His ugly face snarls and grunts. He sits at his brother's table. "The Territory's too small for the two of us, farmer," he says.

Franny nods at me, looking somewhat pale although dignified in her daunting velvet dress trimmed with purple fringe, puffed sleeves, and a bustle. From a netted bun, a thick strand of golden locks falls down her back.

On occasion, I've paid Miss Francis a visit. I'm not betraying my Rib in any kind of way. Mattie's a lady and this woman is a whore who meets my desires in ways Mattie can't. It's a natural thing for a man to enjoy the company of saloon women. I nod at Franny, continue eating, and pay no mind to Horton or his gang of misfits. I don't want any trouble and I refuse to let rebel rustlers interrupt a good meal. Mattie's cooking is not a T-bone steak at Snider's Hotel.

"He pilfered your gold, farmer," Kaleb says, glaring straight at me. He lights a cigar. "That contraband man you brought to the Territory. Can't trust such folks. Like you can't trust Apache, Comanche, or Billy Yanks!" The cowboys chuckle, fart, and belch. They're rude cusses, each and every one of them.

“Why don’t you cock your holster, Horton!” I finally say, screeching back my chair, slapping cash on the table, and leaving my steak half eaten. The Hortons and their men laugh from behind me as the doors slowly swing shut.

Over dinner that evening at the farm, I tell Mattie and Pard about my run-in with the Hortons. “I need to ride to Fort Whipple and concince the Army to investigate Kaleb and his gang of Bar Double H cowpokes,” I say. “I believe the Hortons, not Apache, not road agents, are the source of most trouble in Yavapai County. From the Bachman murder to the Loring massacre and David’s recent trouble. If Sheriff Tylor won’t take action, maybe the Army will.”

“I’ll come along with you,” David says, as I knew he would because him and me are pards. But I tell him I’ll be riding along with Russel and Jose and that I want him to look after my Rib. David has a new set of Colts and a Remington rifle and he’s the best dang shooter out of me and all my hands. His aim is nearly always spot on. He’s an on-point man. A good man to have around.

I look at my Rib and notice she ain’t asking questions. She’s returned to her quiet mood this evening. Something’s bothering her and I’m wondering if she senses approaching trouble. A foreboding. I don’t want to stir her ability to foresee anything because I don’t want to know the future. It’s enough to forget the past and plod along day by day. Enjoy a hearty meal and a twenty cent Habana cigar.

Miss Mattie Bachman

Since before the flood and the bushwhacking, when I told David there was going to be a killing, I’ve fought against having a foreboding. I’m grateful David never mentioned to Jason what I said about a killing. It’s an awful thing, living on the edge of knowing

something bad is bound to happen when menfolk pursue trouble. But I also realize that stirring up trouble sometimes solves problems. It's in the scriptures. A man must act. Fight his battles. In order to stop the Hortons from killing again, someone must kill them. I smile at Jason and give him my silent blessing to head to Fort Whipple. I just pray it's the Hortons who die and not Jason.

Instead of sitting outside with David after supper, as he is accustomed to doing, Jason follows me into the bedroom. "It's early, Mr. Shear," I remark as he strips to his skivvies. Usually, Jason comes to bed well after I'm asleep except when he's looking for favors.

"I want you, Miss Mattie." He reaches for me in the bed. His matted hair tumbles on my face. He smells of leathery Bellingham's stimulating onguent. He kisses me and his bristly whiskers scratch my skin. His breath is stale and hard, like that of a man. "It's time we make that family," he says like he does each time he wants me. Then his lips explore my neck and he unties the strings of my lacy night shirt.

At first, I pull back, unprepared for this sudden onslaught of my husband's uncharacteristic manners. He's acting like a rutting Billy goat. I don't appreciate such behavior. But I can't refuse him so I resign myself to meet his needs. Besides, I'm also eager for a family and this is how that happens.

Jason's rough and drunk with desire, although he didn't drink any whiskey this evening as I recall. His spirit arouses him. Having a family comes from having me. And now it's me he wants to have.

I'm musing during my husband's hunger. I want a family, sure, children with bright prosperous futures. Then he hurts me as he lives deep inside my soul, filling me with his

seed. It always hurt, at first, but that soon passes and he will be done for the night and I can sleep until the start of a new day. But this night he takes me twice more as if he lives his last moments, as if he will have me no more, ever again.

I wake the next morning, exhausted from the congress. During breakfast I'm embarrassed in front of David and Mrs. Gonzalez who is still using the crutch her husband made. Jason looks relaxed and happy, fit and full of life. They know Jason had his way with me the night before, I'm certain. I keep my eyes averted from everyone's glance. They know what's happened and that amuses them.

Not long after breakfast I'm standing on the porch and watching Jason ride up the Hassayampa Trail with Russel Buckholtz and Jose Gonzalez. They're heading to Fort Whipple on a mission to bring the Hortons and their cowboys to justice. Until Jason returns, I will worry about what might happen to him.



Chapter 11: Bit by a Rattler

Miss Mattie Bachman

Last night

I dreamt

I wrote a poem

About a dream.

My dream was short
But the poem was long
And I was
In between.

The voice was old
Patterned full--
A promise of
A sullen null.

Tonight, I dreamt
to forget the dream.

It's near the end of October and Jason's been gone for a month. I'm sitting on the porch feeling joy as I rock in my rocker with my hands on my belly. I'm carrying Jason's child. I know this like I knew it when I was carrying my little daughter who never took a breath of life. A woman knows when her body changes, when she's conceived a child.

I don't fear having another stillborn. I don't fret over things that might happen or that have happened before but I don't want any forebodings about the future. Enough! I tell myself. I'm tired, me and my heart. I will carry this child the full nine months. This time will be different because David's around.

The afternoon lull makes me drowsy as I rock with my sewing on my aproned lap. Desert wrens, thrashers, and Gila woodpeckers chatter in nearby saguaros and the shady mesquites that shot up after the flood. Desert trees, like the paloverde and mesquite, grow faster than any kind of tree I've ever known. The sequoias back in the City take centuries to grow. The mesquites are now sporting lacy leaves that ripple in the autumn breeze and fold up at night. Mesquite pods make good fodder for my goats. Mrs. Gonzalez taught me how to make a potent remedy for most any ailment from mesquite pods. I roast them and crush them in the pestle and mortar Jose made for me then I brew them on my cookstove for several hours.

I close my eyes and think about my baby, Jason's baby, and I begin to quietly laugh.

"Why, Miss Mattie." David appears at the porch with a bucket of water for Mrs. Gonzalez. "I never seen you laugh with such a glow."

I open my eyes, embarrassed that he caught me in my quiet moment of joy.

"You sure got a sweet, dimpled smile," he sets the bucket on the porch. "No disrespect."

I giggle, covering my mouth to be polite.

"Miss Mattie," David says, his hand on the post, "Tell me what's amusing you."

I look at him then glance down and tease, "Well, guess I've never seen a man of color up close, until you came along Mr. Thompson."

David grins and seems unabashed by my remark. "A lota men are of color. Some are red from the sun, some yellow with sickness, and some very black. Some very, very white, Miss Mattie, paler than an unshorn sheep."

I feel a sense of shame and say, “I meant no disrespect, Pard. I was only trying to make banter, that’s all.”

“I know, Miss Mattie. I know you’re having fun with me.”

I look at him in a momentary glance, one we sometimes share. It’s a look of admiration. Each of us knows the other is honest, true, and special because we were both held captive at one time in our lives and we both carry spiritual hymns in our hearts.

“You like it here, Mr. Thompson?” I look toward the eastern hills. I’ve never asked him this before but now I want to know how he feels about the desert I love.

His eyes survey the land from the eastern hills to the Hassayampa. “God’s country here. I love the smell of chaparral and mesquite, the open sky at night. I’m living free, Miss Mattie. I’m happy wherever I put down my hat. This farm is nothing like the swamps where I come from along the Missouri.” He sits on the porch steps and seems to contemplate his own words. “I hope to settle upstream in a year or two.” He pauses and looks at me. “Think a man of color can file a land patent? A free colored veteran of the War of Rebellion?”

I nod with assurance. Deep inside I’m wondering what he thinks about me. Can he discern I’m with child? But these are questions I’ll never ask. I haven’t even told Jason about my condition. I’m waiting for his return.

David stands. “Of course, we’ll be neighbors, Miss Mattie. I’ll always look after you and Jason. You’re the only family I got.”

“I’d like that, Mr. Thompson.” My rocker creaks the pinewood planks of the L-shaped porch. “Just wish you could be with your Navaho wife and son. It’s awfully sad when folks die before their time. Specially children, even stillborns.”

David nods, “I know, Miss Mattie. And you can be sure I won’t be leaving here until we install that turbine windmill and pipe water to your house. Every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you, Miss Mattie. And that’s straight from Walt Whitman himself.”

After David returns to the stables, his poetic words leave me feeling as content as my husband is when eating a good steak and speaking with sweet reason. I want to summon David back to tell him I’m with child, but I resist. Something keeps me quiet. I’m not sure I’ll even tell Jason when he gets back. Not right away. Maybe I’ll wait a few weeks to be sure the child survives. Meanwhile, it’s my secret. My source of power and joy. A child conceived after the flood.

Later that day, before Mrs. Gonzalez calls everyone to supper, I saunter to the river hoping to hear the song of a marigold warbler once again. For the second time. Or maybe even a new bird species I can identify in my Audubon Ornithology set.

Blue and Red follow me barking with excitement. I’m wearing my bonnet, an apron, and a long-sleeved dress. No matter what time of year, the sun can blemish a woman’s skin, especially skin as pale as mine.

Along the way I see Pedro sitting on a bench outside the bunkhouse. He’s saying English words and phrases as if reciting poetry. Since the flood, I’ve been teaching English to all the Mexican help. I hold the lessons at the new pinewood table Jason built. First, I was teaching only Mrs. Gonzalez and Rosita but then Pedro wanted to learn better English so he could speak as well as Jose.

“Where’re you heading?” David yells. He’s brushing down Ghost at the corral.

“Yonder.” I point to the trail that leads to the river.

“Let me accompany you,” David suggests.

“Of course not. I’ll be fine with these beasts protecting me. Got my derringer and Jim Bowie knife in my new tote.” I hold up the fringed bag David recently made for me from a deer hide he tanned.

“Be fine,” Pedro stammers from where he sits.

“Stay close by so we can hear you holler,” David exclaims.

“Yes, yes. You think a woman can’t do anything by herself.” I continue on. Sometimes the farm is a calaboose with so much concern for my safety. I only want to walk in the desert, free, like the javelina, the coyotes, and even the renegades unafraid of what might happen. What tomorrow might bring.

I sit on a stone beside the stream that’s now about ten feet wide. The rains were slight this season and the men have fully restored and reinforced all the levees and dams.

I take off my shoes, dip my feet in the cool water, listen to the river gurgle, and recite the words of my favorite poetess I wandered by the stream of time, made dark by human tears. I threw my voice upon the waves, and they did throw me theirs. I’ve made peace with the river that tried to take my life. I defeated death and now I’m bringing about new life. For my husband, for myself, and for that new life. Our baby. It seems I’ve come full circle like a wagon wheel with good traction. I think about what Jason once said. Mattie darlin’, I’ve fought many battles, survived the devastation of war, and like a wagon wheel, I came around to finding you. Winter and spring will arrive and pass, I muse. The baby will come in the dreadful heat of next summer when the house grows hot and we sleep on the porch in the cool night air.

Pedro's distant shout abruptly interrupts my thoughts. "Ay, Caramba!! Dios Mia!!" he yells then someone fires a Colt 45 single action, David's gun, and the dogs bark and run toward the commotion.

Concerned, I look around for renegades or the Hortons and quickly slip on my shoes, grab my tote, and dash toward the corrals with my derringer in hand and the hammer fully cocked, like Jason taught me to do.

When I reach the new barn and stables, I find David crouching near the watering trough.

"David," I call, fearing he has an arrow in his gut. Or a bullet.

Then Pedro holds up a dead rattler with its head blown off.

"My wrist got bit," David utters. "Dang thing was under the trough. Excuse my cussing, Miss Mattie."

"David," I say as calmly as possible. "Don't move your arm."

"Been lucky up to now," David remarks good naturedly, then winces. "Never got bit before." He deeply inhales and looks at me. "Hurts like hell!"

I yell for Pedro to fetch mesquite pods from the desert and cayenne from my garden. Then I help David to the house, walking him very slowly, keeping his wrist at his side to prevent the poison from flowing through his body. People die from rattler bites if they don't attend to the wound immediately or if the bite occurs in a susceptible place such as on the face or at the heart.

Pedro tosses the dead rattler to my chickens while Mrs. Gonzalez fetches from her newly built adobe hut a bottle of Dr. Wizard's cure-all remedy.

I shoo everyone from the house and instruct David to rest his arm out flat on Jason's new pinewood table, palm up. Then I dab the wound with a mixture of gun powder and kerosene while the ground mesquite pods boil on the stove for a poultice I'll apply with slices of cayenne. "When it's ready," I tell David, "the poultice will ease the pain and draw out the poison. Now drink this." I hand him a cup of the Wizard tonic and sit at the table beside him.

"Sorry, Miss Mattie," David says. "Should've used a stick. But I done it before. Grabbed an old rattler and broke its neck in one swift strike." He pauses a moment and gasps. "Guess I could use some of Jason's whiskey with this Magic Wizard tonic."

His wrist is badly swollen, deep purple and yellow, and bleeding at the fang marks. But I'm certain the tonic and poultice will dissolve most of the poison spreading inside him. David's a strong healthy man and the poison will quickly pass. "It doesn't look too bad," I say. "You're lucky. Could've been much worse, Mr. Thompson. Pard."

David sighs again but like a brave soldier, holds his own as I wipe his sweating forehead and bandage his wound with strips of Jason's old shirt. "You know a lot about homespun remedies," he suggests, trying not to show his discomfort.

"Jason says that too. Got books about remedies. Juanita taught me a thing or two, I must admit. And so has Mrs. Gonzalez."

"It's more than book learning, Miss Mattie. Or learning from the Mexicans. You got a natural proclivity."

I take his words to heart and decide to tell him about my childhood dream in Frisco, the one about the medicine man emerging from a cave. I'm hoping to distract David from his pain. "I think he was my father, my Ipa, when I lived with the Pawnee. Maybe he taught

me about natural remedies. I'm sure you know, Mr. Thompson, that because I lived with the Pawnee, townsfolk think I'm as loco as a wet hen. What do you think, Pard?" I finish wrapping the bandage around his wound. "Think I'm crazy because I get forebodings?"

"You're not crazy, Miss Mattie." He pauses and I can tell that pain is bursting from his wrist and through his body. "Like I said, you got the spirit of an Earth Seer, that's all."

I place his wounded arm against his chest and tie it in a shoulder sling. "Tell me about your Navaho wife. Sometimes talking about family is a good remedy. About positive things that's happened in our lives. She must have been pretty with long black hair, I imagine."

"That's right," David smiles. "You remind me of her Miss Mattie. Because you're gentle and quiet, yet strong and resilient. That was my Maria until the hand of God struck her down with fever."

"There now" I finish tying the shoulder sling. "Keep your arm low and you'll be all right, soon enough." I sit back in the chair, glancing away. "I never knew my real parents," I say. "Leastways, not that I can remember. My uncle had a daguerreotype of my mother Fredericka. She was pretty. But I never think about her. Never have. Just about my uncle and Jason. Guess they're the only family that ever meant anything to me. Except for you. You're Jason's redeemer, his Pard. You're family to me, too, Mr. Thompson."

David grits his teeth and says, "I don't know, Miss Mattie. Man's just got to make the best out of what he's got. Sometimes that's without any family around. We best not contend with the past. Better to be what you are as you're living and look ahead to the future. If Sweet Jesus gives us one."

My thoughts swirl with admiration for David's simple wisdom about life which could have come from Jason. I gaze at him, at his becoming brown eyes, but quickly shy away. I know I have strong feelings for Pard and I'm not sure what they mean. My husband is Jason and I can never have inappropriate feelings for another man.

David reaches over with his free hand and tenderly removes a willow leaf from my hair. His hypnotic eyes hold me in a trance. Unexplainable elation overtakes me. I've never had such overwhelming feelings for Jason. Maybe the child is bringing a charge of vitality within me, I tell myself. I look deeply at the man before me. A man of spirit and wisdom. A survivor of captivity, like myself. A hero in the War of Rebellion who carried the wounded off the battlefield and buried the Union dead. The awe of him leaves me to wonder where the moment might go. I'll have to tell Pard about the child, I'm thinking, even before I tell Jason.

