

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS

BOOK I

By: Adele Marie Crouch

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Dedication

Dedicated to my grandmother, Elizabeth Catherine Friedbacher.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my wonderful husband, Douglas, for all of his patience; my eldest daughter, Charlie, for insisting I could do this; Patricia Berrington, author of The Famous Rose Callahan, for all of her encouragement; and my very dearest friend, Apache, for hours of editing, and all the things she taught me about Native Americans.

Forward

Everyone loves a western and most of the current population of America has done a search of their ancestors. Some of us have exciting backgrounds and some not so exciting. It turns out that mine was just mediocre. My mother's family came to America when her mother (the heroine of my story) was 4 years old. I took the liberty of trading her, age-wise, with her brother.

Fortunately, for all of my relatives, this story is fiction. I have done some research and given true accounts of various historical events. However, for the most part, I let my imagination run wild and had a wonderful time in the process. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Thank you for allowing me to share this story with you. After all – I wrote it for you. Your comments are welcome, but please don't be too hard on me. This is my first book.

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CHAPTER 1

The river was lovely this time of day. The rays of the sun danced on the riverbank as the leaves swayed in the soft morning breeze. Catherine could swear the trees were whispering secrets to each other as the breeze blew through them. *Surely there is not a more peaceful place anywhere in America*, she thought as she arranged her tools to prepare for her self-appointed task.

A blood-curdling scream ripped through the air and a deafening growl shook the trees. Catherine's blood ran cold and a chill crept up her spine. She grabbed her weapons and ran toward the sound. The scream was closer this time and the growl made the hairs on the nape of her neck stand up. "What could be happening?" She asked herself, as she ran along the riverbank shifting her quiver to a comfortable and easily accessible position across her shoulder. Her rifle was primed and she carried it in her right hand as she ran.

She rounded a bend and came upon a sight that caused her mouth to go dry and her heart to skip a beat. There in front of her was a bear! On the ground was a man, bleeding and unconscious. The bear raised his head and looked her right in the eyes causing her throat to tighten and sweat broke out on her forehead. There was blood dripping from his mouth. He shook his head and made strange "Hmpf Hmpf" noises. The blood was spraying everywhere. It took a couple of seconds for the severity of the situation to sink in, then she raised her rifle and fired. She quickly dropped the rifle, swung her bow around and notched an arrow. She had fired three arrows into the bear before it dropped to the ground. She stood riveted, for what seemed like an eternity, before she began sinking to the ground, staring at the bloody scene in front of her. The musty odor of the bear, mingled with the strong smell of fresh blood, made her nauseated.

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Catherine awoke with a start. Her heart was pounding so hard she could barely breathe. There were little beads of perspiration on her forehead and upper lip. It was dark. She felt disoriented. As her heart calmed and her breathing returned to normal, she glanced up into a sky filled with stars. Looking around, she saw the familiar safety of the wagons and the other sleeping travelers. Then she realized it was just a bad dream so she concentrated on slowing her breathing and layed back to resume her sleep.

It was early September, 1820 and the days were starting to cool. Catherine was beginning to enjoy the beauty of the country with the onset of less inclement weather. The trail they followed had deep ruts from the wagons that passed this way previously. She didn't mind the ruts, she was just grateful they were finally out of the forest. The trees were fascinating, but they were so thick it seemed like dusk all day long. Now that she was in open country, she felt like she could see for miles. The brightness made her eyes water but she loved it.

Thinking back, it seemed as though she had been traveling for years. It had only been a couple of months ago they started the trek from New York, but then, there was the long trip across the ocean before arriving in this wide-open country. It seemed a long time ago since Catherine had slept under a real roof in a real bed.

The weather was milder now so she didn't miss the roof as much as the bed. She simply must quit thinking about it, for the day had just started and it would be many hours before nightfall. If she continued to think about the big feather bed, left behind in Austria, she would start feeling lazy and never be able to keep up with the oxen-pulled wagons squeaking their way across the plains ahead of her. It was easier traveling now and she found she could let her mind wander without too much worry as to where she would put her next step.

Yes, this was a perfect day to dream and think about all the recent changes in her life. Papa and Mums decided, with what

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Catherine felt was a sudden move, that things were getting uncomfortable in Austria. They announced at dinner one evening that the family would soon be aboard a ship to America. Napoleon had been defeated five years before, now with Prince Klemens von Metternich pushing so many people, the revolutions were getting too close to home for Papa.

The most important and sentimental of the family belongings were packed with care and the great trip across the ocean began. It was a frightening thing for Catherine, since she had lived in the same house, just out of Graz, Austria, all of her life. Their house wasn't fancy, but it was warm and cozy. The river ran not too far from the outer-most region of the land Papa worked so hard to farm. The Friedbacher's owned that piece of land for generations and now it was left to the Revolutionists. True, Papa got a fair price for it, but it was still sad to think of the destruction that the ensuing battles could bring. She read about conquered lands and knew that the battles left large scars in the landscape. She lifted her eyes to the heavens and whispered a prayer that this would not happen to her beautiful homeland.

The trip across the ocean was cramped and noisy. The anticipation of new sights, new lands and freedom made it bearable. The arrival on Ellis Island was a nightmare and Catherine was glad when it was over. The lines of immigrants went on forever; and the processing took days. The streets were filled with people milling about. Dirty, rowdy children were running rampant. There were beggars in rags everywhere and Catherine began to wonder if America was any better than what they left behind. The process was finally over and they loaded onto the ferry to cross over to New York.

Papa, along with the other Elders, took care of all the necessary arrangements to get under way. After what seemed like an interminable amount of time, the wagons were assembled and the next leg of the trip began.

They left New York in late June. It was hot and muggy with afternoon thunderstorms that turned the streets to a quagmire.

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After the first day of travel, everyone was wet, muddy, tired and irritable. The weary travelers made camp for the night. The soft glow of the campfires seemed to calm most everyone's nerves. Catherine loved sitting in front of a campfire and looking into the flames. It brought back memories of quiet nights in Austria in front of the fireplace; Mums in her chair making a quilt for her little brother or just resting and humming the beautiful tunes of Strauss. Catherine, curled up in her Grand-Mama's lap, enjoying the peace of the family and the quiet comfort of home. Grand-Mama's lap was here, but the quiet was most definitely gone! Oh, how Catherine wished for the serenity she had once known, as she stared into the fire watching the flames dancing and playing before her. Catherine always trusted her Papa and he promised wonderful things with this trip to America. She prayed with all her heart, in the midst of so many people, that Papa would be right again.

After that first night, one day ran into another as the wagon train made its way across the lands the Colonists called New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and into the Indiana Territory. Anticipation grew among the travelers. Everyone's spirits were heightened by the news that they were only a few days travel from St. Louis. Missouri was working for statehood and the town of St. Louis was becoming a metropolis. Everyone in the wagon train was anxiously looking forward to a real town, a hot bath, a meal at a table and a bed. *Ah, the bed*, Catherine sighed. One of the luxuries she missed the most, second only to quiet.

An hour or more out of St. Louis, Catherine began to hear the hum in the air that is caused by too many people in too small a place. The sound came across the plains to accost her ears like the buzz of a large swarm of bees. The closer they came to the city, the louder it was. As the wagons moved slowly down the main street of St. Louis, Catherine felt like her head would surely explode. Children laughed and screamed as they ran along the boardwalks; horses tied to hitching posts stamped their feet and made snorting noises. Men and women gathered to

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gossip and visit and then went about their daily tasks. Worst of all was what might have been music. The sound, coming through the swinging doors of a building, with a sign above it that read "Saloon", was foreign to Catherine's ears. It sounded like some sort of a piano, but the notes were high and fast. It grated on her nerves and she made a mental note to ask Papa what it was as soon as they stopped. She tried very hard to concentrate on the soft orchestral sounds of Bach, Beethoven and, of course, her favorite, Johann Strauss Sr., although, the constant buzz of the city was still there. Relief began to come as the wagons moved out of St. Louis to set up a temporary camp.

