

# Dreams along the Upside-Down River

a novel by Teri Ekland

## Part One



### Chapter 1: A Farm along the Hassayampa River

*April 1876*

*Miss Mattie Bachman*

Sometimes I really don't know where I am, in time and place, because my life has been so peculiar and I can't remember everything that's happened to me. Most notably, when I was a small child no more than two or three and a Kansas tornado killed my parents and brothers while we were on a wagon train to California to live with my uncle Willie.

But I tend not to dwell on my past and what I don't remember about it. I prefer to think about my life now with Jason on our Hassayampa farm about ten miles northeast of Wickenburg Town in Yavapai County, the largest county in the territory. Yavapai is one of four counties they named after the native inhabitants when Arizona became a territory during the War of Rebellion; the other three counties being Yuma, Pima, and Mohave.

Jason was fighting for Mr. Lincoln during that time but after nearly five years he walked away from the War at the age of twenty-five, the age I now am. It was ten years back when my brawny husband began growing out his reddish beard and blond locks and partnered up with David Thompson. They headed out onto the frontier until six years back when Jason quit his wandering days to settle on this 160-acres that Lincoln himself provided settlers like Jason and me when he signed the homesteading act of sixty-two. Uncle Sam is now offering Union veterans additional land, a benefit Jason rightly deserves. At the Battle of Nashville, he nearly lost his life when he recaptured the Union flag from the 6th Florida Rebels. For his bravery, President Grant mailed him the Congressional Medal of Honor but I have read of late that Grant is handing out a vast number of these medals to Union men. Doesn't matter though. The medal is still one of Jason's most cherished treasures like me, his Rib, Miss Mattie Bachman.

In truth, Jason decided to settle down because of me and build me a three-room farmhouse. To the east of my house are the desert hills with saguaros and spindly ocotillos standing tall among the creosote and brittlebush. To the west lies the Hassayampa River which originates near Prescott and flows down toward Wickenburg and on into the Gila. Eventually it joins the Colorado which flows south to the Gulf of California sometimes called the Sea of Cortez. The Hassayampa is an unusual river and nothing like the Colorado or the Mighty Mississippi which Jason and David came across during their prospecting days on the frontier.

Twice a year the rich floodplain gives us a bountiful harvest of pumpkins, barley, potatoes, pinto beans, corn, and tomatoes--cash crop that Jason sells to the Army, ranchers in the Territory, prospectors from the Bradshaw Mountains, the Vulture Mine, and Date Creek, and the emigrants from the States who pass through Wickenburg Town on their way to the Colorado to catch a steamer down to Baja and then a ship up to Frisco or back to the States. Emigrants like to

buy Jason's cash crop because by the time they have reached Wickenburg, they're yearning for fresh produce after weeks of living off of dried beans, wild game, biscuits, and belly-wash coffee without any sugar.

Hassayampa is a Yavapai word meaning "the river that flows upside-down" because during the hottest days of early summer the river dries up in places and seems to be flowing upside-down. That all changes toward summer's end when the rainstorms arrive and the barrancas overflow and cause the river to stampede down the valley and wash out homesteads, from time to time. After the storms pass and the flood waters subside, stagnant pools develop and attract mosquitos that bring about sickness and even death to the settlers.

Despite all these hardships and the uncertainty of renegade and outlaw trouble, I am partial to this land and content that Jason brought me out here to our little Hassayampa farm. During full moon evenings he escorts me to the river to watch the moon rise over Vulture Peak and touch the hills and the floodplain. We listen to coyotes howl and the Mexicans sing and play guitar music outside their bunkhouse. I never really watched the moon rising in San Francisco like I do on my Hassayampa farm.

If I venture beyond the homestead by myself, Jason is most likely to growl at me. But sometimes, when he's gone to town, I walk along the river anyway or in the eastern hills to the gravesite of our stillborn daughter. I rarely fear Indians or outlaws anymore like I did when Uncle first brought me out to the territory. Maybe because the Pawnee held me captive for a year I don't have as much fear as I should. Or maybe it's because I'm with Jason. Otherwise, fear would consume me. To survive I have made the desert valley my home and not a place of fear. Perhaps this is what soldiers, captives, and frontiersmen learn to do, live without fearing so much.

On the rafters inside my house, I hang dried herbs from my gardens for homespun remedies. Jason says I have a knack for healing and mending but he claims my cooking is not like his mother's back on the Pennsylvania farm which is why a Mexican girl helps me with the cooking and domestic chores. Jason calls me a tenderfoot Victorian lady on the frontier because I grew up in a San Francisco mansion with servants and cooks until Uncle brought me to the territory shortly after the war ended and the South killed Mr. Lincoln. Even while I was living in Wickenburg Town with Uncle Willie, a Mexican señora did all the cooking. And when I lived with the Crawleys, after Uncle Willie's murder, Rebecca did the cooking although she taught me how to bake pioneer bread which I still bake on occasion in my Westinghouse cookstove that Jason bought special for me.

In the front room of my little farmhouse sits the cedar hope chest that my uncle brought to the territory from San Francisco. I keep everything from my past inside it including my letters from Cousin Constance and the things she sends me. Constance is Uncle's only daughter although he considered me as much as a daughter to him as Constance. Maybe even more so because Uncle Willie traveled across the frontier to Fort Leavenworth to fetch me after dragoon soldiers had rescued me from the Pawnee.

Every day, after I tend to my chickens, goats, and gardens, I enjoy sitting on my Lady's Sewing Rocker and listening to it creak on the pinewood planks of the L-shaped porch Jason built for me. Part of the time I do my sewing and stitching. When we were living above the dry goods store in Wickenburg Town, Uncle had asked Rebecca Crawley to teach me how to sew. He believed I needed "women's work" to occupy my time. He ordered me a Wilcox and Gibbs sewing machine, a sewing box with hooks, hoops, buttons, and lace, reams of fabric, and patterns

from Ellen Butterick who sold graded tissue patterns with instruction sheets on how to make garments. Miss Butterick is one of the very few women who developed an improved upon patent, my uncle liked telling me. He greatly admired such women who stepped beyond the sphere of their domesticity.

While I'm sitting on my rocker I also like reading a Louisa May Alcott novel or a Harper's periodical. I used to read articles and poems from Harpers to my uncle. Now I only read to Jason if the matter concerns farming, mining, livestock, and horses, or bee keeping, a newfangled enterprise Jason talks about starting one day. Sometimes I write in the leather-bound diary Cousin Constance sent me from San Francisco. I call it my Lady Pioneer Diary and fill its pages with notes about my life on the homestead or the little ditties that pop into my head as I'm going about my daily chores.

Since I left San Francisco in sixty-seven, Cousin Constance has been sending me thoughtful letters about her married boys and her second husband Herman Andrews and his management of my investments at the Wells Fargo Bank. I faithfully reply to each letter and tell her things I cannot say to Jason. My husband doesn't have the attentiveness for listening to me unless it concerns something he finds relevant to himself and I'm not one to say much anyway. But in my letters to Cousin Constance, I share my deepest thoughts and always include one of my little ditties. Constance claims that Harpers should publish my poems, they are so good. *You must be famous to get printed in Harpers* I wrote back. *And I'm afraid my little ditties are no way near the poetic voice of my favorite poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning.* I also quoted my favorite verse penned by Miss Browning. *The little cares that fretted me, I lost them yesterday, among the fields above the sea, among the winds at play.*

After Jason and I got married I wrote Constance that I got hitched to a Union man who won the Medal of Honor for retrieving the Union flag from Rebel hands. When a sin-busting preacher came to Wickenburg, as Jason called the man, my husband lodged him at Snider's Hotel and I sewed together a frontier dress for my wedding so unlike the silk and lace gown that Constance ordered from Paris for her second marriage. Jason gave me a twenty-two-karat wedding band that he had made in Prescott from his own gold nugget. It's fully hallmarked and engraved *from JBS to MBS*. When we got married we didn't have a shebang hoedown, as Jason would say, or any social event. Wickenburg Town isn't high society like San Francisco or my cousin Constance. The preacher held the service in Snider's dining hall and Jason's Mexican hands stood in as our witnesses. I wrote my cousin that I wore the beaded steel plum Kidd shoes that she sent me for my cedar hope chest.

To help me get along in my role as a new wife, my cousin sent me "The American Woman's Home," by sisters Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. I've read the book from cover to cover, at least the parts that pertain to the domestic science of women's work. Or anything about healing. Even tenderfoot ladies need to be prepared for the hazards of homesteading on the frontier.

Jason and I aren't prone to lengthy conversations like I had with Uncle Willie or Constance about a variety of matters--political, spiritual, domestic, and newsworthy topics of the times. That all went away after my uncle's murder except for in my letters to and from Constance and in my own mind. My husband may be a quiet man but he's not a lily liver. He confronts trouble and faces his battles. He farms and hunts and keeps me fed, sheltered, and protected, but a man from the War of Rebellion is prone to dispositions. He is peckish before a meal and is not in a listening mood. As a good wife, according to the Beecher sisters and my

cousin Constance, I must determine if my husband is in a talking mood or if he's smitten. Based on my own experiences of living with Jason I have learned not stir his hidden wrath and awaken the Grizz inside of him; the Grizz comes from what he experienced during the War of Rebellion, I suspect. Don't get me wrong. I'm grateful for Jason and don't mind our quiet lives together. My husband is a brave Union man who lives by the hand God's dealt him and who ventured "beyond the battleground for prospects on the frontier." These are the words Jason sometimes tells me after a hearty meal.



## Chapter 2: Smoky Row to Wickenburg Town

*1860-1870*

*Jason Bartholomew Shear*

My father and grandfather were Pennsylvania farmers and they had me in mind to inherit the Shear farm where I grew up hunting whitetail deer, turkey, and elk using a Springfield percussion. Around the Hassayampa farm I use my Winchester to hunt antelope, cottontails,

jackrabbits, and javelina. Hunting and farming are my heritage which is why I settled down with Mattie and gave up my wandering days on the frontier.

On November 6, 1860 the world changed for me when Abraham Lincoln won the presidency and the southern states rebelled and left the Union. War posters began appearing everywhere declaring *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 at the time and my heart and spirit pressed me to fight for the honor of my family, my country, and for Mr. Abraham Lincoln. On October 15, 1861, I volunteered with the 77th Pennsylvania, First Division, Third Brigade, under Colonel Thomas Rose. At the time I made a three-year commitment but ended up fighting until 1866. In a gruesome hospital tent near the fields where the Battle of Nashville took place, Army doctors tended my wounds. At neighboring tables fellow soldiers were wailing as surgeons sawed off their legs and arms. Sometimes doctors gave these boys chloroform and ether to make them sleep during the procedures.

I was more fortunate. Although my wounds were severe, gunshot to the gut, I pulled through thanks in part to the angels who appeared to me as I lie on that hospital cot. I'm speaking of the volunteer nurses who bathed and fed me, gave me medicine, and sang lovely hymns to me and to all those suffering boys who were dying. They gave us a promise of life after death. One such angel helped me pen a letter to my folks and she provided me with an Army envelope that had a red white and blue shield with a star and the inscription "The Union Forever."

I wanted my folks to know that I had survived the horror of war and that when I recovered I would return to the farm. But that's not what happened. Over the months and years, I never received a reply from my folks because I no longer lived at my regiment's address; I had



walked away from the war and never sent them another letter and never made it back to Pennsylvania. It didn't matter that my father wanted me to inherit the Shear farm. It just wasn't what I had in mind to do. The war had changed me and the course of my life forever. Like it did every other soldiering man I have ever met.

Unlike Mattie and her fancy hope chest, I own nothing from my past before the war. I'm not a man who keeps mementos except for the medal of valor from Uncle Sam and my Army issued Colt 44 which I always have holstered at my hip. Long ago I lost the only picture I ever had of my Pennsylvania family. It was a daguerreotype that I carried close to my heart every day of the war. In it my mother was holding my only sister Mary Rose Anne, a cherub child whose image eased the sight of dead and mutilated soldiers. Corpses bloody and mangled. These days, when battlefield nightmares jar me awake at night, as they are prone to do, I look at Mattie sleeping beside me in the moonlight that enters the window of our bedroom. I see her pretty face, soft and gentle, listen to her quietly breathing, and smell her lavender scent. Then all the nightmares and horrors of war leave my mind and I fall back asleep like a baby, or more specifically, like a man who is dead drunk.

I was still on the road to recovery when I left that hospital tent and walked to Nashville for whiskey and a whore. The nurses had bandaged my gut and wrapped a band around my crown. With the meagre pay of a soldier in my pocket, I bought me a Stetson hat to cover the wrappings and a new set of clothes at the first haberdashery I came across. Then I headed for a saloon and bordello in an area of Nashville the locals called Smoky Row.

Outside the Stage Stop Saloon and Bordello I happened across the very man who had carried me from the battlefield to the hospital tent. I learned that he was a Union rear echelon support soldier whose military occupation was to find the wounded and bury the dead. I

immediately recognized his kindly face and recollected his reassuring words *You wasn't meant to die today*. He said these words to me when he awoke me from the dead. David Thompson is the name of that man who carried me off the battlefield like the redeemer Christ himself or like one of them heaven sent angel nurses in the Army hospital tent.

I shook Mr. Thompson's hand, gave him a hardy pat on the shoulder, and invited him to drink John Barleycorn lager in the saloon. Before long we got to talking about life after the war and all the prospects out west on the frontier. I already had a notion to head west ever since soldiers in my unit boasted about the frontier as a place where fortune was to be had and where "the forty-niners had paid a thousand dollars for a ten-cent whore." I asked Mr. Thompson to ride with me onto the frontier and he said he was still obligated to his regiment and didn't want to desert them.

"How long have you been burying the dead?" I asked Mr. Thompson.

"Nearly five years it's been," he told me.

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

That very day, at the poker tables, David and I wagered what little money we had between us and amassed enough cash to buy two horses and gear. Then we left the saloons of Smokey Row, headed out of Nashville, and onward we rode into Choctaw, Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Comanche land. We crossed the Mighty Mississippi, traveled through Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas all the while avoiding hostile renegades and Confederate bushwhackers the likes of Bloody Bill Anderson and Jesse James. Everywhere we went folks in saloons and bordellos spoke about gold strikes in the territories, most notably the Vulture Mine and the Comstock

Lode. The prospect of striking gold and hitting it rich was never far from my mind or that of my riding partner Mr. David Thompson.

In New Mexico Territory we accumulated a large reserve of gold by sluicing, panning, and chipping away at rocks inside caves and tunnels. After nearly a year of this my pard decided to settle on a small piece of land with the Navajo woman who had guided us through Rio Chusca.

“I found everything a man could ever want,” David told me. “A good woman, a place to hunt, farm, raise livestock, and prospect for gold.” Pard invited me to stay and settle with a woman of my own on a neighboring ranch but I still had a hankering to ride farther west into the newly formed Arizona Territory. I wanted to see for myself what all the talk was about concerning the gold at the Vulture Mine and Comstock.

I bade farewell to my old pard and rode off to Sante Fe where I 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 on the frontier but I had become rather lonesome without the company of Pard and 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 in Tucson. My intention was to marry a good woman, if I could find one, and prospect in the Santa Catalina Mountains northeast of town. This notion of mine lasted less than a year because word was spreading through town that prospectors were striking abundant gold in Yavapai County in the heart of Arizona Territory. Old prospectors in my saloon kept speaking of strikes at Lynx Creek, Gila City, Quartzsite, the Bradshaw Mountains, and along the Hassayampa Valley near the Vulture Mine.

I decided to sell my saloon to a gambler. Truth be told, I lost the Congress Hall in a poker game so I stowed what tender I had remaining in my 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 the new settlers and the interests of Uncle Sam. During the fifties and sixties, cavalry soldiers fought to exterminate the native inhabitants or force them onto reservations. By the time I arrived in Yavapai County, there were very few incidents with renegades off their reservation.

Six years after the War of Rebellion ended, I arrived in Wickenburg Town as a seasoned frontiersman, Union man, gambler, and the one-time owner of the Congress Hall in the territorial capital. The mining town of Henry Wickenburg had about 400 inhabitants, mostly merchants, furloughed soldiers, and Mexicans. Nearly one hundred Anglo settlers were living in the Hassayampa valley at the time. The folks of Yavapai County had elected John L. Tylor as their sheriff to enforce the federal law in the county and President Ulysses S. Grant had appointed Milton B. Duffield as US Marshal of the Territory. But Wickenburg didn't have a town marshal of its own. Instead, they had a committee of prominent men to enforce law and order and they chained their prisoners to a mesquite tree until Marshal Duffield, Sheriff Tylor, or a "hanging" judge came to town.

Wickenburg Town was a far cry from the bustling commerce and saloons of Tucson. Adobe homes spotted First and Second Streets and a few squatters, prospectors mostly, camped in canvas tents at the edge of town. When I first rode down Frontier Street, past the flat-roofed one-story adobe shops and pinewood two-story buildings, townsfolk took no notice of me because they were gathering around a medicine wagon and listening to "Professor Medicine Man" pitch his remedies. His voice boomed so loudly I couldn't hear the clomping of my own

horse's hoofs. *Dr. Wizard's Miracle Tonic cures spasmodic asthma, hair loss, piles, corns, rheumatism, and irritation of the bowels and bladder. It erases freckles, revitalizes memory, and cures stammering. Ladies and gentlemen, don't fall victim to cataleptic neuroplexy! I can furnish you with my marvelous patent for one dollar per bottle.*

During my second day in Wickenburg Town, I encountered Miss Mattie Bachman when I was securing my roan to a post outside Snider's Hotel where I had found lodging for fifty cents a week. In her haste to cross the dusty intersection of Second and Frontier, from LaFayette's General Store to Crawley's Dry Goods next to the assayer's office, Mattie nearly knocked me down because she was carrying large bundles of calico that obstructed her vision. After gathering her wits, she glanced at me as if I had jumped in her way. Then she quickly looked aside and continued toward the dry goods store.

At first, I considered that she came from the Bucket of Blood Saloon and Bordello at the seedier end of town. Generally speaking, the only Anglo women living in frontier towns were soldier's wives and whores. But then, Abraham J. P. Grant, proprietor and bartender of the Magnolia Brewery and Saloon on the corner of First and Frontier quickly dispelled that notion. He explained that Miss Mattie Bachman was one of the few respectable and unmarried ladies in Yavapai County.

"She's a strange one, albeit," Abe added as he filled my glass with the warm John Barleycorn lager that he brewed in the back room.

I puffed my 20-cent cigar, leaned against the counter with my left foot resting on a railing above the spittoon trough, and gazed ahead at the wood-framed mirror behind the bar. A tall bottle of Abe's rotgut whiskey sat on the long pine counter before me. Behind me were smoking coal lamps over dusty billiard, roulette, and poker tables. "Say what?" I asked the old bartender,

envisioning the finest woman I had seen since leaving the States for the frontier. I was picturing her soft rosy cheeks, thin pointy lips, long chestnut hair like my mother's, and perky green eyes that a man can't easily forget. I had even caught her scent of vanilla perfume.

"The girl never says much," Abe replied. "Not even to womenfolk. Especially after her uncle got himself kilt a year back." The old bartender filled my shot glass with his whiskey and recounted the story. "Mattie's uncle, William Talbot Bachman, was a California dry goods merchant and friend of Henry Wickenburg. They were business associates back in Frisco before the war. Both spoke that German lingo. After Henry struck gold at the Vulture he asked old Billy B to invest in his mine and help run the town. Wickenburg needed a merchant jobber like Bachman who had connections to San Francisco, New York, and Chicago. Turn around, Billy B established the dry goods store down the street. Crawley's Dry Goods these days."

"What's so strange about the lady," I interrupted the old bartender. "Ain't nothing wrong with *not* saying much." I backed against the bar, rested on my elbows, and looked out the open window onto the street. Near my roan were three horses belonging to ranchers dining at Snider's Hotel. A Mexican boy in a broad sombrero was riding past the saloon on a mule carrying strings of garlic, onions, and chilies and shouting "*Ajo, cebolla, chili picante*." It was the sort of dry dusty afternoon that offered a man little to do but get drunk and stay clear of the sun and trouble.

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

"Injun? How's that? Never seen no Injun with eyes the color of emeralds," I said.

Abe grinned. He was enjoying my company, a stranger in town and a Union frontiersman at that. I got the feeling that he enjoyed telling a story to anyone willing to listen. 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 caught hold of their wagon and blew them to

smiddereens. Cavalry found Mattie's folks and brothers all deader than a card-cheating Mexican. But couldn't find their little daughter as recorded on the wagon train's registry. That's how they located Billy B. His sister listed him as her next of kin. Mattie was only two or three at the time. Turns out Pawnee got a holda her. She was just a wee 'pint-size slip of a child,' Billy used to tell me. He claimed his niece took right to him like he was her pa and 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. "He was a stubborn old fool. That's what got him kilt, I say, sure enough."

I listened intently. I had heard many stories about captives on the frontier. They ain't pretty affairs. Folks lay claim that captive women become White Indians and marry their captors. And even after they're rescued 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 tell about it. And sometimes, those who die quick and easy are the luckiest of us all.

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

I turned back and glanced at the bartender and at my reflection in the mirror, drank another shot of gut-splitting whiskey as fine as any on the frontier, and said, "I'm asking, 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 warned him about Mr. Lincoln's murder." The bartender picked up a glass from the tin dishpan under the counter and began toweling it dry. "Miss Mattie knew Mr. Bachman was going to get kilt. Billy told me the night afore his murder. Turn around the next morning, it was

raining pitchforks and bullfrogs, had been all night, Mattie ran down the muddy street a 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 John Barleycorn, thinking that forebodings was nothing but a hill of beans. 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 unlesen someone drug him out there."

Just then, beyond the front window, I caught sight of Miss Mattie Bachman leaving the store across the street. Without a word to the bartender, I hastened away from Abe's saloon with the swinging doors creaking back and forth behind me.

I stopped before Snider's Hotel and watched Miss Mattie cross the street. When she neared me, I touched the brim of my Stetson and nodded. "How do, Miss Bachman, Ma'am? Name's Jason Bartholomew Shear. New in town."

Mattie continued toward the dry goods store while peering down and avoiding my eyes.

I stood mesmerized by her tender features, her small delicate frame, her tiny hands clasping a beaded purse. I couldn't remember ever seeing such an angelic vision, not since seeing them nurses in that Army hospital tent in Nashville or since last seeing my baby sister wave good-bye when I left the Pennsylvania farm and headed to war.