I look away from him and glance at the flickering flame of the kerosene lantern. My heart is rapidly beating and my head begins to pound. I glance back at David. He's sitting back on his chair with his eyes closed. His breathing is shallow but steady. Then the door flings open with a fierce gust of wind that blows out the lantern and sends us into total darkness. I feel a foreboding coming on, one more terrible and powerful than when I foresaw the South rising to murder Ipa, the Great Father of our glorious nation.

Part Two



Chapter 12: The Face of all the World is Changed, I Think

Miss Mattie

In a dying moment

I looked another way,

To catch a different point on Earth,

But then it slipped away.

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 dazed, somewhere between a dream and a miracle. Somewhere outside of my time and place. Have I swallowed the tonic meant for David? The Magic Wizard potion.

The bed is as soft as my feather mattress in Frisco. It conforms and wiggles and is so unlike the hard-woolen mattress I'm accustomed to. 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 to recall.

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

I suddenly recall David's snakebite and his pain. Was there a knock on the door last night? Had Pedro brought me more mesquite pods? Silly man. I hadn't asked for any.

No, I remember. It was Stanly Buckholtz returning from town to warn me and David that the Hortons were cock-hammered and threatening to waylay the farm and shoot a certain "blue bellied contraband man." They're fixin' to hang Mr. David my thoughts roar with recollection. I struggle to clear my befuddlement. Is David hiding? I can't remember. Everything is like a San Francisco fog. Why am I in bed so late? Does the baby make me lazy? And why is my mattress so soft and commodious? So . . . transmogrifying?

In the distance, down by the river trail, someone shoots a Remington rifle. My heart leaps like a jackrabbit. Then I hear shouting, a clamor so boisterous I can't imagine what's happening. The Hortons have arrived! I realize. A gang of Bar Double H cowboys are here to kill David! Is my foreboding coming true? Is someone about to die?

I attempt to sit up and still my heart so I don't 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 last night that I fell into bed without properly changing?

The blinding sunlight obscures everything in 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 racket grows louder. The Horton gang is drawing near. They must be in wagons I surmise and brace 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. I don't recall him returning. Did he even leave? I'm so utterly perplexed.

I call Jason's name, shake his back, yank down the quilt, and see the smooth skin of a man who isn't Jason. He has long black hair strung in many plaits with colorful Apache beads. He is, I realize, a naked man of color but he's not a former captive. His back is smooth and not riddled with welts like David's back. Before I can even contemplate how this man came to my bed, I remember the Hortons are nearing, raring to kill.

Why aren't the vaqueros stopping them? Have the hoot owls 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 who else this naked man could possibly be. 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 cannot 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 intensifies. More gun shots rip asunder. And what's more troubling, 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. A man shouts, "Hey, David!" I jump up and stand frozen at the bedside. 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 as large as my hope chest. It 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'm somewhere other than my own bedroom. But where could I possibly be? In Wickenburg Town? At the Bucket of Blood bordello?

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, many things are the same as in my bedroom. The armoire stands at the west wall and the east window, where the sunlight is streaming in, is the same size and in the same place. No. This is my bedroom but someone has refurbished it, somehow. My last foreboding was so powerful it knocked me unconscious 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, astonished that I'm in my undergarments and David is with me in a bed that isn't mine! I'm someplace else other than

where I was before. But why would any of that matter now? Kaleb Horton is hellbent on killing and I'm doomed.

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

I drop to the floor and grope around for my buckskin tote. At any moment the men will burst through the door to kill David and maybe even me. Or worse. I can't 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 very presence. Stranger yet, David is no longer clean shaven. He sports mutton chops like 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 four-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 the bed quilt to cover my shoulders and nakedness. "What are you doing here? Have you no shame?" I then rush to stand against the door. What else can I do? I just don't know.

A strange cry with clanking drums and Mexican guitar music bursts through the house.

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 Apache have captured the vaqueros and Mrs. Gonzalez.

"Come out here 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 skivvies!

I can't believe the sight of him as I stand against the door, frozen in fear. What have I done? I stare at the man in utter astonishment. His body is so strange, so unblemished by welts from former lashings! How can that be? Did Mr. Wizard's remedy fix him all up?

"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 man of color holds out his arms. "It's okay. Come to daddy." He has a gold hoop in his ear like an old forty-niner, like Frenchie Lafayette.

I pull together my wits and decide that if I'm going to die in this discombobulation, I'll die bravely like a soldier during the War of Rebellion. I'll be like Jason, a recipient of the medal of valor. I take a deep breath, drop the quilt from my shoulders, and run out the bedroom door screaming, "What do you want? Who are you?"

I halt at the pinewood table now stained and polished with branding iron burns like the new elaborate headboard of the strange transmogrified bed. I'm paralyzed in wonderment over what surrounds me. It's the farmhouse Jason built but furnished differently. My cedar hope chest is missing and that means my Audubon Ornithology set is 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, Navaho 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 still in Fort Whipple?

"Why Martha. Congrats!" a man's voice distracts 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 him and 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 feet are bare 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? Has the Magic Wizard's potion taken hold of everyone's mind?

"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. I notice he's sporting whiskers! Two days growth. An absurd 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 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 sensible explanation.

"Are you feeling all right?" I 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." Still clinging to Jeremiah's arm, the woman smiles glowingly with stunning white teeth.

I grasp the pinewood table like I'm on the raft of planks shooting down the raging Hassayampa, holding on for dear life. I begin to recognize the woman, but can't quite place her.

"Well sister, aren't you curious?" She approaches and I back 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—pedicure, manicure, braids. It's my shower-gift to you."

"Shower-gift? How preposterous!" I 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 pounds so violently I grasp it and conclude that natives have held these people too long and they're suffering from mental afflictions. This is my foreboding. But why are they here? Has Jason brought them to the farm? Of course, he has. I'm 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 ask, 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. I had lost consciousness. I look around the room still holding my head. The change in décor is astonishing.

"Turn down the fucking volume," Jeremiah yells at two boys about eleven and twelve. They're 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 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 area. It has a counter and sink with piped-in water and a stove of yellow metal beside a tall yellow metal box that is humming like bees. A Jim Bowie knife sits on the counter and I lunge for 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 one’s in there,” I scream, gripping the knife and bracing myself at the counter. “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 loose-fitting trousers made from a colorful fabric with swirls of green and purple. I recognize the paisley cloth I recently ordered from LaFayette’s. But it was for a lady’s dress!

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 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 asks.

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 dreamworld.

To my surprise and relief, I find enormous comfort in David’s strong embrace. It feels like an old habit, like 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 but it’s an unfamiliar eau de cologne.

“What’s that fragrance I smell?” I whisper in his ear.

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

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

“What? You made these groovy harem pants.”

Just then, at the front door, three other outrageous people scramble inside and end my tranquil moment with David.

“Hey Bro, congrats!” a man exclaims.

I squint at the newcomer and realize it’s the Tonto Apache scout who rode through town with the cavalry led by General George Crook as I sat outside Frenchie’s store. When was that? How long ago? The scout wears a headband, a raw muslin frontier work-shirt open at the neck, and maroon denim britches tucked into rawhide fringed boots up to his knees. Some kind of vanguard fashion, I assume, for an Apache scout.

And with him, incredibly, are Ben Horton and Juanita. Yes, Juanita returns to my farm dressed in denim and underclothes. And they all smell of this new fragrance, this patchouli oil. Has the entire town gone wild and wooly? Are they all here to punish me for having a foreboding? Yes, all this madness has to do with my foreboding. I turn to Ben Horton and angrily ask, “What are you doing here?”

“That’s not friendly, Martha,” Horton replies. His shirt is a gradated orange and yellow dyed cotton and his denim britches flare at the bottom. “Aren’t you 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 wouldn’t have left the farm.”

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 a rear echelon mother fucker. He'll be home in two months."

I push David away because I'm feeling out of my mind. How can a Horton be in my house without pointing a rifle at David? 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 is 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. Get High. Live in the moment. Like Whitman says, 'habit ourselves to the dazzle of the light and of every moment of our lives.'"

I fall back in David's 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 and 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 like my cousins Mathew Lemont and Eugene Scott when they were 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 the South has just surrendered to General Grant.

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

“Got hitched,” his hand caresses my back. “And we’re fixin’ to have a baby.”

Shivers charge through me like an Edison electric pulse because I don’t remember telling David about Jason’s baby? I’m not showing yet. So how does he and everyone else know? It was my secret; one I planned to keep until Jason got back. Or did I confess the news to David last night? Before I have a chance to ask David how he knows I’m with child, he kisses my lips and I’m overpowered with love. For David. “Thy soul has snatched up mine all faint and weak,” I utter the words of Miss Browning. 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 dream 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 smell fragrances or feel physical sensations when asleep. A dream is 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.” Before we head outside, 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 into the bedroom. “Everyone can wait. My baby needs a little lovin’ from Daddy.”

I giggle uncontrollably as David playfully plops me on the commodious water mattress. I feel like a child Christmas morning in the house of a wealthy man. Like I'm riding on my rocking horse Thunder Cloud 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 camisole and unveils 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 and folly? Or, does Jason allow 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 what's customary. 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 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 and remember my wild dream on a mattress that wiggles. I look around the room. Again, my bed transmogrifies. This isn’t a dream. Everything is changed somehow with new furnishings and fixtures. David, not Jason, lies in bed beside me as if he is my husband. The dream is as real as the man of color smiling 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 captured my soul. I am his captive.

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

All of a sudden, I remember Jason. 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 moment between us but I’m pressed to reach the bottom of matters. “He’ll be coming back soon. Oh David, what will we do? He’ll know about our sinful deed. I’m 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 front room I ask, “Where did it all come from, David? This can’t be a vision from Mr. Wizard’s medicine. Jason must have brought me these gifts.”

“Medicine, sister?” the Apache asks. 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 is the box

of flickering light on a table before them. The box is making moving pictures with people talking.

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

The Apache scout and Juanita glance at me and explode in 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 teared up eyes. "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's 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 mind can't keep pace with what's going on.

"Here Babes," David deeply inhales smoke from the pipe and causes bubbles to burst through the water. It's captivating. Then 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 native ritual involving me? Am I once again a captive? Are my thoughts born from my year in Pawnee captivity? The abrasive smoke causes me to cough. "Weed tobacco," I suggest. "As potent as Jason's after supper cigar."

Everyone roars with laughter. Especially Juanita. This angers me. Of course, she's laughing at me because I sent her away. She has no right to return to my farm. Especially to sneer at me despite all these strange goings on. I clear my throat with small successive coughs. "What's so funny?" I stare 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 before."

"Oh, forget about 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." Juanita and the scout, with the pipe, follow David outside. 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 I smell my lavender and mint gardens beside the house. Then I notice, 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 asked him to.

I sit in my rocker and watch Juanita join Franny who is arranging dishes of food on 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 Rebecca Crawley! My piano stealing nemeses is wearing loose denim trousers that hang below her belly. Her navel shows! What an extraordinary day this has turned out to be!

The corral fencing is gone but 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 or adobe hut. 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? It wasn't Jason because he's away. David could have done it. Gardening isn't that much different from farming cash crops.

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, my world has 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 that 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 commotion distracts me. 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 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 under the ramada. A side door opens and more yawling music explodes onto the scene. The wagon has a white top and side panels painted in colorful flowers and the words "love," "peace," and "make love not war," and pictures of the wagon wheel with four odd

spokes instead of eleven. This strange wheel is a token of the War, I'm surmising. It seems to be everywhere.

"Here they are," David greets the new arrivals as the two Snider boys 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?" Franny asks. 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. 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 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 reeking of patchouli oil like everyone else. She gives me a hug and 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. I wonder who the little

girl is with the two boys. She's too old to be Rosita and certainly five years haven't passed me by.

"Congratulations Chica." The large woman smiles.

"Mrs. Gonzalez?" I utter, hoping she'll 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 wanted an instant family and I was happy to marry a quiet, hard-working man like James."

"Three children?" I ask. "What of little Rosita? Where is she? How's she doing?"

"Rosita?" Gonzalez gives me a puzzled look but before she can explain, Franny asks for her help with the salsa.

I decide not to inquire further about little Rosita. Maybe Mrs. Gonzalez lost her as well and the three children belong to Mr. Grant although I didn't know he had children. Maybe Gonzalez twisted her story around to avoid revealing the painful truth that she lost two babies. I just don't know what to believe or think.

The colorful wagon grabs my attention. I'm suddenly more curious than confused. I've read about the Iron Horse in Harper's and 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 ask. "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 can’t reckon everything, that’s all.” I 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.”

Happy to occupy my mind with an activity, I walk to the long table and stand across from Juanita. She’s cutting tomatoes and greens.

“Hey girl,” Franny says as I stand beside her. “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 hardly matters now, girl.” Juanita winks 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 one fried onion today.” 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 at me.

“Hear about that chick who OD’d in town last week?” Franny changes the subject.

“Chick traveling alone to Vegas?” Juanita remarks.

Franny nods. “Shot up smack in the Greyhound 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 died after ingesting too much laudanum. I wonder if this is 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. It happened last week at the Greyhound.”

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 into a pipe. “Let’s smoke to peace.”

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

Juanita begins playing a guitar and singing a lovely sonnet with her sweet lulling voice, one I remember well. 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 Edison box, that I wonder why I ever got 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, 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. It's a favorite verse from my favorite poetess. Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Do you think all these strange happenings have to do with my having a foreboding?" 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 and that it involves my forebodings and the fact that Jason's away.

Franny glares at me and sets down her pipe. "Foreboding?" she asks. "What the hell is that psychedelic shit? You got cravings, honey? Need a dill pickle? 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.

I approach him at the wagon and say, "Mr. Grant. You of all people must know where Jason is."

James stops what he's doing. "Martha, you're baked. You need to lie down."

"Mr. Grant," I plead as my eyes begin to tear. "Where's 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 and with her hair dangling down like a native woman's and her breasts clearly visible under her shirt. And, unbelievably, she's painted her lips that sparkly pink color!

"Could you help Mattie," Mr. Grant says then leaves carrying the box to the porch.

"Come on girl. You and the baby need to rest." Rebecca, smelling like the roasting pig, takes my hand. "It'll be all right. Trust me."

I jerk from Rebecca's grip. "Why do you care so much? And what about my piano?"

"Piano?" Rebecca asks like she's suspicious about what I'm saying.

"I never gave it to you. 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 from David and Mrs. Crawley. The other townsfolk start approaching with ghostly pale expressions. 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 so loudly I probably damage my vocal cords. I don't allow anyone near me, not even David. Tears stream down my cheeks. Whether I'm dead or alive, I can no longer withstand the strange events surrounding me.

"When is Jason coming back?" I 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 as I 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 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 time and place. Maybe even of Jason coming home. But I can hear the men talking outside on the L-shaped porch like I used to hear Jason and Pard talking before the flood, before Jason went away.

"What's up with Martha?" James Grant is asking.

"Don't know," David replies. "Everything was groovy till this morning. Then she started rapping about Jason coming back. It's jolting."

"Whoa, heavy. It's been three years now, right?" I hear the Apache asking. "She should be over her grief. I mean, especially with your baby coming."

“I saw guys in Nam wake up all dinky dau like she did this morning,” David says. “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.

“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 from one of those boxes Mr. Grant brought. “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 her, until this morning. For several months she hasn’t mentioned Jason let alone ask when he’s coming back.”

I can’t 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, the women are sitting at the long table engaged in their own conversation. I’ve distressed everyone. But as these people keep saying, they’ve all seen bad trips before. Whatever that means.

“Who’s Wynona?” I ask David. “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 in Prescott with James Grant. Mr. Grant is here with me now, sitting on the swinging bench with the Tonto scout. They are rolling cigarettes.

David smiles at me like he remembers me telling him about this dream.

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

David senses 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.



Chapter 13: Are you a Feminist or Suffragist?

Martha

Who froze this little heart?

And locked her in the storage vault,

Where ancient treasures lie,

Waiting to be had.

Don’t scald a thawing heart,

It never will survive

Allow it time to have

Fresh air,

To melt the ice away

(and the frozen heart won’t die).

“I’d rather face another flood than head to town,” I tell David a FEW DAYS after the pig roast party. After I transmogrified in time. We are sitting at Jason’s pinewood table eating a Swanson’s TV dinner. David claims to have polished, stained, and marked Jason’s table with cattle ranch branding symbols—a Diamond T, a Star L, a Rocking R, and the Bar Double H. He claims they came from the old territorial days in Arizona and he found them in one of my books on the history of the Arizona. I know nothing about this book, like a lot of other things.