The travelers planned to stay for about a week to rest and obtain information of the vast, open country ahead. It was a long way to the other side of the Rockies and the men of the party wanted to know what lay ahead. Any information regarding the area known as the Louisiana Purchase and then, the unclaimed area beyond, would be of great value. A chill ran up Catherine's spine as she realized St. Louis would be the last of the "civilized country" within the United States of America. They were about to enter what had become known as the "Territory of the Louisiana Purchase"; wild and untamed.

Of course, there were inhabitants out there in that vast wilderness. There were some small settlements as well as a town some distance away called Independence. Once they left Independence, the next leg of their trip would take them on what would become the Santa Fe Trail less than a year after their passing.

Mums began to set up the camp space for the family as small groups of people wandered into St. Louis to explore, get baths, have a meal and listen to bits of gossip. Catherine decided she would be the most help by taking charge of her little brother and keeping him out of everyone's hair. As she reached for Joseph, she saw her older brothers, Carl and Ernie, along with her sisters Josephine and Matilda, following Papa into town. She knew her other two sisters, Martha and Jean, would help Mums and

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Grand-Mama. So she urged Joseph along toward the river in hopes of finding a little peace and quiet and knowing her brother would find some way to play away the afternoon.

The river, "The Mighty Mississippi", took Catherine's breath away. As she sat under a welcome canopy of trees and gazed over the boiling waters, a calm began to engulf her. The buzz of town was still intrusive, but she put it out of her mind and relaxed as Joseph played in a little pool that formed along the bank. Catherine called to him not to get out of her sight, removed her shoes and layed back to let nature take over. She closed her eyes so her senses of smell, feeling and hearing would be stronger. She took a deep breath, through her nose, and let the fresh grasses, the trees and the river overwhelm her. She pressed the palms of her hands and the bottoms of her bare feet to the damp, soft earth. A lump arose in her throat and tears stung her eyes, as she realized how much she already missed the country of her homeland.

Trying desperately to get her emotions in check, she thought of the times, after chores were done, when she had slipped away, alone, to the river on the other side of the farm. The meadow filled with fragrant flowers, the massive trees towering over her head, the soft gurgle of the water as it wandered off to the south - and the solitude. This spot reminded Catherine of the peace and quiet of her river in Austria.

She wondered if Grand-Mama ever dreamt of the lovely place by the river, where the family had layed to rest her husband of fifty seven years. Did it hurt that she would never again place flowers there or just sit and visit with him as Catherine had done so many times since he left them? It was hard on Grand-Mama when he went, but she was doing much better now. There were all of Catherine's brothers and sisters for Grand-Mama to help Mums with and now, with the trip to America, she had a lot to keep her mind off the sad days of Pampa's passing.

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The sun cast shadows in the trees overhead and her favorite Strauss music was lulling her to tranquillity, when all of a sudden a splash and a yelp made her bolt upright. She looked in the direction of the sound and burst into hysterical laughter as she saw her brother, sitting in water up to his chest, grinning from ear to ear, proudly clutching a frog in his fist. Once Catherine controlled her laughter and wiped the tears from her eyes, she helped Joseph to his feet. It was time to head back to the wagons anyway. Joseph refused to let go of the frog, insisting that it was Grand-Mama's favorite food. Rather than have him screaming all the way back, knowing full well that one frog was hardly a meal, she let him keep his prize and pointed him in the direction of camp. The buzz of thousands of people again invaded her ears. With a flip of her head, she realized she was just going to have to get used to it until they reached their destination, somewhere on the other side of the Rockies. *How far was that and how long would it take?*

Catherine thought again of the day by the river when she realized she was, what people called, a loner. She loved her family very much and she so enjoyed the nights when company came and Mums had cooked all day to prepare for the guests. Everyone talked and laughed while the children played. But then the guests left. Quiet would again encircle her. She didn't have to listen to it on a full time basis, like now!

She had a large family, to be sure. In fact some of the neighbors teased Papa and asked him if he was trying to make his own town. The thing she was used to however, was that everyone respected the other's space and quiet time, not like some of the families on this wagon train who seemed to always be carrying on about something. Didn't they realize how important peace and quiet was to the soul?

Well, Catherine thought, as she gave a big sigh, everyone is different and, it was said, America gave them the freedom to be just that! So be it, she said to herself, looking forward with longing to the end of the trail.

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They were very near the wagons now and Joseph took off as fast as his little legs could carry him with his “prize” thrust out in front of him and a beautiful smile on his face. Catherine let him get a good distance ahead, knowing he wanted to reach Grand-Mama first to present her with “dinner.” When she decided he had a good head start, she lifted her skirt and began to run, letting her longer legs rapidly close the distance between them. Just as she reached his side, he was pushing the frog into Grand-Mama’s face, with a smile that would melt anyone’s heart. Of course, she made a big fuss over “dinner” and hugged him with the love only a Grand-Mama can give at a time like this. Catherine was very glad she had not insisted he leave the frog behind when she saw the elation in his face. What a joy little Joseph was for her and all the rest of the family. He was so full of life and happiness that it just kind of bubbled over to everyone and became quite contagious.

Reflecting on the night that he graced the family with his presence, Catherine had to smile. She was the youngest then, at an all too grown up age of thirteen. Everyone pampered and fussed and worried over Mums having a child so late in life. Mums would laugh it off and explain that both she and the child were healthy as horses. She’d have everyone watch and laugh while he wiggled and squirmed in her stomach, like a Lipizzaner giving them a private performance. Mums was right, as she so often is. All eight pounds of Joseph came squalling into their lives early one evening four years ago and he hadn’t stopped since. He was a beautiful child. Plump little arms and legs, hair as white as the snow on the Central Alps, and eyes that were a crystal blue; so intense you felt like he could see right through to your soul. “Just like Catherine’s,” people would say, “Just like Catherine’s.”

Catherine would look into Joseph’s eyes and think, *no wonder complete strangers stop me on the street to comment on my eyes*. It had always been an embarrassment to her before Joseph was born. She just couldn’t see anything unusual about

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her eyes. Then she looked into Joseph's. *Is that what my eyes look like to other people?* She finally began to understand the open-mouthed stares and the comments, thanks to Joseph. In fact she very seldom thought much of it anymore.

Joseph, the youngest of the Friedbacher clan, a joy to all. She smiled again then she realized Grand-Mama had all of Joseph's attention at the moment, so she hurried to the area where Mums had set out her things, rummaged through her trunk, found a clean set of clothes and headed for the water to freshen up - alone!

By the time Catherine returned, dinner was nearly ready. She didn't feel guilty about taking so long because she knew her part would come after everyone had eaten. She and Josephine would get the clean-up chores.

Papa said the Blessing and the travelers enjoyed the fresh meat provided by the men who had taken advantage of this rest stop to hunt. Grand-Mama made a big show of eating her frog, much to the delight of Joseph and all those within hearing distance.

The week passed quickly. Catherine spent most of her time with Joseph down by the river. They played in the water, chased frogs, and rolled in the soft, new grass sprouting from the recent rains. When she was with Joseph, she didn't have to "act her age." It was such a bore to be seventeen. Not old enough to be an adult, but too old to play.