### Chapter 3: Mattie's Captivity and Childhood in San Francisco

*1852-1867*

*Miss Mattie Bachman*

Though naturally I don't remember anything from my earliest years, my Uncle Willie has told me the story many times about how I ended up in his care in San Francisco. I had been orphaned and held captive by the Pawnee and this seems to explain why I am so often puzzled about time and place and about who I even am. But ancestry is important to me. It helps me connect to my world.

After Uncle Willie established himself in San Francisco, my father Conrad Johnston, who was Uncle's former law partner in Rochester, moved his family to Chicago where I was born. He took a job at a small real estate speculation firm on Weaver Street to help Uncle establish his mail-order business. In 1852 Uncle sent a letter to my father and mother Fredericka, Uncle's sister, via "Adams Express Mail Service" which had steamers on each side of the Panama Isthmus. In that letter he described his mansion on Rincon Hill and boasted that San Francisco had shipped thirty-four million dollars in gold to the States that year alone; that Alcatraz Island in the harbor had a new lighthouse with a revolving lantern from France; and that much of the city was landfill piled atop sunken ships deserted by the "gold fever" of forty-nine. The crux of

my uncle's letter was an invitation to my parents to move to the City and enjoy the prosperity he had established through his mercantile business. Uncle's wife Josephine had died a few years earlier from a fever caught during their trek across the Panama Isthmus to catch a steamer to the bay area. He told my mother that he could use her civilizing force in his household alongside his growing daughter Constance.

After receiving Uncle's letter, my father quickly concluded his business dealings in Chicago and sold everything he owned. With my two older brothers and me, my parents caught the steamboat to Independence, Missouri, the point of departure for the Oregon, California, and Santa Fe trails. Father purchased a wagon and a team of oxen and signed onto a wagon train heading west. My mother's last letter to Uncle Willie arrived two months past the postmarked date at Independence. She wrote that the long treacherous days ahead filled her with fretful anticipation and that she prayed for a happy reunion with her dear brother "William of California," as she referred to my uncle.

Within the month Uncle received a telegram from the Commander at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Territory. The wire brought him the sorrowful news that my parents and brothers were killed in Kansas Territory and that they could not locate me, their little daughter.

Guilt and melancholy shattered my uncle's spirit even more than the death of his wife Josephine. He felt certain he had caused his sister's tragic end, just as he had brought about his wife's death by bringing her out west. At least Josephine arrived in California, he always told me, whereas my parents barely left Independence when calamity struck them down. Sadly, I do not even know the names of my two brothers. They were only recorded as sons of Conrad Johnston on the wagon train registry.

After a year passed Uncle received a telegram from Governor Andrew Reeder, a man President Pierce had appointed to govern the newly establish Kansas Territory. Governor Reeder resided in rookery quarters at Fort Leavenworth's Government Depot. His wire specified that dragoon soldiers had recaptured from the Pawnee a young Anglo girl who matched the description of Fredericka's daughter. Governor Reeder had placed me under the care of an officer's wife until uncle arrived to retrieve me.

In March 1854 a cavalry regiment escorted Uncle from outpost to outpost across the frontier to Fort Leavenworth. It was the year of the Kansas-Nebraska Act which repealed the 1820 Missouri Compromise and gave territorial settlers the choice of owning slaves. At the time, my uncle has told me that the US was a hornet in a beehive over the issue of slavery ten years before a full-blown war.

Uncle liked talking about the moment he first laid eyes on me when Governor Reeder called for the officer's wife to escort me into the room. He said I was the most darling little girl he had ever seen wearing a proper dress to my knees and lacy pantaloons and with my chestnut hair hanging in tiny ringlets with ribbons. The officer's wife told Uncle that she had tried to civilize the little captive as best she could.

When Uncle first held me on his lap my tiny hands took hold of his mutton chops, Uncle told me, and I called him "Ipa" which is Pawnee for Great Father. At the time, before I can even remember, I only spoke Pawnee and not a word of English.

The First Cavalry Regiment escorted Uncle and me back to the City in an Army ambulance carriage. Each day and into the night our coach crossed Indian land through Kansas and Nebraska Territories, through the Rockies to South Pass, Utah and Washington Territories to Fort Hall, then we traveled on the California Trail to San Francisco.

Much of the time Uncle said that he held me on his lap because I was dearer to him than any shipment of gold. At night I would point to the Great Comet that was passing over the prairies at that time; it was a bright star with a long tail in Pegasus. The sight delighted me and the first English word I uttered was “comet.” That’s when my uncle began calling me “Miss Mattie Comet” in honor of the lady astronomer Miss Maria Mitchell who discovered the forty-seven comet coined “Miss Mitchell’s Comet.” As I’ve already mentioned, my uncle greatly admired any woman of distinction.

Any memory of my childhood seems to begin during my first few months living at my uncle’s mansion on Rincon Hill. Cousin Constance, who was in her mid-twenties at the time, helped me adjust to my new life and speak only English and bury my Pawnee words. Mostly, I kept quiet and politely smiled except I greatly enjoyed impressing my uncle with my new English words when he held me on his lap in his parlor chair. Uncle made me feel safe and protected during a time I must have been completely confused. My world had been toppled twice in my young life. First I lost my family, the Johnstons, then I was taken away from the Pawnee who I must have grown to think of as my family because I spoke only their language when my uncle retrieved me. But at this time, I did not remember my parents or brothers and I seemed to have forgotten everything about my year of captivity or I buried it deeply in my mind.

During these early days in the mansion on Rincon Hill I was only thinking about my uncle. He was everything to me; he was my Ipa, the only Pawnee word I retained, and I became the apple of his eye. Uncle understood that I had endured a traumatic year that I didn’t talk about or seem to remember. I believe he saw me, his little Miss Mattie Comet, as the rebirth of his beloved sister Frederika. I was a gift to his heart and that is why he gave me his own family name and I became Mattie Bachman instead of Mattie Johnston.

One sunny summer day, after the morning fog had cleared, Uncle convinced me to go for a ride in his chauffeured black carriage. He wanted to present me to friends and associates around town. Uncle was a well-known man in the City and a prominent mercantile jobber who often appeared in the Who's Who columns of newspapers. When he first brought me to San Francisco the newspaper headlines read *Mr. William Bachman Retrieves Niece, an Orphan Captured by Indians in Kansas Territory*. Of course, Uncle never allowed the newsmen to interview me.

Soon after my uncle introduced me to several famous people in the city, I had a haunting dream about an old medicine man who emerged from a cave to speak to his tribe but I didn't understand his words because I had forgotten how to speak Pawnee. I only told Uncle about this dream because early on I understood that it was an abomination to mention my captivity even to my Cousin Constance and especially to her two sons, my cousins Matthew Lemont and Eugene Scott who were onery boys I never liked playing with or being around. They teased me when the adults were out of earshot and called me a little savage or a white Indian. Matthew Lemont and Eugene Scott were two and four years older than me which meant they were about seven and nine when I first arrived at the mansion on Rincon Hill.

Eventually, I refused to leave the mansion and would not even attend church with Cousin Constance and the boys. Once or twice, Constance insisted to Uncle that I attend the services but he put his foot down and wouldn't allow Constance to force me from the house if I didn't want to leave. "I don't attend church," he told his daughter. "So why should Mattie?"

My fondest memory of my early years was my first Christmas morning when my uncle gave me a magnificent dollhouse modeled after the mansion and a mahogany rocking horse with flowing yellow mane and a leather saddle. I named the horse Thunder Cloud; a name Constance

didn't like because she thought it came from Pawnee and she tried every which way to erase my mind of any Pawnee word or thought. But Uncle said he liked the name and I was as happy as a lark as my uncle sat on his parlor chair to read or to meet with associates and I rode Thunder Cloud in the corner of the parlor or rearranged my doll house furniture while playing with the two China dolls that came from Constance. Uncle suggested I name the dolls Miss Emily and Miss Elizabeth after the Blackwell sisters who were the first women to earn medical degrees. Even when I was a small delicate child Uncle Willie wanted me to learn about remarkable women in a society based on the traditions of men. He explained to me that Miss Elizabeth had graduated first in her class but when the sisters tried to practice medicine, people sought them out only for midwifery and preventive care. "It's a difficult world for brilliant women," I remember my uncle telling me. "But one day, Miss Mattie Comet, your star will outshine us all."

After I lived in the mansion on Rincon Hill for about a year, Constance began insisting that I play in the backyard with the children whose mothers stopped by socially. Cousin Constance believed that I needed to interact with other children to become a "normal" child. Uncle was generally at the Exchange during these times and when he returned home I often told him that I did not like playing with any of the children because they all called me a little white savage. But uncle believed Constance was probably right and he encouraged me to enjoy the afternoon sunshine with the other children, if I could.

I tried to please uncle and play with these children and ignore their taunts but I soon began avoiding them by sitting alone under a towering manzanita tree in the backyard and reciting nursery rhymes to Miss Emily and Miss Bess. This is when I first took to staring off in the distance, at the Golden Gate Bay, at the ships and boats bobbing up and down in the harbor, waving their flags at the stern. The distant sight captivated me and this was when I first had

trouble knowing my time and place. *Where I was, who I was, and when it was* began confusing me. I felt like one of those boats bobbing up and down and not going anywhere or coming from any place. They were just there. Like I was.

Naturally Cousin Constance was opposed to my sitting alone and staring off in the distance but this time Uncle again put his foot down and told Constance to let me be as I would be. “We don’t know what trauma she endured during her year of captivity,” I remember hearing him say. “Certainly, it was nothing you have ever experienced and in my opinion our little Miss Mattie Comet is doing remarkably well.”

When I turned eight-years-old I had my first premonition which I came to call forebodings. It occurred while I was sitting under the manzanita tree one bright and sunny afternoon. A five-year-old neighbor boy named Timothy McNamee was busy playing with hoop sticks in the backyard 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 turned dark like I was deep inside a cave and I felt chilled and sweaty at the same time. My heart began thumping nearly out of my chest then my head began pounding as well. It were as if too many notions and Pawnee words were filling my mind and I was struggling to sort them out until one thought took over and practically shouted at me *A foreboding looms on the horizon of the bay. Death and doom are coming to poor Timothy McNamee.*

“Go home Timmy,” I remember saying to that poor innocent little boy who hadn’t even called me an unpleasant name. “Your daddy is taken with gout.” The words simply fell from my lips before I even realized what I was saying.

Well naturally little Timothy began crying uncontrollably until his mother appeared and gathered him in her arms.

I didn't intend to frighten the boy because I wasn't mean spirited like the children who called me names, like my cousins Mathew Lemont and Eugene Scott; but I couldn't explain this to Cousin Constance who made me sit in the parlor and wait for my uncle to return home.

A few days later Constance learned that Timothy's father had succumbed to a serious attack of gout and died. This put her in a dither at first but soon she concluded that I had somehow overheard talk of the illness and that the prediction was merely a coincidence. Cousin Constance continued to instruct me with dedication, but she became increasingly impatient with me and never quite knew how to react to my peculiarities, my staring at the bay, other than to send me to the parlor until my uncle returned home.

In time, Constance couldn't deny that I had premonitions that mostly came from dreams I'd reveal at the breakfast table. My predictions concerned tragic events, such as a fire, a brawl, or a drowning in the harbor, and then Uncle or Constance would read about these events in the next day's newspaper. They began to realize that I was clairvoyant, but Uncle did not find this too unusual. He said that a great aunt back in Prussia possessed a similar nature. Constance, however, was convinced that the "savages" had bewitched me during my year of captivity.

I was eleven in 1860 when lifelong bachelor James Buchanan became president of 31 million people living in the United States. San Francisco had a population of nearly 57,000. During the year, the City held yacht races along the Pacific coast, the California Regiment of New York Volunteers arrived, civil engineers finish the railroad from Market Street to the Mission, and the Pony express brought news of Illinois congressman, Abraham Lincoln, campaigning for the ticket of the Republican party.



By this time, thanks to Cousin Constance, I was well versed in social manners, Christian morality, English and French literature, and I played the piano. But I never left the mansion on Rincon Hill. Playing the piano replaced the enjoyment I once found with my doll house, rocking horse, and Misses Emily and Bess. In the evenings, Uncle sat in his rosewood parlor chair before the brick fireplace, smoked his pipe of cherry tobacco, drank Port wine from a crystal glass, 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.*

I also enjoyed reading to Uncle items serialized in *Harper's Weekly: Journal of Civilization* including the poems by Walt Whitman and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. In March of 1861 Harper's Weekly illustrated Lincoln's inauguration with the great man riding in a carriage procession before the Capitol. In response to Lincoln's win, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas seceded from the Union and Jefferson Davis became the president of the Confederate States of America. On April 12, 1861, the Confederates shot the first bullet at Ft. Sumter and the issue of slavery divided the nation into conflict and chaos. As brother fought brother, Harper's Weekly brought the war to life in San Francisco. The publishers supported Lincoln and the Union Army but took a moderate stance regarding slavery to continue reaching readers of the South.

During the conflict Thomas Nast illustrated for Harper's Weekly. His sketches included Lady Liberty weeping over the flagged coffin of a fallen Union soldier and Lady Columbia with colored soldiers forcing Rebels into retreat. Harpers celebrated sisters Emily and Elizabeth Blackwell training volunteer nurses such as Clara Barton, Florence Nightingale, novelist Louisa May Alcott, and the freed slave Susie King Taylor who tended to the wounded black troops, and

Mary Edwards Walker who was the only female surgeon during the war, although much of her volunteer service was as a Union nurse.

For Lincoln's second inauguration on March 4, 1865, Harper's centerfold illustrated an enormous crowd before the Capital. At Appomattox courthouse in Virginia, a month later, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant. Harper's headline read *Lincoln, our Great Leader, is Victorious! We extend an olive branch to our misguided brethren of the Southern States*. Everyone believed that peace and victory blessed our nation, as Thomas Nast so beautifully illustrated with Ladies Columbia and Liberty together in his sketch titled "Our Blessed Victory."

The news of the Union's victory had barely reached San Francisco when I had my most powerful foreboding ever.

I had been tossing and turning all night. My night clothes became wet from my sweat and I didn't know if I were asleep and dreaming or awake and thinking Pawnee words and thoughts. This is when I really felt dislocated in time and place. Where am I? I kept asking myself. Who am I? Is it winter, summer or spring? I grew so confused in the darkness of my bedroom that I arose from bed and lit a candle so I could see. The candle mysteriously blew out as if a gust of wind had entered through the window. But my window was closed and I felt no breeze. Then I felt myself tumbling back into that cave, deep into its caverns and my heart pounded and my head felt like it was going to explode from all the thoughts and words filling my mind.

It was mid-morning when I appeared at the threshold to the dining room dressed in my bed garment and coat. Uncle was sitting 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 sitting with her sons Matthew and Eugene who were then thirteen and fourteen.

“Guten Morgen, Miss Mattie Comet.” Uncle stood and greeted me like he always did 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 below. The War of Rebellion had ended. Victory was in the air and it seemed like the start of a brilliant day and a wonderful new era.

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

Constance immediately arose 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 and then she 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 our Mr. Lincoln. The south will rise again and kill Ipa, our Great Father.”

“Mattie! Please,” Constance exclaimed. “General Lee surrendered at Appomattox 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 suppress their giggles and I said nothing more but refused to eat my breakfast and for the rest of the day I sulked around the house which worried both Uncle and Cousin Constance. But they refused to acknowledge or believe my dreadful foreboding until early the next morning when the ominous news cannoned balled 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 announcing, “The President Mr. Lincoln is dead.”

April 14, 1865 was a dark day in America. The next issue of Harper's Weekly announced *In the joyous prospect of coming peace, our chosen leader was stricken down by a coward.*

Uncle seemed more stunned by my prediction than by the assassination itself. But I chose not to discuss it, finding some things were best left unsaid like my captivity. Constance, on the other hand, became agitated by my devastating premonition. For days, she kept distant from me, her young "traumatized" cousin, but the boys couldn't hold back from bragging that I had predicted Mr. Lincoln's death.

Shops closed and draped their windows and doors and 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. And our large house on Rincon Hill filled with sadness. Because Booth shot Lincoln on Good Friday, churches adulated our great leader as Moses who had led his people to freedom but never made it to the promised land. It was not the sentiment of the South, however. 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 Browning *And mighty beings come and pass away, like the comets* and I swore to never allow my thoughts to bring about notions of tragedy. I cried endlessly, desperately trying to control my mind so another premonition would never touch me again. I couldn't help but believe that I myself had brought about the death of Mr. Lincoln.

Towards the end of 1865 the Secretary of State proclaimed that the 13th Amendment abolished slavery and the era of Reconstruction had begun. It was the year President Andrew Johnson awarded Mary Edwards Walker a Medal of Honor although she wanted an Army

commission for her heroic efforts to treat the wounded during the War. Miss Edwards Walker was the only woman to receive the coveted medal.

A year after the assassination, my uncle's friend Henry Wickenburg sent a letter inviting Uncle to Arizona Territory to establish a dry goods business in Wickenburg's growing town along the Hassayampa River. Henry Wickenburg was an Austrian emigrant who had lived in California for several years before he ventured to the Hassayampa valley a year before the War. He had discovered one of the largest gold strikes in the west and named it the Vulture Mine because, as Uncle loved saying, his stubborn mule refused to budge and vultures circled above believing the beast had died. Henry then threw a rock to move the mule along but missed and struck an outcropping with a vein of gold.

The Vulture Mine launched its operation during one of the roughest periods in territorial history, when General George Crook's Pima, Papago, and Apache scouts fought alongside the cavalry to protect settlers and prospectors. After the War of Rebellion, additional troops reinforced the Army posts like Camp Date Creek and relative peace prevailed except for the occasional band of renegades who fled their reservation to bushwhack, torture, and massacre the unwary homesteader or traveler.

Mr. Wickenburg's offer intrigued my uncle who had always trusted the Austrian and felt the two of them could skillfully manage the mine and develop a thriving town. And I know that at this time in his life, my uncle hungered for adventure and new opportunities. He had lived in one place for fifteen years and this was an intolerably long time for a man who fondly recalled the thrill of emigrating to America, then journeying to San Francisco and prospering. He craved this new prospect of mining for gold and establishing a trade in the rugged new territory of Arizona. But my uncle's spirit was torn. His main hesitation was me. He felt obligated to see me,

Fredricka's only living child, married to a respectable man. He felt it would be cruel to leave me behind but he hesitated to drag me, a young lady, a child in fact, into uncivilized territory.

A few months following Wickenburg's letter, a business associate sought permission to marry Constance who had been widowed a few years before. Herman Andrews was also a dry goods jobber and had paid several social visits to the mansion on Rincon Hill to meet with Uncle and to see my cousin. When Constance agreed to the proposal, Uncle felt encouraged to head for Arizona with a new man in the household to look after me. In the parlor my uncle talked to Constance and me about the notion and I insisted on going with him but he was still reluctant to bring me along and Constance was wildly opposed to the idea. She said that Arizona Territory was wrought with wild animals and savage Indians and urged my uncle to stay in San Francisco until he saw me married to a man of good standing and wealth.

Despite Constance's protests and Uncle's own concerns, he felt driven to see this new territory at any cost. Perhaps if his wife Josephine had lived he would have felt differently. But her death had made my uncle a bachelor for life and free to seek his own challenges and create his own destiny. Not one his daughter determined.

In a matter of weeks, Uncle Willie turned over his business interests to Herman and took the stage to San Bernardino then on to Ehrenburg. Once in Wickenburg, he sent weekly letters to the house on Rincon Hill describing his mercantile business and work at the Vulture Mining Company. He had built a two-story wood frame building on Frontier Street for his living quarters and dry goods store. Constance often wrote to Uncle Willie about my tormented disposition and she implored her father to return home.

Soon after I turned sixteen, Uncle Willie finally returned to San Francisco, prosperous and full of enthusiasm. I was overjoyed to see him and pleased that the venture had given him a

resurgence of spirit. I believe Uncle was happier to see me than his own daughter and grandsons which may have bothered Constance but she was too busy urging her father to move back into the mansion and see me married-off. To her chagrin, my uncle had no intention of staying in San Francisco. He had returned only to import merchandise to the town named after his friend and to fetch me, his Miss Mattie Comet. He had missed me more than he expected to, uncle told me, and he wanted me to live with him in Wickenburg Town. He believed I'd be more comfortable there helping him run the store and living far from the crowds and chaos of the City. A bustling life in San Francisco's society wasn't meant for me and he was convinced that the dry desert climate would suit me better than the city's drizzle and fog. "But what of all the dangers in the territory?" my cousin asked.

"Mattie will be safe living with me," Uncle told her. "Her spirit is strong and hardy, more so than that of any of us. She lived through a tornado and a year of captivity, and besides, there hasn't been much danger in the territory since the Army reinforced its troops. At least, I haven't experienced any problems in Wickenburg Town or at the Vulture Mine."

In 1867 I happily traded my fancy gowns from Constance for the simple calico costumes of the frontier. After I arrived in Wickenburg Town, I felt secure and protected living with Uncle again. My Ipa. And I was happy to be far away from the ever-booming Golden City on the Bay and from my less than tolerant cousins Matthew Lemont and Eugene Scott.



#### Chapter 4: Courting Miss Mattie Bachman

*1871*

*Jason Bartholomew Shear*

As the summer of 1871 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 a farm. With the help of Abe's spindly son James Grant, I settled on a promising stretch 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 in Prescott 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 pelts from the grizzly and cougar I shot while mining for gold up in Skull Valley.

All the while I was feeling restless and impatient. 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, there was no other way to explain it.

I bought a buckboard wagon from Patterson and from LaFayette's I ordered a Westinghouse cast-iron wood stove, oil lamps, and many fine things to please Mattie such as a Lady's Sewing Rocker for the porch, boxes of lace and velvet fabric for her sewing, and kitchenware and butcher and paring knives.

Each time I was in Wickenburg Town I sought out Miss Mattie's attention but no matter how hard I tried she refused to even 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 their store and order shirts from Mattie or ask that she stitch my trousers.

"Leave the girl alone," Mrs. Crawley said to me 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, if you value your life."

I paid no mind to her 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, a provider, and someone to make her happy. And I swore I'd be that man.