On the table sits a bouquet of wild globe mallows in my silver vase. I found it in the headboard cabinet of the newfangled waterbed. A steaming loaf of my homemade pioneer bread sits on the kitchen counter ready to slice and serve with butter and David’s Wild Desert Honey. Its aroma fills every nook and cranny of the house.

“What Flood?” David gives me a quizzical look. “I want you to see a doctor in town for a prenatal exam and you bring up something off the wall.”

“The flood last year,” I exclaim. It seems that whatever I say causes misunderstandings and I’m already agitated by the thought of going to town. I won’t even walk beyond the farm or step inside David’s or anyone else’s iron bellied Folks Wagon. I imagine Wickenburg Town is a lot like Frisco these days, a city with wide streets, tall buildings, and wagons everywhere booming on gasoline horsepower and brazenly tooting their horns. “A melee of drunken forty-niners,” Uncle Willie would have said.

The Sniders dropped by last night. To party. Fran, as we seem to be calling her, pestered me about going to her new salon for the works but I resisted so she’s promised to do my nails and braid my hair here, at Jason’s table. I’m resuming my sewing business on a Singer Zig Zag that David bought me in town, he says. It has a pedal, not a treadle. This improved upon patent runs on electricity like everything else. “Townsfolk like your camisoles, corsets, maxi and mini denim patched skirts, and rayon paisley harem pants,” David tells me. He says he’s been taking my costumes to Snider’s “head shop” in town called The Medicine Man Peace Pipe. Jerimiah’s store specializes in accessories for smoking locoweed tobacco and he sells my “hippie clothes,” as people call them, along with notions of the time such as rolling papers, roach clips, stash boxes, black lights, and posters of psychedelic paisley flowers. David says that Snider sells everything in his store except for the weed hemp itself because locoweed is an outlawed substance in this new transmogrified time. This makes me think of Lafayette’s store but I don’t ask David if it’s still in Wickenburg Town. I don’t want to know. Or maybe, truth be told, I’m afraid of finding out it no longer exists.

My favorite new patent in my rearranged house is the TV. It runs throughout the day even while the stereo's booming. Last evening, David and I sat on the large beanbag chair which is akin to the waterbed patent. We munched on fiddle-faddles while watching Room 222—a drama about Walt Whitman High. Throughout the day, while sewing my costumes, I watch One Life to Live and the Days of Our Lives.

I've been paging through David's periodicals—Mad Magazine, Zap Comix, Fritz the Cat, and Fabulous Furry Freak Brother's. They're all political cartoons likes those in Harpers by Thomas Nast and Winslow Homer. David's "Whole Earth Catalogue" is a more pragmatic periodical. It offers Thoreau style self-reliance advice and homespun remedies for pioneers on the frontier like me, Jason, and David.

As it turns out, David is running a desert plant nursery on the farm with bee hive boxes at the edge of fields for his honey business. Unlike Jason, David has no hired hands. Instead, he uses a strange roaring Ford tractor to drag the earth and a small forklift to haul around black plastic buckets containing date palms, Mexican fans, agaves, barrels, ocotillos, and saguaros. David claims he took over Jason's business. Balderdash, I tell him. Jason never grew potted desert plants!

David's red Chevy pickup is a conveniently rearranged buckboard made of tungsten with black rubber wheels and rims of chrome. He says he drives it to town at least three times a week to sell my garments at Snider's and his plants, honey, and his cash crop weed tobacco that he grows in an old yellow school bus, an iron bellied horse. He lined the inside with aluminum foil, hooked up bright lights over the medicine that David constantly smokes like it helps him breath or think. I don't know. He calls this medicine plant, Puff the Magic

Dragon, Mary Jane, lids, dimes, Panama Red, Acapulco Gold, Maui Wowie. I call it locoweed.

"Locoweed is a natural herb, a gift from God," he likes to boast. I don't recollect smoking before my little jaunt into another time at the same place, but I find that a hit or two helps me relax, recollect stories, and set stories right, at least in my own mind. Weed doesn't make me "get high," as townsfolk like saying. It makes me steady myself in a place that must be a dream. And dreams are already a "high." Unfortunately, sometimes, after a toke, I'm likely to ponder what will happen when Jason returns. Or I think about David's claim that me and Jason started the farm while living in that old yellow school bus.

Now, as we sit at Jason's pinewood table eating our Swanson's dinner, David is giving me a puzzled look over my remark about last year's harrowing flood. "Are you talking about the flood of seventy?" he asks. "The year Jason and I went to war? Or the Walnut Grove Flood when the dam burst and killed a hundred homesteaders along the Hassayampa? That was back in 1890, Babes. A long time ago. IT'S ONE OF THE STORIES YOU RESEARCHED AND WROTE ABOUT in your notebook. ALONG WITH THE WICKENBURG MASSACRE OF 1871."

"WROTE ABOUT?" I ask. "I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. I LIVED IN WICKENBURG AT THE TIME OF THE LORING MASSACRE AND I LIVE THROUGH THE Hassayampa FLOOD. I survived and helped rescue Señora and Little Rosita."

DAVID GIVES ME HIS PUZZLED LOOK AND I REALIZE WE AREN'T CONNECTING, YET AGAIN.

"Thunderation," I declare. "I'm talking about the wall of water taller than San Francisco's Episcopal Church, spire and all. The flood that killed the old vaquero and swept

Señora's baby from her arms. The flood that destroyed much of the farm shortly before road bandits bushwhacked you on your way back from Prescott with Jason. David! They stole all your gold! And you act like you don't remember."

David says nothing more. He's probably thinking I'm having another "psychedelic flashback" like the one he tells me I had at the pig roast. My mind draws Peter Max posters, David likes to say. When I'm zoning, being boo coo dinky dau, and "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," David says nothing and I know it's because he doesn't want to cause me any further anguish. IT'S the same way COUSIN AND UNCLE TREATED ME WHEN I WAS A CHILD. LIKE THEY WERE AFRAID OF STIRRING UP ONE OF MY FOREBODINGS. IT SEEMS THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT HAVEN'T CHANGED, AFTER ALL.

David lights the tobacco in his bong from Snider's head shop. Colored beads bounce bubbles like the lava lamp by the waterbed. "Okay," David finally says. "I guess you'll just have to rely on Wynona and have a natural childbirth at home. Lucky for us she's a midwife as well as a social worker."

"Is there any other way to have a baby but at home and in my own bed?" I say with exasperation. "And yes, David. I remember the pig roast. But which lady are we talking about?"

"Jim's lady. The big Mexican woman with three kids."

"Mrs. Gonzalez, you mean?" I ask.

"Okay. Yes," David says with a sigh. "You've already spent a year with Wynona, uh, Mrs. Gonzalez," David reminds me. "She's a staunch feminist, a woman's libber."

“What’s a feminist woman’s libber?” I ask, exhausted from all the new terminology and phrases. I’m not Pedro trying to learn English. Or am I?

From my expression, David realizes I’m serious and he recaps the ERA movement to me, something he’s EXPLAINED before, he says, but it seems that my new transfigured self is quite forgetful or perhaps there’s simply too much new information in my head. I can’t keep track of it all. It’s what happens before I have a foreboding. My head overfills with words and thoughts until one, the foreboding one, bursts from my lips. But it seems that hasn’t happened, yet.

“In the twenties,” David says, “the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote. Last year, Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment. We’re waiting for the States to ratify it. You need to brush up on what’s happening, HONEY BEE.”

I want to say I know about the suffrage of women and the calamity of war. All the goings on during my life. I do read Harper’s Weekly. I know about Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Ida B Wells. I admire such women of note, just like Uncle Willie did, and I believe women should have equal opportunity. But I say nothing. Early in life I learned not to pose too many questions or express too many opinions. This is especially relevant now, in this transmogrified time. Questions bewilder people and that brings more trouble. In fact, quibbling over names and facts causes outright misunderstandings. It’s as if people think I should already know about everything new that’s going on, when clearly, I don’t.

Before the change occurred, I never knew David to be a reader like me and uncle Willie, although he quoted lots of Whitman’s poems. But now he reads late into the night while I’m sleeping. If he’s not reading, he likes to “rap” about his “trips” on peyote, magic

mushrooms, and LSD and discuss altered states of consciousness in dreamlike trances where he sees what's not there and has out of body experiences. "That's what's happening to you, Martha," he tells me. "Flashback memories. Bad trip paranoia. We dropped LSD one time too many when I first moved to the farm and took over Jason's nursery business. You have the power to see amazing and meaningful coincidences and make connections to the spirit world. That's synchronistic, Babes. A psychedelic electric light orchestra! Keep on trucking."

Synchronistic or not, I know my faulty memory bothers David. But I can't lie to the man I love and trust, the one true thing in my transmogrified state. Or whatever state of mind I'm currently in. "And what do we do during our visits? Me and Mrs. Gonzalez, the feminist suffragist libber?" I take a bite of my Salsbury Steak which I find to be as delicious as any meal at Snider's Hotel, when Snider had a hotel.

"You talk about your dreams AND THE STORIES YOU write."

"STORIES? What stories?"

"ABOUT THE TERRITORIAL DAYS. LOVE STORIES. ADVENTURE STORIES. TRUE ACCOUNTS OF HISTORICAL EVENTS. LIKE I SAID, stories about THE WICKENBURG FLOOD AND MASSACRE. Can't you remember what you've written?"

David is growing impatient with me. Why is everything so difficult? "I'm sorry dearest," I say. "I'm frustrated myself. Day and night, it seems, I'm slipping into or out of a phase, a dream, a story retold, wrongly told. Perhaps all these stories come from TV dramas. OR DRAMAS I WANTED TO WRITE FOR TV. I'm living in a haunted past that no one but I properly remember."

David totes on his joint and I swallow some Schlitz malt liquor. Drinking, from time to time, seems to calm my nerves. Although drinking's something I never did before the change unless you count Dr. Wizard's magic potion which has alcohol in it. But I don't remember actually drinking the potion.

"I don't recall Señora's past visits," I admit. "After Juanita left, Mrs. Gonzales cooked for me and Jason, helped me with the domestic chores. She was going to wet nurse my baby. Then the flood ripped her own baby from her arms. Did I ever tell you how I rescued her and little Rosita during the flood?"

"Yes, Honey Bee, I've READ your remarkable story."

"READ my story? I NEVER WROTE IT DOWN."

"BUT YOU DID, HONEY BEE. BUT YOU DID."

"Well," I say with exasperation. "What happened to little Rosita? Who were those three children at the pig roast? They don't belong to Mrs. Gonzalez or was the girl Rosita at seven years old? HAVE FIVE YEARS PASSED ME BY?"

"Rosita?" David asks with frustration. "I never heard of Rosita."

I decide not to pursue the matter, for now. I'm beginning to feel like no one, including David, wants me to know what really happened to that poor little girl that I rescued from the Hassayampa flood, because of my delicate state of mind. I'M ABOUT TO ASK DAVED TO SHOW ME THESE REMARKABLE STORIES I SUPPOSEDLY WROTE but Wynona Gonzalez Grant pulls up in the distinctive wagon from the pig roast AND toots her horn.

I GREET HER on the front porch AS David chillS on the swing WITH his Zap and Mad political magazines.

“Hello, Martha,” Gonzalez says as she carries a large bag over her shoulder, a carpet bag. She approaches and hugs me like she had at the pig roast. She wears her hair pulled back from her face and dresses like a man, except for her fetching dewdrop earrings. Her leather jacket smells of a vaquero.

“Señora, good to see you,” I utter. I don’t want to cause any confusion by calling her Mrs. Gonzalez.

The woman glances at David who shrugs. One evening, not so long ago, David was on the porch with some of our friends while I was inside sewing in front of the TV. I turned down the drama and listened to David saying that I sometimes acted really wigged-out and didn’t seem to know how anything worked and that I didn’t remember what happened to Jason and how David came to the farm. I didn’t confront David about this. I simply let it ride because I didn’t want him to know I had been eavesdropping. In truth, I can’t help but feel that I’m the topic of conversation for a lot of townsfolk. But this is nothing new. People have found me a fascinating subject to discuss ever since Uncle Willie brought me to his mansion in Frisco AND learned I could predict misfortunes.

“How are we feeling, Martha?” Señora asks as we stand on the L-shaped porch. “Been keeping your dream notes in the diary I brought you?”

“My Lady Pioneer Diary, you mean?” I ask. Mrs. Gonzalez merely nods and I say no more. I’m fully aware that this Mexican woman didn’t give me the diary. It was a gift from Cousin Constance soon after I arrived in the Territory. Suddenly, the thought comes to my mind that I haven’t even written my cousin since living in sin with David and I haven’t received a letter from her either.

“I write in my diary religiously,” I tell Wynona, hoping to say the right thing. “Just as you suggested. Writing settles my mind. THAT’S WHY I WRITE STORIES AND DITTIES.”

“Far out,” the Mexican woman says. She is quiet for a moment, as if wondering what to expect after my flashback behavior at the pig roast party.

“Would you like some freshly baked bread?” I politely ask, hoping to make her more comfortable. Hoping that I’m acting the right way. SAYING THE RIGHT THINGS. IT’S TRICKY TO MANEUVER MY WORDS IN SUCH A WAY.

“I thought I smelled something wonderful.” Wynona follows me inside. David remains on the swing. He doesn’t want to interrupt me during the session.

Wynona sits at Jason’s pinewood table, polished and finished by David. Meanwhile, I zap two cups of mint tea in the RadarRange and set them on the table along with the pioneer bread. I smile brightly at Señora, genuinely liking the woman who is no longer wife to Jose Gonzalez and living in a small adobe hut near the barn. Is she even the woman I rescued with her child during last year’s flood? I have to ask myself. The woman Jason brought to the farm? She never mentioned that story at the pig roast and I don’t want to bring it up now. I have too many other matters on my mind, although I do want to know about Rosita.

I slice and butter some bread, add David’s honey, and hand it to Wynona whispering, “I know David worries about me. I know that’s why he asked you here. For me and for my baby. I know we . . .”

“Bonkers, doesn’t this taste heavenly!” Wynona interrupts me. She then sips HER tea.

“Pioneer bread like they used to make.” I’m rather proud of my statement, one I’ve heard David say. It’s easy to jape when living in synchronized time. EASIER THAN COMING UP WITH THE RIGHT ANSWER TO SOMEONE’S QUESTION. EASIER THAN DRAWING TOGETHER THE THREADS OF A STORY I ACTUALLY LIVED.

Once the session gets going, I admit to Señora, “You townsfolk and David are the ones who twist stories around and get the facts wrong. Not me. It’s as if everyone’s skunked on laudanum, making a stink of the truth.”

“I’m impressed with your rap, Martha. You have a far out way with words,” Wynona replies. “I hope you’re writing down such thoughts in your diary.” She takes a spiral bound notebook from her huge tote bag and opens it on the table. “I want to read some notes I took during our past sessions. David says you have trouble remembering our past visits. But I have to warn you, they’re mostly about Jason. Do you remember the sessions?” Señora looks sincere and reassuring.

“About Jason?” My interest soars. The notes might explain my strange and present predicament. Perhaps Jason isn’t dead, I’m secretly hoping. Maybe he’ll be back any day now.

“David says you’ve been having trouble since the pig roast. Is that true Martha? Is that when all the trouble started? The bad flash backs! Your failure to remember simple things like turning on the coffee maker or using the blender. Are you living in an afterglow mind?” She takes my hand. “Where is your mind at this moment, Martha? You’ve got to start living in the present and get on with your life. Start thinking of the baby.”

“Jason’s baby?” I ask. Wynona turns pale which makes me wonder if she’s thinking about the baby the Hassayampa ripped from her arms.

“All right,” I say. “I know everyone believes Jason’s been dead for three years and that the baby is David’s. This confusion started the day of that party, when I last saw you, right after David claimed we got hitched?”

“Exactly.” Wynona pages through her notes. She glances at the front door to see if David peers in from the porch. He’s the type of man who grows too close to a woman, I’ve learned, and must be a part of her entire life. Rather like I imagine James Grant is toward his new wife Señora Gonzalez.

“Here we go.” The woman stops paging through the notebook. “Do you remember our third meeting?”

I shake my head no, feeling frustrated again. But I can’t contrive what I don’t remember. That much is certain. Wynona would catch me in the lie. Everyone else does, especially David. He knows when I’m saying things just to go along with his version of facts and notions. There are simply too many opinions in this world! If only I could convince everyone of my truths, as twisted as they may seem. Most often, however, I tell myself it doesn’t matter that I can’t remember other people’s facts. God and my husband love and protect me. That should be all that matters.