People were beginning to form up. The playing was over, the wagons were heading west. The fear of the unknown passed over Catherine, along with the thrill of going across wild country. She couldn't wait to see the trees, "so tall ya fall over backwards if ya look ta the top," the trappers said. They also told of rivers, deep and wide, yet so clear you could see the bottom. Miles of open grasslands and buffalo. Catherine tried to picture this beast in her head, but the way the trappers described them she was having a problem fitting the parts in the right places. She would wait to see this animal for herself, then maybe she

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could tell someone who had never seen one, in such a way as to have the parts fit where they belonged.

Upon leaving St. Louis, they decided to follow the Missouri River to Independence. They knew, with Missouri fighting for statehood, there would be numerous settlements along the way where they could get news of the trail ahead. By following the river, there would also be comfortable places to camp. With twenty wagons, and over one hundred people, it was imperative to be sure of the availability of fresh water.

Catherine was beginning to enjoy the trip immensely. Mother Nature had outdone herself along the river. The Mississippi and the Missouri were the largest rivers she had ever seen. The air smelled fresh and clean. Wildlife was abundant and enjoyable to watch.

Early one morning, she took Joseph to sit by the river. As they sat quietly listening to the morning sounds of birds waking the forest, a doe and her fawns came to drink. She explained to Joseph what their father told her, "if the animals have twins, it is a very good sign. It means there is food aplenty and winter will be mild." Catherine was teaching Joseph to be still and quiet.

The mother and her little ones were not afraid of them so they sat and enjoyed the calm and beauty of nature. Soon the deer had quenched their thirst and meandered up the bank in search of forage and a comfortable, safe place to rest during the warmest part of the day.

Within a few minutes a raccoon came down the same trail. Fish were jumping in the early morning light; catching the bugs that flitted across the river. The raccoon waddled over and seated itself on a rock, not far from them and looked down into the water. Before either of them knew what happened it pounced into the water and scrambled to the bank with a small fish. Catherine and Joseph sat motionless watching it hold the fish in its paws as if they were human hands. Catherine was thrilled with herself for having picked this particular spot to work with Joseph on the skills of being quiet and still.

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Too soon for Catherine, she could hear the sounds of people stirring in the camp. Joseph heard them about the same time and the smile vanished from his lips as he turned his head from the river to Catherine and then toward the wagons. They both knew it was time to return. Neither wanted to leave this special place by the river, however, common sense prevailed and they headed up the bank.

Traveling along the river was tedious. There were numerous tributaries to cross. Some days the wagons only made a few miles before setting up camp for the night. In spite of the difficulties, Catherine felt like she had gone to heaven. The peace emanating from the countryside, the fresh smell in the air, the animals too numerous to keep track of and the soft, green grasses were a tonic to her soul.

The hum of Independence wasn't nearly as offensive as St. Louis, although it did creep into her audio senses some distance before they reached it. Again the wagons passed through the town before setting up camp. It was an unspoken agreement, of sorts, to put the crossing of waters and the passing of towns behind them before stopping for the night.

Once on the other side of Independence, they were at the beginning of what would soon be known as the Santa Fe Trail. Over the years that followed, it would take many travelers west to Council Grove, Kansas and on to the Cimarron Crossing of the Arkansas River near Cimarron, Kansas. There the route would divide. One branch leading up the Arkansas River to Bents Fort, near La Junita, Colorado, then turning southwest across Raton Pass to the upper Canadian River in New Mexico. The other route would cut across the Cimarron Desert. This one would prove to be shorter, but rumors of "Savage Indians" would make it much more dangerous.

In later years, it would continue on to Los Angeles by way of Durango, Colorado, the Green and Virgin Rivers in Utah, the Colorado River and across the Mojave Desert into California.

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Catherine didn't think about the fact that the group she was traveling with could be part of history in the making. She didn't care. She was too busy enjoying the beauty of the world around her.

Much to the delight of Catherine and Joseph, the group of men who, unofficially, were dubbed "the Council," elected to spend a couple of weeks camped on the outskirts of Independence.

She was unmercifully teased by her older brothers and harassed by her sisters for her "play time." Catherine didn't let it spoil her fun. She and Joseph were having a wonderful time and she wished it would never end. She took the opportunity to teach Joseph the basics of swimming and laughed uncontrollably at his antics in the river. Grand-Mama and Pampa taught her that laughter was healthy and one should be happy with one's lot in life. "A smile keeps the body healthy" Pampa said. Catherine believed that, with all her heart, and found joy where others overlooked it.

She took the clothes from each member of the family, washed them thoroughly and hung them in trees to air in the fresh breezes by the river. All the while, keeping a close eye on Joseph as well as teaching him all she could about the river, animals and survival.

So complete had been her Papa's teachings to the older children that she wanted to pass as much on to her little brother as she could. Even though the fear of the Revolution was thousands of miles away across an ocean, one could never be too careful.

On the decided day of departure, Catherine dawdled until Mums and Grand-Mama finally got irritated with her and admonished her severely to "act her age!" Her spirits were low until she found out they would still be following rivers and skirting around lakes for a good many days ahead. With that bit of news, the twinkle returned to her eyes, and she began to look

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forward to the miles ahead with the same exuberance as she had previously shown in the miles behind.

Some of the people in the wagon train had made friends in the town of Independence, so people came out with well wishes for them. With hugs, laughter and numerous good-byes, the party was again on their way toward their destination on the other side of the Rockies.

Catherine continued to be frustrated when she would hear someone say "the other side of the Rockies." No one had yet been able to tell her how far that was, or when they would get there. Even though she was enjoying all of this very much, she couldn't quit thinking of the end of the trail, a real roof, a bed, and quiet.

The first morning out of Independence dawned clear and calm. They had managed a good day's travel upon leaving the settlement before they stopped for the night. Catherine awoke to the soft murmur of the breeze flowing through the grass. Independence was a full day behind and the continual hum was washed away with a good night's sleep. She soon realized no one else in camp was awake. It was wonderful to bask in the peace of the moment. Too soon, people would begin to rise and another day would begin.

Catherine's calm was shattered. Not by the sounds of individuals waking from sleep, but by the sound of a horse pounding toward them. She looked in the direction of the intrusion to her quiet, just as a young man, wearing a badge, brought his horse to a sliding halt near the last wagon. It wasn't long before everyone was stirring and the men were gathering around the new arrival. There seemed to be a great deal of excitement around the young man, so Catherine rolled out of her coverlet, slipped into her clothes and went to investigate. The only word she was able to make out over the din of voices was "Indian." She forced herself to be calm. After all, she read all about the Natives of the New World during her studies in her homeland. *They are people too, aren't they? What could*

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possibly cause sensible members of the group to be so up in arms?

All too soon, the full story began to unfold. Deputy Marshal Lawson had ridden hard to reach them. He came from Independence to warn them. The Comanche and the Kiowa, some Natives of this area, were on the raid trail again. A wagon train was attacked and there were reported to be no survivors. Catherine felt her stomach twist into a knot.

Lawson knew he must take the time to fill these people in on what he knew about the Comanche and the Kiowa, for their own safety. He called everyone together, with the help of the men. Once the group was assembled and calmed, Lawson began to explain the situation to the travelers.

“The Comanch is nomads. They done hooked up with the Kiowa, a real mean bunch. They travel most all the plains ‘n are known fer raids on wagons, settlements ‘n forts. They don’ b’lieve in leavin’ folks alive ‘n most always take everythin’ a value with ‘em.”