I soon discovered that other men in Yavapai County took a fancy to Miss Mattie Bachman as well. 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 of a man Kaleb Horton, cattleman and owner of Yavapai County's largest ranch, the "Bar Double H." The Horton cowboys came to town more often than I'd like. As cattlemen, they had a reputation for stirring-up trouble for us farmers. They claimed that "sodbusters" and "nesters," as they called us, stole land rightly meant for their cattle grazing. And the Hortons had ways of making homesteaders feel unwelcome in the valley. I heard about fences trampled down, fires set to barley fields, and even dead sheep tossed in a homesteader's well. Most folks put the blame squarely on the Bar Double H cowboys.

Abe told me that before the war three Horton brothers, Josh, Kaleb, and Benjamin, worked on their uncle's cattle ranch in Texas. After Texas joined the Confederate States the brothers enlisted and ended-up in the skirmish of Picacho Pass north of Tucson. The rebels killed three Union soldiers--Lt. James Barrett and privates George Johnson and William Leonard. The Union took three rebels as prisoners but no rebel died during that skirmish. However, the youngest Horton brother Josh later died of gangrene from a gunshot wound to his foot inflicted during the skirmish at Picacho Peak.

"After that," Abe told me, "Kaleb and Ben swore revenge on any 'blue bellied Yankee scrub' that dared cross their paths. 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 and in a few years they established the Bar Double H east of Skull Valley and their herd grew to three-thousand head. The Hortons prospered and came to practically rule Yavapai County.”

Abe Grant warned me that Kaleb Horton had sought Mattie’s hand in marriage before her uncle’s murder. “He offered old Billy a bundle of cash and that made Billy mad as hell and 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 wrong doing. 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.”

One afternoon, 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 corner gaming table across the room. Their cattle stench outright obliterated the kerosene smoke coming from the ceiling lanterns.

“Stinks of Yankee sodbuster in here,” came the gruff voice of a man with bristly black whiskers and black hair under his hat. I knew him to be Kaleb. Abe had warned me about his imposing appearance, his distinctive twang, and his hatred for Union farmers like myself.

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

“I say, stinks of blue belly liver in here,” Kaleb persisted and pounded his heavy fist on the table, rattling the entire saloon or so it seemed to me. His cowboys laughed, each of them dusty and gritty from their long ride to town.

“What do you boys want?” Abe asked from behind the bar. He was eyeing his six-shooter under the counter. He hadn’t had any trouble in his saloon for weeks because the Hortons and

their cowboys weren't coming to town regularly and when they did they frequented the Bucket of Blood Saloon at the rougher end of town.

"Whiskey, old timer," Kaleb yelled. "With a bumblebee sting. And bring out them cards. I feel like playing me a hand of poker."

Abe pulled out a bottle of his distilled rot-gut, his eyes still affixed to his gun. "I told you boys, no guns in here."

"Sure, old cuss. Come on boys. Guns." Kaleb clambered from his chair and ambled over to the bar.

"Let's head out," James whispered to me as we stood at the bar. "Don't need no trouble from these here Horton boys."

"No," I stopped my friend from leaving by grabbing his arm. I then swallowed my lager, 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 had learned to tamper my temper. But as a trained soldier I am first and foremost a fighting man ready for battle in an instant with my finger always near or on my barking irons.

Kaleb, pungent from sweat and livestock, placed his Colt on the bar. "Hey blue belly," the Texan said to me. His cold gray eyes peered at my reflection in the mirror. "Hear you beena badgering my Angelica."

I took another drink of my lager, not looking at the cowboys placing their revolvers on the counter.

"Hear me, mudsill farmer?" Kaleb asked and I saw his hand inching near his Colt before Abe could place it under the counter.

“I ain’t looking for no trouble, cowboy.” I thumped down my glass on the wooden 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 here parts. Especially bastard Yanks trying to court Miss Mattie Bachman. She’s marrying me. See here.”

I kept my cool under pressure. A soldier’s restraint. And I swallowed more John Barleycorn. In general, name-calling never bothered me, much, until then. Kaleb’s talk of marrying Miss Mattie Bachman made my stomach burn like a blast furnace 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. He was too young to join the Union when the war broke out so he never became a soldier and he grew up living a secluded life on a Prescott farm before his widowed pa moved to Wickenburg Town.

Abe slowly placed the guns, one by one, under the counter, never taking his eyes off Kaleb.

“No, I ain’t a going nowhere, see here,” I said defiantly. “Not till I finish my barleycorn. Fact is, I’ll take another one. Abe, hear me man? I have a powerful thirst all of a sudden.”

Kaleb’s neck veins flared. “Billy Yank here has a yellor streak down his back.”

I kept silent, steady, but with my nerves prickling and my thoughts saying *blowhard bottom sucking yellow dog. Go boil your shirts.*

Kaleb threateningly leaned toward me, his breath reeked of chewed tobacco, decay and rot-gut of the worst kind. “You best head outa town and not show your ugly face around here no more. Farmer. I’m here to court Miss Mattie.” All at once, Kaleb reached in his worn leather vest

but before he could remove a hidden pistol Abe had his six-shooter pointed between Kaleb's eyes.

"You and your boys best 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." He grinned, showing stained and missing teeth. "Come on boys, let's get. Got some ladies waiting for us up the street. But I ain't done with you, sodbuster," he glowered at me. "No, sir. You're as good as a dead man now. Hear me?"

I remained at the bar, trying to ignore the cowboys as they clambered through the swinging doors. I knew trouble had started. But Horton and his threats weren't going to dampen my spirit for using the land as I saw fit, the land I deserved after battling the likes Kaleb Horton and his gang of Rebel cowboys. Nor was he going to stop me from winning over Miss Mattie Bachman, a fine and proper lady who would never marry a Horton. Deep in my heart I knew Miss Mattie was destined to become my wife.

By the end of October 1871, I completed the farmhouse and its furnishings. But the Westinghouse cook stove and the pump from California hadn't yet arrived. Generally speaking, a freight teamster wagon brings large orders to town from the Colorado. But at the time I was growing more than concerned about the shipment because I wanted to marry Miss Mattie as soon as possible before some stink of a man beat me to it. And I wanted the farmhouse to have all its furnishings and fixings when I brought Mattie to her new home. To make sure my supplies made it to Wickenburg Town without further delay, I decided to head to Ehrenberg myself and check on the steamer's shipment. Abe suggested that the stove and pump could be sitting in a warehouse along the river. And besides, I wanted to see what the town of Ehrenberg had to offer.

I'd heard that the shops along the Colorado brimmed with misplaced supplies and lost orders from California and even the States. I figured on finding me a Singer sewing machine to give to my intended.

The day before I was to take the stagecoach to Ehrenberg 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 Street from the Bucket of Blood up town.

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

"Where you heading, Billy Yank?" Kaleb rudely asked. He was dusty and smelled of whiskey, cattle, and sweat even from ten feet away. "Thought you'd a been scalped by now."

Tall and lanky Ben Horton laughed at his brother's remark.

I kept heading to the store but watched every move the cowboys made, concerned they'd brazenly shoot me at any moment. The Hortons were fearless when it came to the law, especially when "half seas over" drunk on liquor, as they were. But I was prepared to draw out my Colt and shoot them both first.

Before anything happened Miss Mattie came out of LaFayette's store carrying a bundle of cloth. She wore a fetching black silk wrap with violet fringe and a bonnet with tiny pink rosebuds. Her appearance choked me and for a moment I completely forgot about the saddle stiff Hortons.

Mattie stopped in her tracks when she noticed the Hortons and me.

"I'm off to the Colorado, Miss Mattie." I tipped my Stetson as I passed by the Hortons who were dismounting their horses. At the edge of the boardwalk, I added, "Off to pick up my

new stove 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 quite know what to make of it. But I felt encouraged.

“Miss Bachman,” I finally said when I found my tongue. “I got to meet the shipment on the river and pick up supplies for my new spread up the Hassayampa.”

“Mister,” Mattie said and 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 soft pretty words consumed me. Her very presence filled my heart. *Miss Mattie wants me to stay in town* was all I could think. *She cares about me.* I knew she’d soon be accepting my proposal and moving out to my 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-liked 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 burst out. 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 got me 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. “Hope someone kills you before I do it myself. I hate Yankie nesters and I especially hate the likes of you.”

I closely watched the Hortons stammer around their horses and stumble 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 for a pug of tobacco but Kaleb stopped at the swinging doors and pointed his thick finger at me. “You’re a dead cur,” he said then spit a red stream of tobacco on the planked walkway and entered 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 the rebels were soldiers and all soldiers are fighting men whether from the North or South and they lived miserably under the command of Captains and Generals. No matter what they believe. No matter the reason they are fighting.

At the Magnolia Brewery and Saloon, I described to Abe my encounter with Miss Mattie and told the old bartender about her warnings concerning the next day’s stagecoach to Ehrenberg.

“We got to warn those people,” Abe remarked as he anxiously wiped his sweaty brow. “And you, young feller, ain’t a going! Mattie’s never been wrong about her forebodings. Besides, I got a feeling them Hortons are up to no good. Been coming to town much too often lately. 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. I got a feeling myself. And it ain’t Apache doing the killin’. No sir. Ain’t Apache.”

“No,” I remarked. “Reckon I ain’t going tomorrow.” I removed my Stetson and rubbed my untanned brow. I never liked feeling flustered. It’s not the make of a Union man. But Kaleb’s attentions toward Mattie flustered me something fearsome and made me want to stay in town as long as the Hortons were around. And the fact that Miss Mattie spoke to me at long last and gave me a warning filled me with the nerve to finally propose marriage to her. No, I concluded, it wasn’t the right time for me to leave town no matter how much I wanted to see the Colorado and find a Singer sewing machine for Miss Mattie.

Just before midnight that same day the red Arizona stagecoach screech to a halt beside the livery station and the six passengers from Prescott spent the night at Snider’s Hotel. They were weary and dusty after traveling all day and they had many jolting hours ahead before the stage reached Ehrenberg.

Early the next morning men from Patterson’s Stock Corral hitched a fresh team of six horses to the Arizona Stage. The most famous passenger, Frederick Loring, was on his way back to New York via river steamer to Panama. Another passenger was an insurance salesman from back east dressed in a gray suit and bowler hat. While these men loaded their carpet bags and packages aboard 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 was locking the doors to his saloon across the street.

The old bartender approached us and called to the men hitching the horses. “Hey fellows. You can’t take off today. Heard there’s trouble between here and Walker Station. Road bandits, maybe Mexicans, maybe renegades.”

No matter how persistently Abe protested, no one heeded his warnings. They all had pressing business in Ehrenberg or had to catch the steamer down the Colorado or the coach heading on to Bakersfield. No one had time to allow some old timer to delay them.

“You folks loco around here?” Dutch finally announced. “Got a schedule to keep. Mr. Loring’s got a steamer to catch.”

Frenchie, Snider, Patterson, and some Mexican families gather around the stage while Patterson’s men continued to ready the coach. Mrs. Crawley gazed over from across the street probably feeling helpless because of Miss Mattie’s warnings which everyone in town had heard about by this time. But townsfolk also knew that the driver wouldn’t delay his stage. Until the Iron Horse Train comes along, stage companies pride themselves as the quickest means of travel across the frontier.

“Ma’am,” 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. “Don’t go. 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 trying to frighten the lady,” another passenger protested.

“Let’s go,” Dutch yelled as he climbed on the high box seat and collected the reins from the break lever. All the passengers boarded the coach while Abe shook his head in defeat.

I watched it all unfold from the dusty street feeling unsettled about foregoing my trip to Ehrenberg and about the concern Mattie had stirred up in town. I looked across the street, upstairs in Crawley's store, and noticed the taciturn Miss Mattie peering from her window, something she seldom did.

"We're off," Dutch yelled from his seat. "Can't hold up the mail or the Arizona Concord Stage. Besides, ain't been no trouble around these here parts for months. And I've fended off my share of outlaws and renegades before. Git up!" He whipped the reins and the stage rambled down Frontier rousing up dust clouds in its wake. The woman passenger leaned out the window and waved back at the townsfolk she didn't know.

"I got a sick feeling," Abe said upon seeing Miss Mattie appear on the street. He meandered back to his saloon wringing his hands and shaking his lowered head.

I watched the stage disappear then noticed Miss Mattie had retreated into Crawley's store presumably back to her room. I headed to the Magnolia and decided to spend the day getting drunk. There was 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 great quantities of lager and had to piss with frequency in the gutter out back.

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

After three hours, 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 that stage got through?”

“First thing tomorrow,” Frenchie calmly suggested. The men mumbled in agreement and we continued playing poker.

Throughout that day an eerie silence fell over the streets of Wickenburg Town. Then, when evening dropped upon us and the town began to quietly slumber and everyone’s nerves got bolstered, us men in Abe’s saloon began muttering in agreement that the stage had made it through.

However, no more than an hour later a courier trotted down Frontier Street shouting *Stage’s beena robbed! Stage’s beena robbed!*

We jump to our feet and fell out of our idle stupors. By this time everyone in the saloon was completely jiggered and stewed.

Townsfolk hurried onto the street. I ran up to the courier as he was dismounting a gelding nearly sweating blood. “Hell broke loose at Walker Station,” he said while panting like his horse. “Appears Injuns done it. Mr. Loring. He’s dead. Kilt everyone but that Krueger man and Miss Sheppard. But they’re both in real bad shape, the two of them.”

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

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

Abe locked up his saloon, the men returned to their homes to keep vigil, and I staggered to my hotel room wondering how I might protect Miss Mattie Bachman when trouble arrived in town.

I recalled terrible stories about Comanches on the warpath killing and torturing settlers across Texas and other parts of the frontier, destroying towns, homesteads, killing any poor fool traveler--women, children, and old people alike. I'd heard that the Apache and Yavapai were just as fierce.

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

I took a few swigs of whiskey from a jug beside my bed and passed out completely for maybe an hour. Then I jolted awake and swayed into the darkness with my trusted Winchester. I stopped outside Crawley's and yelled Mattie's name as I pounded on the door.

A light from her room came on. She had lit a candle, no doubt, but no answer came to my call. No sound. Only a distant screech owl. Or maybe it was a hoot owl outlaw? I had pondered. Or an Apache making his clandestine call. I knew one thing for certain, it was surely a bad omen.

Then suddenly the light in Mattie's room went out.

"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 back up, I blacked out dead as a door nail for the night.

Over the following weeks soldiers, the sheriff, and reporters from Prescott, Tucson, and places back east gathered in Wickenburg Town. Fred Loring's death was big news telegraphed

across the nation. *Loring Slaughtered on the Frontier, Renegade Apache Massacre Loring and 5 Others* headlines read in all the newspapers at Lafayette's Store including the New York Times, Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, San Francisco Chronicle, Prescott's Weekly Arizona Minor, and Harper's Weekly.

Everyone in town ceaselessly talked about the tragedy. Most believed that Indians ransacked the coach but some suspected that outlaws disguised as Indians had done it. Others felt sure that Mexican rancheros along the lower Hassayampa had been planning the massacre for some time. No one expected poor Miss Sheppard to live but before she died she told Captain Meinhold of the Third Cavalry that she saw white men among the robbers. Then folks began thinking that in her delirious state, Miss Sheppard's memory was unreliable. Regardless of who robbed the stage, six new graves occupied the site of the massacre outside of Walker Station.

With all the excitement in town I assumed that Miss Mattie would talk to me like she had when warning me about the ill-fated stage. But she avoided me in her typical manner and stayed mostly in her room while I meandered past Crawley's glancing at her window, hoping to see her peering outside. More than ever, I was determined to return to my farm with Miss Mattie Bachman at my side.

Finally, on a Sunday morning, maybe a week after the massacre, 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 because I had already drunken a few barleycorns that morning out of pure boredom and frustration over the stubbornness of this fetching, apple of my eye.

"How about forgetting all this trouble in town and move to my farm?" I found myself saying. It was like I was back in the War and had shored up all my courage and might to win the

battle. “I built you a nice little house out there. It’s got a stone fireplace, three rooms, 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 and I watched her calico dress sweep the dusty walkway.

I suddenly felt foolish. Flustered. And considered giving-up on courting her all together and 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. I hadn’t been there since before the massacre.

“Dad blame-it woman,” I cursed in one last effort. “What do you want? Why won’t you talk to me?”

Miss Mattie then stopped in her step, turned, and looked directly at me. For a moment she smiled then she continued on to Crawley’s. A powerful shiver rekindled my yearnings for this taciturn lady. I stood in the dusty street pale and speechless. *Miss Mattie has a dimpled smile as bright as her emerald eyes I kept thinking and 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 very afternoon I hitched my 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 bean fields.

But before leaving town I went to Crawley's Dry Goods to fetch Miss Mattie Bachman. This was going to be my last attempt, I swore to myself, although deep inside I knew I was refusing to ever give-up on her. How could I? There was nothing I wanted more in life 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 as if she was tired of my pestering her day after day about Mattie. "You just as well stop your persistence. Besides," she waved her hands to clear the air of my breath and said, "You're clearly fuddled."

I paid no mind to Mrs. Crawley's words and insisted she fetch my intended. But before the cantankerous woman budged from behind the counter Miss Mattie appeared at the top of the stairwell in a long periwinkle cotton blue calico 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 said, looking straight at me. "We going?"

Her face glowed with a beauty I hardly thought possible. I stood at the counter like a flummoxed bull ox when Mattie approached me.

Rebecca watched with her jaw dropped, dumbfounded as well.

Mattie presented her gloved hand to me, casting the scent of citrus eau de cologne. I gently kissed the soft cool velvet then escorted her while carrying her bag to my buckboard parked across the street. We quietly pulled away from Wickenburg Town and headed up the northeast road to my homestead along Hassayampa.



## Chapter 5: Meeting David Thompson on the Arizona Concord Stage

*Springtime 1876 five years after the Loring Massacre*

*Miss Mattie Bachman*

Springtime on my Hassayampa farm is my favorite time of year. The tall ocotillos tipped with crimson flowers are dancing with the orange globe mallows, the yellow creosote flowers are humming with bees, and the cottonwoods and willows are brimming with flycatchers, red cardinals, and yellow tanagers. One time I spotted a marigold warbler and heard its trilling song. I later identified it in my five-volume Audubon Ornithology set where, among its pages, I like to press springtime wild flowers like the primrose, poppy, chicory, lupine, and orange fiddlenecks that pop up along the Hassayampa Trail on the way to Wickenburg Town.

“These are good hickory wheels,” Jason says as he yanks the break-lever and the wagon screeches to a halt on Frontier Street. “Good hubs, felloes, rivets, flanges, and spokes. The solid metal strips around them makes for good traction and wear.”

I say nothing. Jason takes a swig of water from his Army canteen then hands it to me before he helps me down from the wagon. His hands are calloused and dry, despite his use of Hegeman’s Camphor Glycerine for chapped hands, face, and lips.

My eyes are surveying the quiet town and the dry dusty windswept streets. Doves are cooing from rooftops. A furloughed sergeant is trotting down Frontier on a bay Mustang quarter-horse most likely purchased from the reservation. Down the street, Mexican boys are shouting while chasing a hen that escaped its crate. They are ranch-hand children at Henry Wickenburg’s spread. I’ve seen them on the occasions Mr. Wickenburg has stopped by the farm to give me cured hams and jerked meats.

Wickenburg’s Vulture Mine has run dry and stopped producing gold. The bonanza is over and these days many townsfolk have abandoned their houses and businesses, compared to the heyday of this boomtown shortly after Uncle brought me here. Folks have moved off to Prescott and to the new settlements at Maricopa Wells along the Salt River. A few folks went down to Tucson seeking gold, adventure, and land. *It’s do or go bust, die, and dry up* people say. Samuel Crawley, Jeremiah Snider, and Frenchie Martin are holding out for better times.

Normally, Jason hitches his team and heads to town with either Pedro or his brother the old vaquero from Guaymas, his hired hands. Truth is, he rarely asks me to come to town and I only accompany him on the days I want to look through the merchandise catalogues at Lafayette’s; but today he wants me by his side to welcome David Thompson on the Arizona Stage from Santa Fe. Jason likes telling me that his former prospecting partner is the best man

he's ever known. After a hearty supper, he's prone to tell stories about how he and his old pard set out on the frontier after the war. I especially like hearing how David found Jason wounded on the battlefield outside of Nashville. *Would have died if David hadn't come along* he says to me. *Owe him everything I got. Including you, Mattie darlin'.* *David carried me from the war into the arms of an angel.*

Sometimes Jason likes recalling the long hours of riding with his pard across rough terrain and the late evenings they spent together beside a flickering fire drinking coffee, smelling sizzling bacon, and listening to an owl hoot beneath a brilliant shoal of stars. He misses those days and I believe my husband secretly hopes to prospect with David once again. Since I came to the farm and lost the baby, Jason hasn't prospected for gold or worked his existing claims because he doesn't want to leave me at the farm for more than a day at a time.

I follow Jason to Snider's Hotel where he takes me to lunch whenever he brings me to town. As soon as we enter the swinging doors I notice my Ladd piano-forte sitting prominently on the dining hall floor and then I see a sign behind the hotel counter that reads *Wanted, Piano Player.*

Here's the thing. Uncle had bought me that piano. But it was too big to move out to the farm so it remained in the house above Crawley's store and I meant for it to remain there until I decided what to do.

Shortly after my uncle's murder, Samuel Crawley, a worker at the Vulture Mine, bought the dry goods business from me. I was anxious to unburden myself of the store. My only request was that I remain living in my room upstairs where I had lived since Uncle Willie brought me to Wickenburg Town. I never sold them my piano but I had agreed to pay ten dollars a month in

rent from the money I earned from my garment business. In my room overlooking Frontier Street I maintained a sewing studio where I stitched men's fitted shirts and lady's petticoats and gowns.

The room that originally belonged to my uncle became the Crawley's and we shared the house above the store. It had a modern kitchen with the Mary Evard cook stove with Elizabeth Hawks baking attachments that my uncle brought from San Francisco and a well-furnished front parlor that featured my Albert Ladd Victorian piano-forte that Uncle Willie had ordered special for me from Worcester's in New York. A postal company had shipped it via Panama to San Francisco, around the Gulf and up the Colorado by steamboat, then a Murphy wagon with a thirty-six-mule team brought it across the treacherous desert from Ehrenburg to Wickenburg Town. I used to play it for my uncle every evening but after his murder it sat silently in the parlor like a memorial to him. The notes seem empty without my uncle's presence and I had no desire to play any music for Rebecca and Samuel Crawley or for anyone else in town.