Wynona reads from her notes words she claims I once spoke. I’m fit to be tied because my beloved protector left me alone on the farm. His country called him to war. To fight to the death, if need be. Wynona glances at me. I’m listening but can’t believe, no matter how hard I try, that I ever spoke such words. Deep in my heart I don’t believe Jason has somehow died at war. I know for a fact he survived the War of Rebellion.

“You feel anger and sorrow,” Wynona tells me. “That’s natural. But it’s been three years. How are you feeling about Jason now?”

I sit back and think long and hard about my answer. I desperately want to talk about Jason but it's one of those topics that scares people about me. "Well," I say at last, seeing anticipation in Wynona's eyes. "I appreciate being with Jason. I love him, sure. He always brings me gifts and allows me to live at peace with myself. Never asks about my captivity."

"Captivity?" Wynona seems surprised. "Tell me about this captivity."

"You don't know?"

Wynona shakes her head and waits for my response. Now is the era of "women burning their bras and men burning their draft cards." The era of freedom. Not captivity. I'm remembering something David recently told me. I do remember some things, certain things, as I try to make sense of the vast and varied circumstances of my present situation.

"With the Pawnee in Kansas," I say. "When I was the same age as your little Rosita!"

"My Rosita?" Gonzalez has a perplexed look.

"Oh, never mind," I say, convinced now that the little girl has somehow died and it's too painful for Mrs. Gonzalez to talk about. Instead of pressing her on the matter and trying to learn who these other three children are, I ask to see her spiral notebook hoping to find answers to the perplexing questions filling my mind in this synchronized transmogrified time.

Wynona passes me the spiral and I page through it looking for notes about Jason, Rosita, or the medicine man dream I had in Frisco. This dream is the only relic of my captivity in my memory. Maybe I'll learn what he said to me when emerging from his cave. Maybe his words are about Jason's fate.

"Tell me more about your Pawnee captivity," the large woman persists.

“No, I’d rather not.” I pass back the notebook, disappointed I didn’t find notes about the dream. Suddenly, I’m feeling rather mocked. Made into a joke. It’s a feeling that sometimes overtakes me when I’m with other people. I’ve felt this way my whole life especially these days with the new set of townsfolk in this new time. But I never reveal this to anyone, not even David. It would confuse them even more, and probably me too.

“Do you remember when David first came to Wickenburg?” Wynona asks.

“Pard arrived on the Concord Stage. Jason wanted me to meet him in town. But I don’t want to talk about David. Did I ever mention a dream about a medicine man?”

“Not that I recall. Tell me about it. Tell me what’s been troubling you, Mattie. Are you dropping acid? Did you find David’s stash?”

“Mattie?” I look at the social worker, shocked. “You just called me Mattie. No one around here calls me Mattie. Not since before, since I left . . . Not since before the pig roast party.”

“Why, you’re right, Martha. Slip of the tongue. And what an old-fashioned name.”

“Yes,” I mumble. “Very old fashioned. Like my pioneer bread.” I glance to see if David’s at the door. I want him beside me now. Fear bubbles up inside me. I feel a foreboding coming on like I used to. My heart and head are pounding. Something is going to happen. Another change, another transmogrification. I want David at my side or I might lose him like I’ve so mysteriously lost Jason.

“David,” I call, but Wynona touches my wrist.

“Let’s just you and me talk, sister.” From across the table, the woman gently strokes my hand. Her gesture is calming.

“You know,” I say, suddenly wanting to tell everything to the woman. Wynona will help me, believe me, unlike everyone else. We survived the flood together. I saved her life and the life of her little Rosita. “I get the feeling that I don’t belong here. I mean, I’m not from here yet this is my home. And I love David so deeply. But this is Jason’s farm.”

“Just keep writing about your dreams, your thoughts, and jot down your cute little poems you call ditties. WRITE MORE STORIES ABOUT THE TERRITORIAL DAYS. MAYBE THAT WILL HELP YOU MOVE ALONG AND SETTLE YOUR MIND.” Wynona ends the evening’s session with a remark I’m sure she’s made many times before. “In time, you’ll sort everything out.”



Chapter 14: Dream Notes

Martha

Fragments of feelings I thought I once knew,
Emotions caught up with the times,
Periodically thinking of what I might do,
leaving old memories behind.

Will I continue this broken-up pace?
Will things become easy and smooth?

Will it all happen this time, this place
Or must I continue to move?

Fragments of feelings
I know I once had,
Locked-up in a past far away.
I can feel it coming, a time to be glad
And a beautiful lifetime to play.

When it comes to writing in the leather-bound Dream Notes Diary that I used to call my Lady Pioneer Diary, I'm not sure if my words are from a dream, from stories and ditties I've imagined, or if I'm having a "fucking flashback." I write when I'm not sewing, tending animals, watching TV, hanging out with friends or in bed having relations with David. I carry my diary around the farm in the buckskin tote bag with fringe that David made for me a long time ago.

Soon after I awoke in my transmogrifying bed in my rearranged house, I found the tote hanging in the armoire. It contained my Jack Bowie knife and my derringer. When I showed the gun to David, he took it from me and said he's keeping it until I get my "head together and stopped freaking out." Uncle's watch wasn't in the tote. This makes me sad. Now more than ever I want to keep track of time.

I've suffered a tremendous memory loss. Years have passed me by and I'm now living in a psychedelic era of new and improved patents. It's a time when everyone's taking magic potions, popping pills, smoking locoweed, and behaving outrageously. People are

protesting a war that evidently took Jason from our Hassayampa farm. It's a time of social movements and unrest. I ask myself, are people suffragists or feminists? Abolitionists or Civil Rights activists? It's hard to reckon which with so much confusion and so many changes.

Women dress like men or like captives. Men dress like Apache scouts. And nobody behaves with any decency. If I'm actually dreaming, which I suspect to be the truth, well, that explains everything. Especially with Jason still being away. He'd be back by now if this were actuality. But why am I presently sleeping with Jason's partner David? (Because it's just a dream).

As time passes, I find life with David similar to my life with Jason before the flood. In my gardens are herbs, tomatoes, string beans, and a variety of chilies. I tend chickens and goats, but now I have a house cat named Mary Todd after Mrs. Lincoln. Everything I'd ever want is on my farm. The peculiarities of this world won't frazzle my mind, I'm determined. I have the baby to think about. Jason's baby, I'm sure.

Both Jason and David bring me contentment, each in his own way. In return, both men seem gratified growing and raising food, fodder, and cash crop. They are both hunters, veteran soldiers, and farmers. Men who prospect for gold. Jason uses a Winchester. David hunts with a Remington and his dogs are Pointers that retrieve Gambel's quail and rabbits.

Everything isn't entirely as before Jason rebuilt the farm after the flood. There is no windmill. Instead, water is piped into the house and to David's nursery and cash crop of locoweed. Edison lightbulbs and electrical gadgets abound. The entire farm has electricity.

I especially love the modern country kitchen. Water flows from a faucet into a white porcelain basin, the Harvest Gold Kenmore stove miraculously heats food, and a large ice

box keeps food cool and frozen. I have a rotary washer, a dryer, and a chrome Amana RadarRange that heats up a frozen Swanson's in five minutes. Both stove, microwave, and 'fridge, as David calls them, operate on electricity although I'm confounded that one thing makes heat and the other makes ice when the energy comes from the same source. Improved upon patents make my head spin but they make chores much easier. No wonder Mrs. Gonzalez no longer helps me in the kitchen.

The world has moved away from me like a runaway carriage charging down Mission Street in the fog of San Francisco. Loud noises drown out the gentler desert sounds. Horseless wagons called slug bugs and two wheeled bicycles rip down new roads near the farm. Most amazingly, people actually do fly in steel birds that make sonic booms over the desert, a noise so loud it makes thunder sound like Mary Todd's purr. Sometimes I wonder if the airship inventors of the fifties envision such marvels. David claims that just four years back men actually landed on the Moon. I don't believe him and tell him this is a story by Jules Verne called From the Earth to the Moon that involves gun enthusiasts after the War of Rebellion who shoot themselves to the Moon.

David has hundreds of disks that create music on his Edison cylinder phonograph patent. I once read in Harpers about Edison reading "Mary had a little lamb" on his first recording the year after Sarah Josepha Hale of Godey's penned this little ditty. David calls the phonographic recorder a Pioneer stereo with JBL speakers. He bought it after he returned from Nam. David's albums have curious names, some from tales by Dickens like Uriah Heep and Jethro Tull. The turner plays disk music I've grown to like. Or maybe I'm just becoming used to it. The fanciful lyrics tend to replace my confusing thoughts rather like TV serials.

What I find most curious, after the transmogrification, are the books lining the waterbed's headboard shelves. Other than a copy of David's Leaves of Grass, there are several books on the history Arizona, Wickenburg, Native tribes, the Civil War, and a few about a war going on in this place called Vietnam—the Green Berets, The Quiet American, and The Pentagon Papers, to name a few.

About a week after the pig roast, I ask David about these books while we're relaxing on the commodious bed. I've noticed them before but too many other things are happening all at once and I reason that the Whitman book is David's and assume all the other books are his as well because I don't recognize any of them. What he tells me is astonishing and I'm not sure I believe him.

"These are all your books, Martha," David says. "Except for Whitman's book of poems. You gave that one to me."

"I don't remember any of these books." I'm feeling perplexed yet again.

"Before Jason got drafted you were putting together Jason's and your genealogy for the children you intended to have. In Nam, Jason talked about you all the time. Said you uncovered that his great-granddaddy was a Civil War veteran from Pennsylvania. He was proud of you for learning that little fact. It made him proud to know his ancestor served in the Union Army fighting a virtuous war, a war with purpose and honor, so unlike the clusterfuck of Nam."

"I don't remember all this," I say with frustration. Maybe I'm angry at myself for forgetting so much or at David for trying to convince me of something that isn't true. "Jason comes from a farm in Pennsylvania," I say defensively. "And I was born in Chicago. Surely, I told you about the Kansas tornado that killed my folks and brothers. About how the

Pawnee held me captive until dragoon soldiers rescued me. About how my uncle traveled across the frontier to fetch me and take me to his mansion in Frisco."

"No. Martha," David insists as he sits up in the wobbly bed to fire up a joint. "These are stories you concocted based on all your research."

"I don't believe you. Where's all this supposed research?" I also sit up and lean against the headboard of books but decline to take a hit from the joint. At the moment I don't want my mind any more stretched out than it already is.

"It's in a folder," David tells me and takes another lengthy hit.

"FOLDER?"

"YES. A FOLDER with THE pictures, NEWSCLIPPINGS, and records your cousin sent you." David blows out masterful smoke rings which always fascinate me. I've never seen anyone do such a thing. Certainly not Jason with his Habana cigars or Uncle with his pipe of cherry tobacco.

"Cousin Constance? In San Francisco?" I put my finger through his smoke rings, to make him smile. I feel like we were getting somewhere. "Does THIS FOLDER CONTAIN LETTERS FROM MY COUSIN Constance?"

"IN FACT, IT DOES, Honey Bee, ALONG WITH THE STORIES YOU WROTE."

"Show me so I can write Constance a long letter. Maybe she CAN advise me about what was going on."

David maneuvers around in the wobbly bed and pulls out a folder tucked inside one of the headboard cabinets in a place I had overlooked. A sort of stash box shelf. I scan the contents in the folder and can't believe that I hand wrote the notes AND STORIES. But I

must have because they're in my script. SOME OF THE notes and documents indicate that Jason was born and raised in Wickenburg and that my mother and I had moved to Wickenburg from Berkeley. It's unnerving to read something in my own script that I never wrote. "I don't know who wrote this," I say. "It wasn't me because none of it's true. EXCEPT MAYBE FOR THE STORIES THAT you claim I wrote but I SWEAR I DIDN'T write them. SOMEONE ELSE DID USING MY SCRIPT." I continue skimming over the handwritten stories then add, "David. THESE AREN'T STORIES TO ME. THESE ARE RECORDS OF MY ACTUAL LIFE. JASON'S LIFE. AND HOW I REALLY MET YOU ON THE concord stage from Sante fe."

"NO Martha. THESE ARE STORIES YOU WROTE. Love stories. Adventure stories based on your interest in the territorial history of Arizona post-Civil War. During the Reconstruction."

"This isn't true, DAVID. I never knew my mother and her name was Fredericka Johnston not Marie."

"Martha." David picks up the folder I set aside. "I wantED you to see ALL THIS STUFF to help you with your memory problems." He pulls out a daguerreotype of my mother, the one I remember uncle Willie gave me, a long long time ago. On the back he shows me her name, Fredericka.

I gaze at the picture long and hard. "Yes," I finally say. "That was my mother. Uncle's sister."

"No. Martha. Your cousin sent you this picture of your great-great-grandmother who came out to California on the Sante Fe trail."

“Constance in San Francisco sent this to me?” I ask, gazing at my real mother’s face and thinking that I COULD HAVE CONFUSED THE FACT THAT COUSIN gave me the picture instead of uncle Willie. IT’S A SMALL ENOUGH DETAIL THAT I can accept.

“Your cousin sent you a lot of these genealogical documents and microfiche articles from Harpers about the Civil War, Lincoln, and notable women of the 1800s. Your father also sent you some of these records.”

“Records? Documents?” I ask. “How? Why?”

“Because your father’s a professor of history at UC Berkeley and your cousin works in the university’s library.”

“That’s preposterous. My father died in that Kansas tornado. His name was Conrad Johnston.”

“NO. HIS NAME IS WILLIAM BACHMAN. This is the problem, Martha. You’re mixing up your ancestry with your reality. No one died in your family tree from a Kansas tornado. You great-great-grandfather was Conrad Johnston. He made it to California with his parents, you showed me the records. But his little sister Josephine didn’t. Your great-great-great-aunt was the little girl the Pawnee captured from the wagon train outside of Independence. Not you. And yes, dragoon soldiers tried to rescue her but the band of warriors had killed her before they arrived.”

“No, no! You’re so wrong,” I protest. Then David shows me a news clipping from the 1850s. “This is a microfiche copy that your cousin sent. See, it’s stamped from the UC Berkeley library.”

I glanced at the clipping and read about a Pawnee band of warriors CAPTURING AND KILLING a three-year-old girl name Josephine. Still, I’m not convinced that this has

anything to do with my own capture and captivity. But instead of insisting that I was also a Pawnee captive, I decide to go along with David's version. For the time being, that is. "If I came out here with this Marie, this woman you claim is my real mother, where is she now? Shouldn't she be seeing me through my time of confusion?"

David takes me in his arms for comfort. "That's part of the problem you're having, Queen Bee. You mother died."

"Died? I know. A tornado killed her." David gives me an exacerbated glance so I ask, "How did this Marie die?"

"You don't like talking about it."

"Tell me anyway. How else am I going to get my head together?"

"While we were in Nam Jason mentioned that your mom was a religious woman, so unlike your hippie professor dad connected to the anti-war protests. Evidently, HE had an affair and your mom left San Francisco with you. SHE REFUSED TO file for divorce BECAUSE OF her religion. Your mom and dad were a mismatch, I remember Jason saying, and they must have pulled your mind from side to side. It's no wonder you're confused and living in synchronized time."

"Had an affair? With whom?"

"With Connie, the librarian at UC Berkeley. Your mother's cousin."

"Now you're being outlandish, David. Cousin Constance is WILLIAM BACHMAN'S daughter! AND WILLIAM BACHMAN IS MY DEAR UNCLE."

"She's young enough to be your father's daughter, as I understand it."

“Go on,” I press. “I don’t want to get entangled in another falsehood story while I’m trying to work one out. I need to keep my focus. What happened to this Marie? My so called real mother.”

“She brought you out here to Wickenburg when you were about fourteen. During your senior year at Wickenburg High, just before Jason took you to the prom...” David hesitates a moment and takes hold of my hand. “Martha,” he continues. “I’m only telling you this to help you recover from some sort of amnesia. I’m hoping your notes and stories will jog your memory.”

“Go on David. What happened to Marie?”

“She took a bottle of pills. Of barbiturates, I’m sorry to say. And killed herself in a gas station restroom. I guess she tumbled into such a dark place and had no other escape. I don’t want that to happen to you, Queen Bee. I don’t want you to go there. To this very dark and dismal place.”

“No. I’m not going anywhere because I haven’t been anywhere but here, on my Hassayampa farm!” I pull from David and stand from the wiggly bed. “You’re talking about the girl at the Greyhound bus depot. Fran told me about her during the pig roast. Or, maybe it was the soiled-dove Jason talked about. At the Bucket Of Blood Saloon in Wickenburg Town. One or the other. Not my mother! I never even knew her.”