Lawson advised the group to find places to hide things like knives, axes and other items the Natives might want. This way, if there was an attack on them, some of the items necessary for survival would still be available, if anyone lived. Not wanting to frighten these people unduly, but attempting to be realistic, he stressed the importance of items most valued in the raids.

He explained to them the habit the Comanche had of taking small children, who were adopted into their families and raised as their own. Lawson stressed to the people to instruct the children on hiding places, in the event of trouble, to deter such kidnappings.

After a couple of hours of explanation, followed by questions from various members of the group, Lawson explained that he needed to get on to a settlement farther west. If they would wait here for his return, he would bring back anything that would be important for them to know about the trail ahead.

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Catherine felt glued to the ground as she watched Deputy Lawson ride off to take the message to a small community of settlers, a half days ride away, in a small valley. Her mouth was dry and the knot refused to leave her stomach. Her mind was spinning in a conflict with the information just given and what she learned about the Natives while still in Austria.

The raised voices of the men trying to bring order to the gathering finally penetrated Catherine's senses. She realized the party was in favor of taking the advice of the young man and staying right where they were until his return. They had a nice, comfortable campsite. The river was close by. No need to break camp right away. Besides, this would give them time to calm some of the women who became gripped with fear, almost to the point of becoming hysterical.

As the men gathered to discuss the situation and make plans for the group, Catherine decided to take Joseph to the river. *At fours years old he could not understand the reason for the fear emanating from the nervous travelers. They surely weren't in any real danger this close to Independence. After all, Deputy Lawson rode out in the direction of the attack, so there must be a good distance between our wagons and the ones that had been raided.* Having reasoned all this out to her satisfaction, Catherine calmly made her way down to the river with Joseph in tow.

Catherine was relaxed, lying under a lush green Cottonwood tree, filling her eyes and her heart with the marvelous sights of Mother Nature. Joseph was pitching pebbles into the river, informing her in his shrill little voice that he was going to "brain dinner." She giggled, thinking how those fish didn't stand a chance.

The vibration in the ground slowly ebbed its way into her consciousness. Her first thought was, the deputy was returning. The vibration became considerably stronger and she realized this was too much for one horse, besides which, there was no way the deputy could possibly return before sometime tomorrow.

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She sprang to her feet, grabbed Joseph and jumped for some bushes close by. As she rolled into a large, thick patch of bushes she heard gunshots and shouting. She clapped her hand over Joseph's mouth and whispered for him to be very quiet. She could feel the tears rolling down his cheeks and seeping between her fingers. She continued to whisper in his ear, attempting to calm him. The screaming and shooting was so intense, it was difficult to be reassuring.

Once Catherine felt Joseph was beginning to relax and a nod of his head confirmed he would stay quiet, she removed her hand from his mouth. He quickly wiggled around to face her, hid his face in her breast and began to shake uncontrollably. She soothed and comforted him as best she could while her mind went to the information given by the deputy.

The Comanche were a magnificent war machine, leaving behind no survivors, thorough and meticulous in their raiding and often taking young women and children back to members who recently lost a loved one. They hoped this would help heal the hurt of the loss. Most often, these captives were adopted and raised with love.

Deputy Lawson also made a point of telling everyone what to hide, from valuables to children. *Had anyone had the opportunity to make the preparations he suggested? How long have I been here, by the river, with Joseph?* She tried to get some kind of an idea by the sun, but the bush she rolled into was thick and full. She couldn't get an accurate bearing on the time of day.

Joseph was still gulping down sobs occasionally and the noise continued from the direction of the wagons. Catherine thought she would surely go crazy with worry over what was happening up the riverbank, out of her sight. She knew she had to stay right where she was until quiet, again, came into her world. *Even if it isn't Comanche, something very wrong is happening out there and I must protect Joseph.*

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After what seemed like hours, the screaming and shooting began to subside. Joseph had fallen into a fitful sleep in her lap. She tuned her ears toward camp. She could hear an occasional sound that reminded her of a dog yipping when you stepped on his tail. She very carefully readjusted her position, using great care not to waken Joseph or make any noise. She told herself repeatedly to relax and there she waited until the unearthly silence held for, what she thought, was at least an hour.

She gently woke Joseph and told him to wait right there for her. She explained to him that she was going to go investigate all the noise. She made him promise not to move from that spot until she returned.

Catherine cautiously made her way up the bank and looked out in the direction of the wagons. She stood there numb with shock. There were bodies everywhere, mutilated and bleeding. Things were thrown helter-skelter around the wagons. The wagon tops were ripped full of holes and blowing in the breeze.

She dropped to the ground and put her head between her knees fighting back the bile that was rising in her throat. Once she felt she was under control, she made her way slowly to the carnage that was once twenty families traveling to a new home in a New World.

Unbeknownst to Catherine, Joseph desperately needed to relieve himself and didn't want to soil the place where she would be returning. He crept out of hiding right into the arms of a Comanche, who just finished doing that very same thing, before catching up with the rest of the group.

Oblivious to Joseph's fate, Catherine made her way through the wagons. People were mutilated beyond recognition and their belongings were strewn everywhere. She was unable to distinguish if any of the bodies belonged to members of her family and again felt nausea taking hold of her. Trying desperately to get control of herself, she thought of the deputy's recommendation to hide valuables and children. It was obvious, even if some had taken that precaution, the raiders missed

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nothing of value to them. She noticed that there were no bodies of children and realized, with a sense of deep despair, they were probably all on their way to some Native camp somewhere out on the plains. *What was it Deputy Lawson said, they were adopted and raised with love?* Well there was nothing she could do about them now. As the realization sunk in that she and Joseph had no one to depend on but her, she felt a panic more frightening than she had ever experienced in her life.

Uncontrollable shaking racked her body as she gripped the tongue of the wagon and emptied her stomach. When there was finally nothing left and the upheaval inside her subsided, she sagged against the wagon and began to cry.

Suddenly she realized she had to get control. Her Papa spent hours preparing every member of the family how to survive in the event of a disaster in Austria. This wasn't Austria, but she knew how to survive. She needed to get hold of herself and think! "Come on now Catherine," she told herself, "Papa had a reason for all that training. Now get your wits about you and act."

It was difficult for her to think rationally with all the bodies and destruction around her. She walked around the backside of the wagons where it wasn't so bad and started to think of survival for both her and Joseph. She rummaged through some of the wagons for anything useable. She grabbed some blankets, piled a few items on top, and then tied it in such a way so she could throw it over her shoulder, and headed back toward the river.

Catherine accepted, in her mind, that it was the Comanche. She knew from the information gleaned from the deputy they would be rapidly returning to where ever their families were with the prizes obtained from this raid. She regretted the fact that what few horses they had with them were nowhere to be found. She was reasonably certain they were rounded up and taken by the attacking Natives.

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The quiet she so long prayed for was now frightening and she hurried back to where she left Joseph. Full, complete panic set in when he wasn't there. She searched diligently for him, afraid to call out his name for fear someone else might hear. When she came across the tracks that confirmed her worst fear and realized Joseph was gone, it was more than she could handle. Catherine fainted.

When she came to it was dark. She could hear the river close by and the sounds of night creatures scurrying about. It took a few seconds to remember where she was, then the entire scene rushed through her mind. Catherine began to cry. She continued until she was spent and then just lay there in shock and exhaustion.

"Well Catherine," she told herself, "you're very much alone. Now what are you going to do?" She thought, again, of Joseph and her wasted attempt to save him. Tears welled up in her eyes once more. There was no way that Catherine could know that sixteen years from now, the Naconi Comanche would raid Parkers Fort. In that raid, young Cynthia Ann would be stolen and a search would last for decades. Many of the children captured during these raids would be returned to their families.