I never felt any warm affection for Rebecca Crawley, a lean woman who was nearing forty-five when she moved into the store. She had been a seamstress for many years but after purchasing the dry goods store, she turned over her sewing business to me so she could clerk at store while Samuel toiled over accounts for both the Vulture Mine and his new store. Before the war, Samuel had arrived in the Territory as an Army sergeant and Apache fighter while Rebecca remained in Ohio raising their two boys, fearing her husband would never return, as she's told me. After the War, Samuel brought her and their two boys to the Territory. Despite Rebecca's protests, Samuel refused to give up the vast openness of the Arizona desert and the thrill of ever-present danger. Rebecca lost out again, she liked complaining. It seemed to her that nothing went her way even though she believed *her way* made the most sense.

When the eldest Crawley boy Clayton reached twenty he and his younger brother Jon, who was eighteen at the time, set off for California to prospect. They ended-up cutting Douglas fir in Oregon. Rebecca painfully missed her boys and had begged them to stay in Wickenburg and work with their father at the mine. But they were young and driven to seek their own destiny, and whenever Rebecca received a letter from them she dreaded opening it, fearing that someone killed one of them. In his last letter, Clayton spoke of settling with a woman up in Seattle while Jon traveled to Alaska in pursuit of gold. The news aggrieved Rebecca fretfully because she had begged her boys to always stay together. She felt like her sons deserted her and she barely endures the pain this causes and so it seems that the best she can do with her pitiful life is to make others feel miserable too. It's her way of reckoning, I believe. Although she's never been directly unpleasant to me or other townsfolk, she's the town's best source of unflattering scuttlebutt. Often, on a lazy afternoon, when a cool breeze gently sweeps along the boardwalk outside Crawley's store, Rebecca likes to sit on the wooden bench re-reading old letters from her sons, probably wondering why life has treated her so poorly. All beer and skittles, she is.

Now, as soon as I see my piano in Snider's Hotel, I drop everything, hasten out the swinging doors, and head to Crawley's store. I find Rebecca standing behind the counter placing tin goods in a customer's knitted bag, a señora with a baby in one arm. "What's Snider doing with my piano?" I ask.

"I never made no promises to keep it for you," Rebecca says, obviously taken aback by my uncharacteristic fit of rage. Like everyone else she's used to my being quiet and soft spoken. But I am rabid with fury. "Besides, Miss Mattie," Rebecca continues, "We bought everything from you, clear and for a fair price!"

I catch hold of my wits so I won't cause the señora's baby to cry. I give Rebecca a look of disdain, leave her establishment, and returned to Snider's Hotel, eager to head back to my quiet little farm. But Jason hasn't finished his business in town and I sit at the table but no longer feel hungry for lunch. Instead of my usual pot pie, I eat vanilla rice pudding with ginger snaps while Jason eats his T-bone with brown gravy and potatoes. I say nothing to him about the piano because, as I have learned through experience as well as advice from Cousin Constance and the books she's sent me, a woman keeps her peace when a man is eating a hearty supper.

After Jason pays the waiter fifty cents for our lunch, I follow him to Frenchie's well-stocked store. All the while my thoughts are rambling on and on about Rebecca Crawley. On the one hand, I pity the woman who does little more than strut about as if she were Wickenburg's First Lady and Wickenburg isn't much of a place for feeling proud. No place is, I muse to myself, except for my little farm along the Hassayampa.

*Too much sentiment will be your downfall* I recall Uncle saying to Cousin Constance back in San Francisco. She had wanted to keep an old termite infested trunk that came from Prussia. But despite her protests, Uncle Willie burned that old trunk. I of course had felt a little bit sorry for my cousin, but I mostly agreed with Uncle. He knew about things that mattered. *Sentiment serves very little purpose, Miss Mattie Comet* he often told me. *The only thing that really matters is the health of those we love. Once they're dead and gone, nothing important remains.*

With my uncle's advice in mind, I decide to forget about the piano and let Rebecca keep the money she earned from selling it to Snider. Jason is what matters to me, nothing else, and I refuse to let Rebecca's woes further rile my emotions. Besides, I dread having confrontations with anyone. That might stir up forebodings and I haven't had one since the Loring Massacre

five years before. However, I will no longer patronize Rebecca's store when I come to town with Jason. I'll only frequent LaFayette's General Store. Jason won't ask me why I'm refusing to speak with Rebecca. But I'm certain he'll suspect it has to do with a woman's venomous spite, as he might put it.

The aroma of Arbuckle coffee fills LaFayette's store. He has his shelves stocked with anything I might need including tins of peaches, beans, and stew, and hardtack crackers. Wooden rolling pins, metal spoons, funnels, strainers, and kerosene lanterns hang on nails on the pine board walls. Against the eastern wall, among the horse tack and weapons, are plump sacks of barley, potatoes, and livestock feed. LaFayette's store fills the needs of all his frontier customers, and, as old himself Frenchie likes to say *If I don't have it, I'll ordered it for yee.*

"How do, Jason, Miss Mattie," the bearded old-timer remarks from behind the counter. Garters gather up his sleeves and his worn leather vest smells musty from his sweat. He's a man who loves telling a story, any story, about himself or about someone else. He tells stories he heard back in Montreal or on the frontier where he moved nearly thirty years before when the cry "Gold in California" pulled him away from Quebec. Frenchie is a Forty-Niner.

Although my husband is a quiet man and prefers a man of few words, he allows for Frenchie's loquacity. The Canadian has never crossed Jason, has always extended us generous credit, and, as Jason likes to tell me, Frenchie plays a fair game of cards. To Jason a poker game demonstrates a man's true character. He sees gambling a matter as serious as prospecting for gold. It has rules that men must respect and abide by. Jason and Frenchie both can spot a honeyfuggle bluff and a cheat and neither man *ever* frets over winning or losing. It's a game played against the odds among men of good manner, Jason's been prone to tell me.



“Your prospecting partner arriving today?” Frenchie asks, although he knows why Jason and me are in town. Everyone in Wickenburg has heard about Jason’s telegram from Santa Fe. News wired across the frontier rarely remains a secret especially with an old Army cuss like Wilford Jones running the Wickenburg Post. Wilford can never keep his mouth shut about news that concerns a newcomer coming to town.

“Due in this morning, I reckon,” Jason replies. He stands at the counter, gripping his prized Winchester that he customarily carries.

A display of squash, tomato, corn, and flower seeds sits on the counter along with newspapers and magazines, canisters of lemon drops, jelly beans, rock candy, and peppermint sticks, and a bowl of freshly-cut apples. Jason looks over the colorful produce. “Guess we’ll take some of them apples.”

“And a dozen Mason jars,” I add as I open a canister and removes a peppermint stick. I love peppermint sticks. In my gardens I grow peppermint but don’t know how to make candy and I can’t find recipes in my homemaking guide from Constance. But I make a tea from my peppermint to soothe the stomach ailments of Jason and his Mexican hands.

“Shipment’s just came in from Ehrenberg.” Frenchie offers Jason a slice of apple. “All the way from Wala-Wala, Washington Territory, mind you.” The old Canadian guffaws. “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 in the midst of his story. I nervously turn, fearful I might see Kaleb’s buzzard face or that of sour grapes Rebecca. However, at the door stands a small Mexican boy and his younger sister, a pretty girl of four tightly holding a ragdoll as tattered and soiled as the children themselves.

“Out of here you two!” the shopkeeper yells.

“It’s all right.” I motion to the children. Hand in hand, they saunter over to me and I give them each a candy stick and send them on their way. Then I grab a *Harper’s Weekly* and 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 my uncle Willie, but sometimes I grow weary of tinker’s news that I’ve heard dozens of times before.

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

I open my *Harper’s Bazar* and page through the pictures of beautiful women in fashions from Paris, Vienna, London, and New York. Fashion I’ll never wear on the frontier or reproduce. These days, out on the farm, I’ve been using my Wilcox and Gibbs hand crank sewing machine to stitch my own garments and dresses and make Jason’s shirts and mends his britches or those of his farmhands.

I stop at a page titled “Ladies and Children’s Spring Dresses” and muse to myself *if my baby had lived, she’d now be the age of that little Mexican girl. And I’d be sewing her lacy white pantaloons and dresses to the knees.* I then recall Jason’s words at the little stillborn’s gravesite *A child who never breathed we bury and now move onward.* Her grave lies on the eastern hillside beside a saguaro. Losing the child doesn’t weigh too heavily on me; it’s something that commonly happens. Almost all women lose a baby or two and a woman on the frontier has to be as resilient as a soldier and as remarkable as a frontiersman. I learned this from Uncle Willie and from my husband. Jason lives by a few simple notions when it comes to life and death. Perhaps it makes life less shocking. Easier. Men have no time for sentiment and sorrow especially veterans

of the Rebellion. Dr. Frye had assured Jason that I could have another child one day. But he advised him to wait for my full recovery. A year, maybe two. Consequently, Jason left me untouched for two years. Then, when he took me again, he was gentle, careful, as if not to cause my death. Although I sometimes worry that I've lost my ability to bear children and this burdens me because I'm hoping to give Jason many sons and daughters to help with the homestead and establish his legacy on the frontier.

I set aside the *Bazar*, open *Harper's Weekly*, and glance at an article about cattle ranching in the territories. It makes me think about Kaleb Horton and his gang of Bar Double H cowboys. Men who stare at me relentlessly as if I'm an uptown fair and frail soiled-dove. Jason was different, of course. When his eyes first landed upon me his look was respectful, a bit shy, but sincere. So very unlike Horton's piercing gaze. Kaleb is a devilish man, hoot owl bad.

I'm beginning to grow agitated at the thought of Kaleb showing up in town while I'm here and I start questioning why Jason insisted I come along with him to meet the stage. I could just as easily greet his old pard back on the farm. Properly. Respectfully. Without encountering the unpleasant folks of Yavapai County. "I hate this town," I say aloud, swearing I'll let Jason know just how outraged he's made me feel.

A sudden movement catches my sight and I forget about my anger with Jason. Across the street is a finely dressed woman. Her gloved hands carry a parasol spoked like the wheels of Jason's wagon. Her lavender dress has crimson flowers embroidered along one side, a fancy bustle, and puffed polished-cloth sleeves that are shiny from the sunlight striking the boardwalk. Her long golden hair also glimmers as it falls down her back from a stylish New York hat with ostrich-feathers. I'm aware that her fine clothes come from Tiffany's Blue Book in Frenchie's store. The woman is an unusual sight. It's odd enough seeing any white 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. *Maybe I think she's heading to the assayer's office with gold dust from some old drifter.*

I know her to be Franny McDuff because I learned all about her when living with Rebecca who knows about every living soul in the county, including the women of misfortune. Franny arrived in Wickenburg Town shortly after my uncle's murder and Rebecca claimed that she came from Memphis money but that's all she knew. It seems that when ladies end-up on the frontier, like this uptown woman, this Franny McDuff, they lose their heritage forever.

Franny passes directly across the street and I return to my magazine; I can almost hear the rustle of her lavender dress. I glance up for a moment. Franny is looking at me. She nods and smiles, not pausing in her brisk walk.

I feel foolish and bury my eyes back in the magazine. Six months before Jason took me to Uncle Willie's grave on cemetery hill west of town beyond the uptown establishments and houses. As our wagon passed the Bucket of Blood Hotel and Saloon I noticed Franny peering out 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 really do day-in and day-out? It isn't the sort of thing I've ever discussed with anyone, not Constance, not my uncle, Rebecca, and certainly not with my husband. But I'm guessing that Franny isn't happy doing what she does. In the name of Kingdom Come! How could any woman be happy doing *that* for a living?

Perhaps it was Rebecca who told me that fallen women can be as mean and wicked as Indians. But Franny seems lovely and mysterious. Although what they're doing is sinful, as my cousin might say, I can't find any 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 them to do within the sphere of domesticity as the Beecher sisters write in their book. This is especially true for women on the frontier. Rebecca Crawley is a good example. Perhaps Rebecca can't help but agonize over her sons. A woman's life can be truly pitiful and enduring.

I return to my favorite magazine. Sometimes Harpers offers controversial stories about ladies who step beyond the accepted norm, the sphere of domesticity. Articles occasionally portray suffragists fighting for a woman's right to vote, to own property, to earn equal pay with men, to pursue the dreams of men, to venture into the world of men, and make monumental changes for the betterment of society. Editors at Harpers raise the question "Are women trapped in bondage."

Both Constance and my dear uncle influenced my life from opposite sides of the suffrage issue. In her letters Cousin Constance often quotes Catherine Beecher who says that *The question of women's rights comes from women who avoid large families often by sinful methods such as spiritualism, free love, and divorce*. Uncle Willie, on the other hand, taught me to appreciate such innovative and progressive women as the Blackwell sisters, Miss Maria Mitchell, and Myra Colby Bradwell who was a favorite heroine of my uncle. Miss Bradwell apprenticed under her lawyer husband and passed the Illinois bar exam with high scores. Law firms rejected her because of her being a woman but she went on to start a periodical called *Chicago Legal News*, *Journal of Legal Intelligence* and she fought for a woman's right to serve on juries and attend law school. Last year, ten years after Lincoln's murder, his son Robert had his mother Mary Todd committed to an insane asylum but Myra and James Bradwell engineered her release. "Mary Todd Lincoln is no more insane than I am," Harpers quoted Myra Bradwell as saying.

The idea of being such a courageous lady puts me in a tizzy. I have no voice to shout for social reform or become an important citizen. I don't like making decisions. I never had to during my childhood. No one asked my opinion. Most likely my uncle and cousin were afraid they'd stir up something inside me, "the traumatized child," and send me into madness like Mary Todd Lincoln. Perhaps Jason never asks my opinion because gentlemen don't upset a lady with a delicate frame of mind. But Jason isn't the questioning type although he might make a few suggestions. He's a good man who cares dearly about me. And besides, the suffrage movement does nothing to reform such women as 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. Where would I be if Jason hadn't come along? Someplace other than my quiet and unimposing 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 on his way to Frenchie's store. He's clean-shaven except for a full dark moustache. "Haven't seen you in town for quite some spell. Waiting for the stage?"

I nod at the tall, lean man, leader of the unincorporated frontier town, and member of the Vigilante Committee. A mayor, really. He is a conscientious believer in women's suffrage and the extreme doctrine of State's Rights. Before moving to Wickenburg Town from Tucson at the end of the war, Mr. Snider had lost his wife of ten years to typhoid. None of their three babies had reached a month of age and now all of them lie in lonely plots outside Tucson where he left them behind. Jeremiah Snider was a good friend of my uncle Willie who liked to say *I put Snider down as a man of his word, a shrewd trader, and a good man to know in this strange hostile land.*

Mr. Snider drove the investigation into my uncle's murder and to this day he follows any lead although most are pure story and speculation. Snider has always been especially kind to me. He saw to it that I got a fair price for my uncle's interests in the Vulture Mining Company and he helped me settle the Crawley's purchase of the dry goods business. He sent the gold I received by Wells Fargo Freight to San Francisco's Wells Fargo Bank where my cousin's husband manages the account. On the night of my uncle's wake at the Snider Hotel Jeremiah proposed marriage to me. He promised to take care of me and make me the most respected lady in the Territory. He would be Governor one day, he suggested. I considered marrying him, knowing my uncle would have approved, 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 about people. After marriage, a woman takes on her husband's propensities, I've read, whether that be in farming, ranching or even in politics.

*Perhaps I'd be more like Rebecca* I laugh to myself *if my husband were Jeremiah Snider. I'd spend my time prancing about town with seven or more children while Jeremiah chased a congressional post.* The notion seems ludicrous and I reassure myself that I'm quite content with Jason on the farm. No, I think, I won't bother Jason tonight about my coming to town. It wouldn't do any good anyway. As Jason likes saying *We face whatever we face when the time comes to face it* meaning the Apache or the Hortons or even a rattler in the barn.

I watch Jeremiah Snider leave Frenchie's store carrying a box of biscuits and a jar of strawberry preserves for his extravagant mid-morning breakfast. He's a polished man who enjoys fresh butter, Muscat grapes, shelled walnuts from California, and Habana twenty cent cigars, all mail ordered and delivered by stagecoach. Outside the assayer's office he greets

Franny with his charming nod and touch of his hat. What are they saying? I wonder. Possibly Franny expects something on the stagecoach, or someone. Occasionally sporting women arrive on the tall round Concord Stage along with salesmen, drifting gamblers clad in fine Bostonian suits, 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 Mining Company. The reporter inquired about me because I'm a rare sight on the frontier. I now regret my reluctance to meet with 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 yet arrived in Arizona Territory and when they do, folks expected them to replace the stagecoach companies like the transcontinental wires replaced the short-lived pony express. It seems no one can stop progress from bringing about all these new and improved upon patents of change and 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 with Abe and James who is helping his father run the saloon.

The town begins to awaken. Fortunately, there are no Bar Double H cowhands in sight. Kaleb evidently expects nothing on the stage. Barking dogs are chasing a wagon rumbling down Frontier Street to Patterson's Livery. The battered rig belongs to an old prospector from the Black Hills who'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 coyly nod back, sorry I spotted Rebecca's glance, and sit back in anticipation of meeting Jason's pard. If it weren't for Mr. Thompson Jason would have died on the battlefield and never started his farm along the Hassayampa. *And where would I be then?* I ponder. *Living with Rebecca? Married to Kaleb Horton? Or would I be back in San Francisco?* *No, if Jason hadn't come along I'd have married Jeremiah Snider before returning to the City.*

On the flat desert west of town, the red coach appears trailing a line of dust. I take a deep breath to prepare for this meeting and recollect a phenomenal vision of power and force I saw a year back. I was sitting on the same bench outside Frenchie's Store watching General George Crook and his cavalry of soldiers noisily paraded through town. I had never seen such a sight. I avoided glancing at the soldiers who could stare at me as relentlessly as any Bar Double H cowboy, if the sergeant wasn't watching. Trailing the white soldiers in forage hats, polished black boots, and blue uniforms with stripes, insignia, and ribbons were about twenty Indians on horses dressed in discarded cavalry shirts with red arm patches that said "Scout US Army." Each scout carried a single-shot raffle.

Harpers featured an article about the Army enlisting Apache, Pima, and Yavapai scouts to locate hostile renegades. The use of Indians as scouts came about after President Grant ordered General Crook to "force the savages onto reservations or exterminate them and bring order to the frontier." General Crook was a hero of the War of Rebellion and a seasoned Indian fighter who had killed over 250 Yavapai during the Indian wars of the fifties. Crook had suggested that the Army use Indian scouts claiming that the Apache are as "elusive as the wind," that it "takes an Apache to bushwhack an Apache," and that "the Apache scouts are *born* of this dry rugged land and know its dangers better than any newly arrived white man." As far as a scout's allegiance to his regiment Crook maintained that Apache warriors were loyal to their

family tribes, not the entire Apache Nation spread across the Territory. And if the Army gives a scout a rifle, pays him, and entices him with a medal of honor for his allegiance, he will serve the cause without a problem.

I hadn't seen many Indians before because they live primarily on reservations and don't wander freely about town like the Mexicans and white folks. In particular I recall one Tonto Apache sitting tall on his palomino as the twenty scouts majestically rode in formation down Frontier. 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 a bearded frontiersman like Jason. When his dark brown eyes found me I saw a look unlike that of any other man who has ever stared at me. At first, his blistering gaze made me tremble. But he drew me to him, hypnotically, like a spirit guide draws in a spiritualist, I suppose. I had felt a surge of excitement at beholding his fearless and unrestrained eyes. If only I were as brave, I thought then and am thinking now. If only I knew what it was like to never feel captive or trapped. To never be afraid. To be a powerful force.

Across the way the red Concord Stage is halting outside Patterson's Livery and wakes me from my thoughts. A Mexican vaquero attends the team of six horses that are frothy and tired after running from the last station. Men from the stables clear the reddish mud cakes under the carriage and on the wheels. Jason is now standing near Patterson's; his team hitched up to our buckboard and tethered to the posts. Boys are shouting with excitement; their dogs are barking. The entire town gathers at the stage. The first thought on everyone's mind is whether there's been any kind of attack. No one's forgotten the tragic Loring Massacre that happened five years before.

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 stagecoach for ten years.

“No problems folks,” assures the shotgun rider next to Big John. He holds his Winchester with both hands.

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

Snider opens the Concord’s door and assists an older woman down the step. She is the mother of rancher Alfonzo Ramirez and will stay at Snider’s Hotel until her son receives word of this unexpected but not unusual visit. She’s followed by a prospecting friend of James Grant, a burly man originally 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 shadows of the coach I hear Jason saying, “David,” and he shakes the man’s hand, gives him a firm embrace, and pats his back. All at once I notice that Jason’s pard is a man of color. But he isn’t Mexican or Apache, I’m thinking as I stand ten feet from them. He’s tall with broad shoulders and has a clean-shaven face under his Stetson hat. He wears the clothes of a seasoned frontiersman--canvas trousers, army boots, a striped muslin shirt, and a rawhide vest.

*It 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 had been 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 back 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 such 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 distinctive heritage have special senses when it comes to locating gold.

No wonder he's here, I suddenly realize. Jason *is planning* to head out prospecting with Mr. Thompson. Suddenly, I'm feeling angry again, 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. He's loading Mr. Thompson's saddlebags onto the buckboard bed.

I venture toward the wagon and notice that many of the townsfolk are glancing, now and then, at Mr. Thompson and at me too. 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.

My agitation growls inside me but I summon the courage to stand before Mr. Thompson and smile. He politely kisses the hand I offer and says, "Miss Mattie Bachman Shear, Ma'am. I'm mighty proud to know you."

He's a gentleman, I'm thinking as I politely nod back. But 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 a child. Sometimes, it seems to me, Jason is too quiet for his own good.



#### Chapter 6: The Farm while Jason's Away

*1876 five months after David arrived*

*Miss Mattie Bachman*

"Mattie darlin'," Jason says one morning five months after David arrived on the farm. He sits at the head of the pinewood table. Also present are David, the old vaquero, and Pedro. They're eating a hearty breakfast of fried bacon, eggs, potatoes, and Jason's Dutch oven biscuits that he learned to make during the war. Only Jason makes the biscuits. He tried to teach me how to make them but mine never turned out as good as his. The only thing I'm able to cook is the pioneer bread Rebecca taught me to make in the Mary Evard cook stove with Elizabeth Hawks baking attachments. I never did the cooking when I lived with my uncle above the dry goods store. He always had hired help. 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.