David crawls from bed and gently touches my face. “Marie was your mother, Martha. After her funeral, Jason brought you to this farm in that yellow school bus. He inherited this little stretch of land from his grandparents. I’m sorry about this Honey Bee. I truly thought you had recovered from the shock of your mother’s death but I guess her suicide is something you can never get over like the trauma of losing Jason.”

I place my hand on David's and sigh. "Maybe you're right about all this. I'm just not sure which parts of my life I've lived and which parts were actually dreams. But I don't want to confuse you any more than I already have and I don't want to insist on knowing my past when I don't know what I actually know. But one thing's for certain."

"What's that Bumble Bee?" David asked.

"I don't want to read any of these books or review the notes AND STORIES you say I wrote. BURN MY NOTES AND Take THESE damn BOOKS to Snider's headshop. Let me just live on my farm with you, in the present. Without any genealogy or history to contemplate or rewrite."



Chapter 15: Learn to Think Wisely or Cease to Read

Martha

How do you know–what you might feel?

How can you say–so far away?

Seized up by past, old feelings don't last.

Locked in their room

(you'll free them too soon),

and shovel away, what never could stay,

oh, what a play–these lines of dismay,

Future Feelings.

I have no future feelings,

At the moment I can say,

As for what the future brings me,

Might it be another day!

I ask David to bring back a Harper's Weekly on his run to town. "Harpers?" he asks. "They're the ones who broke the story the year Jason and I were drafted."

"What story?" I'm sitting in my rocker stitching a corset. David's on the porch swing reading one of his political cartoon periodicals. The day is bright and as soon as I finish my sewing, I intend to walk along the river with David's pointers Big Boy and Mama Girl.

"The story about the My Lai massacre," David says.

"Massacre? Are you talking about the Loring Massacre?" I ask. "That was six years ago. Long after Jason walked away from the war. Just before he brought me out to the farm, I'll have you know."

"No, I'm talking about the massacre in Nam when Charlie Company killed 500 women, children, and old people. They all went dinky dau and burned down hooches with Zippo lighters."

"There've been lots of massacres on the frontier. Lots of pillaging and slaughter. Soldiers killing the natives, even women and children. Renegades killing settlers. Pure evil plagues the hearts of men."

David is silent. He doesn't "dig rapping" about the war and he's learned not to agitate me when I'm in a synchronized state of afterglow. When my ramblings mismatch his, which happens more often than not. I've decided to disregard nearly everything David said about the books on the waterbed headboard. And despite my so-called stories and notes about Jason and my genealogies, I refuse to believe I wrote them and came up with such an alternative reality to my existence. I'm glad David gave the books to the Wickenburg library. And I'm thankful he doesn't say anything more about my stories and research. I have no intention of looking back in that folder. I plan to focus on my Dream Notes Diary because in are my ditties and notes about how I'm feeling in my present days on the farm. It's basically my Lady Pioneer Diary but for some reason it's now called dream notes. In it there aren't any contradictory notions about me and my past or any talk about a mother who killed herself probably because of me.

Late in the afternoon, David returns from town and hands me a Harper's Magazine and a Harper's Bazaar. I ask about Harper's Weekly and he claims that Harper's hasn't published its weekly periodical for fifty years. Now I know for certain that the world changes under my feet.

Harper's Magazine has also changed. It contains short "wraparound" reports and commentaries such as "What may yet befall we know not" and "Down the up Staircase" which are fitting titles for my life. Among the pages of Harper's Bazaar, I read that Harper's Weekly will reemerge next year as a periodical of civilization. The editors want readers to contribute their views. They promise to publish "the swath of human consciousness." It's a lofty notion, I can't help but think, even for Harper. No wonder the periodical stopped its initial run.

In truth, I'm finding that current events are simply too topsy-turvy for me and I avoid the Eyewitness News on TV and I won't ask David to bring me another Harper's. As my favorite poetess once wrote of such delusions let the mind take heed and learn to think or wisely cease to read.

Sometimes, after we make love and I'm snuggling in David's arms, he likes to rap about lofty current events. This is so unlike Jason who turns over and snores when he finishes having his way with me. Fact is, Jason and I never cuddle.

"The president's killing was enough monumental news for my lifetime," I admit one evening in bed. I'm lightly tickling David's back, something he loves for me to do.

"Dig it," David says. "But what about Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Bobby."

"I don't know these names except for Martin Luther and I feel frustrated again. Tell me about the movements of the times. It's the seventies, right?" I ask.

David agrees and talks about President Johnson and the Civil Rights and Black Power movement.

"Yes, yes. Vice President Johnson became President after the killing of our great leader," I say. "But he was a cad who didn't promote the wellbeing of black people."

"Yes, he did, Babes!" David sits up on the wiggly bed and proceeds to roll his after-sex doobie. "Maybe you think Johnson is a cad because he increased troop deployment in Nam to stop the commies from invading Hawaii and San Francisco! That's when all hell broke loose."

"Our dear president declared victory before Johnson even took over the reins," I state as a fact. When I see David's puzzled look, I ask, "Isn't Rutherford Hayes the president? Grant didn't run a third term, as I so vividly recall."

“Nixon’s president, Bumble Bee. Grant is Wynona’s husband. Tricky Dicky gave Jason the Medal of Honor.”

“No, that was Grant. After the war between North and South,” I declare, sitting up as best I can on the water bubble and leaning against the massive headboard now emptied of all those books I refused to read. Except for Whitman’s book of poems and a collection of poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning that David bought for me in town.

“The north and south signed peace accords in Paris at the first of the year and newly re-elected Tricky Dicky declared a ceasefire. Hanoi released POWs and the US is withdrawing troops. The draft is over, Honey Cup Girl.”

Not letting David confuse me any further, I stand my ground and say, “I know black men got the vote when the 15th Amendment passed. That was the year before I met Jason.” David now looks disparagingly at me so I correct myself and say what I think he believes. “I mean, the year he went to Nam.”

“We went to war shortly after the Kent State shootings. . .”

“The what?”

“When the national guards opened fire on students protesting Nixon’s wartime bombings. They shot sixty-seven bullets, wounded nine students and killed four. The year was a monumental time in history.” David tokes on his doobie, hands it to me, and says, as if in an effort to compromise, “As was the era of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Nat Turner, and Booker T Washington.”

“I’ve read the Narrative of Sojourner Truth and I’ve read about Harriet Tubman, the Moses of her people, heroine of the Underground Rail Road,” I eagerly relate, pleased we have common knowledge about something. “My uncle had these books in his collection. He

was a great supporter of suffragists and abolitionists. Sojourner Truth was both. She was a Union spy during the war. A true heroine of mine."

"Right on. Babes. But you know you rap about a movement from a century ago. Today, black people vote, women vote, soon 18-year-olds will vote. 'Old enough to fight, old enough to vote' they say. And everyone can own property. Now, my dear lady, is the era of the ERA and Black Panthers."

"Black Panthers?"

"Yes. I was a Black Panther before Uncle Sam drafted me. The movement became too radical when I returned to the world. Now I'm a peace-loving man. I believe in black power and black is beautiful, but. . ." He hits the doobie and blows me a pot kiss. "Most of all, I believe in making love to my lady!" Once David speaks of sexual congress, I know he's waylaid our conversion and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets of the Portuguese fill my mind . . . When our two souls stand up erect and strong, Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher, Until the lengthening wings break into fire.

—

"Lucky we don't have a phone," David mentions one evening. We are snuggling on the bean bag chair watching the Waltons. He's teasing me for being so reclusive, the Hermit of Wynona's tarot cards.

I hate to seem so ignorant but from time to time I have to ask questions. "Okay," I say, "What's a phone? Alexander Graham Bell's invention of last year? The telephone."

"Come on. The telephone wires crossing the country belong to Bell."

"Yes, yes, I know. Alexander Graham's patent spread across the nation like word of the gold strike in forty-nine," I respond teasingly. "I think this phone is the telegraph system

expanded into houses. That isn't too odd. So, with this phone, would we tap-out messages? I'm afraid I never learned Morse code."

"You're tripping again, Babes. Stop acting like you know nothing. You're psyching me out."

"I'm just curious. Maybe we should get this phone. Then what would we do?"

David hugs me closely as John Boy Walton says good-night to his family. It's such a wholesome program to watch. "Why, you could call Fran, Wynona or Becky and gossip to your heart's content. Have a chick clucking bee. And I can call you from Snider's Peace Pipe while I'm in town. Especially with your due date approaching. I won't leave your side when the baby comes, Honey Bee Mama."

He pecks my neck with kisses and I try to imagine this device, an obvious improvement on the telegraph. "So, I would just 'call' out into this phone and Franny, I mean Fran would hear me?"

"Come on Martha, stop it."

"I will," I say. "But I want a phone."

"Really?" David looks surprised. "You once insisted we never get a phone. I'm lucky you let me have the TV which you watch all the time now, Lady."

"I fancy the incredible love stories. The faces in the dramas are now part of my everyday life. They even occur in my dreams like the townsfolk do. Anyway, I've changed my mind. It's a woman's prerogative to change her mind, I've heard tell. I want a phone."

"Anything for the light of my life," David says.

—

Unlike Jason, David doesn't mind when I walk alone along the river which ripples down the valley as before. "There aren't any Yavapai and Apache warriors shooting arrows at settlers. No renegades, no road-agents," David assures me. "Maybe there's a few bad dudes in town. But that's all."

David often walks with me to the stream like Jason used to do once in a while. But David trifles with me. He likes to banter and tease, be happy, be funny, cavort, and frolic. We splash each other in the river until we passionately embrace. It's the most incredible part of my new life, my living in a perpetual dream-state. I feel entirely free. Uninhibited. In love with a man of color. A Black Panther of power. No one seems to take note of our interracial marriage. Although David says some folks in town wouldn't like seeing us together. I figure these people are the Hortons, the few bad dudes in town. But then I remember that Ben Horton is one of David's friends.

As the child grows in my belly David and I seldom mention Jason anymore. It's simply too painful. Jason's not coming home, everyone tells me. And soon I start to believe that he probably is dead and that the Hortons killed him. When David tells me Jason died in an ambush during the civil war of Viet Nam, I argue that the war is long over. "Reconstruction is in progress!" I suggest. After that, our rap session ends. It's too trippy to argue twisted illogic, for both me and David. It's a matter of learning how to talk to each other, of knowing what not to say and when to say whatever either of us needs to say (and not become too curious).

One Sunday morning, as we are relaxing on the waterbed after having pleasures, David claims that the waterbed makes sex more sensual. I run my fingers through the coils of his hair, touch his mutton chops, and say, “Tell me about your Navaho wife, David.”

“What?” He feels my forehead. “You all right, Honey Cup?”

“Tell me about Mai. In Nam,” I add, trying to help the conversation along. Because David talks about coming back to the world from Nam, I’m now thinking that Nam might be New Mexico Territory, or any territory beyond where we live in Arizona which is the world to me. “What was she like? Did you love her as much as you love me?”

“You talking about Ma’li from Saigon?”

“Well, yes. I mean Ma’li from Saigon, although I thought her name was Maria. You did mention once she had a native name. Mai.”

“Babes, I’ve already said Ma’li was a boom boom girl at a brothel outside our base. She gave me head, I gave her bread and booked. Who knows who fathered her kid. Doubt it was me, somehow.”

“But she had the child, a boy. Your son. And the fever took them both.”

“Martha, I couldn’t possibly love anyone as much as I love you and that’s just how it is.”

“David! You did love her. You told me that, a long time ago. She was an Earth Seer, like me, like your Auntie.”

“What? Oh sure, I suppose I said that.” I know he’s humoring me.

“Tell me how you met her,” I press, wanting to hear the story of the Navaho woman who led David and Jason through the hills of northern New Mexico Territory. I don’t want to mention Jason’s name, however. It seems to bring about too much confusion.

“Well, okay man, if you insist. Vietnam was a place of R&R whores and drugs on base and when humping the boonies. Heroin, amphetamines, and khan sa everywhere. It was potent and cheap. We needed it to keep calm after a battle. Uncle Sam himself gave us pep pills to keep us alert on long range recon patrols. GI pills pumped us with bravado. We felt invulnerable. In med kits the Army provided Darvon, codeine, and Dexedrine that we called Mad Dogs. Medics gave out sedatives and shot us with steroids before missions. The Nam was a place of getting high and going out of your mind.”

“That’s why so many veterans are morphine addicts,” I say, recalling Jason’s story about orderlies giving wounded soldiers laudanum, opium, and morphine to ease their pain. I look at David. His expression is heavy. Like Jason, David doesn’t like recalling the war. I return to the matter I asked. “And your woman in Nam?”

“Ma’li was a whore, like I said, but she had to make a living. And she seemed decent enough, pretty too. Dep qua.”

“Long black hair,” I suggest.

“Right on. Bitchen long black hair. For a while I saw her a lot. But then the war turned ugly near the time of Operation Jefferson Glenn when Jason saved my life. We were patrolling commie rocket belts at the edge of the mountains in Thua Thien, Hue Provence. Shot up with steroids, we were using our primeval instincts to forage the jungle swamps and rice paddies.”

“Were you riding Ghost?” I ask while trying to understand the story David now tells, with new names of people and places.

“Ghost riding now? You are one weird pussy cat,” David laughs. “We were riding point in the boonies.”

He stops. His reddened eyes begin to water. His mind is back in the war. I know the look. Jason had it from time to time, ESPECIALLY WHEN I AWOKE THE GRIZZ. But now David's mind is in a faraway place called "Nam." Long ago, before the flood and bushwhacking, David told me the story of finding Jason on the battlefield. It's the one war story Jason liked to relate. David's new story distorts the facts. He and Jason were in the war between North and South, before their riding days in the Territories (David keeps saying "back in the States"). And in his upside-down version, Charlie kills Jason while Jason's saving David's life. Not the other way around. At least both stories happened during the war and in both Jason receives a Medal of Honor. But David embellishes his new version with monumental claims I simply don't remember hearing about. He insists Tricky Dicky awarded Jason's Medal of Honor posthumously to me, as next of kin, in a ceremony at the White House. For Jason's distinguished valor. For giving up his life to disrupt an enemy raid and to save his comrade soldiers.

But that's not how it happened. Jason recaptured the Union flag on the battlefield outside of Nashville. I know this for a fact. I've held his medal before which brings up another mystery. Once upon a time Jason kept his Medal of Honor in a tin box under the bed with his deeds and documents. But now his stash box is gone along with lots of other things. Gone or replaced. And his golden five-pointed star with an eagle on a bar and a blue ribbon is in a box kept in the new headboard cabinet.

I know it pains David to recall Jason's last act of bravery. Perhaps he thinks it's disrespectful to me because I was Jason's Rib. And now, as it appears, if Charlie hadn't killed Jason, David wouldn't be sharing my bed. "I'm sorry." I reach over and wipe David's

eyes with the sheet and kiss him tenderly. “We don’t have to talk about the war between North and South.”

He deeply inhales. “It’s cool, Babes. I think taking helps. Wynona says we should rap about everything. Dig deep into the psyche, into the things that traumatized us, expand the soul. Set free the chains that bind us.”

“You mean, carry a hymn in our hearts?” I suggest and bring a smile to David’s lips. He has a very becoming smile, I’m thinking as I ask, “You never saw Ma’li after the war?”

“Nope. Never thought about her either. After I got my discharge papers things got complicated. Besides, I had to look you up. Tell you about Jason. About how he,” David sighs, his mind slips away again, back into the war. Into the Nam.

I place his strong callused hand on my belly where the child sleeps in the darkness of my womb. I’ve decided to never again tell David the child belongs to Jason. What good does it do? David’s happy. Satisfied. I’m happy. Content. And Jason, it seems, may never be coming back to the world of our little farm.

David pulls me against him in the wiggly bed. He cries the tears of a man who buried the dead in a gruesome, unthinkable war. A man who has haunting memories in places best left untouched. In my mind, he is much like myself. Except, I’ve never been to war, I’m not a brave soldier, and I cannot remember a past that sometimes haunts me. The past David and others insist that I lived.

“David,” I say with my hand on his face to comfort him. “I don’t care what you or anyone else believes. You saved Jason. You carried him to the hospital tent from that battlefield in Tennessee. It’s what soldiers of color did. They had no choice. Like women.

The Army was reluctant to allow the black man to fight so you aided the wounded and performed burial duties. Lots of women aided the wounded too."