She snapped herself into the realization that action was better than self-pity. Moving around to maneuver into a sitting position, her hand came in contact with the bundle she brought from the wagons. At least she had a few possessions to assist her in, what seemed, an impossible situation.

Catherine gave careful consideration to her precarious position. After contemplating all angles, she decided to head down river. *Deputy Lawson and the settlement he mentioned must be closer than Independence.* Making her way along the river's edge by the light of a partial moon and the stars, she walked until the events of the day and the struggle to keep her balance forced her to stop. She snuggled herself into an outcropping under a tree and quickly fell into a deep sleep that comes, only, from exhaustion coupled with fear.

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She awoke several hours later to the feel of her stomach twisting in hunger. She knew she could survive for quite some time without food, as long as she had water, and was very irritated at her stomach for thinking of food at a time like this. Catherine picked up her bundle, brushed out the evidence of her rest and started on her way. She knew she would have to leave the river eventually if she was going to find the little valley the deputy mentioned. She reasoned, however, she needn't make that decision yet. Deputy Lawson said it was a half days' ride and she was on foot. Besides, the way the river twisted and turned, maybe, just maybe, it would lead her right to her destination.

"It sure would have been nice if I had taken time to take some food from that mess! You're dreaming now Catherine," she told herself. "Well, what else do you have to do but dream, and..... listen to your stomach growl!" She decided to watch for a likely place for frogs. She had nothing but time now and could sit and wait for the little creatures to surface. If that was unsuccessful, she would keep her eyes out for any sign of a game trail, set up a camp and try her luck at snaring a rabbit or some other small animal. She made a mental note to watch for sticks that would be good for throwing. She could always "brain dinner." A little chuckle passed through her, mingled with sadness, as she remembered that was the very last thing Joseph said to her before her world fell apart. She sank to the ground with a sigh, to rest for a bit and bring her emotions back under control.

She leaned back on her elbows, looking up at the trees and listening to the river until she felt her calm return. Then she got up, went down to the river, splashed some water on her face, took a long drink and started out again. She knew the best areas for frogs would be where there was a little backwash. Someplace where the water was calm and dank. By the time the sun was headed on its downward slide and no such place had been seen, she began to watch the bank carefully for any sign of

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a game trail. "It looks like sleep on an empty belly for you tonight my dear," she said as she moved up away from the river a little, set down her bundle and prepared to make a camp.

"This looks like a good spot, some bushes for shelter; enough flat area for a small fire and I'm far enough from the river not to end up in it. Yes, this will do nicely," she said, as she lowered herself to the ground and rested her back against a tree. She opened her bundle and went over her meager supplies. It consisted of two blankets, a light coverlet, some clothes that may or may not fit, fire starting equipment, a ball of purple yarn, a jacket, a badly dented pot, a few pieces of silverware and a cracked wooden bowl. She cleared the area between the bushes, stretched one of the blankets over it to form a shelter and went off to gather small pieces of hard wood that, she hoped, would cause very little smoke.

Once that was complete, she went to work on a snare using the purple yarn. "Well that's quite a funny looking contraption you have there Catherine," she giggled as she surveyed the snare. "You'll definitely need to camouflage this!" After getting it hidden to her liking, she said a silent prayer that she would not catch a skunk and returned to her little camp. She decided against a fire for a time, remembering her Papa saying, "Waste not want not..... always remember that Catherine, it could save your life." She snuggled down into her shelter and tried to sleep. Unable to sleep, she tried to determine how far she had traveled. "Not far, I'm sure. You spent so much time looking for frogs and trying to keep your balance that you are probably only an hour or two, by horseback, from the wagons."

Sleep was a long time coming as the horrors of the past twenty-four hours played out again in her mind. She finally succumbed to a fitful sleep, filled with terrifying nightmares of half-naked savages and mutilated bodies. Somewhere in the back of her mind she was hearing a very strange squeal that didn't fit into the nightmares.

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As she began to surface into a state of grogginess, the nightmares faded, but the squeal continued. She sat up to what appeared to be nearly daylight and tried to focus on the sound. Suddenly she realized, "it must be something caught in my snare." She hurried to the place she selected the night before as quickly as she could in the strange light of the false dawn. A laugh escaped her lips before she knew what happened and she jumped up and clapped her hands when she saw the rabbit struggling to loosen itself from that beautiful purple yarn! "All right Catherine, be careful..... you don't need to get bitten by the sharp teeth of your first meal." She realized she left her throwing stick back in camp in her haste to get to the snare. "Stupid, Catherine. You really need to start thinking more clearly." A quick glance around the area produced a stick that would do fine to club her captive. She returned to camp quite pleased with herself. She dropped to the ground with disgust when it struck her that she had no knife or any other sharp instrument for that matter. A rabbit with no way to skin and clean it wouldn't fill her gnawing need for a meal.

She sat there for a time with the rabbit in her hand, feeling frustrated and unable to think. Then her eyes focused on the rocks along the river. She smiled as she rose and walked around looking for a nice, sharp rock she could use in place of the knife she didn't have. Soon the rabbit was skinned, cleaned and on a stick roasting over the fire. Her stomach began to growl with a vengeance when the grease started dripping down into the fire and the smell of meat cooking assailed her nostrils. The biggest test on her patience so far was to wait for the rabbit to cook enough to be edible.

Catherine felt very good and extremely proud of herself after consuming the better portion of her catch. She sat back and smiled, with a pain in her heart, as she thought of how proud Papa would be. The brightness of full daylight was shining over her camp now and she knew if she was going to get anywhere she better get moving. She took the skin down to the river and

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cleaned it thoroughly. She wrapped the uneaten portion of her meal in it, placed her survival gear neatly on the blankets and began to wrap up her bundle. As she was carefully clearing her campsite of any evidence of her presence she remembered the yarn she left where she snared the rabbit. She hurried to retrieve it and got on her way. Heading out, she reflected on the fact that she made it through the most terrifying experience of her young life and she was still alive.

The day passed slowly, but uneventfully, as she walked along the riverbank. Numerous times she had to ford streams entering the larger river. She took what she felt were far too many rest stops. She drank lots of water to ward off the hunger she knew would come. She didn't want to eat the rest of her rabbit until she stopped for the night, not knowing when her next meal would come and feeling she couldn't be that lucky again so soon. She kept an occasional watch on the sun. When she saw that it was on its downhill march to the west, she started looking for a place that would serve her needs for the night. "Well Catherine, you might have made another mile or two. It's better than sitting in one spot though, so stop complaining and set up your camp."

Catherine awoke to the song of birds in the tree overhead. Off to her left was the sound of the river as the water playfully danced and sang along its way. She stretched and yawned feeling very lazy. She couldn't believe she was healing already. *What was it Grand-Mama always used to say? "Ah, the resiliency of youth."* She didn't know for sure about all that, but she didn't feel nearly as tired or frightened. She was actually convinced she would make it to somewhere. She had no clear idea where, but she knew she was going to be O.K. It didn't take long to break camp. She did her best, as she did the day before, to obliterate the evidence of having camped there. If there were any Natives or unfriendly people around, she certainly didn't want to lead them right to her.

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“I think today I will only stay down by the river for a short way. It is time to get to higher ground and attempt to find the settlement the deputy spoke of.” She hadn’t gone very far when she saw, what appeared to be, a very well used path headed up the bank. “Now is as good a time as ever,” she told herself as her feet turned and walked the path.