At the pinewood table I pause from pouring coffee from the blue enamel pot and look at my husband. He seldom addresses me during meals especially now that Mr. Thompson is 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 telling me what he’s aiming to do. 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 that might bring about one of my premonitions. Therefore, he waits until the last moment. “Me and James is heading to Camp Date Creek this morning,” he says. “The crops are planted and it’s time I go and file that Veteran land patent.”

As if not listening I continue pouring the steaming coffee into 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 possessions--coins, stamps, cigars and tobacco for rolling, telegrams from his pard in Santa Fe, and his star flag and eagle Medal of Honor, the symbol of his distinguished heroism during the War of Rebellion.

“Last time I was in town James told me he was riding up to Prescott,” Jason says. “I agreed to ride along with him and do a little prospecting after I filed my land patent.” He swallows a spoonful of eggs probably wondering what I might say. I say nothing and 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 his land patent and that

he misses his prospecting days with David. Fact is I expected him to depart any day but I always assumed he'd be leaving with David.

I proceed to eat. The thought of Jason returning to his claims after neglecting them for so long 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 there's been news of renegades vandalizing mines for the pleasure of destroying what the "white-eyes" have created. 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."

Jason looks at me with biscuit crumbs lodged in his 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 that I'm being plain ornery. He's already promised me he'd stay clear of the Hortons.

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

"Why head out now?" I venture to ask because I really don't want him to go but Jason is a man who can't settle in one place all his life without pursuing prospects and adventure rather like my uncle Willie. Men are restless, driven to seek something new and different. I knew this about Jason the minute I laid eyes on him and saw a seasoned frontiersman in Wickenburg

Town. And I also 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.

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 good month. Maybe two or three. This troubles me and I say, in a last attempt to stop him from going, "Mr. Thompson just got here."

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

Mr. Thompson is eating his breakfast and keeping his eyes to his plate. I'm sure Jason's already discussed this matter with him. That's why Pard's being unusually quiet. Generally, he conversates with Jason during our meals about the farm or their riding days.

"Thought you'd be wanting to go *with* Pard. I know you both want to prospect together once again."

"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.

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 can say anything more he abruptly gets up, walks over to the front door, and grabs his Stetson hanging from a wall nail. “You can depend on David while I’m away,” he says, looking at me. “As good as you can rely on me.” My husband then heads out the door to the corrals.

I begin gathering up jerked meat, flour, bacon, beans, sugar, and coffee for his journey north and 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. 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 and lonely as I’m watching him leave. *If only men felt satisfied with what they had* I muse. Suddenly, a breeze tousles my hair. The morning is fresh and scented from the lavender growing at 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 his arrival. He smiles at me reassuringly 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 really mind David’s pleasant smile and compliments, now and then. But Pard likes to talk and tell stories and with Jason gone I’m dreading that 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 and the iron horse, about telescopes and outer space, about patents described in Scientific American, about prominent men and women, and the interesting

signs of the time. My Uncle Willie was a remarkable man and I miss him dearly. His company, his compassion, and his understanding of me and my peculiarities. He tended to make me feel connected to his time and place, if that makes any sense. Maybe it was just him I felt connected to.

It's not the kind of connection that I have 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 before as if David stirs recollections from his mind in ways I never could, maybe because I'm a woman. Late into the night, after I retire to bed, 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 conceptualized business matters with visiting associates in the front parlor while I was sitting on my rocking horse Thunder Cloud or playing at my doll house with Misses Emily and Bess. Men like to talk about serious matters, about adventures and ideas to improve upon things. It's so unlike the giddy palaver 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 Navajo 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 Navajo wife and son that I felt my own heart break 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 say such a thing? It seemed disrespectful. Not enough mourning time had passed. And there's the fact that David's Indian wife had 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.

As I help Juanita clear the breakfast dishes off the pinewood table, I keep pondering how I won't allow Mr. Thompson to trouble me with conversation. I decide to 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 potato stew or a pot roast. Awkwardly, perhaps, but the men eat it. I get the feeling they appreciate a change from Juanita's tomalleyes, tortillas, and beans.

At the dinner table I find myself feeling especially 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 hunted down 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 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 what happened to me many years before.

“Grizzly’s good eating,” Jason said, avoiding my question. I then 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 me and David coffee. I sit back at the table, sip the strong brew, and watch the young Mexican woman smile at David.

“Gracias,” he remarks. I can’t help but suspect that Juanita likes the man of color. I’m not positive. 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. But after arriving in Wickenburg Town on a Mexican freight-wagon she learned that

Ramon had died a year earlier. Fortunately for her, Jerimiah Snider offered Juanita temporary lodging and when he learned the girl grew up helping her grandmother who was 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 herself useful and when I became bedridden she fanned me with cooling air and softly sang Mexican lullabies that rang through my mind long after she stopped singing.

During my sixth month with child, I had fallen 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 he feared that 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 just after they gave 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 the sweat from his brow, that his Mattie would survive to 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 and consider going outside to help Juanita wash the supper dishes but I don't feel right leaving David alone at the table. He's been enjoying his supper with very little to say. If David doesn't speak soon, I keep thinking, 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. 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 while 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 Navajo 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 to me 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 of captivity. As I know full well being a former captive is an abomination and not a matter to discuss. Only once after David arrived on the farm did Jason mention that Pard lived in Missouri before he escaped bondage and became a Union soldier of the Colored Regiments who fought to break the chains holding down his people.

“Africa is a continent I’ve read about in Harpers,” I say to David on one occasion 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, are drinking our coffee, and I feel like it’s time I start a conversation with Pard. Certainly, he’d be interested in knowing that I’m aware of where his people come from.

David offers me one of his genuine smiles that seems to brighten the lantern’s flame. “That’s right, Miss Mattie. I know you’re a well-educated lady. Must be, if you read such articles in Harpers.”

I sip my coffee and say, “It was an article about the ‘Last Journals of Mr. David Livingston’ and it discussed his missionary work in Central Africa. Livingston wrote about the atrocities committed by the Arab ivory and slave traders.”

“Many thousands of African folk were slaughtered,” David says as I glance at his deep brown eyes reflecting the lantern’s wick in an almost spiritual way.

“Can be a right ugly world when it comes to humanity,” I say. “But there are good souls living on Earth like yourself, Mr. Thompson.”

“Like you, Miss Mattie.”

I smile and can feel myself blushing but I doubt David can notice this in the dim evening light. Then I think to say, “I also read exposés about slave-hunts. The stories befuddled me and I asked myself endless questions. How can people enslave other people? How do people live as

slaves? How can they 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 in life through her poems. She came from a family of slave owners in the East Indies but she detested the outrageousness of the institution. I especially think about the line she wrote *While memory waits with twilight mists overcast to mete the lengthening shadows of the past*. I don't think we can ever escape memories of our past 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 served as a war time nurse. He comforted the Union soldiers like Clara Barton and the Blackwell sisters Emily and Elizabeth."

"Yes he did. I always hoped for an opportunity to meet the man who could write such inspirational poems about humanity and freedom of the soul."

"You're very poetic Mr. Thompson."

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

"In fact, I do from time to time," I say, feeling flattered. It's almost as if Uncle Willie is talking to me and encouraging me to become a shining star. To be Miss Mattie Comet. "I jot down my 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.’*”

“How inspirational, Miss Mattie. I do believe Harpers would publish it. And I understand 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 had been turned upside down when I was only three and the Pawnee took me. I know how you might feel except I really don’t remember my captivity like I’m sure you do. 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 Indians. They think they’re all savages and beneath them. 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 have engaged in more than enough conversation for the night. It’s starting to feel improper with Jason away. I excused myself and thank Pard for his enchanting company and I 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 had never before done with a man. Not even with my 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 farm life on the frontier. I survey the homestead looking for my help but 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 glisten; his muscles are strong and sinewy except his back bears welts from a horsewhipping during his days of captivity, no doubt. He notices me looking his way and politely touches his Stetson. A frontier man always wears his hat and sports his revolver. 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. Red and Blue bark excitedly behind me thinking we're setting out for a short walk by the river.

The large barn doors hang slightly ajar. As I near them I hear whimpering that sounds like Juanita's voice.

*An Indian Attack!* Is my first thought and I begin quivering as I push open one door and peer in at the cobwebbed interior buzzing with bull flies. A milk cow moos from behind its stall and the smell of manure penetrates the air. I scan the area and see nothing but hay stacks, bags of feed and fertilizer, a rusty iron plough, and rolls of Gidden barbed-wire that Jason recently purchased to fence-in the property and keep out roaming cattle. I see my own garden tool box

that Jason had ordered special for me a few years back. The box includes a hoe, rake, spade, and garden fork with a long handle.

From behind the far stall across the room Juanita's moaning escalates and 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 premonition? I ask myself as I nervously enter the barn. Why didn't I hear the whooping war cry of Indians or the rumpus of rabbleroising outlaws? Why hadn't David?

I tiptoe toward the far stall, prepared for the worst. My concern is to save Juanita and I don't consider my own safety if renegades are still lurking about. 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 and my heart pounds. The milk cow loudly moos as if calling out the alarm. Should I run for David, I keep asking myself, or run and retrieve my derringer? I quickly decide I must render immediate aid to the poor girl left injured before she succumbs to her wounds.

As quietly as a door mouse I inch my way to the far corner of the barn feeling certain that the culprits have fled. I hear only Juanita. I stand before the stall and peek behind stacks of feed, not knowing what to expect. Then, after a moment of shock, I begin to understand what I am 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 wailing now and are much too involved with what they are 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 showing me that she's angry at him, her Don Juan.

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

I look at David and feel baffled. "Make them leave my farm," I finally yell.

Juanita flees the barn wailing 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," he says. "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. Jason being gone and all."

I then leave the barn and return to the house unsure of why I'm feeling 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. The woman is 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 just fall and fall like Franny McDuff in 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, awaiting her fate. “Who’s going to do the cooking, Miss Mattie, if you send Juanita away?” David asks me.

“I can cook fine,” I answer. “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 quite certain now that trouble is somehow brewing on my Hassayampa farm while Jason is away.



## Chapter 7: When Mind Met Matter at the Eternal Call

1876

*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 four poster bed. Her upstairs lodging room smells of a man’s musty leather and of Franny’s 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. Even after a very pleasurable time together.

“I have my hopes and dreams,” she continues as her soft fingers run down my chest.

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

She smiles brightly at me and pinches my cheek as she likes doing. I take hold of her hand and squeeze it 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 a woman finds 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 that maybe Mattie was different from all other women I’ve known. But then I saw that even dear Mattie has a typical female side to her. Why else would she run Juanita off? 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 there is a problem. Mr. Calloway refuses to sell it for less than five thousand dollars in gold. And Calloway demands his fifty percent share 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 of the 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 things come from customers who say they are in love with me. Maybe they are. Like you David," she says as I sit up beside her at the edge of the soft feather bed. "I'm still young enough and I 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 ask while drawing her against me like women like a man doing.

"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 that Jeremiah Snider visit 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 together when he invited me to dinner at his hotel, like a real lady, before he took me to bed. Those times meant 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 to 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.

“I love you too, David Thompson. I know you to be a fair and honest man, good at heart, and a straight talker. I can freely tell you about my aspirations and you listen 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 into town this morning?” She surprises me by asking this question out of the blue. I wonder why. “I’ve never known the girl to come to town while she’s been living on Jason’s farm.”

“Mattie made her go,” I say and take a stiff drink. “Rebecca agreed to take her in to cook and clean.”

“Made her go? What kinda trouble went on out there at Jason’s spread?” Franny asks while slipping on her hose, garters, and 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 know *why* Juanita left the farm.”

“Why is that? Miss Franny.”

“Well, my being around whores for a good part of my adult 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 his family. 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 drifter who offered me a promising life on the frontier only to abandon 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 regular customers who must choose which one of us he wants 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 other girls my dream of buying the saloon. Why, if I did own the saloon, Annie, Rosa, and Josie would be working 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've 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 had 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 is fading 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, when he gets back?” She strokes my cheek with the back of her hand. “Jason took on Juanita to help Mattie. He told me so himself. And 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 fought for Mr. Lincoln. But I never wage war with a woman.”

“No, you’re right. I’ve heard that Miss Mattie’s touched by Indians, true. 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 smile 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 rancher 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 and Mr. Calloway would torment me if I caused such trouble among his women and with his cash flow. He'd probably even lash me a time or two and I'd never end-up owning the saloon."

"I best be going now, Miss Francis," I say as I place a silver Double Eagle on her nightstand. "Got to get supplies and head back to the farm before night falls. 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 sits 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 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 to me from the front porch. "The old vaquero shot a fat Tom turkey 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 I remain at the table to drink coffee, as I customarily do. Tonight, I'm feeling especially obligated to stick around in case Miss Mattie has anything to tell me, directly, considering 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 I wonder if she's still upset because of what happened in the barn. That's too simple, I conclude. Too much like a 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 on the table before her filled with fragrant sage and nasturtiums. It sits beside the lantern burning pungent kerosene.

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 concerned. Unlike Jason, I take Mattie’s abilities quit seriously.

“Don’t know, just got a feeling about trouble, about a killing. It’s how it happened before. My heart starts beating fast, my head begins to pound and fill with too many notions and sometimes everything grows dark. That didn’t all happen this time but the words just tumbled from my lips without my even thinking about them. 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 or 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 the townsfolk would react. The thought riles me with disgust and to calm my nerves I begin singing the words to “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.

Seemingly pleased with what I've said, Mattie takes from her apron pocket a gold chain and watch to check the time as she customarily does each morning at the end of breakfast. It's how she likes to start the day.

"Been meaning to tell you, Miss Mattie," I venture to say. "That's a fine watch you got there." Her smile gives me a warm feeling. I like seeing a woman smile; it's like a sunny morning with song birds. Or, as my Auntie would say *A smile speaks to thyself in spiritual hymns and makes melodies in your heart 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 that horrible Kaleb Horton and his Bar Double H cowboys. I always believed 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 say, pleased Mattie's now freely talking to me.

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

I get this feeling that something inside her has sprung forth again, something closed for too long, maybe for all her life. Suddenly, 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 smiles and 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 to Jason. I just can’t talk so freely to Jason about sentimental matters.”

“Family is a good thing,” I say, also feeling a sense of relief from the conversation 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 Navajo wife of course. Otherwise, friends like Jason and you are 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. She’s never had such a notion about me, I’m sure, and probably never thought I saw her this way. I was just Jason’s Pard, that’s all. “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 really remember. And we both found Jason. Well, I guess he actually found me. And you found him on the battlefield.”

“Yes Ma’am. That’s a fine watch,” I say. “But don’t need to tell much time around here, I reckon. Not like in San Francisco,” I add, knowing that she grew up in the largest city in the west. “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 my 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, why are you so poetic with words?”

“I was born a house boy. Master was a wealthy educated man. He was also my father,” I say and suddenly feel as if Miss Mattie has opened the flood gates that held back my own traumatic childhood memories. I never have related them before, not even to Jason or other soldiers of color in the regiment. But now I tell Mattie about my childhood and she raptly listens, 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 slave to the Mistress. The day I could walk and talk, Mistress forced Master to sell my mother because she knew that her husband was my father. When I was about 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.” Mattie giggles. “Auntie also cooked for all the colored folks living in the shanties,” I continue with my story, thoroughly enjoying revealing my life to Miss Mattie. She pulls my childhood out of me like Auntie used to do. “And my old auntie always found time for singing, telling stories, and speaking about the Lord’s power and glory. She was a wonderful force of nature, a pure hearted woman of love.”

“She must have been a blessing in your life, like my 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. The slaves. 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, of course, but a life without vengeance doesn’t come easy. Not for a man who soldiered in the War of Rebellion.”

Mattie listens intently and seems mesmerized by my discourse. “Your story is truly a poem by Miss Browning,” she 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 that He reveals to only a chosen few. Like you, Miss Mattie. Auntie called it *being given to Mazes* and it means having spiritual tendencies. My Indian 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.”

My words seem to give Mattie pause. “Mr. Thompson,” she 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 field outside Nashville, before you carried him off to that hospital tent. He thought he was already dead. Did he ever tell you that, Mr. Thompson?”

I smile, beaming inside and out. I’m enjoying Miss Mattie 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. Then didn’t you say to him *You’re all right now mister? This isn’t your day to die.*” Mattie looks beseechingly at me then 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.”

I nod and say, “Two years into the war I heard tell of Mr. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. He proclaimed 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. I knew that 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 then and there. God had him in mind to make Miss Mattie Bachman a farm.”

Mattie glows, seemingly pleased by 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.” She suddenly seems to realize that she tells the story that I had lived.

“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 like Jason to the hospital tents. After the

war, Jason found me in town. Remembered me. Called me his savior. And we just 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 Navajo wife?”

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

Mattie daintily eats her scrambled eggs and biscuits with sausage gravy.

Across from her, I eat my eggs while deep in thought. Mattie has stirred my memories. I miss my Indian 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 Navajo wife. 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 but 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 you’re special, Mr. Thompson. 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 is away.”



## Chapter 8: 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 our gold money 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 ends up marrying a widow twice his age. She owns the Prescott Pine Hotel where me and James each have a room. When we first entered the boardinghouse, the widow took ahold of my lanky diffident friend and smothered him with motherly attentions. "Why Mister," she squeezed his biceps, "Let Mama put some meat on them bones." James fell smitten over this woman, the first one to ever pay him any mind, and he proposed marriage to 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.

With gold in my pockets and the additional acreage officially mine, I hire two fellows 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 of Yuma and brought his cattle up to Prescott where they ended up working for room and board at Huckaby's Livery Stables. Now that James got himself hitched and moved permanently into the boardinghouse, I figure the Buckholtz brothers can help me run my new livestock to my farm and stay on as hired hands at least for the year. I'm planning to build an extra room to Mattie's house and need help to sell the livestock in town and plant animal fodder and cash crops. 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 other parts of Yavapai county.

At the Palace Saloon on Park Street, I come across Jose Gonzalez who had been 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 I meet his señora. On the street outside Randal's Hardware Jose introduces me to his wife who is sitting with a toddler and baby and selling steaming tomalleys that prove to be quite tasty. The señora is a stalky woman, scrupulously clean, and she wears a low-neck camisa that reveals heavy breasts. *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. I feel certain.

In early November I arrive at my homestead with livestock, a wagon full of lumber and purchases, 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 shortly after my return. I’m not angry that she sent Juanita away. I see no reason to interfere with her decision and it feels like divine providence that I came across Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez like I did. Besides, my eagerness to start a family consumes any agitation I might otherwise feel.

Mattie is so pleased with my safe return and my many gifts which she sets around the house for everyone to see that she willingly accepts my favors at night. She is not so distant when I take her like she was before. Her mind is more with me and this makes me feel certain that I’ll be planting my seed in her fertile womb.



## Chapter 9: The Hassayampa Flood

*Late summer 1877*

*Miss Mattie Bachman*

In the late summer of 1877 Jason receives a wire at the Wickenburg Post informing him that 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 back 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 our vaqueros and wranglers and with Mrs. Gonzalez here to help you along. We'll be gone no more than a month."

I politely give him my blessing and keep my peace. It's not that I really have any 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.

After Jason and David ride off in the early morning, I wonder who I will 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 onto the frontier. My uncle preferred that I read him stories and poems from Harpers because he wasn't a religious man like my husband. Truthfully, the only religion in Jason's house occurs when I recite grace at supper *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 rekindled my spirit for the Lord and awoke the hymns of my heart.

About a month after Jason and David have left for Prescott, toward the end of summer, a storm rolls into the valley and begins pelting the desert with torrential rains. Usually, I don't mind the summer cloudbursts. They're not like the cold drizzle of San Francisco which lasts for weeks at a time and consumes everything including one's 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 its eau de cologne, mostly the sweet medicinal aroma of creosote and sage. From the shelter of my L-shaped porch, I like sitting in my rocker and watching the rain muddy the yard and fill the gullies that surge down into the Hassayampa. And I love hearing the pitter patter on the pinewood rooftop.

But this storm is unusually long lasting. After two days the unending downpour and dark skies bring me melancholy, as Cousin Constance would call my gloomy moods. On the porch, I spend hours rocking in my chair thinking about Jason and worrying about his ride home from Prescott. I battle to put him out of my mind so I won't get a bad premonition like I had before my uncle's murder. I don't want to know Jason's fate. I want to believe that 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's carrying 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 takes 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 set off to check on the levees and dams up the 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 the 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 a creosote and 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. Darkness and disturbance permeate the air and my thoughts are as turbulent as the desert washes rushing into 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 do some hunting 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 because a thunderous eruption is coming from the northwest where the river enters our farmland. I stand with my hands clasping my pounding heart. What I see keeps me from breathing.

Nearly a hundred yards away a wall of muddy water taller than the house charges toward the corrals while devouring mesquite trees, fencing, my gardens, and everything else in its path. I can’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 cannot run to their hut because the river will swallow me too.

Not knowing what to do I bolt inside the house then back to the yard below the porch in the torrents of rain then, as far and as fast as I can, I run away from the house and up the nearest

slope of the eastern hills. All the while the wind is wailing like a 1000 screech-owls and howling coyotes.

Halfway up the hillside, I stop in my tracks. Through the dark and relentless rains, I glance back at the river. “Señora Gonzalez!” I scream again as I watch the Hassayampa bury 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 with the question *Why didn’t someone move the livestock?* But I know why. Because no one expected a flood to reach the corrals and barn.

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

I shamble a few more steps up the muddy slope near the grave of my stillborn baby. In my haste I slip and fall 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 in the heavy rain and wait for the river to pass by or take me with it. Either way, I’m exhausted and cannot flee any farther. When the water covers my legs up to my waist, it begins to retreat but the rains never stop pelting me and 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 ravaging the land but the adobe house of the Gonzalez family is nowhere in sight.

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

the river waited until Jason and David weren't around to rescue me. The river 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, it appears, has made her way to the top of the barn. However, I begin fearing that at any moment the roof will break apart and plunge the poor, wounded señora into the ferocious river. 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 and lion rugs, 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 do think about Uncle Willie's autobiography and assure myself that it 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.

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 with panic. It is 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 above the thunderous river. I yell and yell until my throat pains me like a scorpion sting.