"Martha, no. Stop your rap!" David has grown frustrated with me just when I thought I was saying something relevant and important. Making a good comparison between the suffrage of women and the plight of the black man. But no matter how hard I try, I never get it quite right. How can I when I have no memory of all the things people claim to be true? About me. My past. About Jason. And a mother I clearly don't remember or ever knew.

David begins rolling a doobie. After he lights it, takes a drag, he continues in a calm serious voice, "You know I don't like thinking about that day. God, Martha, I still see him lying there, dead, after he pushed me down the gully, away from the deluge of enemy fire!" David sniffs back his tears and takes another toke.

"But you saved his life!" I insist. "I know you did. I'm not dinky dau. Jason told me the story himself. So did you. I'm so tired of you people switching the truth around." I sit up in the agitating bed. "You feel bad because you slept with me when Jason was gone. Someone killed him, yes, probably in an ambush. But it was you, Mr. David Thompson, who saved my Jason so he could build me this farm. Not the other way around." I suddenly begin crying uncontrollably. Perhaps a memory haunts me. The burden is too heavy sometimes, all the mixed-up truths occurring after the transmogrification. When did I sign up for an all aboard no return ticket?

David puts his arm around me for comfort. But I move away in the floating bed.

"I don't want to hear any more falsehoods, exaggerations, new stupid, stupid places that don't exist," I raise my voice in anger. "Why can't we talk straight with each other?"

“I’m sorry Queen Bee. I’ve pushed your buttons and that’s something I don’t like doing because of your hormonal condition and delicate state of mind. I don’t want to send you to places far worse than my own war time memories. Places of hell. Places that took hold of your mother. I’m not sure how close to dinky dau any of us really are. It’s pretty scary stuff. Especially with the baby. Sometimes I worry that chemicals have fried your brain. But Wynona insists otherwise. She says you are just going through some kind of shit. A lot of grief. You’ve got to stop asking questions.” He shakes my shoulders, slightly, to awaken me from my sobs. “We’ve got to pow wow, Honey Bee. You need to listen to me.”

My eyes widen and I slap the man beside me, scratching his chin, the clean-shaven part of his face. I then jump from the squirmy ridiculous bed, grab my clothes and tote bag, and rush from the house to be alone along the Hassayampa.



Chapter 16: Living in Synchronized Time

Martha

I might say,

That is,

For me,

Reading a poem

Is like taking in hemp.

But the real high

Comes

As I write

My own poem

(upside-down.)

Moments later David finds me at the river where he knows I'll be. On a large rock he sits beside me and puts his bare feet in the cool water. He has learned to live with my moodiness and idiosyncrasies most of the time, like Jason has. David doesn't drop blotter acid anymore, nor purple haze, orange sunshine, windowpane, or white lightning. It's a big step for him, he tells me. He enjoyed tripping on LSD. Although he still takes mescaline when Cookie the Apache scout gives him a peyote button.

We listen to the gurgling river as David takes weed tobacco from a leather pouch at his belt, like a frontiersman. He rolls himself a joint. "We all go around," he says at last. "And somehow, I did for one moment in Nam. I mean. Maybe saving me, saved Jason. Trippy, eh?"

I look at David and feel perplexed but no more than usual. He hands me the doobie. I take a drag of his strong locoweed. It makes me cough. I watch the river glide over stones and twigs, listen to the whistle of flycatchers and the twittering songs of curved bill thrashers. Hummingbirds and butterflies are fluttering over purple lupine and yellow desert poppies along the shore. But I don't see a marigold warbler like I'm always hoping to. Haven't for a very long long time.

“Maybe,” I say at last. “I’m experiencing the other side of what I once knew. Maybe nobody’s that far from the other side of the wheel. Good hickory wheels, Jason liked saying. Good hubs, flanges, spokes. The solid metal strips around them make for good traction and wear.” I take David’s hard and calloused hand. “We need to find our way right side up, Pard. Does any of this make sense?”

“Sure, Babes,” David says. “Your words are as trippy as ever. I just can’t get used to you calling me Pard. Jason called me P and Homey. But to be honest, Honey Bee, even when I’m high, which is most of the time, my head is never as trippy as yours. I’ve never been to this other side. Maybe if I read your Dream Notes Diary, I’ll better understand your mind. I must do something to make you and my baby settled into the world. My world. Our world.”

He looks at me as I throw pebbles into the flowing stream. I’m chilled out now. Mellowed. No longer upset. That’s all that matters.

In the water, David touches my bare feet with his. “I’ll get my head together,” I whisper. “Our baby will keep me from drifting into madness like a Cherry dinky dau in Nam. Like my mother. This Marie. David, tell me the story of how Jason saved your life. Please.”

David skips pebbles on the Hassayampa and I know he’s thinking about the war. It’s written on his face. “Wartime memories are never far away,” he says in his own quiet voice. “They’re implanted in the head like land mines ready to explode.”

“I know. Jason’s that way. I call it the Grizz. Like an old grizzly bear wakes up in him and he explodes, probably like this land mine. But I learned to read Jason like a book. Like a good and proper wife. I learned not to waken the Grizz.”

"Sure Honey Bee. Like that."

David totes his joint and hands it to me. But I don't want anymore. I want a clear head. "So, tell me the story, Pard."

"In the thick of things," he says, "me and Jason are sitting together on a rotting jungle log, taking a smoke break. A reefer break. We're both thinking War is Hell. White grunts smoke Marlborough. Brothers smoke Kool Menthol. But we all smoke Khan sa. Jason lights his smoke with a Zippo engraved with Yea though I walk through the Valley of Death, I'm a mean Motherfucker. A jeweler in Saigon etched it for a dollar bill." He pauses a moment and deeply inhales his j-roll. His khan sa. I know he's back in Nam and I say nothing, not wanting to contradict his memory.

"Jason is a for real cat. A right on dude," David continues. "We're both grunt-riflemen, 11 Bravo fighters, not Rear Echelon Mother Fuckers like Ben's brother Kal. We're on zone reconnaissance patrol, LURP. For six fucking days we've been humping the boonies, losing track of time, wearing filthy OD jungle fatigues, heavy boots, packing ammo, grenades, canteens, enduring ticks and leeches, avoiding vipers, and crawling through razor-sharp elephant grass. We're all high on high alert for landmines, pungi-sticks, and enemy snipers lying-in-wait. Such is the hell of war."

I reach over and affectionately tickle David's arm. "Jason never told me such stories," I say. "I appreciate your telling me now. I know it pains you."

"On my helmet I've drawn a black power salute with a magic marker. Jason wrote Live in peace or die fighting a Mean Motherfucker on his. He carries your photo in the scrim band next to the Ace of Spades which we leave on any dead Charlie we come across

or kill. We're fighting a psychological war of intimidation. Charlie thinks the card is an evil omen. Bad luck for him all around. Stupid mofo."

"Jason carried a daguerreotype of his mother and sister Little Rose. But he lost it after the war. It kept him sane during the turmoil of battle after battle."

"No. Mattie. He carried a picture of you. Your high school photo."

"I'm sorry, Pard. Please finish your story. I won't interrupt anymore."

He takes a few hits while staring ahead at the river. "The jungle is eerily quiet. Don't hear any screeches and howls from birds, monkeys, jackals, and leopards. Even the bugs are silent. This is not a good sign. When the bugs stop buzzing in Nam, the enemy is ready to ambush."

David looks at me beside him, our feet in the stream. I have one hand on my belly over our baby. A breeze rustles the cottonwoods and willows. Across the way, a Harris hawk perches on an ironwood snag and David tumbles back into the Nam. "Jason takes a long drag from his joint. He speaks aloud, breaking the lieutenant's order for total silence. Who knows our future? he says. Here right now. Gone in a second! The ammo guys sitting nearby signal Jason to shut up. Even now, I smell the damp rotting jungle of that day Jason uttered those words before the ambush took his life. I can't understand why a hippie freak like Jason went to Nam. He said you begged him not to go. I guess he didn't want to spend his life running from the draft."

David's so deep into his powerful story that I hesitate to tell him why Jason joined the Union. I think for a moment to carefully choose my words. "Jason was a proud man with a keen sense of patriotism. He believed in the war. He was a Lincoln man. Freedom for all rang in his heart."

“No, he didn’t believe in the fucking war!” David protests. I ended up saying the wrong thing after all. “Jason hated the war as much as I did. The war was an American foreign policy clusterfuck! We were both drafted! And your Mr. Lincoln died a century ago.”

“Jason fought against the South for your freedom, David,” I can’t help but say. I’m really trying to make my new husband feel better.

“Sure, we all fought for democracy. But what you really mean is that we fought against the commie bastards of North Vietnam! Victor Charlie.”

“Oh, of course,” I teasingly push at David’s shoulder. “Twist it all around. And just who are commie bastards? Who is Victor Charlie?”

“You’re right about one thing, Martha. It has to do with freedom. Uncle Sam told us that the communists would take away our freedom in this domino effect. If one country falls, then another and another will crumble until the entire world becomes communist and there will be no freedom.”

“Well, I don’t know about communists but Jason fought to free people of color like you.”

“Like me? A black man.” David is put-off, I can tell. “What are you rapping about? Slavery? Once again, you’re living a hundred years ago.”

“We were both captives, David. You were a slave. The Pawnee held me captive for a year.”

“That was your Great Great Great Aunt Josephine. But yes. Jason and I fought for democracy. For the best government in the world. That’s what we were doing over there, humping the boonies.”

“But what about the commie bastards. Charlie Victor. Were they the slave masters or the slaves themselves?”

David takes a roach clip fastened to a braid of his hair. He attaches it to his joint and deeply inhales. “The communists, I suppose, are both the slaves and slave owners, if you think that living in a communist country means you have no freedom to do what you like. And yet, you support the structure of what you’re doing.”

“If you’re going to confound me, Mr. David Thompson, then leave me in peace.”

“I’m sorry,” he hands me the roach clip with the burning doobie. “It’s just that you confuse me too. I’m trying Babes. I’m really trying. Sometimes, I think we’re both zoning in Nam.”

“Jason never saw his family after the war. But he really wanted to make them proud. That’s why he volunteered.”

“Volunteered!?” David takes back the roach, takes a hit, and holds in the smoke until his lungs practically burst. I know he hates putting me on another wild train of thought which he can easy do if he upsets me by not understanding what I’m saying. To keep himself from becoming frustrated and angry, he does what he typically does and starts singing They call me Mellow Yellow.

“Yes, Jason volunteered,” I persist. “I can’t help but say this. I’m the one who needs to sort out all this confusion and I can’t do so by keeping what I believe to be true to myself. Like all those Northern boys. All those boys who died to keep our nation a free society for all men and women. You and Jason fought with your hearts and souls for the Union.”

“Baby, war changes a man. I knew Jason during war, not you. I knew his last thoughts, not you. When I first came here a year after he died, or I mean, like you’ve

explained, after he invited me to the farm, I was scared shitless to meet you. But when I did, well man, I saw the finest chick I've ever seen. Pointy lips, a dimpled smile, and green eyes a man can never forget. Just like your high school picture, the one Jason carried in the scrim of his helmet."

"I was looking forward to meeting you too, on the Concord Stage. I'm a bit taciturn. That's all."

"The stage? Groovy!"

"Yes, the Arizona Concord Stage from Santa Fe, the Nam. Don't you remember?"

"That's right. And you made me feel real welcome, Babes. Guess that's why I never left and why I kept coming around to see you even while I was sleeping with Juanita." He smiles, hoping that what he says doesn't trouble me. I know him so well. Push her a little at a time. Nudge her back into coherency I overheard Wynona encourage David on her last visit. She thought I was out of hearing range, but I wasn't. I rarely am.

David flicks the roach into the river and watches it float downstream.

I comb my long hair with my fingers. "Jason's not coming back," I venture to say, speaking as if I now know the truth David wants to hear.

"I know Baby. And Daddy's real powerful sad. I loved him too. Men can do that, you know. We cry. We love. Especially when out humping the boonies and dying like dogs. Like the New Fucking Guys airlifted onto a landing zone for a search and clear mission. Victor Charlie is always trying to kill you. Do you know what that's like? Constantly under the threat of hostile fire?"

"The war is over, Mr. Thompson. You said so yourself. Tricky Dicky declared a ceasefire. The North won. Jason fought for the North, at least I'm assured of that."

"No! For the South, Baby. In maneuvers with ARVN, the Army of the South."

"You mean those of the South got a bad rap?" I'm trying to say what might make sense to him.

"Well, yes, you can put it that way. The South got screwed. I imagine those of the North feel pretty good."

"David!" I exclaim, frustrated once again after I thought we were making progress. "Who was the enemy during the war?"

"Charlie. Victor Charlie!"

"Charlie the Rebel?"

"Yes. Baby, I'm sorry. We're getting nowhere. We're just spinning our wheels. The important thing is that we're together. You and me. I miss him too. Jason was my brother in arms. He saved my life. I guess you're lucky if you meet someone special like Jason even if he leaves you after a short while. They're kind of with you always." His words fade out as a chilling breeze carries the essence of desert spring. I'm mellow now, into the scene, the gurgling stream, twittering warblers, globe mallows and desert marigolds, and the scent of the locoweed we're smoking. I'm into David too and I know he's into me. Into having our baby. We sit quietly by the river a moment longer and then make love on the grassy bank beneath the willows.



Chapter 17: An Impromptu Therapy Session

I look forward to the future

Like a shadow on the wall

Vague and dank

A Mystery

With visions of a pall.

Suddenly I look aback,

At prints I've left behind,

Each fading in the distance

While executing time.

After I'm about three months along, Mrs. Gonzalez begins stopping by the farm every Thursday evening to check on my condition. When she does, we hold impromptu therapy-sessions. She drives to the farm straight from her job at Wickenburg High where she's the school social worker and nurse. By now I look forward to these "sessions." They

help me explore the truth about my situation, at least some of it. For each occasion, I bake fresh pioneer bread in my Kenmore Harvest Gold because it seems Wynona can't get enough of it.

For tonight's session, Wynona sits across from me at Jason's polished pinewood table, drinking mint tea from my garden. A sandalwood sand candle sits unlit on the table beside my silver vase of globe mallows. I'm wearing one of the garments I make for Snider's headshop—a white laced camisole, red embroidered corset, and a long violet swirl skirt. Wynona starts out by warning me not to pop pills or drop acid. She claims that sometimes I behave like I just took a hit of something.

"I don't remember taking any kind of acid medicine," I say, feeling somewhat put upon. "Nor did I drink any of Mr. Wizard's tonic after that rattlesnake bit David. I'm certain of this."

"I understand your father is a history professor at UC Berkely." Wynona says. "In our past session, you talked about letters from your cousin who lives in Frisco."

"I don't know my father. Don't know my mother. William was my dear uncle, not my father. And I'll never go back to the City. Not even to visit my cousin. Constance doesn't want me there anyway. She thinks I've been touched by the Pawnee."

Wynona looks taken aback but allows me to continue uninterrupted.

"It's the folks around me that are touched, not me. You and everyone else, including David. And this house, this farm. These strange new patents none of you seem to notice. And yes, I recall watching Jason leave after David's bushwhack. After the flood. The Hortons were stirring up trouble in town and then things stopped. People confuse the story. Not me. I remember things as they were, as they are. My mind is sharp, not dinky dau. Jason

left not so long ago. And he's planning to come home. He didn't die in the war between north and south. I know this in my heart. Perhaps it's a foreboding or a woman's intuition as you highfalutin townsfolk like to say."

"Where did Jason go, Martha?" Wynona asks. It's a probing question she's asked before. She obviously hopes to break through and snap me from my "so called" confusion.

I pause, stare at the woman then glance at the orange globe mallows I picked this morning. Is she testing me, like David does? Teasing me? Pulling my leg? Ah, but it doesn't matter. I have to tell the truth. Get to the heart of matters so I know the truth myself. "Jason rode up to Fort Whipple to track down the men who ambushed David. Jason thinks the Hortons are behind the trouble. He believes that Bar Double H cowboys dressed as renegades and looted the devastated homesteads along the Hassayampa. After the flood."

The Mexican woman sits back and savors a bite of the warm bread with butter and David's honey. "I see, yes. It's all true, somewhat. The ambush. The soldiers. What about Vietnam? Martha. Didn't Jason go to Vietnam?"

"My goodness. David talks about Nam. Everyone does, especially people on TV. It's one of those new words so amazingly popular. Where do these words come from? These far out, groovy words? People now frolic like wranglers in town drinking liquor and chasing fallen women. Love, sex, rock and roll. Maybe because of the war between north and south. It's what makes sense."