Catherine couldn’t believe her eyes. Her mouth went dry and her heart did a quick tattoo in her chest. She stood very still, looking carefully. A fence, in bad need of repair. Beyond, a shed with the doors open. She looked beyond that and stared in awe, “A cabin,” she whispered to herself. “Oh my. A cabin. Is this the settlement? No it can’t be, there is no one around.” She realized she was still whispering and felt like her feet were riveted to the ground.

CHAPTER 2

Lawson wasn't happy as he mounted his horse and headed out of the settlement. He couldn't figure out why these people wouldn't listen. All he pleaded for was a couple of weeks in Independence, until the Comanche started to follow the buffalo south. "Ve vork too hardt!" "Ve put ar sweat and blood here." "Ve no leefe!" *Damn Germans! Were them cabins 'n lil garden plots worth their lives?* All he could do now was report it as it happened and pray those poor people didn't end up paying dearly for their stubbornness.

He didn't look forward to that wagon train full of Austrians. *Are they gonna give me a hard time too? The elder, Mr. Friedbacher, seems ta have a sensible head on his shoulders. Maybe if'n I take him 'side 'n explain that the Comanch will be migratin' with the buffalo soon, maybe I could get the ol' man ta convince the rest a the group. All they gotta do is turn 'round, go back ta Independence, wait a week or so, then they kin be on their way. Hell, they ain't gonna make their destination afore winter sets in anyways. Them folks need ta understand, they gonna have ta stop somewheres this side a the Rockies 'n wait out the winter, so what difernce is a week?*

"Listen ta me Smokey Ol' Gal" he patted his horses neck, "already arguin' with people I don' even know 'n I'm nowheres near where I left'em. Christ, I hope they used their damn heads n stayed put. Well Smokey," he leaned over and patted her neck again, "guess we'll know in a few hours what kinda argument we'll git from'em."

Lawson was comfortable with his life. *Deputy Marshal don't pay much, he thought, but it's a 'spectable line a work. Hell, I coulda done a lot worse!* He had a pretty easy life and couldn't complain. *If it weren't for these damn "Westward Ho" immigrants, I'd be pert-nere headache free.*

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“I got nothin’ agin the immigrants. If my folks hadn’t come to America, I might never’d a been borned.” He spurred his horse and let his mind wander. His folks weren’t even married yet when they each, separately, were indentured out of debtors prison. Things worked out well for them. The families they were obligated to were friends. A romance developed and they were married within a week after they completed their indenture-ship. Mom and dad always said they owed their lives, and that of their future generations, to those wonderful people in need of servants. His family history never bothered him, in fact, he was quite proud of his family. Each of his parents had obligated themselves to five years. They worked hard, stayed honest and God fearing and made a good life for themselves after they were married. The land they set out to homestead, in Ohio, was good land. Dad worked the farm and produced a bounty crop every year. *No, I got nothin’ agin the immigrants. Them damn Germans is jus’ so stubborn!*

“Lord, I’m beat. Arguin’ with them people jus plum wore me out! Maybe I’ll spend the night with the wagon train. That’s a good idee Lawson. Thata way ya kin talk’em inta goin’ back with ya.” That made him feel better. If he escorted the wagons back, his boss would be happy, he’d feel good about the situation and maybe then he wouldn’t be so upset over the Germans. “Never saw such a bullheaded bunch a folk in mah life Smokey ol’ gal.”

He figured he should be getting close to where he left the wagons just in time for supper. “Good job ol’ gal. This is workin’ out jus’ as if we planned it.” Smokey tossed her head and whinnied in acknowledgment.

Lawson took his hat off and wiped his hands through his hair. As he went to put his hat back on, he saw the buzzards. “Aw hell! Now what?” Smokey felt his tension and sprang into a lope. Long before he reached the wagons, he knew there was trouble. Pieces of clothing, bits of cloth and various other debris were blowing out across the plains. From a distance, he could

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see the wagon tops flopping around and the only sounds were the buzzards. *Disgustin' creatures*, he thought, *with them ugly red heads 'n their habit a eatin' on the dead.*

He nearly lost his stomach when he pulled his horse to a halt at the wagons. "The poor fools didn't stand a chance," he whispered. There was obviously no one left alive, but he'd scout around, just in case. *Good gawd! The Comanch outdid themselves this time*, he thought as he rode through the massacre, *musta had the Kiowa with 'em.*

The Kiowa were the most tenacious fighters on the plains. The Comanche were good fighters, but they weren't quite as destructive, unless they had the Kiowa at their side. The Kiowa seemed to have a grudge. Some said it was because other Natives had forced them from one region to another over the years. Whatever the reason, they were very destructive. The Comanche were infamous for their raids and didn't often leave survivors, but they weren't into mutilation. He would have lost his dinner, if he'd had any.

"Get on with yer search," he told himself, "this ain't the first time ya come up on a scene like this 'n it sure as hell won't be the last. Not as long as there's people headed west 'n Natives wantin' what they got."

He made a wide circle around the wagons and didn't see any sign of survivors. Most of the ground was torn up from the Native's horses. He spread out a little further and that's when he noticed the foot print. The print was small and appeared to be made by someone who didn't weigh much. It was so faint he nearly missed it. It had definitely been made after the horses left and was headed into the wagons.

He knew at least one person survived, but where were they now? They certainly weren't among the wagons. "O.K. Smokey, let's make some circles. We got a live one 'round here." The track came from the direction of the river, so he started that way. He decided it must have been sometime yesterday when the attack came. *Was the sole survivor hold up*

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down by the river? How'd anybody escape? Better yet, what'em I gonna do with some kid once I find'em. A print that light had ta be a kid. "Probably don't speak no English neither."

When he got to the riverbank, he tied his horse to a tree and started down the slight incline to the river. There were good tracks here in the soft dirt. *Yep, the kid come down here.* The tracks were a little deeper here. "He musta been carryin' sumpthin'."

O.K. lets reconnoiter here abit Lawson, he said to himself. The kid was at the river when the attack come. He had 'nough sense ta stay put till the noise quit. Then he musta gone back ta the wagons, saw the mess, gathered a few things 'n lit out. Jesus, what a sight fer a young kid ta walk up on! Musta been damn tough on the lil squirt.

Lawson looked around and found where the "kid" had hidden in the bushes. Then there was the indentation where Catherine laid her bundle. All too soon he came across the tracks where Joseph was lifted onto a horse and taken off to join the others. "Sumpthin' jus' ain't right here. The footprints made by the kid near the horse tracks is smaller 'n lighter than the others all around." He carefully sorted out the confusion and realized not one, but two had survived. One was carried off on horseback and the other headed down river on foot.

It's gettin' too late ta track along the river t'day, Lawson reasoned. He headed down river, a good distance from the wagons and picked a spot to set up camp. He went back for Smokey then out to look for some food. He could make do with the jerked beef in his saddlebags, but it sure would be nice to have some fresh meat, if possible. *Don' want ta git nothin' too big, seein' as how I ain't plannin' on makin' this mah permanent residence. Rabbit or squirrel'd do jus' 'bout right.*

After his meal, he rolled out his bedroll and laid back. He could hear the Coyotes yipping and howling from the direction of the wagons. *Shor am sorry them folks cain't have a Christian*

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burial. Ain't no way I kin bury near a hundred folk alone, ain't nothing ta do but let Mother Nature take her course.

Daylight found him packed up and headed down river. "Ya make fer damn hard trackin' kid," he said out loud to no one, "stayin' right down here on the rivers edge like this." He walked along holding his reins and Smokey followed dutifully behind. When he came upon Catherine's first camp sight he was pretty impressed. "Well now Smokey," he grinned at his horse, "this here kid ain't no greenhorn." He noticed the attempt to wipe out the evidence. Although he could still tell someone slept there, it wasn't a bad job.