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

For a moment I remain on the floating table beating 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 my uncle telling me what had 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 get out of this calamitous deluge. 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 feeling each piece of lumber quiver beneath me. But the boards are miraculously holding together.

At the top of the roof slope, through sheets of rain, 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 who is precariously near the edge of the roof. “Grab my hand,” I shout, stretching my arm as far as it will extend.

Mrs. Gonzalez slowly 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 now visible to me for the first time since I saw it covered by the flood. It lies some forty feet away.

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 I see the Gonzalez child holding herself in fear and crying for her mama.

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

I’m feeling stunned once again and 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, I have no doubt, and the river will wash away the stranded child.

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

The lumber beneath my feet shakes as I try to 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.*

Suddenly, as if Jason himself is actually with me in spirit, bolstering my aim, the rope lands on the adobe roof near the crying child. *Almost dead-on spot. Remarkable!* I can really hear Jason say. But it is Señora shouting for her baby girl. Her Niña Rosita.

“Tell your baby to put the rope around her waist,” I holler through the storm at the panic-stricken woman beside me.

Mrs. Gonzalez screams to her child in Spanish.

The barn roof jolts, knocking me on my seat. I steady myself and rise up while 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 brace myself and tug the rope with the help of Mrs. Gonzalez. The child hits the water in a splash then 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 because I know that 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.

Señora, the child, and I grab one another and tightly huddle as the boards we are lying on hold together and miraculously become our raft heaving us downstream away from the farm.

I hear only clashing thunder as I embrace the child and woman with one arm and grip onto the lumber with my free hand. We shiver from fear and cold because we are drenched like drowned ferrets. 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 I’ve tightly affixed my face to the pinewood and when I do look up the rain and splashing waters blind me.

Then, all at once, the lumber beneath us falls to pieces and I tumble underwater. With all the strength left in me I fight against the surging river 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 keep thinking about Rosita who 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 am able to clamber ashore where I shake my sopping hair from my face and plop onto the muddy earth. With what little life that remains in me I buttress myself with my arms and sweep my sight up and down the river but don't see Rosita or her mother nor any of the lumber from the raft.

Then suddenly I hear the little girl wailing so loudly I'd think she could push back the river. I look along the bank and see, twenty feet downstream, little Rosita in the arms of her mother. I clamber to my feet, amble to where they lie in the mud, and fall to my knees before them. We all embrace and gasp from sheer exhaustion.

"The old vaquero help my Rosita onto the roof," Mrs. Gonzalez stammers between her breaths as if she must tell her story now in case she doesn't make it. In case she dies after all. And then 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, and 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 he 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 dress because I don’t want her to see her injuries and fall in to a state of shock. “Rest now,” I whisper as 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 away into the clamoring river.

Russel Buckholz and Pedro wake me from a deep slumber. I shakily sit up and try to steady my spinning mind and aching muscles. Have I drunk pineapple cider? I’m thinking. 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 the 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 and try to focus in the light. The sun has broken through departing clouds in the western sky and the light is swathing me and the horse Pedro helps me to 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 10: Bushwhacked

*Just after the Flood of 1877*

*David Thompson*

After Jason got his federal deed for his homestead, him and me took to prospecting once again like in the old days when we were riding across the frontier. We knew we didn't have much time because Jason needed to get back to Mattie and his farm but we spent a few weeks panning and sluicing for gold in the forest creeks of Prescott Valley. Our efforts paid us a bounty of gold.

The assayer is placing value on Jason's and my gold nuggets with a stamped hallmark certificate when we hear twelve-year-old Jedidiah Huckaby riding down Main Street and shouting, "Dam's broke on the Hassayampa!" The sheriff's son regularly announces Prescott's most important news in this manner. But today's earthshattering revelation isn't the typical political gossip that the boy relates.

Jason stops what he's doing and runs across the road to where the boy is tethering his horse to a post outside the Sheriff's office. I'm following close behind carrying the bags with our hallmarked nuggets.

Jason towers over Jedidiah Huckaby as he grabs the boy's shirt and gasps, "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 were responsible for the calamity.

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

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

“Didn’t have time to buy Mattie cloth and sundries,” Jason says at one point.

Along the river bank we pass detritus, upturned trees, logs tossed against boulders, and drowned animals. The Hassayampa is flowing beyond its natural boundaries for this time of year. The first homestead we reach lies in crumbles. No one is around and we hustle on, unable to stop and look around 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 beyond the floodplain,” he says. “Even the corrals and the adobe hut are far 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 the likes of everything. I

keep playing in my mind what Mattie had 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 is 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 continue riding to his farm. Without another word, Jason lopes down the trail with Red and Blue close behind. His saddlebags carry his land deed and certificates of legal tender. In my saddlebags, I have both Jason's and my ingots of gold stamped for value and purity with the assayer's hallmark. In his haste to reach his farm, Jason forgot to take the gold and I forgot about it myself. But there's nothing I can do about that now.

I locate a grove of cottonwoods and willows away from the Hassayampa and all the flood debris and 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 next to 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 do 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, starless night in a plantation of trees. The rains begin. Soon a downpour drenches me. Lightning illuminates the treetops and I listen to the wind howling, to water falling from leaves, and to the river rushing down the valley. Lightning strikes and I see gray uniforms and enemy faces peering from the brush; they have their rifles aimed at me and my comrades in arms. The rebels fire musket percussion shots and flashes pop in the darkness. The enemy has the upper hand advantage. I plunge into a muddy bog by the levees.*

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

Morning light is breaking when I jump awake from this nightmare. I immediately spot Ghost quietly looking cockeyed at me from the side of his face, as horses are inclined to do. My horse is not an Indian broke mustang from the reservation. Ghost has a partnership with me, his master, and he is letting me know that the swelling on his leg has gone down and he's ready for me to 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 that goes on between me and Ghost.

The chilly morning darkens with clouds as I ride downstream keeping Ghost at a brisk but easy pace and hoping to give my enemy the slip. In a short while the sun peers from parting clouds and its light angles across the trail beside the chalky river. A Gila monster trundles from the topsy-turvy debris. The poisonous creature stops in its slow pace and gazes at me when I near

it then slowly moves on, unaffected by the flood. It's probably getting fat eating all the bugs and grubs stirred up along the river.

A strange sensation consumes me again, a wartime feeling. Someone, the enemy, is out there. Waiting. To cool my agitation and pounding heart I start humming spiritual hymns and then singing Flag and Union songs played in saloons across the frontier when Jason and me were riding from Territory to Territory. *Jimmy Crack Corn, Oh Suzanna* . . . keep running through my head along with this feeling that the enemy is setting up an ambush at any moment.

All at once I stop singing, rein Ghost to a halt, and quietly listen. On point, I must interpret the signs and sounds of my surroundings. All is silent for a moment then I hear the rustling of a shrub. There is no wind. No rain. A blackbird caws and lands on a nearby ocotillo.

The rustling returns and a twig snaps.

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. I look ahead and tear down the trail then veer left into an arroyo coming 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 Indians whoop and holler warpath cries. They fire shots and 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 into a firing position, I feel a blow to the back of my head. Then I see nothing at all.

It's nearly dusk when I awake with my head pounding. I quickly realize that I ain't been shot. Rather, someone or something has hit me with a rock. But why did they leave me alive? Is it because Indians feel men of color possess special powers? But why are Indians on the warpath in the first place and just after the flood? It makes no sense. There hasn't been Indian trouble along the Hassayampa since before I came to the Territory.

After my head stops spinning, I stumble up and look for Ghost. I find horse tracks in the sandy soil 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 are looking for me.

Near the river I stop at the canyon wall because my head is throbbing and my heart is thumping out of my chest and I need a moment to steady my breathing. Then I hear a familiar whinny and I 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 seems miraculous to me that he didn't run off to the farm or that the Indians didn't take him. But the horse remains steady in the wash as I near him and grab the reins hanging from the bridle and reassuringly pat my horse's neck. "That's 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 even really Indians? 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 clamber onto Ghost's bare back, trot toward the river, and head for the farm as the sun is about to set over the western 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 gold ingots are gone makes my heart ache. Jason is a true friend. A brother. And I feel like what's happened to me is my own betrayal to him. He left me in charge of the gold and now I'm going to let down the best man I have ever known.

In the darkness of night, as I near the farm, I see the moonlit silhouettes of three figures riding toward me. I recognize them as Jason and his hired hands the Buckholtz brothers.

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

One of the last things I remember is that Miss Mattie, alive and well, is running out the front door onto the porch and asking me 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.

When I awake in the morning the room smells dank and I see the bear and lion rugs outside the opened door, washed off and drying on the porch railing. But I can't discern whether or not they're both ruined.

"It's been three days since the river receded and left the farm in a shambles," Jason tells me. "Only the house and bunkhouse remain standing. And a few hardy cottonwoods along the Hassayampa. Surviving 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 and songs are forever muted.”

I smell the 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 life syrup remedy of iodine and potassium.

“Not too bad,” she suggests and then 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 just enough to drink some of the much-needed Arbuckle then Mattie rebandages my headwound.

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

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

“Don’t know,” she pauses and looks at Jason then at me. “Can’t seem to get any feelings about this like I used to.”

“The gold,” I utter with shame. “I’m sorry, partner. Whoever it was they 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 and 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 throughout the night.”

“I slept peacefully indeed and 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 say and try to sit up but am suddenly feeling dizzy and flushed.

“No, you stay with Mattie. Lost your guns too, I seen.” He looks at his Rib who rises to prepare breakfast. Señora Gonzalez is recovering with her surviving child in the bunkhouse.

I can only shake my pounding head and collapse back on the cot as I watch Mattie light her Westinghouse stove to boil the coffee.

Later that afternoon, Jason returns from town and tells me he met with the visiting deputy marshal, Fletcher Fairchild. “Fairchild’s heading to Fort Whipple,” Jason assures me. “He’s getting both the sheriff and Army involved because we’re not sure who did the bushwacking. Sheriff Tylor takes care of rustlers and road agents and the Army tends to Indians matters. That’s how the marshal put it. He also said they’ve got to investigate who’s been thieving the homesteads upturned by the flood.”

A few days later US Army soldiers and Sheriff Tylor arrive at Jason's 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 a band of men ambushed me according to my best recollection. In little time soldiers find derringer bullet shells.

"Derringer!? Don't look like Indian 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 blue wool frockcoat with two rows of 14 brass buttons down the front and three buttons at each cuff. "This bushwhacking happened too quick. Must be rustlers who are pilfering off survivors of the flood."

"You got enemies, boy?" 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 both Jason and I know that the sheriff won't look into matters concerning the Hortons and their Bar Double H cowboys.

After a day of scouting the vicinity of my bushwacking the soldiers find no sign of Indian 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 Indians aren't behind my bushwhacking and the pillaging trouble after the flood. In the end both Captain Kerr and the Yavapai sheriff close the investigation until someone uncovers further evidence.



## Chapter 11: Jason Heads up to Fort Whipple

*Summer's end 1878*

*Jason Bartholomew Shear*

By the summer's end in 1878, 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 to both 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 Navajo wife.

Although puzzling at first, I soon welcome the change in my Rib. In part, I feel like Mattie is stronger 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.

No trouble stirs during my many trips into town to sell our cash crop and buy supplies, that is until one afternoon in late September when I'm eating lunch at Snider's Hotel. Benjamin Horton walks through the front swinging doors and he's followed by Kaleb who has Miss Franny McDuff at his arm. Two other Bar Double H cowboys trail in behind 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 holstered Colt.

“Why lookie here,” Kaleb says as he passes and bumps my chair. His ugly face snarls and he grunts and sits at his brother’s table. “The Territory’s too small for the both of us, farmer.” Horton squarely gazes my way and his cowboys start laughing.

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

On occasion I’ve paid Miss Francis McDuff a visit myself. I don’t feel like I’m betraying my Mattie in any kind of way. My Rib is a lady and this woman is but a whore who can meet my manly 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 and continue eating and pay no mind to the likes of Horton. I don’t want any trouble, true, and I refuse to let cowboy 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, now glaring straight at me. He then lights a cigar. “That colored man you brought to the Territory. Can’t trust such folks. Like you can’t trust Indians 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 double doors slowly swing shut.

Over dinner that evening, back at the farm, I tell Mattie and Pard about my run-in with the Hortons and that I now want to ride to Fort Whipple and push the investigation against Kaleb

Horton and his gang through the Army. “I believe the Hortons, not Indians, not road agents, are the source of most trouble in Yavapai County. From the Loring massacre, to the Bachman murder, to David’s recent trouble.”

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

I look at my Rib and note 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 because I don’t want to know the future. It’s enough to forget the past and plod along day by day. Enjoy a hardy 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 off to Fort Whipple. I just pray the Hortons die and not Jason or David.

Instead of sitting outside with David after supper, Jason follows me into the bedroom. “It’s early, Mr. Shear,” I remark as my husband 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 is tumbling on my face. He smells of a working man, of leathery Bellingham’s stimulating ointment. 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 advance, for my husband’s uncharacteristic behavior. He’s acting like a rutting Billy goat ram. I don’t like such behavior. But I can’t refuse him and I resign myself to 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 amorous congress. During breakfast I’m feeling 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 Prescott and Fort Whipple on a mission to bring the Hortons and their cowboys to justice. Until Jason returns I will miss him and worry about what he's intending to do and what might happen to him.



## Chapter 12: Bit by a Rattler

*End of October 1877*

*Miss Mattie Bachman*

It's near the end of October and Jason's been gone for nearly a month. I'm sitting on the porch feeling joy as I rock in my chair with my hands on my belly. I'm carrying Jason's child; I know this like I knew 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 in my chair 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 palo verde and mesquite, grow faster than any kind of tree I've ever known, like the sequoias back in the City which take centuries to grow. The mesquites now are sporting lacy leaves that ripple in the autumn breeze and fold up at night and the pods now dropping 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 then crush them in the pestle and mortar Jose made for me then 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 suddenly 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 so much."

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 smiles, 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," he teases me and seems charmed by my happy disposition.

Suddenly, I feel a sense of shame and say, "I meant no disrespect, Pard. I was just trying to make banter, that's all."



“I know, Miss Mattie. I know you are 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 ask, staring 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.

“I'm happy here, Ma'am,” he says as 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 Shear, 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 seemingly contemplating his own words, “I hope to settle upstream in a year or two.” He pauses. “Think a man of color can file a land patent? A free colored veteran of the War of Rebellion?”

I smile and nod with assurance. Deep inside I'm wondering what he thinks about me. Can he discern that I'm with child? But these are questions I'll never ask him. 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 Navajo wife and son. It's an awfully sad thing 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 any time soon, not until after we install that turbine windmill and pipe water to the fields and 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 leaves the bucket of well water and returns to the stables, his poetic words leave me feeling as content as my husband is when eating a good steak or when smoking his cigar 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 own secret. My own 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 with Blue and Red following me and 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 he's 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 English so he could speak as well as Jose.

"Where're you heading?" David yells as 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.

"No. No, 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 had recently made for me from a deer hide he had tanned.

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

“Stay close by so we can hear you holler if something happens,” 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 renegade Indians who are unafraid of what might happen. What tomorrow might bring.

At the river I sit on a stone beside the water flowing through the homestead. The stream is 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 moccasins, dip my feet in the cool water, touch my belly, and listen to the river’s gurgle. Even though the Hassayampa rose up and tried to take my life, I’ve made peace with it because I defeated death and am now able to bring about new life. For my husband and for myself. It seems I’ve come around full circle, like a wagon wheel, as Jason once said about himself because he had fought many battles and survived the devastation of war and came around to find me.

I begin singing to my baby inside *Lavender’s blue, dilly, dilly* . . . The dogs frolic upstream, content to hear my voice although it’s not as soft and sweet as Juanita’s. I don’t regret having sent her away but I miss her sweet songs. I recite the words of my favorite poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning *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.*

Winter and spring will arrive and pass, I muse, and 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.

Suddenly, Pedro's distant shout interrupts my thoughts. "*Ay, Caramba!! Dios Mia!!*" I hear him yell then someone fires a Colt 45 single action, David's gun, and the dogs bark and run toward the commotion.

Frightened, 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, just like Jason taught me to do.

When I reach the new barn and stables I immediately see 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 done 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 he gasps. "Never got bit before." He breathes deeply and looks at me smiling. "Hurts like hell!"

I yell for Pedro to fetch creosote 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 more susceptible place such as on the face or at the heart.

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

I shoo everyone from the house and instruct David to rest his arm out flat on Jason's new pinewood table. Then I dab the wound with a mixture of gun powder and kerosene while the creosote and 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 an enamelware cup of the Magic 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 steady strike." He pauses a moment and gasps. Then continues, "Guess I could use some of Jason's whiskey with this here Magic Wizard tonic."

His wrist is badly swollen a deep purple and yellow and bleeding at the fang marks. But I'm certain that 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 smiles at me with seeming admiration and says, "A true frontier woman knows how to nurse and treat whatever injury befalls those under her care." He gasps again but like a brave soldier, he tries to hold his own.

I wipe his sweating forehead and feel that he has a fever and that his heart palpitates. Then I bandage his wound with strips of Jason's old shirt that I had cleaned and set aside specifically for tending to scrapes and wounds. "You know a lot about homespun remedies," David suggests, still trying not to show his discomfort.

"Jason says that too. Got a lot of books about remedies. The Mexicans have taught me a thing or two as well. Juanita, I must admit. And now Mrs. Gonzalez."

“It’s more than book learning, Miss Mattie. Or learning from the Mexicans. You got a natural proclivity.”

I look at his grimacing face and take his words to heart. “When I was a child living in San Francisco I had this dream about a medicine man,” I say and then begin describing that dream 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 Indians the 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, tie it in a shoulder sling, and say, “Tell me about your Navajo 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 say as 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 trying to smile. Momentarily, he 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 begin to 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 eyes are hypnotic and seem to put me in a trance. An unexplainable rush of elation overtakes me. I’ve never had such overwhelming feelings for Jason. Maybe the child is bringing on a charge of vitality within me, I tell myself. I look deeply at the man before me. A man of faith 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. Now 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 on the table. Suddenly my heart begins rapidly beating and my head starts pounding. My glance returns to David. He is sitting back on his chair with his eyes closed and his breathing 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 upon me, one more terrible and powerful than any before even when I foresaw the South rising up and murdering Ipa, the Great Father of our glorious nation.

## Part Two



### Chapter 13: The Face of all the World is Changed, I Think

#### *Miss Mattie*

I awake. A hot stream of light pours through the open window, something that never happens until past ten in the morning. And I always rise before the break of day. I'm feeling dazed, somewhere between a dream and a miracle. 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 San Francisco. It conforms and wiggles and is so unlike the hard-woolen mattress I'm accustomed to, but it's very comfortable. Thoughts of Jason come to mind. He'll be back soon. Perhaps today. Then I remember David. What happened the night before? I close my eyes trying to recall.

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

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



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

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

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

Then I hear loud hellacious shouting! A clamor is so boisterous I can’t imagine what’s happening. The Hortons have arrived! I realize. A posse of Bar Double H cowboys are here to kill David! I thought I was having a foreboding. Is this what it’s all about?

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

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

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

Before I can scramble from this strange new bed I notice Jason lying on his side with the quilt pulled over his head. 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 Indian beads. I'm seeing a naked man of color but he's not a former captive. His back is smooth and not riddled with welts like those upon David's back. Before I can contemplate why this man is in my bed I remember that the Hortons are nearing the house, raring to kill.

Why aren't the vaqueros stopping them? I'm thinking. Have the 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 the room intensifies. More strange gun shots rip the air asunder. And what's more troubling is that the shots aren't from Remington or Winchester rifles or Colt revolvers. Or any kind of gun I've ever heard. I don't know what's making this gunfire.

I hear someone kick open the front door and a man shouts, "Hey, David!" I jump up and stand frozen at the bedside. Then I notice that feathers aren't forming the mattress of this new commodious, transmogrified bed. It's an enormous rubber bubble of sloshing water and the headboard isn't what Jason made from pine poles. It's a massive piece of furniture that has

shelves and cabinets made of stained and polished boards with branding iron burns that include the Bar Double H. I hold my head and conclude that I must be elsewhere. I'm not in my own bedroom. But where could I possibly be? In Wickenburg Town? At the Bucket of Blood bordello? It's all too puzzling and my head is spinning.

Then my thoughts return to fear over the impending threat and the loud indiscernible noises. Both men and women are shouting. Even children? I can't determine whether they speak English or Spanish or even Apache. Now I'm certain I'm elsewhere and not on my farm. But then again, many things are the same as in my bedroom. The armoire stands at the west wall and the east window, where the sunlight is flowing inside, is the same size and in the same place. No. This is my bedroom but someone has refurbished it, somehow. The foreboding I last remember 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, agape that I'm wearing my undergarments and that David is with me in a bed that isn't mine! I'm someplace else other than where I was before. But why would anything matter now? Kaleb Horton is hellbent on killing and I'm doomed.

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

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

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

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

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

A strange cry with clanking drums and Mexican guitar music suddenly 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 the Apache captured the vaqueros and Mrs. Gonzalez.

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

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

I can't believe the sight of him as I stand against the door, frozen in fear. What have I done? I can only stare at the man in utter disbelief. 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 black man holds his arms out to me. “It’s okay. Come to Daddy.” He has a gold hoop in his ear like an old forty-niner, like Frenchie Lafayette.

I can hardly bear what’s happening in this discombobulation. But I pull together my wits and decide that if I’m going to die, I’ll die bravely like a soldier during the War of Rebellion. 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, “Stop, stop, stop! What do you want? Who are you?”

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

In their place are strange candle fixtures, large metal boxes, and fancy glass things that must have come straight from the City, Chicago or even New York. Pictures, Indian weavings, and mirrors hang on refined walls. There are no wooden shelves and nails for Jason’s things. I’m beginning to wonder if the railroad finally arrived. Or has Jason brought me new sundries and notions? And where is Jason? Is he in Prescott? Fort Whipple?

“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 Jeremiah Podsworth Snider. But he's not so neatly dressed in a tailor-cut suit. He appears more like a rugged frontiersman in a fringed leather jacket. His bare feet sport some kind of "Indian" footwear of leather straps and his hair hangs halfway down his torso. He's still sporting a thick moustache but now he has a French mouche. The man has taken a tumble down the prairie. Or, is Jeremiah 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 Jeremiah and snuggling in his arm.