"Where is Vietnam?" Wynona asks, taking notes in her spiral notepad. Her questions and constant probing are irritating me because it never seems to end. No one can resolve the confusion, not even me.

“Well,” I rise from the table, straighten my skirt and carefully consider my words, feeling confident I’ve reached my own reckoning, perhaps. “I figure,” I say, bracing myself on the back of the chair and looking straight at Wynona, “Nam is Comanche or Kiowa land, am I right? Far away in New Mexico Territory or in untamed Alaska which the US recently purchased from the Russians.”

The large woman wipes her face with a napkin, her patchouli oil overpowers the aroma of my pioneer bread. “Where are you now, Martha?”

“Come on Wynona.” I sit back down somewhat disappointed Mrs. Gonzalez doesn’t acknowledge my conclusion about Nam. It seems logical. “What do you mean?”

“Tell me where you live. What year is this?”

“I live on the Hassayampa, Yavapai County. On Jason’s farm. He’s very proud of his land patents.”

“And the year?”

“The year. Oh, I’ve lost track of time. What happened to my heirloom watch, the one passed to me from Uncle Willie?” Wynona has that look people get when I speak the truth. “We’re in the seventies anyway.”

“That’s right!” Wynona states, pleased with me like I’m a little child who’s just figured out how to recite the alphabet. “It’s seventy-four.”

“Pardon me?” I look at the woman. “No. Now I remember. Sitting Bull killed General Custer two years ago. I had no premonition about his defeat like I did about our Mr. President, the Great Man. Ipa. In sixty-five. Over ten years ago.”

“Yes, yes!” Wynona says with encouragement. “Oswald shot President Kennedy nearly ten years ago. Sixty-three was a dark year in American History. That’s the year you and your mother moved to Wickenburg. The year you met Jason at Wickenburg High.”

“No! That’s not how we met. And by the way, I mean Mr. Lincoln! And it was in sixty-five. Just after the war ended. In sixty-three Mr. Lincoln proclaimed the slaves forever free during his Gettysburg Address at the graves of Union soldiers. He honored the brave men who consecrated the ground.” I pull myself back on track, concerning the current year. I refuse to let Wynona trip me up, ever again, or David, or anyone else. “Shocking news about Custer, though. He was a Gettysburg hero. You cannot dispute these facts! They are what I believe to be true and you asked me for the truth. To be on the level.”

“That’s right, I did. Martha, are these dreams you’re having about the Civil War? David said you were doing historical research before Jason left. He said you learned Jason had a great grandaddy who fought in the Civil War.”

“Perhaps. Perhaps that’s it. Dreams. Strange dreams,” I pause in thought. “I never dream about the medicine man anymore and I haven’t had a foreboding since I knew someone was out to kill David! I had that feeling. But the premonition was about Jason getting killed, not David.” I shake my head and sigh.

“Please tell me more about your medicine man,” Wynona presses. “Maybe that dream will help you remember. That’s all you really need to do, Martha. Remember what you’ve forgotten. Remember what happened to Jason. To your mother. That’s how you’ll find the truth.”

“I’ve never forgotten my childhood dream. I didn’t know then, but now I understand its meaning. It takes me back to the Kansas prairie. Land of the Pawnee. I lived there, after a

tornado killed my folks. That's how my mother died and I never ever knew her. See, I don't remember this, in real life, but the dream tells me that I somehow found safety from the tornado in a cave. Or else, perhaps my mother put me there." I look at Wynona.

Wynona takes my hand from across the table. My nails are natural. I'm wearing my gold wedding band along with the turquoise rings and silver bangles I found in a stash box in my rearranged bedroom. But I refuse to let my new chuckaboo friends—Fran, Juanita, and Becky—pierce my ears or tattoo a sisterhood ring on my finger. They are wayward women with bees in their bonnets.

"My dream about a medicine man," I continue as my mind returns to the matter at hand. "He's a very old man with long white hair. He dresses like that." I indicate Wynona's fringed leather jacket slung over the back of her chair. "Buckskin leather, beads and feathers. He emerges from the cave to tell his people something important. That's the dream. I always woke up before hearing his words. Or if I heard them, I didn't understand his language because I had forgotten how to speak Pawnee. Cousin Constance made sure of that."

"Do you know his words now, Martha?"

"Yes, my sister," I say, feeling great affection for the Mexican woman, a best friend, a sister who works to know what is true and what is a lie. The woman I rescued from the flood now rescues me from the flood of delusion thrust upon me.

"I believe he wants to tell me that the world changes quickly, turns upside-down, and nobody, nowhere, knows what's true anymore. When making reckonings about the Great War, the medicine man had a vision about what was going to happen to me."

"Wow," Wynona pauses from her writing. "That's heavy. Off the hook radical!"

“I believe he knew me very well when I lived with the Pawnee. He loved me. Maybe it was even pity because he knew I’d see the change and not change, like I have. Everyone has changed but me. I haven’t forgotten the trail of my past although I no longer make conclusions about the future.”

“Martha, is it you who emerges from the cave?”

“Maybe. I didn’t understand all this until lately, after everything changed.”

Wynona stops taking notes. “This is really good, we’re making progress. Breaking through.” She closes the notebook. “Let’s meditate now like we used to?”

“Can David join us?” I ask, suddenly wanting him beside me for this spiritual gathering. He’s part of my everything now and although we don’t speak about the Lord, per se, we still talk about spiritual matters, about the hymns of the heart. About the fate of our being together. About karma. Sometimes David suggests we’re soul mates. When he does, I think about Jason and the baby soon to come.

“David is always part of our meditations.” Wynona lights the sand candle with her Keep on Truckin’ Zippo from Snider’s head shop. The aroma of sandalwood scents the room.

“Turn off the lights,” Wynona says as I’m fetching David from the front porch where he likes to sit on the swing and smoke his shit during my therapy sessions.

Despite what David or Wynona claim, I don’t remember meditating and wonder what Wynona has in mind. Cousin Constance raised me as a proper Christian child and not as a spiritualist accustomed to seances and the supernatural. The husband of my favorite poetess, Mr. Robert Browning himself, declared that clairvoyant mediums were charlatan frauds pretending to communicate with the dead through a spirit guide. But times have changed, I

tell myself as I sit holding David's and Wynona's hands. In this new "hippie freak" transmogrified synchronistic time, the spiritualist movement perfectly fits.

The house is silent but for the humming Kenmore Harvest Gold and water dripping into the white porcelain sink. Even my cat Mary Todd silently sleeps on the bean bag chair like she's accustomed to doing. I remember reading that Mary Todd Lincoln held spiritualist seances in the White House to communicate with her dead son. What a shillyshally world this is!

"We call upon the spirit realm." Wynona wakes me from my thoughts. "To free Martha from this medicine man who holds her dream spirit. We call upon her spirit guide to free the medicine man from his cave."

"Medicine man?" David asks.

He's forgotten my dream! I recall telling him about it after he spoke about his slavery days shortly before he was bushwhacked. "Jason was up in Prescott with James Grant, your husband, Mrs. Gonzalez," I burst out saying because I cannot suppress what is crossing my mind. "And why isn't your name Mrs. Grant? What's up with this feminist movement?"

"Shush. Close your eyes," Wynona rebukes. "Open them enough to see the sandalwood candle burning the eternal flame of oneness." She inhales the scent and continues, "We call upon our spiritual guides, powerful animal guardians among the angels, watchers, and supernatural forces. Aliens."

What fiddle-faddle! I'm thinking, but keep my peace.

"Do you remember your animal guide, Martha?" Wynona asks.

“I know David is a Black Panther,” I think to say. David squeezes my hand in response to my banter.

“I mean for you, Martha. We’ve done this before. But you yourself must name your animal spirit guide.”

“I suppose it’s an old Grizz.” I think about Jason’s prized bear rug no longer in the house because the flood had ruined it. And I THINK ABOUT MY CALLING HIS WORST DISPOSITION, THE GRIZZ. IT MAKES SENSE.

“You boogie, girl. The bear hibernates in a cave. Your cave. Your inner self of contemplation. The bear will lead you to the crux of what has you so spaced out.” Mrs. Gonzalez takes a breath and continues, “Guide us Great Grizzly Bear spirit to the truth OF our being. Magic light of Heaven, show us the way to recover mind over matter.”

I closely watch the flickering candle and try to clear my mind. But my thoughts keep returning to the cave, to the medicine man and I’m wondering if he’s actually me, a small lost child who took refuge from the tornado inside a cave. Only to reemerge and make pronouncements and premonitions. “I was crying when I came out of the cave into the daylight. It was all gone. My world had changed forever.”

“Shush,” Wynona says. “When we meditate, Martha, we are quiet and without thought. Chill your mind. Explore infinity. Let the spirits speak for you.”

I relax. But clearing my mind has never been an easy task. I cannot still my thoughts. They stir and stir, rebound, but they don’t go away. My thoughts perpetually and simultaneously play in my mind like TV dramas, commercials, and commentaries all at the same time. Even while sleeping, I’m always dreaming. Long ago, to settle my mind, I took to staring at the far-off harbor of San Francisco. Then at the desert surrounding my farm. Or

at the Great Comet when Uncle Willie brought me to the City. Miss Mattie Comet, he liked to call me, I suddenly remember. I suppose this habit of staring into the distance was my way of meditating. So now I must do as I'm told and focus on the candle flame as if it were my faraway place.

I glance at the man I love, at his handsome face flickering in the candlelight. He cracks his eyes to see the candle flame. But he sees me, squeezes my hand again, and smiles. I look back at the hypnotic flame dancing a hallucination of Almighty God. Or is it of the Old Grizz?

"Let the flame put you in a trance empty of thought," I hear Wynona's words. But it doesn't happen. Instead, the old medicine man appears from the cave at the cusp of dawn. I see him clearly. He stands in his fringed buckskin tunic and leggings. A beaded buffalo cape covers his shoulders. Red paint lines his old face, or is it blood? Does he wear a belt of scalps? A headdress of eagle feathers?

He upholds a feathered tomahawk to the path of the Great Comet with a long tail. His words are not English but they resound in my mind. He chants to the morning and evening stars Mars and Venus. He is priest of the tribe. Keeper of the star bundle that contains skulls, arrows, and flint knives. He holds a club for the sacred ritual to appease his gods and bring bounty to Mother Corn's children. The warrior god Mars requires a sacrifice before he unites with the evening star Venus. He requires the captive girl. "I have seen her sacrifice in my vision," chants the old priest. "We render her spirit to the union of evening and morning stars on the path OF the Great Comet."

The room is silent. I can't even hear my own breath OR FEEL MY HEART BEAT. Then a thought flares through my mind. Their kindness and care are slight-of-hand parlor

tricks straight from the medicine wagon show. For a year, they keep me ignorant of their intentions to keep me compliant.

I shiver at the revelation. My eyes open wider to view the sandalwood flame dancing on top of Jason's pinewood table. In my mind a huge fire scorches the sky. It's made of four logs representing the four directions. Each quadrant has its own guardian animal—the bear, wolf, cougar, and bobcat. The flames call upon the spirit guardians. My guide is the Grizz, I remember in the midst of my trance.

All of a sudden, I know the truth. My captors are preparing me for their big ceremony. I READ THIS STORY IN MY RESEARCH. THE DRAGOON SOLDIERS WHO RESCUED ME KNEW WHAT THE WARRIORS INTENDED TO DO. Governor Reeder at Fort Leavenworth TOLD THE STORY TO UNCLE WILLIE . . .

On the day Venus rises under the comet they INTEND strip me and tie me to a wooden scaffold. Then they will brand me in the armpit and on the groin. Boys and men will shoot arrows into my tethered little body to symbolize Mars making love to Venus. The medicine man will beat my head with his club and stab me in the heart with his flint knife. He will shout at the Great Comet as he rips open my dead body to smear his face with my blood, "I release her as your celestial bride on the Milky Way path of departing spirits into the mysterious land of darkness."

But elite mounted dragoon soldiers wielding carbines, sabers, and pistols appear as if from clouds. They battle hand-to-hand with the Pawnee band and rescue me from sacrifice. Now I remember. The bear is invulnerable, it can heal itself. He spares me from the Devil's abomination.

I awake from my terrible epiphany about the medicine man's intentions. I feel blindsided by a haunting, outlandish truth. I stare at the sandalwood candle and squeeze David's hand for moral support. Will I ever tell him about the vision? Probably not. Such heinous truths are best kept secret. Hidden forever. Forgotten. That's why Uncle Willie never told me the truth about my captivity WHEN I'M SURE HE KNEW ABOUT THE RITUAL. THE OFFICER AT FORT LEAVENWORTH MUST HAVE TOLD HIM.

The spellbinding flame makes me drowsy and I begin slipping away into another phase, a dream, a mood, a buzzing high, a mental condition susceptible to the synchronization of time. It seems to me, I reflect before my thoughts fade or shift, something has afflicted my mind all my life and without the use of chemicals. I live in too many realities. I hear too many voices. See too many visions of death. Even my own in an alternative "sick" reality. Just like a dopehead freak in his altered state of consciousness.

A gust of wind whistles through the L-shaped porch. My rocker is creaking on the pinewood planks. The winds grow stronger. It seems a storm is brewing.

The sandalwood candle flickers violently AND the door bursts open. A chilly gust of wind blows out the sand candle's flame and WE'RE ALL enveloped in darkness.



Chapter 18: A Moment of Transmogrified Time

Martha

Midnight draws in hours taut –
Endeavored pangs of yore,
And you, who keeps
To twilight's thought,
Are accosted more and more.

Awakened recollections,
Perhaps you never knew –
These hours spent in torment
Were wasted thoughts of you.

My eyes open. I'm sitting at Jason's pinewood table but it's roughhewn, unstained, unpolished, and without branding iron burns. Across from me sits David. He's different now; he's clean shaven and his hair is cropped short.

Light is streaming into the room from the open door. Late afternoon light. No sandalwood candle sits on the table! I thought it was evening and that a storm was brewing. What's happened? Another foreboding?

David's arm rests in a shoulder sling. He's drinking a cup of tea. The chamomile and mesquite tea I brewed to clear out his poison. On the table sits the tonic from Señora González—Professor Wizard's Miracle Cure Remedy along with a bottle of whiskey from Jason's stash meant to ease David's pain from the snakebite.

“David?” I look at him. He wears a disheveled pleated shirt, soiled from sweat. His smile is more subdued and polite, not so free and full of frolic. Not buzzing like a bee over creosote flowers. He doesn’t have the reddish eyes and dilated pupils of a stoner. His eyes are clear and alert, but they lack the spark of intimacy between us. He smells of whiskey, not patchouli oil. He might be high, after all.

I’m wearing the same white laced camisole, red embroidered corset, and long violet swirl skirt. I look around the room. The new patents are missing. The TV, fridge, and Edison stereo are all gone. An old Westinghouse stove stands in the place of my Harvest Gold Kenmore. In the stone fireplace, mesquite logs are crackling and scenting the house.

“Miss Mattie?” David stirs me from my thoughts. His face is cringing in pain.

“Did the tea help?” I ask, trying to fall back into a once familiar time and place. Into a lucid frame of mind. (Take a chill pill, not a pep pill.)

David gulps some whiskey straight from the bottle. “That and this,” he stammers.

I gaze at his arm and recall the snakebite and the poultice I packed onto the wound.

Mrs. Gonzalez appears at the door wearing a black embroidered and fringed rebozo over her head and shoulders. She shows cleavage in her white camisa, embroidered and laced, tucked into a long full maxi skirt. She asks if the cure-all-tonic helped ease David’s pain.

Yes, that happened too I surmise as Señora approaches the table. Mrs. Gonzalez, Wynona, and her medicine show remedy. Perhaps I drank some of the powerful tonic and it made me sleep and dream for a very long while.

The Mexican woman stands beside me at the pinewood table, awaiting my instructions.

As if having another epiphany, I decide it's easier to believe what's happening now in the present as I'm living it. My memories after the flood are damaged. And because I'm alive and living, this is the truth of my existence. I will believe what people tell me and forget my own recollections. Really, I have little choice. Otherwise, I will slip forever into dinky dau and become permanently freaked fuck'n flipped out!

I look over at Mrs. Gonzalez and say, "Señora. Where is Rosita? Is she all right?"

"She sleeping, Miss Mattie."

"You may go now. Everything's good."

The older woman gives me a questioning glance. "Si, Miss Mattie."

"Go," I repeat. "And take this." I hand her the bottle of tonic. I no longer wish to drink any medicine that affects my state of mind in such an irrational manner. I can't quite remember what happened. Not everything, not all the small details.