"Smokey ol' gal, looks like we awta git back ta Independence, give our report 'n get some help out here." The better part of reasoning told him tracking this one was going to take some time. *The kid 'peers ta have a bit a training, I ain't gonna wander 'round out here, alone, fer who knows how long.*

"Time to head on home, ol' gal." He mounted up and turned Smokey in the direction of Independence. On the trip home he went over the events of the last couple days, carefully, in his mind. When it was time to give his report he didn't want to miss anything important. His boss liked things done proper. *Said a deputy marshals job was pretty important 'n ya need ta show people ya got integrity. Who gives a horse's ass 'bout integrity out here on the edge a nowhere?* Lawson laughed at the thought of saying that to his boss, but he liked his job. Not to mention his paycheck, so he went over everything again. *Fer the sake a mah "integrity,"* he told himself with a grin.

He rode up to the marshal's office just before dark. The last thing he wanted to do right now was mess with some lengthy report. Well, maybe if he was lucky, he could get it put off until morning.

He was happy to see the boss wasn't there, so he scratched a quick note, left the office and walked over to the hotel. All he had on his mind right now was to freshen up a little, get a hot meal and hit the sack. Yes, food and rest was a very smart

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choice. He could deal with all this better after a good night's sleep.

Bright and early in the morning, Lawson was at his desk, diligently working on keeping his integrity intact, when the boss walked in. He gave a quick run-down to his boss of the past events and said he would be rounding up a little help as soon as he got his report finished. Boss Mills just grunted, like the great conversationalist that he was, and walked back to the cells. First order of business for him was to see how many of last night's "guests" had slept off their unsightly condition and were ready to go on home.

Jus' like the boss, thought Lawson, *if'n he don' say nothin' yer doin' awright*. He finished up his report, put it on the boss' desk, grabbed his hat and went out to find the boys.

First stop was Jason's place, just a short way from the office. He sure hated to bother him so early in the morning. He was grateful Jason's wife was such a sweet lady. As soon as he gave Jason a quick run-down, they were on their way to Burke's place, with a promise from Jason's wife, Kristine, to, "take the kid 'til 'rangements kin be made." *'Rangements*, Lawson thought as they rode away. *What kind a 'rangements kin ya make fer a kid who done lost everbody?* He didn't express his thoughts out loud for fear of hurting Jason. *They's such kind folk, they'd give the shirt off'n their backs to a perfect stranger*. With that thought, Lawson knew he was proud to have people like that in his town.

Burke was in the kitchen of his little cabin sipping on a cup of hot coffee when Jason and Lawson knocked. "Door's open, c'mon in." As they let themselves in Burke stepped through the door from the kitchen into the living room, a coffe cup in one hand and rubbing sleep from his eyes with the other. Lawson filled Burke in and told him that he and Jason were on their way to round up Pete. Burke set his cup on the lamp table and said he would catch up with them at the Irish Belle.

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Lawson and Jason hurried over to the hotel, went up to Pete's room and pounded on the door. Pete was a tough one to wake up and could be real ornery early in the morning. Once they got him to stop growling and explained the situation, he said he would meet them downstairs directly. They walked into the dining room to find Burke waiting with a cup of coffee in front of him looking much more awake than he did just a short while ago.

Just as Lawson and Jason got their coffee, Pete joined them and the four men knew it was time to do their job. They left Independence behind at a comfortable, but timely pace.

After they got past what was left of the wagon train and the guys were done with all their rantin', ravin' and cussin' out the savages that committed such atrocities, Lawson took them down to the river. Pete was elected to walk up on high ground with the horses as they followed the survivor. "Suits me jus' fine." Pete hollered after them. "Got no stomach ta come up on no more chopped up bodies t'day!" The rest of the group got a kick out of Pete. It stood to reason, if the kid got this far, the Comanche missed him. The worst they could find was the kid wandering around in shock, half starved. Lawson didn't think so though. The kid seemed too smart for that.

By the time they arrived at the second camp the kid made, everyone in the group agreed he was still alive. "Smart kid" commented Jason. "Be right proud if'n the kids the missus 'n I plan ta have are half this smart."

Maybe a little too smart, thought Lawson. He was starting to think this "kid" was older than he first thought.

Pete was making a fuss above them about the winds kicking up and black clouds moving in. "We better move up out'a this river," said Burke, "see what Pete's all riled up 'bout." They climbed up the riverbank and nearly got rolled back down when they were hit in the face by the wind. "Well hell, nothin' ta do now but hole up till this passes over." Lawson told them.

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The rain came with a force only seen out on the plains. All of them were soaked to the skin by the time it passed over them. Pete was grumbling in his beard, all wrapped up in the serape' he was so proud of. "Pete, quit yer damn mumblin' 'n speak up!" Lawson hollered. Pete peeked out of his wrap trying to look innocent and said "I jus' figger the rain done washed way any chance a trackin' this kid now, may as well get ar butts back ta home 'n give it up."

He has a good point, thought Lawson, we'll see how the rest of'em feel 'n take it from there. Burke nodded his head in agreement; knowing the rain washed away all tracks and destroyed any chance of locating the kid now. Jason didn't like it, but he too, reluctantly agreed. Lawson had a feeling they should go on down the river a ways just to look around, but the others were right. "Majority rules" Lawson told them, as he mounted his horse. Jason had the look of a lost schoolboy on his face, but he mounted up with the rest of them.

It was getting dark when the group turned their mounts toward home. The trail was clear, so the ride was easy even in the dark. On the way back to Independence, each man was going over in his mind what happened out there. Lawson just let them get things straight in their own heads while he contemplated on the thought of one kid wandering around, alone.

Life went on in Independence, in spite of the massacre less than a day's ride west of town. It wasn't that the people were cold, it was just that they all knew life was hard out here and things like that happened. No one could undo it.

Lawson knew that was how he should feel as he went about the task of keeping order, showing new folks around town, advising the travelers headed west and putting up with the trappers. Somehow he just couldn't get that one, lost kid out of his mind.

It was November first when the town woke to the first frost of the season. It wasn't a heavy freeze, but everyone knew it was just the beginning. Lawson was relieved, in a way, as it

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made his job easier. There wouldn't be anymore travelers now until spring. Well, maybe a few stragglers, but they would stop here for the winter. Most of the troublemakers would stay in now until warmer weather came. Trappers were set up somewhere for the winter too. The days were pretty quiet now and he had a lot more time to think.

He sat at his desk and let his mind go back to a few months ago. *Guess them Germans got lucky. The Comanch 'n their Kiowa friends come up on that wagon train 'n it probly saved the lives a them stubborn, bullheaded folks. Them Germans'll never know that 'n the wagon train a folks from Austria, well, that's a sad situation. Wonder what ever happened ta that kid?* Lawson thought. *Probably never know.* As far as he knew, no one new came into town from that direction, alone. He tried to keep up on all the goings on so he would know if there were any strangers. A kid coming in alone would be the talk of the town.

Lawson decided he better write a note to his mom and dad. He never could understand why they worried about him so much. Their letters were always the same. "Come back to Ohio son, help Dad with the farm, find a pretty little wife and settle down." He couldn't seem to get them to understand. He didn't want to "work the farm," and he definitely didn't want to go back to Ohio. The last thing he needed right now was a "pretty little wife" and, he was settled down! Parents could sure be a pain sometimes, but he loved his mom and dad, so he set to writing the letter.