"We're here to party, man," Jeremiah remarks, grinning gleefully and I notice that he also sports whiskers! Two days growth. 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 very long fingernails pink. She wears a purple puffed sleeve blouse with a denim skirt hemmed far above her knees, and her eyelids are blue and her lips are a glistening pink. She's a soiled-dove dressed like a captive woman, I conclude and wonder if the Apache have captured Jeremiah Snider and this woman. Have they somehow broken free? There's no other explanation that makes any sense.

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

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

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

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

“Well sister, aren’t you curious?” She approaches and reaches for me. 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 break my silence and yank my hands from the woman’s grip, squinting at her face in disbelief. *Why, it’s Franny McDuff. The sporting woman indeed.* My head begins to pound so violently I grasp it and conclude that Indians have held these people too long and they’ve gone loco. And this is my foreboding. But why are they here? Has Jason brought them to the farm? Of course, that’s it. I would be the best person to help them recover. I was a captive myself and have many homespun remedies and a medicine box with tinctures and lotions, ointments and powders. Old rags for bandaging and making a sling . . . For David’s arm! After the snake bite! Yesterday, it happened. Why is there a great period of time missing? Where have all the moments gone since Jason left home?

“Where’s Jason?” I 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, and I lost consciousness. I look around the room still holding my head. The change of décor is mesmerizing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“No 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 can feel the spirit of Jason filling me with courage. I know he’s here. Protecting me and the baby.

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

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 the black man’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. Manly. 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 again whisper. “Such funny britches of paisley fabric.”

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

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

“Hey Bro, congrats!” a man exclaims.

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

When was that? How long ago? The scout wears an Indian headband, a raw muslin frontier

work-shirt open at the neck, and maroon denim britches tucked 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. It's too chaotic to believe. Has the entire town gone wild and wooly? Are they all here to punish me for having a foreboding? Yes, all this madness has something to do with my foreboding. I turn to Ben Horton and ask, "What are you doing here?"

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

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

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

"I pray he gets himself killed. If it weren't for him, Jason would never have left the farm."

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

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

David shakes his head and looks at me with pity. "Baby," he says and glances at Jeremiah then back at me. "You're having a flashback, that's all. Our friends are here to party. We're

going to barbecue that old pig today. Get High. Live in the moment. 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 rather like my cousins Mathew Lemont and Eugene Scott were as children.

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

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

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

Shivers charge through me like an Edison electrical pulse because I don’t remember telling David about Jason’s baby? I’m not showing yet. So how does he know? It was my secret, one I planned on keeping to myself until Jason got back. Or did I confess the news to David last night?

Then, before I have a chance to ask David how he knew, 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 my favorite poetess. I've never had such feelings for Jason. Everything dissolves around me, all the confusion and chaos and all the newfangled decorations in the room. If this is a dream I hope to sleep forever.

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

"Come on Foxy Mama. Our friends are here to celebrate. Let's join them. And, oh hey," he rubs my belly, "let's not upset Junior." 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. He makes me feel like a child Christmas morning in the house of a wealthy man. Like I'm riding on 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 white cotton 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, has Jason allowed this to happen?

Thoughts of Jason soon fall apart as David's soft moist lips kiss my belly. "I'm loving you too," he says to the baby inside. He then stands and pulls off his paisley britches and removes my knickerbocker drawers. I don't want to look at him, at his throbbing manhood. It frightens me. It's far beyond 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 muster a whisper. It's not something I'm used to saying. And my voice is nearly spent. I don't think about Jason when resting in David's arms. When he strokes my hair across my naked body.

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

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

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

Suddenly, I remember Jason. He'll be riding back shortly. If David isn't in his proper attire Jason will know something's happened between his Pard and his Rib. "What about Jason?" I ask David. I hate to spoil the tranquil moment between us but I feel pressed to reach the bottom of matters. "He'll be coming back soon. Oh David, what will we do? He'll know about our sinful deed. I feel so ashamed."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Thank Jesus in Heaven*, I’m thinking as I stand on the L-shaped porch, *my rocker is in its place*. I also see my nasturtiums in their clay pots. And my lavender and mint gardens beside the porch. Then I 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 had asked him to.

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

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



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

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 clamoring blast accosts my thoughts. Could there possibly be more to come?

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

I step off the porch, entranced by this new invention presumably arriving from the Old States. Although it is 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. The wagon has a white top and sides painted in colorful flowers and the words "love," "peace," and "make love not war," and pictures of the wagon wheel with four odd spokes instead of eleven, David's token of the War I'm now putting together in my mind. It seems to be everywhere.

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

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

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

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

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

As David helps James Grant carry boxes of rattling bottles to the L-shaped porch, Mrs. Gonzalez approaches wafting 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 my kitchen help can explain what's going on.

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

“Three children?” I ask. “What of little Rosita? Where is she? How is she doing?”

“Rosita?” Gonzalez asks and gives me a puzzled look but before she can explain Franny distracts her and asks for help with the salsa.

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

The large and colorful wagon grabs my attention again and I am 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 say aloud. “No horses! No steam! What kind of self-propelled wagon is this?” I look to David who is now standing with me before the curious vehicle.

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

“A Folks Wagon?” I repeat.

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

“I just can’t reckon everything, that’s all,” I say and look pleadingly at David, relying on him to help me through these remarkable circumstances. Although I’m not sure why or how it overcame me, I love David now as much as I ever loved Jason and trust him like I trust Jason. I

just don't understand what's happened to Jason, to me, and to everyone else from Wickenburg Town.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hear about that chick who OD'd in town last week?" Franny asks probably to change the subject.

“Chick traveling alone to Vegas?” Juanita remarks.

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

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

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

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

“David,” I call, feeling uneasy with these two women. I don’t know them, who they are or what they do, not anymore, and they’re acting like I’m their dear chuckaboo friend. And I don’t like their odd discussion about that poor whore who died months ago, not a week before, of which I am 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 I refuse it when it’s passed to me and no one insists that I smoke it.

When she’s finished with the salad, Juanita sits across from me and 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 me, pausing from her song.

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

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

“Oh goodness no,” I say. “It’s a favorite verse from my favorite poetess. Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Do you think all these strange happenings have to do with my having a foreboding?” I ask. It’s not a question I take lightly because I know how people fear my ability to predict things but since everyone here is part of this strange experience they must know what’s occurring 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 some dill pickles? I think Wynona has some in her van.”

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

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

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

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

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

Rebecca Crawly, who has been braising the pig on its spigot, puts down the brush and approaches James and me. She looks so silly in her clothes and with her hair dangling down like an Indian 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 returns to carrying the box to the porch.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Deny what, sweetie?” Rebecca asks.

David arrives and takes hold of me but my anger is strong and I push away the one man I thought I could trust in this bizarre situation. “No. Stop. Don’t touch me anymore.” I back away from David and Mrs. Crawley. The other townsfolk start approaching; their expressions are ghostly pale. That’s it! My mind suddenly swirls with one thought. I’ve died. The Hortons *have*

killed me and I'm now living among spirits. Even David is dead. That explains the changes in his appearance. Everyone but me is a doppelganger! Or am I one too?

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

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

No one moves. They just glare at me.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Chapter 14: Are you a Feminist or Suffragist?

*Martha*

“I’d rather face another flood alone than head into town,” I tell David a month 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 iron 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 which I really know nothing about.

On the table sits a bouquet of wild globe mallows in my silver vase that I found 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 room of the house.

“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. It’s enough to greet visitors from town who now seem to be my chuckaboo friends. They tend to drop by quite frequently and unexpectedly to get high and party with David and me. I imagine Wickenburg Town is now a lot like San Francisco, a city with wide streets, tall buildings, and wagons everywhere roaring and booming on gasoline horsepower and brazenly tooting their horns. “A melee of drunken forty-niners,” my uncle Willie would have said.

The Sniders come by most often and Fran, as we seem to be calling her, kept pestering me about going to her new salon for the works but I resisted so she did my nails and braided my hair at Jason’s table. I’ve resumed 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. I use patterns of the time from Butterick, Simplicity, and Vogue which I order through the mail order catalogues David brings home. Townsfolk seem to like my camisoles, corsets, maxi and mini denim patched skirts, and rayon paisley harem pants for both men and women. David takes my costumes to Jerimiah 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 rolling papers, carburetors, roach clips, lacquered stash boxes, Indian beads, sliver rings, bangles, and other notions of the time such as peace symbols, black lights, and posters of psychedelic paisley flowers. David tells me that Snider sells everything in his store except for the weed hemp itself because it seems that locoweed is an outlawed substance during this new transmogrified time.

By far my favorite new patent in my rearranged house is the TV. It runs throughout the day even while the stereo's booming. In the evenings David and I often sit in the large beanbag chair which is akin to the waterbed patent and eat fiddle-faddle munches while watching MASH, the Waltons, Gunsmoke, Bonanza, or Room 222--a drama about Walt Whitman High. Throughout the day, while sewing my costumes, I watch All My Children, Edge of Night, One Life to Live, and the Days of Our Lives.

I like to page through David's periodicals called "Mad Magazine, Zap Comix, Fritz the Cat, and Fabulous Furry Freak Brother's." They're all political cartoons the likes of 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 the fields for his honey business. Unlike Jason, David has no hired hands. Instead, he has a strange roaring old Ford tractor to drag the earth and a small forklift to haul around black plastic buckets containing date palms, Mexican fans, agaves, barrels, ocotillos, saguaros, and organ pipes. He sells mostly to businesses through ads in the *Yellow Pages*, the *Pennysaver*, and the *Wickenburg Sun*. 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 drives to town at least three times a week to sell my garments at Snider's and his plants, honey, and cash crop weed tobacco. He grows his special kind of weed tobacco 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 and townsfolk constantly smoke like it helps them breath or think. I don't know. They call the weed tobacco, grass, Puff the Magic Dragon, Mary Jane, lids, dimes, Panama Red, Acapulco Gold, Maui Wowie. I call it Indian tobacco and locoweed.

Locoweed is "a natural herb, a gift from God," townsfolk like to boast, the ones who come to the farm to party. I don't recollect smoking before my little ditty 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. Grass doesn't make me "get high," as the townsfolk say. It makes me steady myself in a place that must be a dream. And dreams are already a "high." The change locoweed medicine causes is just one phase before the next in this cutting-edge life.

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.”

“Thunderation,” I declare. “I’m talking about the towering wall of water mightier and 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 and destroyed much of the farm shortly before road bandits bushwhacked you on your way back from Prescott. With Jason.”

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.

David lights the tobacco in his bong from Snider’s head shop. Colored beads bounce with rising 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 here 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 the 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, I’m sure, David seems to realize that I’m serious and he recaps the ERA movement to me, something he’s told me about 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, bursts out and falls 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, Baby.”

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. 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. And this is especially true now in this transmogrified time. It just bewilders people and that brings me more trouble. I find that quibbling over names and facts causes outright misunderstandings. My questions constantly take everyone aback, including David. 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 my 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 a dreamlike trance 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. Psychedelic, synchronistic . . . there are so many new terms for what I seem to be experiencing.

"And what do we do during our little visits together?" I venture to ask and take a bite of my Salisbury Steak which I find to be as delicious as any meal at Snider's Hotel, when Snider had a hotel I mean. "Me and Mrs. Gonzalez, the feminist suffragist libber?"

"You talk about your dreams. Don't you remember." I can tell that David is growing frustrated again. Why is everything so difficult?

"I am sorry dearest," I say feeling 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). I'm living in a haunted past that no one but I properly remembers. I swallow some Schlitz malt liquor. Drinking, from time to time, seems to calm my nerves. Although drinking's something I never did before. Fact is, I never had a drop of alcohol before the change unless you



count Dr. Wizard's magic potion which has alcohol in it. But even that I don't remember actually drinking.

"I don't recall Señora's visits," I finally admit to David. "After Juanita left, she 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 heard your remarkable story," he says

"Well," I say with exasperation. "What happened to little Rosita? Who were those three children at the pig roast? They didn't belong to Mrs. Gonzalez or was the girl Rosita at seven years old?"

"Rosita?" David asks with frustration. "I never heard of Rosita."

I decide not to pursue the matter any further, 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.

When Wynona Gonzalez Grant pulls up in the same distinctive wagon from the pig roast and toots her horn, I am standing on the front porch to welcome her. David is chilling on the porch swing smoking a doobie and thumbing through his Zap and Mad political magazines.

"Why Señora Gonzalez, it is you," I say.

"I knew you'd remember," David exclaims.

"Hello, Martha," Gonzalez says as she carries a large bag over her shoulder, a carpet bag. She approaches the porch and tightly hugs me like she had at the pig roasting party. She wears

her hair pulled back from her face and dresses like a man, except for her fetching dew drop earrings. Her dusty 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 a topic of conversation for a lot of the townsfolk. But this is nothing new. I believe people have found me a fascinating subject to discuss ever since Uncle Willie brought me to his mansion in San Francisco after my year of captivity under the Pawnee and when people found out that 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 that I’m saying the right thing. “Just as you suggested. Writing settles my mind.”

“Far out,” the Mexican woman says. She is quiet for a moment, as if wondering what to expect out of me after my flashback behavior at the pig roast party.

“Would you like some freshly baked bread?” I politely ask, hoping to make the woman more comfortable. Hoping that I’m acting the right 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 little 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 the tea.

“Pioneer bread like they used to make,” I say, rather proud of my statement, one I’ve heard David say. It’s easy to jape when living in synchronized time.

Once the session gets going, I admit to Señora, “You townsfolk and David are the ones who twist stories around and get the facts all 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 write such thoughts in your diary.” She takes a spiral bound notebook from her huge tote bag, opens it on the table, and says, “I want to read some notes I took during our past sessions. David says you have trouble remembering our last few visits. But I have to warn you, they’re mostly about Jason. Do you remember the sessions?” Señora’s asks. She looks sincere and reassuring, coaxing me to speak.

“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’s coming 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 flushing the toilet. 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 and 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 says I 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 I just can’t believe, no matter how hard I try, that I ever spoke such words. Deep in my heart I don’t believe that Jason has somehow died at war. I know for a fact that 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 almost 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. Never questions me about having forebodings.”

“Forebodings? Captivity?” Wynona asks with surprise. “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 out of my present set of circumstances that are vast and varied for sure.

“With the Pawnee in Kansas,” I say. “When I was but two. The same age as your little Rosita!”

“My Rosita?” Gonzalez asked with a perplexed look across her face.

“Oh, never mind,” I say feeling convinced now that the little girl has somehow died and it’s too painful for Mrs. Gonzalez to talk about. So 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 that maybe I’ll find some of the answers to the many perplexing questions filling my mind, of late. 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 as a child in San Francisco which 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. I don’t know why I’m feeling this way but 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 feeling to anyone of them, not even to David. It would just 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 lately. 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 sip my tea and glance to see if David’s at the door. I want him beside me now. Fear from deep inside suddenly takes hold. 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 too 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 having a great urge 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 mark down your cute little poems you call ditties.” Wynona then ends the evening’s session with a remark I’m sure she’s made many times before. “In time,” she says, “you’ll sort everything out.”



## Chapter 15: Dream Notes Diary

*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 in a broken-up pace?  
Will things become easy and smooth?  
Will it all happen at this time, at this place  
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 stay.*

When it comes to writing in my leather-bound Dream Notes Diary that I used to call my Lady Pioneer Diary, I’m not sure whether my words are from a dream, or ditties, 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 making love with David. I carry my diary around the farm in the buckskin tote bag with fringe that David made for me a long long time ago.



Soon after I awoke in my transmogrifying bed in my rearranged house, I found my old buckskin tote hanging inside the bedroom closet. There were no closets in the house Jason built for me. I stored important things in my hope chest and hung my dresses in the armoire. Inside my tote I found my Jack Bowie knife, a joint, and a hankie. But in place of my derringer was a Bauer automatic. 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 was not in the tote which makes me sad. I want more than ever to keep time during my discombobulated condition.

I know I've suffered a tremendous memory loss and that years have passed me by. A period of time lengthy enough to bring about monumental bees in the bonnet. I'm living in a psychedelic era of new and improved patents. A time everyone has taken to magic potions, pills, tablets, smoking loco weed, and behaving with outright craziness. A time of protest against a war that took Jason from our Hassayampa farm. A time of social movements and unrest. I ask myself, are people suffragists or feminists? Abolitionists or Civil Rights activists?

Women dress like men or like Indians. And nobody seems decent. Now, 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. And 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 cat in the house that I named Mary Todd after Mrs. Lincoln. Everything I'd ever want is on my little 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.

I find that both Jason and David bring me contentment, each man in his own kind of way. In return, both men seem gratified just being with me on the farm, 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, turkeys, and rabbits.

But everything isn't entirely as before Jason converted and rebuilt the farm after the flood. There is no windmill. Instead, water is somehow pumped and piped into the house and to the pigs, goats, chickens, my gardens, and David's nursery and his cash crop of hemp.

Many things are different now because inventors, such as Edison, who harnessed electrical storms! Now lightbulbs and electrical gadgets abound. Someone has wired the entire farm for electricity. Of all things that are happening in this odd time, I love my modern country kitchen. Water flows from a faucet into a white porcelain basin, the Kenmore stove top oven miraculously heats food, a large ice box keeps food cool and frozen. Harvest Gold, they call it. I have a rotary washing machine, a dryer, both in Harvest Gold, 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 house energy 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 a woman's work much easier. No wonder Mrs. Gonzalez no longer helps me in the kitchen.

The world has moved away from me at an unbridled pace like a runaway horse and carriage charging down Mission Street in the fog of San Francisco. Loud noises drown out the gentler desert sounds. Horseless wagons, small wheeled carriages made of tungsten steel 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 popping thunder sound like a purring kitten. Did the airship and glider inventors of the 1850's 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* and that it involves gun enthusiasts after the War of Rebellion who shoot themselves to the Moon.

Music booms from the house whenever we're not watching TV. Dave 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 the author of this little ditty, Sarah Josepha Hale, retired from Godey's. 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 disks beating drums, strumming guitars, and voices yowling sonic booms. 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 the TV programs and serials.

What I found most curious, after the transmogrification, were the books lining the waterbed's headboard shelves. Other than a copy of David's *Leaves of Grass*, there were several books on the history Arizona, Wickenburg, on Native American 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 first asked David about these books. I had noticed them before but too many other things were happening all at once and I knew the Whitman book

of poems had to be David's and assumed all the other books were his as well because I didn't recognize any of them. What he told me is astonishing and I'm still not sure I believe him.

"These are all your books, Martha," David said as we were relaxing on the commodious bed. "Except for Whitman's book of poems. You gave that one to me."

"I don't remember any of these books," I said feeling perplexed yet again.

"Before Jason got drafted you were researching both of your genealogies to put together the history of your ancestry for the children you intended to have. While we were in Nam, Jason told me that you learned his great-granddaddy was a Civil War Veteran from Pennsylvania. Jason was proud of you for uncovering that little fact. It made him feel good to know his ancestor served in the Union fighting a virtuous war, a war with purpose and honor, so unlike the clusterfuck we were fighting in Nam."

"I really don't remember this at all," I told David with frustration. Maybe I was even angry at myself for forgetting so much or at David for trying to convince me of something that wasn't true. I kept my peace despite the confusion and added emphatically, "Jason came from a farm in Pennsylvania before he joined the Union. And I was born in Chicago. Surely I told you all this?" David said nothing so I continued, "About how a Kansas tornado killed my folks and brothers before we got very far along on the California Trail. About how the Pawnee held me captive until dragoon soldiers rescued me. About how my uncle Willie traveled across the frontier to fetch me and take me back to his mansion in San Francisco."

"No. Martha," David insisted. "You wrote it all up in a spiral notebook that you keep in a folder along with pictures and records your cousin sent you."

“Cousin Constance? In San Francisco?” I asked suddenly feeling like we were getting somewhere, at long last. My only thought was that I could write a long letter to Constance and maybe she could advise me about what was going on.

“Yes, your cousin.” David then sat up in the wobbly bed and pulled out a folder tucked inside one of the headboard cabinets. I looked over the contents in the folder and just couldn’t believe that I had written these notes. But I must have because it was my own script. The notes and documents indicated that Jason was born and raised in Wickenburg and that my mother and I had moved to Wickenburg from Berkeley. It was overwhelming to read something in my own script that I couldn’t have possibly written. “I don’t know who wrote this,” I said to David. “But it wasn’t me because none of this is true. I never knew my mother and her name was Fredericka Johnston not Marie.”

“Martha.” David took the folder I had set aside. “I want you to see this because it will help you with your memory problems.” He pulled out a daguerreotype picture of my mother, the one I remember uncle Willie gave me, a long time ago. On the back he shows me her name, Fredericka.

I held the picture and gazed at it for a long while. “Yes,” I finally said. “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.”

“Constance in San Francisco sent this to me?” I asked thinking that maybe it was my cousin who gave me the picture instead of uncle Willie. That much I could accept.

“Your cousin sent you a lot of these genealogical documents and records for your research, along with your father William. He’s a professor at UC Berkeley and your cousin works in the university’s library.”

“That’s preposterous. My father died in that Kansas tornado and his name was Conrad Johnston.”

“This is the problem Martha. You’re mixing up your history. No one died in your ancestry chart 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 that the Pawnee captured from the wagon train. Not you. And yes, dragoon soldiers tried to rescue her but the band of warriors had killed her before they arrived.”

“No no! You’ve got this so wrong,” I protested and then David showed me a news clipping from the 1850’s. “This is from a microfiche copy that your cousin sent from the UC Berkeley library.”

I glanced through the clipping and read the story David just told me, about a three-year-old little girl name Josephine who a Pawnee band of warriors had captured and killed. I wasn’t convinced that this had anything to do with my own capture. But instead of insisting that I too had been a Pawnee captive I decided to go along with what David was telling me and I asked, “If I came out here with this Marie, this woman you claim is my mother, where is she now? Shouldn’t she be seeing me through my time of confusion?”

“Martha,” David said and held me tightly in his arms. “That’s part of the problem you’re having. Your mother died.”

“Died? I know. A tornado killed her.” David sighed and gave me an exasperated glance.  
“Okay,” I then added. “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?”

“Okay,” David then said. “I’ll tell you what Jason told me while we were in Nam. Your mom was quite a religious woman, so unlike your hippie professor dad who had some kind of connection to the anti-war protests and almost got fired. Evidently, your dad had betrayed your mom and that’s why she took you and left San Francisco. It destroyed her to file for divorce. Went against her convictions. Your mom and dad were quite a mismatch, I remember Jason saying, and they must have pulled you mind from side to side. It’s no wonder you’ve ended up confused and living in synchronized time.”