I sit at the table alone with David and catch his glance, his alluring smile. He seems uncomfortable. He doesn't know about our love, it seems. He needs reminding.

"Guess I best sleep off this pain," he suggests, but doesn't stir from the table.

I scoot out my chair, go over to where he sits, and touch his smooth face. Do I miss the beaded hair and mutton chops? I'm not sure.

He sits frozen, unable to look at me.

"We'll make it, David." I gently bend down and kiss his lips. The pressure of my body must pain his arm, I'm thinking, but he sits quietly, enduring it, probably astonished by my behavior. He doesn't respond with passion like before in the other time and place. But he savors the kiss.

"I love you," I say and look deep in his eyes, gripping his shoulder in emphasis.

“Jason will be back soon, Miss Mattie.”

“We can’t worry about Jason anymore. It’s just you and me, Pard.”

He studies my face and touches my chin with his good hand. He does remember, somehow. He does bear deep love for me.

“It’ll be good, you’ll see,” I say and we kiss once more.

David says nothing as I lead him to my bed in the room beyond the door. For a moment I’m wondering if the room is as I left it with David or will it be as Jason left it with me—with a waterbed patent or Jason’s pine poster bed with a shorn sheep mattress. And what about Jason? Is he returning now that I’ve transmogrified back in time? The renewed confusion makes me dizzy.

Just then I hear a trotting horse approaching the house.

A moment later the door bursts open and Stanly Buckholtz appears all soiled and sweaty. “Trouble!” he yells. “There’s trouble coming to the farm.” I now remember sending him to town early this morning to sell our cash crop in the Mexican market.

“Sit down and tell us the news, wrangler,” David says, collecting his wits and releasing my hand.

“The Hortons and their cowboys are heading this way all roostered, heeled, and mad.”

“For what matter?” David asks, fired with concerned.

Stanly catches his breath and wipes his brow. “Horton doesn’t like Miss Mattie alone with you, Mr. David.”

I can see in Stanly’s face that my attire and the fact that David was holding my hand bewilders him. “Jason’s all right,” I tell him. “And we’ll be fine. David and me. Now go,

Mr. Buckholtz." I want to be alone with David, relish our love, the one thing I believe to be true. Any trouble brewing in town is but a fabrication of the times. I don't believe it anymore.

"Miss Mattie?" David stands at the table. "You look dazed. Do you feel trouble coming? A foreboding?"

"No, David. I'm back where I'm meant to be and I no longer possess the power of prediction. I'm sure of this now." I reach to embrace him.

He pulls away and heads for the door where he grabs his Remington leaning against the wall. "I best be going. You stay in the house. I'll fetch Señora and Rosita to stay with you."

"But your wrist?" I protest. "You can't shoot that rifle with your arm in a sling."

"I'm feeling fine, all of a sudden. I can shoot if I need to." He hesitates, then adds, "We can't do anything about our love, Miss Mattie. It would put us both to shame and cause nothing but trouble."

"Oh, David," I approach him and touch his face. He doesn't resist. "I'm afraid we've lost Jason. But found each other."

He backs from me. "I've got to fetch Señora and her daughter." He hurries out the door toward the barn. I watch him remove the sling from his shoulder and use both of his hands to cock the rifle despite any pain it may cause him.

I quietly sit at the table and let him go. I'm beginning to understand. He'll be back. They'll all be back. I must merely wait.

I sip some cold chamomile and mesquite tea, relishing the sugar sweetened brew, then decide to go after David. I already miss him. He needs to know how I feel about him.

How we rally in each other's arms and make the world disappear. As for Jason. He's not coming back. He died during an ambush in the War of Rebellion. Killed by sniper fire. Apache ambush, maybe Charlie Rebel. It saddens me, but there's nothing I can do but live my life as best I can, on the farm, with David and the baby.

As I near the barn, I suddenly remember the baby. My bump is small now, undetectable. Like it was before the transmogrification into synchronized time. I place my hands on my belly knowing I'm with a child at its incipiency. When a woman first recognizes her body is changing.

David stands by the barn putting a saddle on Ghost while talking to Stanly Buckholtz. When he sees me approach, David shakes his head. He's uncomfortable and glances around for a way out. "Now Miss Mattie. My arm is mighty sore. And I got plenty to do before trouble comes around."

Despite the presence of Jason's wrangler, I approach David beside his horse, place my hands at the nape of his neck, and bring him to meet my lips.

Stanly Buckholtz walks away.

I nod toward the barn door, wink, and lead David inside by his good hand. I ask him to leave his rifle in its scabbard on Ghost. "No harm's coming our way, Mr. Thompson. It's a feeling I have. A foreboding. A good one this time. I come in peace and want to make boom boom in the hay! Love not war."

David doesn't resist me. I make him forget about the threat of the Hortons coming to the farm. He believes in my ability to predict danger. He knows I'm an Earth Seer and he's wanted me for a long time but probably never imagined this day would come. Jason is his best friend. His Pard. But Jason's gone and we're alone together.

David takes hold of me and we fall on a pile of loose hay. Dust and fibers permeate the air that smells of livestock, sweat, and leather. But in my mind, I smell nothing but lavender, sage, and the sweet nasturtiums of my spring gardens. And I hear nothing but the trilling songs of a dozen marigold warblers.

A rifle fires and breaks my spell. I think of the horseless wagons backfiring and the rowdy townsfolk paying us a visit to get high and party! Fran and Jerry. Jim and Wynona. Cookie. Becky . . . Even Juanita

Another shot fires and then I hear a ruckus. Clomping horses are approaching; men are hollering and raising hell. They are not our dear chuckaboo friends from town.

The barn doors burst open. I turn from David. Through the bright sunlight streaming inside the silhouettes of two men appear. One is large the other is tall and thin. The Hortons have arrived after all.

“He defiles my Angelica. Get him boys.” Kaleb speaks to cowboys shuffling into the barn behind him. “String him up. We’re fixin’ to have us a Texas cakewalk.”

The cowboys grab David by the back of his collar and nearly choke him as they drag him from the barn. His arm bends, paining him fiercely I know. But he doesn’t holler.

I sit up in shock and straighten my skirt over my knickerbockers. “No!” I scream and jump up after David but two Bar Double H wranglers grab my arms and hold me back.

Horton points a Colt revolver at David’s head. “This here’s what we do to low down Union contrabands. You watch, Miss Angelica. This hangin’s for you.”

I struggle free from the cowboys and run from the barn toward the river where Ben Horton is on his horse tossing a rope over a heavy cottonwood branch. He is tromping through my garden.

The dangling noose swings from the branch. The cowboys wrap David's hands behind him with piggin' cord then force David onto Ghost.

I stand helplessly watching Kaleb mount his horse all cocked and fired for a hanging. He places the noose around David's neck.

David says nothing but I can see sadness in his eyes. He avoids my glance as if seeing me would make his fate impossible to bear.

"No," I scream, running into my upturned garden. "Stop! He's my husband. I'm carrying his child." My voice seems to echo through the valley as it fills Horton with the devil's fury.

"Husband?" Kaleb dismounts in my garden. "Have you gone completely sagebrush loco, Miss Mattie Bachman?"

"No," I run to Horton, pleading. "David is my husband. I'm with his child."

"A demon child? Well then." His neck veins and nostrils consume his features. He eyeballs his brother who holds the reins of David's horse. "This is downright diabolical. Hang him high!"

Mrs. Gonzalez appears at the scene, screaming in Spanish. Pleading for mercy in the name of Lord Jesus and Santa Maria.

In a final effort I reach for Ghost just as Ben Horton slaps the horse's rump.

Kaleb grabs my arm and pulls me back, hurting me.

The palomino lunges forward. The rope snaps and cleanly breaks David's neck. From the cottonwood branch his body falls limp and begins swinging back and forth.

A sudden gust of wind rustles my skirt and hair. Devastation rips through my body. I close my eyes in torment.

“Hang me too,” I yell, feeling Kaleb’s nasty grip penetrate my arm. “You Beelzebub. You horrible horrible man. You killed my husband now you’re killing me and my baby.”

Kaleb laughs like a wild boar and releases me. “No, woman,” he says. “You’re the one who will burn in hell for your sins but I won’t hang you today.”

The rope creaks the cottonwood branch like my rocker on the pinewood planks of the L-shaped porch. I stand in my trampled garden so close to David I feel the breeze from his swaying body and smell the poultice I had applied not so long before. My eyes remain closed. I don’t want to see him dead.

The desert sounds are vast and empty now. I hear only the fading yahoos of hellbent killers storming away on their horses. Leaving the dead man to hang. Deep inside, beyond my tortured heart, I know everything will be all right and that the horror will soon end.

Mrs. Gonzalez takes hold of me to lead me from the site while Pedro and Stanly Buckholtz start to ease down the body for burial.

“No!” I pull from Señora and yell, “Vayan, todos, vayan. Leave me alone with him.” In my struggle to break from the large woman, I fall to the cool earth of my upturned flowers and herbs.

The Mexicans leave me where I lie, soiled and bruised. Disheveled. I climb to my feet. It makes me dizzy to keep my eyes closed but I refuse to see David lifelessly hang from the tree. At the same time, I don’t want to leave him. So, I stand frozen in place knowing I possess the power to be where David is alive and free. Everything will be as it was, I assure myself. I will return to the time and place of fancy new and improved upon patents where townsfolk are full of fun and frolic.

My lungs fully inhale and exhale the dry desert air. I take deep pranayama breaths like Wynona once taught me and await the moment of change when I can open my eyes and no longer see what I now feel before me.

The yawling of cowboys trails off down the Hassayampa road back to Wickenburg Town.

My breathing relaxes me and the desert becomes completely silent. I don't hear a bird twittering, a bug buzzing, or the river making its gurgling sound. The moment has come, I know. The moment of transmogrified time.

Part III



Chapter 19: The Sweet Trilling Tune of the Marigold Warbler

Martha

I'm taking off my angry hat

To write these words for you

And pluck a moment off of time

Before the hour's through.

Where are you from?

These morning troops?

All visions in a line,

That come to me

To set them free

Inside a captured rhyme.

Many faces have you all,

In colors lost in hue,

Must I select a stratagem

Before the hour's through?

And plot the plummet I design

An ordinance for you.

A breeze from the Hassayampa carries the scent of desert willows. I hear the clatter and chirp of cactus wrens at the river's edge. Otherwise, I can barely hear the river flowing on its way south to the Gila, to the Colorado, and the Cortez Sea. Ships from San Francisco will voyage around the Baja to river steamers that take brave passengers upstream into Arizona Territory. They are seeking a promising life on the frontier, after the War of Rebellion.

I am content to live on my Hassayampa farm away from the fanciful City of fog. The sweet smell of the open desert appeals to me despite the ever-present threat of calamity—of bushwhacking, massacres, and outlaw killings. I rest my hands on my belly below the corset and think about the offspring I will bear for my husband. He will return alive to me and his Hassayampa homestead. We will have many babies to pass on the heirloom of our history.

From behind me his hands rest on my shoulders. My eyes remain closed. His touch makes me shutter. His grip is warm, solid, comforting. I am beloved and protected by a man who doesn't fear danger. "I knew you'd come back," I whisper, reaching up to touch his hands. "I knew we'd find our way back to each other. You and me. And that everything would be all right."

Slowly I turn, keeping my eyes shut. It's part of the magic. The proper way to meditate and infuse my heart with a spiritual hymn.

He embraces me. Fills me with his strength and love. I never want to leave the moment. I don't want anything to change. Anymore. Ever again.

He holds up my chin. I reach for his face and feel a full beard and hair dangling down to his neck. My eyes open. "Jason?"

"Of course, Baby. You've been standing here for some time. Thought I'd better check on you."

"But . . . What of David?" I look at the thick cottonwood branch high overhead. At the ground below. There is no swinging rope, no trampled earth. My garden remains neatly plotted with fragrant lavender in bloom, the mint full and green, rows of onions, lettuce, and parsley. My garden is fresh and new.

"Who?" Jason looks puzzled, his full reddish beard is wild and untrimmed. He didn't apply Bellingham's stimulating onguent.

"Your Partner, your P! My love." I step back to look at the brawny man before me. He stands barefoot in loose cotton trousers (as wild as David's harem pants) and he wears a floppy cotton shirt. It's un-tucked and untrimmed. A very poor job of sewing.

It is Jason. Truly him. Returned? From where, from when. Or was he ever even gone?

"You must be tripping, Martha. We don't know any David unless you got a secret lover." He rubs my arms with his strong calloused hands.

My clothes aren't soiled and ripped. Beads hang from my neck and from Jason's. He wears a headband like an Apache scout.

"You been keeping your dream notes?" Jason asks. He looks so large under the cottonwood in my garden. So strong and powerful like nothing and nobody could ever harm him. Yet, his face bears worry and concern.

I smile reassuringly. "Yes, I'm keeping my dream notes. Guess David was just someone I dreamed up for one of my stories. He's one of your wartime partners."

"Well, Honey, I haven't left yet. Let's not have me over in Nam while I'm still here in the States. Get a grip. Remember where you're at. Just last year we landed on the moon. Remember Chappaquiddick, Kent State, the draft lottery and of course, Woodstock."

He makes me chuckle although I'm also shivering as he holds me tightly in his arms. "Come on Mama. I've only got this morning before we head to town. Uncle Sam doesn't wait for anyone. And my number came up in the lottery."

"Jason," I say, feeling the force of his body embracing mine, "Where are you going?"

"Come on girl. This is hard for me, too. I'm scared. But a man's got to do what he's called upon to do."

"And without a man a woman has no help," I say.

"We are each other's helpers," he offers his standard remark.

“Don’t go, Jason. Don’t go this time. I have a bad feeling. Call it a foreboding if you like. You don’t have to go to war. We can head to Mexico, deep into the Baja. Dodge the draft. Or you could become a conscientious objector. I am.”

“No girl, get real. We’ve gone over this time and time again. Be at peace. I’ll be back.” He hugs me a moment in silence and then says with enthusiasm, “Hey Mama, let’s walk along the river before I go. You, me, and little Rosita.”

“Rosita?” I look at him.

“Of course. That’s what we’ve been calling her, if it’s a she.” He gently touches my belly. “Little Rose, after my baby sister.”

I say nothing. It’s all beginning to make sense. Now.

Jason whistles for his dogs, his Labrador mutts Red and Blue. He takes my hand and we stroll along the river that percolates over rocks and twigs dropped from willows, cottonwoods, paloverdes, and mesquites. I’m mostly quiet, not wanting to cause agitation with muddled notions and questions. Although I can’t help but mention that I’ve been feeling uncertain about things lately.

Jason explains that my condition strains my memory. As if to distract me from my troubling thoughts, he reminds me that last September the rains had flooded much of Wickenburg. “Completely washed out the road to our farm. Didn’t go to town much then because I had to take the long way around through the eastern hills.”

We pause a moment to watch a rare yellow breasted marigold warbler land on a desert willow. “Didn’t mind much, though,” he proceeds to tell me. “I actually prefer not running to town. I like the peace, quiet, and serenity of our land. With my woman beside me.”

I want to tell him I appreciate his sentiments. Love him, but before I can, he says, in a declarative voice, “Then everything changed on December 1st of last year. On national TV Roger Mudd covered the draft lottery. They picked my birthday number. I got my induction letter right when we learned you were pregnant with Rosita. I got my orders to report to the Armed Forces Induction Station and to serve in Viet Nam. I won’t run off or object. Burn my draft card or letter. I believe in serving my country. My biggest regret is leaving you and being away when the baby comes.”

We sit beside the creek, united, and watch the marigold warbler hop among the willow leaves and catch insects. It rests on a twig and makes twittering calls that the breeze carries. His echoing tunes are the sweetest sound I’ve ever heard. In a place of beauty and danger.

The little warbler eventually flies away and I squeeze my husband’s hand for moral support. For him and for myself. I know that spring won’t be festive this year. I’ll be alone to tend the farm, to care for a new baby, and to worry about the war until Jason comes back.

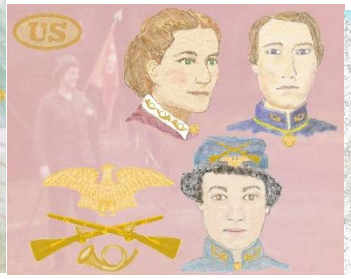
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“Let outward senses for inward sense designed, call back our wanderings to the world of the mind!” Elizabeth Barrett Browning








US






VOTES FOR WOMEN
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AMERICA
LIBERTY
THE LAND WE LOVE