“Betrayed her? How? With whom?”

“With Constance, the librarian at UC Berkeley. She was your mother’s cousin.”

“Now you’re being outlandish, David. Cousin Constance is Uncle Willie’s daughter!”

“She is young enough to be your father’s daughter, as I understand it.”

“Go on,” I pressed. “What happened to this Marie?”

“She brought you out here when you were about fourteen. Then during your senior year at Wickenburg High, just before Jason was taking you to the prom.” David hesitated a moment and took hold of my hand. “Martha,” he continued. “I’m only telling you this now to help you recover from whatever you’re suffering from. Some sort of amnesia, I would say. I’m hoping your notes will jog your memory.”

“Go on David. What happened to Marie? The woman you claim is my mother.”

“She took a bottle of pills. Of barbiturates, I’m sorry to say. And killed herself because she had tumbled into such a dark place of depression she had no other escape. I don’t want that to happen to you, Queen Bee. I don’t want you to go there.”

“No. I’m not going anywhere because I haven’t been anywhere but here, on my Hassayampa farm!” I shouted and pulled away from David and jumped from the wiggly bed. “You’re talking about the girl at the Greyhound bus depot. I remember Fran telling me about her during the pig roast. Or 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 crawled from the bed and took my hand; we sat together at the bed’s edge and David said, emphatically, “That was your mother, Martha. After her funeral Jason took you away 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 that’s something you can never recover from like the trauma of war. And the trauma of losing Jason.”

I rested my head against David’s shoulder and sighed. “Maybe you’re right about all this” I said. “Because I’m just not sure anymore which parts of my life I have lived and which parts were actually my 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’m not certain what I actually know. But one thing’s for certain.”

“What’s that Honey Bee?” David asked me.

“I don’t want to read any of these books or review the notes you say I wrote. Take them to Snider’s shop. Let me just live on my farm in the present. Without any genealogy or history to contemplate or rewrite.”





## Chapter 16: 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 me were drafted."

"What story?" I ask while sitting in my rocker stitching a corset. David is on the porch swing reading one of his political cartoon periodicals. The day is bright and clear 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 a rogue platoon called Charlie Company killed 500 women, children, even old people. Wayward soldiers went dinky dau and used Zippo lighters to burn down their hooches.”

“There have been lots of massacres in the territories and on the frontier. Lots of pillaging and slaughter. Soldiers kill Indians, even women and children. Indians kill 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 my synchronized state of afterglow. When my rambling thoughts mismatch his which happens more often than not. I’ve decided to disregard nearly everything David told me about the books on the waterbed headboard. And despite my so-called notes on 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 them away to the Wickenburg library in town. And I’m also thankful he doesn’t say anything more about it. I have no intention of looking back in that spiral notebook. I plan to focus on my Dream Notes Diary because in it I’ve found only the ditties I’ve jotted down or little notes about how I’m now feeling in my present days on the farm. There are no contradictory notions about me and my past as I believe it to be. No talk about a mother who killed herself probably because of me.

Later 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 explains 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 and "will encourage its readers to contribute their views, promising to publish the swath of human consciousness." A lofty notion, I can't help but think, even for a Harper's. No wonder the periodical stopped its initial run.

In truth, I'm finding that today's news is simply too topsy-turvy for me and I avoid the Eyewitness News on TV and the Wickenburg News and I don'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 which is so unlike Jason who turned over and snored when he finished having his way with me. Fact is, Jason and I never cuddled.

"The president's assassination was enough monumental news for my lifetime," I admit one evening in bed as I am 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 the names he's mentioning, except for Martin Luther and I feel frustrated again. I ask him to tell me about the movements of the times. "It's the seventies, right?" I ask. He agrees then talks about the sixties and Johnson and Civil Rights, and the Black Power movement.

"Yes, yes. Vice President Johnson became President after the assination of our great leader," I say. "But he was a cad, a racist. He didn't promote the wellbeing of black people."

"Yes, he did, Babes!" David says, seemingly frustrated with me, again. He 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 support the south and stop the commies from invading Hawaii and San Francisco! That's when all hell broke loose."

"Lincoln declared victory before Johnson even took over the reins," I state as a fact. When I see David's look of frustration, I ask, "Isn't Rutherford Hayes president? Grant didn't run a third term as I so vividly recall."

"Nixon's president, Bumble Bee. Grant is Wynona's husband." Instead of feeling defeated by my confusion, this time, David proceeds to talk about Watergate and Tricky Dicky as the president who gave Jason the Medal of Honor."

"No, that was Grant," I declare, sitting up as best I can on the water bubble and leaning against the massive headboard now emptied of all those damn books I refused to read. "After the war between North and South."

David then tells me that the north and south signed peace accords in Paris at the first of the year and that newly re-elected Tricky Dicky declared a cease fire. "Hanoi released POWs and the US is withdrawing its forces. The draft is over, Honey Cup Girl."

Not letting David confuse me any further, I stand my ground and tell him, "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."

Seemingly satisfied that I'm showing some kind of cognizance, David replies, "We went to war shortly after the Kent State shootings when the national guards opened fire on students protesting Nixon's wartime bombings. They shot sixty-seven bullets and wounded nine students and killed four. The year was a monumental time in history." He takes on his doobie, hands it to

me, and then says, as if in a compromising effort, “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 and feel pleased we have common knowledge about something. “My uncle had these books in his collection. He was a great supporter of the 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?” I ask thinking about Jason’s cougar rug that the Hassayampa deluge had ruined along with the grizzly rug.

“Yes. I was a Black Panther before Uncle Sam drafted me. The movement became too radical and violent when I returned to the world. Now I’m a peace-loving man. I believe in black power and that 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 conversation 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 across 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 while I’m thinking that this phone is the telegraph system expanded into houses. That isn’t too odd, I assure myself. “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 don’t 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 all 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 push him off. “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. “But *you* 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,” I say. “I think about the faces in the dramas, faces that are now familiar to my everyday life. Faces that 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 floodplain as before. “There are no Yavapai and Apache band of 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 fall into a passionate 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 buddies.

As the child grows in my belly David and I seldom mention Jason anymore. It’s simply too painful for both of us. 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 already in progress!” I suggest. After that, our rap session ends. It’s too trippy to argue twisted around 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 Indian wife, David.”

“What?” He feels my forehead. “You all right, Babes?”

“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 believing 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 an Indian name. Mai.”

“Babes, I told you about her. She was a boom boom girl at a brothel outside 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, long ago. She was an Earth Seer, like me, like your Auntie.”



“What? Oh sure, I suppose I said that.” I can tell he’s humoring me.

“Tell me how you met her,” I press, wanting to hear the story of the Navajo 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 Charlie grew *khan sa* everywhere. It was potent and cheap. We needed it to keep calm after battle. Uncle Sam himself gave us pep pills to keep us alert on long range recon patrols. It pumped us with bravado. We felt invulnerable. The GI pills heightened our hearing and sight. 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 of the War are now morphine addicts,” I say, recalling Jason’s story about orderlies giving wounded soldiers laudanum, opium, and morphine to ease the pain. I look at David. His expression is heavy. Like Jason, David doesn’t like remembering the war and I return to the matter I first 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 Province. Shot up with steroids, we were using our primeval instincts to forage the jungle swamps and rice paddies.”

While trying to understand the story David now tells, with new names of people and places, I think to ask, “Were you riding Ghost?”

“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 tear. His mind is back in the War of Rebellion, I know the look. Jason had it from time to time. But now when David has the look, he’s in a faraway place called “the Nam.” Or is it the War to Preserve the Union? 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. Now, 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 greatly embellishes his new version with monumental claims I simply don’t remember hearing about. He keeps insisting that 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. I distinctly know Jason recaptured the Union flag on the battlefield outside of Nashville.

And another thing, once upon a time Jason kept his Medal of Honor in a tin box under the bed along 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 it seems disrespectful to me because I was Jason's woman. 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 breathes deeply. "It's cool, Babes. I think taking helps. Wynona says we should rap about everything. Dig deep into the psyche, into the things that traumatize 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. I then continue with my inquiry. "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.

I place his strong callused hand on my belly where the child sleeps in the deep 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 home 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 the past that sometimes haunts me. The past David and others practically 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 did save Jason. You carried him to the hospital tent from that

battlefield in Tennessee. It's what the colored soldiers 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 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 my mother?

David sits up and begins rolling a doobie. After he lights it, takes a drag, he continues in a calm serious voice, "Jason saved me outside of Hue. 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 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. Perhaps even before, during the flood, I'm uncertain. 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 say, raising my voice in anger. "Why can't we talk straight with each other?"

“Martha. I’m sorry Queen Bee. I’ve pushed your buttons and that’s not something I like to do 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 17: Living in Synchronized Time

### *Martha*

Moments later David finds me at the stream’s edge where he knows I will be. On a large rock he sits beside me and puts his bare feet in the chilling water. He has learned to live with my moodiness and idiosyncrasies most of the time, like Jason had. 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 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, and 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 the purple lupine and yellow desert poppies along the shore.

“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*, as Jason liked saying. *Good hubs, felloes, rivets, flanges, spokes and solid metal strips around them for good traction and wear*. We need to find our way right side up.” I take David’s hard and calloused hand. “Does that make sense, Pard?”

“Sure, Babes,” David says. “Your words sound as trippy as ever. I just can’t get used to you calling me Pard. Jason called me P and Homey. But I got to be honest. 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 will better understand your mind. I must do something to make you and my baby settled into the world. My 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 cool stream, David touches my bare feet with his. “I’ll get my head together,” I say in a soft voice. “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 you. 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 always ready to burst. In the thick of things, me and Jason are sitting together on a rotting jungle log, taking a smoke break. We’re both thinking, *War is Hell*. White grunts smoke Marlborough. Brothers smoke Kool Menthol. Jason lights his smoke with a Zippo engraved with *Yea though I live in the Valley of Death, I’m the meanest Motherfucker of all*. A jeweler in Saigon etched it for a dollar bill.” He pauses a moment and deeply inhales his j-roll. I say nothing, not wanting to disturb his memory with my contradictions.

“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. We’re on zone reconnaissance patrol, LURP. For six fucking days we’ve been humping the boonies in miserable conditions, losing track of time, wearing the same soiled OD jungle fatigues, heavy jungle boots, packing ammo, grenades, canteens, enduring ticks and leeches, avoiding vipers, and struggling through razor-sharp elephant grass. We’re all on high alert for mines, punji-sticks, and enemy snipers lying-in-wait. Such is the hell of war.”

“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 the VC we kill. We’re fighting a psychological war of intimidation and Charlie thinks the card is an evil omen. Bad luck for him all around.”

“Then suddenly, the jungle becomes eerily quiet. There are no screeches and howls from birds, monkeys, jackals, and leopards. Even the bugs are silent. This is not a good sign. When the bugs stop humming in Nam, the enemy is close by and ready to ambush.”

“Jason takes a long drag from his Marlborough like it’s a joint. He suddenly 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.”

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.

“I smelled the damp rotting jungle that day Jason showed me your high school picture. The 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.”

“Oh? Well,” I stammer. I didn’t know Jason until after the war but this is just another oddity of my present condition and David’s so deep into his powerful story that I hesitate to tell him why Jason joined the Union. I think for a moment then try to carefully choose my words when I say, “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. Apparently, 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! And 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 push teasingly 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 is this talk about? Slavery? Once again, you’re living a hundred years ago darling.”

“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, Mattie,” he says. “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. Freeing the slaves of the south.”

“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."

I look at David and say, "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 easily 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 it. 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 can change 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 that 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 cease fire. 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 who saved my life.” He pauses, checking my demeanor. “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.

A chilling breeze brings 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 and I know he’s into me. Into having our baby. We sit quietly by the river a moment longer and then we make love on the grassy bank beneath the riparian willows.



## Chapter 18: An Impromptu Therapy Session

After I'm about three months along, Mrs. Gonzalez begins stopping by the farm every Thursday evening to check on my condition and when she does, we hold an impromptu therapy-session. 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 the "sessions" that help me explore the truth about my situation and dig myself out of confusion, at least some of it. For each occasion, I bake fresh pioneer bread in my Kenmore Harvest Gold oven because it seems Wynona can never 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 head shop--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. I vouch that I'm not taking anything but Wynona claims that sometimes I behave like I just took a hit of acid.

"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 rattle snake bit David. I'm now certain about this."

"I understand your father is a professor at UC Berkely," Wynona says. "In our past session, you talked about letters from your cousin who also 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 have become touched, not me. You and everyone else, including David. And this house, this farm. These strange new patents none of you 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 now say.”

“Where did Jason go, Martha?” Wynona asks. It’s a probing question she’s asked many times before, hoping to break through and wake 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.* “Riding,” I finally answer. “Jason went riding to Fort Whipple to track down the culprits that ambushed David. Jason thinks the Hortons are behind the trouble. He believes that the Bar Double H cowboys dressed as renegades and pillaged the devastated homesteaders 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, fucking words? People now frolic like wranglers in town drinking liquor and chasing

fallen women. Love, sex, and 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 suddenly irritating me. Maybe because it never seems to end. No one can resolve the confusion, not even me.

"Well," I rise from the table, straightening the skirt I now like to wear, except on washing days when I dress more like a vaquero in leather. More like Señora. More like David, although I won't wear the colorful harem pants I make. Some things in transmogrified time are simply too outlandish.

I stand by my chair a moment, considering my words, feeling confident I've reached my own reckoning, perhaps. "I figure," I say, bracing myself on the chair, looking straight at Wynona, "Nam is Indian land, am I right? Far away in New Mexico Territory or in untamed Alaska. I suppose. And the US recently purchased it from the Russians."

The large woman wipes her face with a napkin, her patchouli oil overpowers the aroma of my pioneer bread. She then asks, "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?"

"Really, 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 of frustration people get when I speak the truth. “We’re in the seventies anyway,” I add.

“That’s right!” Wynona states, seemingly pleased with me like I’m a little child who’s just figured out how to recite the alphabet. “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 the 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 day in American History. But 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 had been doing a lot of research before Jason left. He said you learned Jason had a great grandad 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 premonition 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 never forgot 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 never knew her. See, I don’t remember this, in real life, but somehow, I found safety from the tornado in a cave. Or else, perhaps my mother put me there.” I look at Wynona.

“And the dream?” 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 bureau drawer in my rearranged bedroom. But I refuse to let my new chuckaboo friends 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 is 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 is 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 breaks from taking notes. “This is really good, we’re making progress. Breaking through.” She closes the notebook and adds, “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 now a part of my everything and although we don’t speak about God anymore, per se, we still talk about spiritual things, about the hymns of the heart. About the fate of our being together. About karma. Sometimes David suggests we are soul mates. When he does, I think about Jason and the baby soon to come.

“David is always part of our meditations.” With her *Keep on Truckin’* Zippo from Snider’s head shop, Wynona lights the sand candle. I notice her lighter has a Robert Crumb cartoon character like the one in David’s *Zap* periodicals.

“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.

After we’re all seated at the table Wynona lights the sand candle and sandalwood scents the room. Despite what David or Wynona claim, I don’t remember “meditating” before. 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 fridge and water dripping into the white porcelain sink. Even my cat Mary Todd silently sleeps on the bean bag chair like she generally does. 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! I’m thinking.

“We call upon the spirit realm,” Wynona suggests, waking 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 about my dream! I’m thinking. 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 suddenly burst out saying because I cannot suppress what is crossing my mind. “And why isn’t your name Mrs. Grant? What is 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 I 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.

“You boogie, girl. The bear hibernates in a cave. Your cave. Your inner self of contemplation. The bear will lead you to awareness and to the crux of what has you so spaced out about what’s haunting your psyche.” Mrs. Gonzalez takes a breath and continues, “Guide us Great Grizzly Bear spirit to the truth about 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 the 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 guide 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 of thought, 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 in congress*

*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 soul for the union of evening and morning stars on the path the Great Comet."*

The room is silent. I can't even hear my own breath. Then a thought flares in my head. Their kindness and care was a slight-of-hand parlor trick straight from the medicine wagon show. For a year, they kept me ignorant of their intentions so I would stay compliant until Venus rose under the passing great comet. I was never beloved by my captors.

I shiver at the revelation. My eyes open wider to view the sandalwood flame dancing on top of Jason's pinewood table. I tightly grip David's hand. But 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 vision trance.

All of a sudden, I know the truth. My captors were preparing me for their big ceremony. And I know what they intend to do . . .

*On the day Venus rises under the comet they will strip me and tie me to a wooden scaffold. In a rite they believe is spiritual, they will torture and brand me in the armpit and on the groin. Boys and men of the tribe will shoot arrows into my tethered little body while believing they are Mars making love to Venus. They will beat my head with a club. The medicine man who had the vision will stab my 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 and foil my captors' devilish pursuits. They battle in hand-to-hand combat with the Pawnee band and rescue me from sacrifice. Now I truly 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 that 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 where drugheads find altered states of consciousness. 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.

A gust of wind whistles through the L-shaped porch. I can hear my rocker creaking on the pinewood planks. The winds grow stronger. It seems a storm is brewing.

The sandalwood candle flickers violently.

Suddenly, the door bursts open and a chilly gust of wind enters the room and blows out the sand candle's flame and envelops us in darkness.



## Chapter 19: A Moment of Transmogrified Time

### *Martha*

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 he's cropped his hair short.

Light is streaming into the room from the open window. 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 stove and oven and my Amana RadarRange. In the stone fireplace, mesquite logs are crackling and aromatizing the house.

"Miss Mattie?" David stirs me from my thoughts and I see that 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 now.”

The older woman gives me a questioning glance. “Si, Miss Mattie.”

“Go,” I repeat and the Mexican woman turns and heads for the door. “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, I’m guessing. He needs reminding.

I wink and he nervously looks away. “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 say and gently bend down to 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 he had 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 good arm in emphasis.

“Jason will be back soon, Miss Mattie,” David suggests.

“We can’t worry about Jason anymore. It’s just you and me, Pard.”

He studies my face, smiles, reaches with his good arm and touches my chin. 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 take his good hand to 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. 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 the distinctive sound of a trotting horse approaching the house.

A moment later the door bursts open and Stanly Buckholtz appears all soiled and sweaty from the ride back from town. “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, caballero,” David says, collecting his wits. Letting go of my hand.

“I hear 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 sweaty brow. “Horton doesn’t like that Miss Mattie is alone with you, Mr. David.”

“No!” Mattie says. 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 says to me as he 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 no longer possess the power of prediction. I feel sure of this now." I reach to embrace him.

"Mattie," 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 we've found each other."

He backs away 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 might be causing 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 isn't 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.

Yes, as I near the barn, I suddenly remember the baby. My bump is small now, undetectable. As it had been before the transmogrification into synchronized time. I place my hands on my belly knowing I'm with a child at its incipency. When a woman first knows her body is changing.

David stands by the barn talking to Stanly Buckholtz who is helping him saddle up Ghost. When he sees me approach, David shakes his head. He's uncomfortable and glances around seemingly 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 the 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.

Without a word Stanly Buckholtz walks away.

I nod toward the barn door, wink, and lead David inside by his good hand insisting he leave his rifle in its scabbard on Ghost. "No harm's coming our way, Mr. Thompson. It's a feeling I now 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 trouble brewing in town. About the threat of the Hortons coming to the farm. He believes in my ability to predict danger. He knows me to be an Earth Seer and I also know he's wanted me for a long time and probably never imagined that 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 upon a pile of loose hay. Dust and fibers permeate the air. It smells of livestock, sweat, and leather, but in my mind I smell nothing but lavender, sage, and the sweet nasturtiums of my spring gardens.

A rifle fires. 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 and floating dust motes 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 his cowboys who are 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 purple skirt over my knickerbockers. “No!” I scream and jump up after David but two Bar Double H cowboys 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 runaway slaves. 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 while 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 pain and 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 from his horse in my garden. "Have you gone completely sagebrush loco, Miss Mattie Bachman?"

"No," I run up to Horton, pleading. "David is my husband. I am with his child."

"A demon child? Well then." His neck veins and nostrils consume his features. He eyeballs his brother Ben who holds the reins of David's horse. "This is downright diabolical. Hang him high!"

Mrs. Gonzalez runs up to 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 taught and cleanly breaks David's neck. From the cottonwood limb the body falls limp and begins swinging back and forth.

A sudden gust of wind rustles my skirt and hair as devastation rips through my body. I close my eyes in tormented pain.

“Hang me too,” I yell, still 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 uproariously then 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 limb as I stand on my trampled garden so close to David that I can feel the breeze from his swaying body and smell the creosote 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 clambering away on their horses. Leaving the dead man to hang. Deep inside, beyond the torture consuming my heart, I know everything will be all right and that the horror will soon end.

I feel Mrs. Gonzalez take hold of me to lead me away from the site while Pedro and Stanly Buckholtz 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 away from the large woman, I fall to the cool earth of my upturned flowers and herbs.

The Mexicans leave me where I’m lying, soiled and bruised. Disheveled. I clamor 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 while knowing I possess the power to be where David is alive and free. *Everything will be as it was, once again* 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 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 stills 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.



#### Chapter 20: The Sweet Trilling Tune of the Marigold Warbler

*"Let outward senses for inward sense designed, call back our wanderings to the world of the mind!" Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

*Martha*

A breeze from the Hassayampa wafts the scent of desert willows. I hear the clattering chirps of a busy pair of cactus wrens at the river's edge. Otherwise, I can barely hear the river flow on its way south to the Gila, to the Colorado, and the Cortez Sea. Ships from San Francisco have voyaged around the Baja to the 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 suddenly rest upon my shoulders as my eyes remain closed. His touch makes me shutter. His grip is warm, solid, comforting. I feel 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 is 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. 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 ointment.

“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) and he wears a floppy cotton shirt. It’s un-tucked and untrimmed. A very poor job of sewing.

“Jason?” 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. And Indian beads hang from my neck and from Jason’s. He wears a head band like an Apache.

“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, one of your war time 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 premonition 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 many times. 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 Junior.”

Jason whistles for his dogs, his Labrador mutts Red and Blue. He takes my hand and we stroll along the river bank as the water 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 being especially considerate and in an effort to distract me from my troubling thoughts, he then 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 so Jason can point out a rare yellow breasted marigold warbler 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. Then I got my induction letter right when we learned you were pregnant. 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, watching 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.