He mentioned a couple of times about the good life he had here in Independence. Talked enough about the friends he spent time with so they'd be convinced, but not so much as to make it look like he was trying to convince them. He made sure to tell them about the little piece of land he staked out for himself and the work he was planning on doing on it, in his spare time. He didn't tell them he didn't have much spare time, so the land was still sitting there looking just like it did when he put out his stakes. He told them how much he loved them and his hopes of

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getting away to come out for a visit in the spring. He knew, in his heart, he was just saying that to please his mother, but he did wish it could be true. He signed it off and got it ready for the next person crazy enough to be headed east in the winter.

The letter to his parents started his mind wandering. He sat there in the office with snow falling outside and began to go back over his life.

He'd been born right there at the homestead in September of 1800. His childhood was a happy one. His mom had a pretty hard time having a ten-pound baby and consequently he was an only child. She always made sure he knew it wasn't his fault that he had no brothers or sisters. She just wasn't made to have babies and tried to explain it was God's wish that there not be any other children in the family.

Lawson never did quite understand and it bothered him a little that his mom seemed so concerned about it. She spoiled him pretty proper which upset his dad quite frequently. Life was good though, and he knew he was loved.

As soon as he was old enough, his dad had him out working the farm and learning the "ins 'n outs a it." His dad never distracted him from his studies though. He often said, "no son a mine's gonna walk 'round not knowin' how ta read n write." His mom started his schooling when he was real young. Then when the new preacher and his wife came to town, the preacher's wife took over. His reading lessons were all done with the help of the Good Book. That made him pretty well aware of what the Good Lord had to offer. He was no "goody two shoes," but he tried to live a decent life. If for no other reason than to make his mom and dad proud.

One day in his seventeenth year, when he was resting out by the barn, he realized farming just wasn't what he wanted out of life. He wasn't exactly sure just what he did want. But he knew farming wasn't it.

He tried to explain this to his dad at dinner that night, but his dad just went on a tirade. What a scene that was! Just thinking

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about it Lawson got the giggles. *Dad rantin' 'n hollerin', his face turnin' all red 'n mom tryin' everthin' she knew ta get him ta sit down 'n be reasonable. Reasonable is one thing dad ain't!* He decided he better let it cool for a time. He didn't stop thinking about what it was he wanted to do though. He knew his mom had an idea he'd be leaving soon by the way she looked at him sometimes.

The day he saw the poster, he knew that was it. "Deputy Marshals Wanted," it said. "\$15.00 a month plus room and board." It was followed by a list of towns and the name of a man in town to talk to. He did a little two step, shouted - "Yahoo" and took off to find the man mentioned on the poster. He was very polite while he answered all the questions. When the man asked him which one of the towns from the list he was interested in, it took him by surprise. He hadn't thought about that. He asked to see the list again and his eyes settled on Independence. *That fits perfect. With the help a the Federal Marshal's Office, I'm gonna get mah independence in Independence.* He chuckled a little at the way that sounded, signed all the papers and started home to face his dad.

Now that was a disaster! He remembered the look on his dad's face just before the hollering started. He went a little crazy, yelled and slammed his fist on the table until Lawson thought the table would surely give way. Red in the face, with sweat on his forehead, his dad stomped out of the house and slammed the door.

By the time he was ready to leave home, dad pretty well accepted it. He knew his mom had a hand in that. The day he saddled up Smokey to be on his way to Independence, dad came around completely. He remembered, with a lump in his throat, how his dad gave him a big bear hug, told him he loved him and said, "Now Jim, ya take care a yerself out there on the edge a nowhere."

It was a family joke now, "Jim livin' on the edge a nowhere." People in town didn't feel that way. Neither did all

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the wagons headed west, but Jim got a kick out of saying it every so often just to get a huff out of somebody. Funny, he didn't think of himself as "Jim" very often anymore. He had been "Lawson" for three years now, and had gotten used to it. Strange how thinking of his dad made him call himself Jim.

He'd grown up a lot since he got here. He was six foot-three, about one hundred eighty five pounds and strong as an ox. His blonde hair and brown eyes seemed to fit him quite well. Guess the Good Lord didn't put people together without a little planning. The girls down at the saloon told him he was "good to look at" and the newest one, Tess, even flirted with him a little when she first arrived. He made it clear to everyone, "he weren't ready fer no commitments ta no lady right now," so she backed off and now they got along just fine. She treated him more like a brother lately and he liked that.

He made sure he kept his clothes looking good and Jason's wife did his stitching. He wasn't about to walk around town with a badge on his chest looking like last weeks wash. No siree, not Jim Lawson!

He came out of his reminiscing when the door to the marshal's office flew open. Tess stood there with her hands on her hips, "Well, Mr. Jim Lawson, how 'bout escortin' a lady ta dinner? Or were ya plannin' on skippin' another meal?" He had to laugh. Tess was always straight and to the point and had a way of making him feel like she just caught her little brother with his hand in the cookie jar. He slid back his chair, put his arm out as he walked past her and "escorted the lady ta dinner."

He never had a problem talking with Tess. She knew where he stood and accepted it, so they could talk about anything. Dinners with her were always enjoyable because of it, and tonight was no exception.

The meal was excellent. It always was at Lady McGraw's Hotel, "The Irish Belle." The Irish Belle grew to become the envy of all the towns from St. Louis to Independence. Lady McGraw imported all the furnishings from Ireland and the lush

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velvet trimmings, in all shades of green, were soothing and relaxing. As Lawson's eyes roved the dining room, the shades of green caused him, again, to think of the one missing person from the wagon train. Tess knew that look and decided she wasn't about to let him get on the bandwagon again. "Oh Lawson," Tess piped up with excitement, "Jason's cute lil lady, Kristine, is expecting! They are jus' beside themselves. Ta celebrate, they're givin' a big shindig fer Thanksgivin'. Since I have no escort," she said and added with a wink, "and, I've appointed myself the official preserver a Mr. Lawson's status as a single man." Lawson grinned, knowing she wasn't going to let him sit in his room or the marshal's office on Thanksgiving Day.

"I'd be delighted, Miz Tess, fer yer assistance as well as honored ta be yer escort."

Lawson got a kick out of this game he and Tess played. She was a pretty young lady and had a good bit of manners. People didn't "take" Tess places, they "escorted" her. He felt like somewhere back in her past, she'd had some proper training. He was uncomfortable about prying however so he never asked and Tess never volunteered any information, he decided it was best left alone. Tess interrupted his thoughts. "Lady McGraw's gonna roast one a the pigs she's been babyin' in the back. Pete promised ta go out 'n find some deer 'n the gals from the Crooked Horn Saloon, myself included, are gonna put together some fancy fixin's ta go with it all."

"Well now," Lawson told her, "reckon I don' wanna miss a meal like that." He grinned and gave a sly little wink as he continued, "might be mah last chance fer good food 'til Christmas."

"Lawson, yer such a card, no wonder all the single ladies in town's knockin' themselves out tryin' ta get yer 'tention!" Tess punched his arm and laughed.

Lawson forced his eyes open, big and wide, and got an "Oh my" look on his face as he said, "I ain't seen no ladies knocked out nowheres in town lately!" They both laughed till their sides

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hurt and then Lawson politely informed Tess he had a little more work at the office before he turned in for the night. He “escorted” Tess back to the Crooked Horn before returning to the papers piled on his desk.

Lawson knew that etiquette would require he pay a visit to Jason and Kristine to give them his congratulations on the forthcoming little one. He wasn’t looking forward to that because he knew Jason would start in, again, about not wanting to give up the search for that missing kid. Lawson remembered there was no other option at the time. With all the rain, tracking was made even tougher. *Come spring*, Lawson promised himself, *I’ll take a ride out thata way ‘n look ‘round some*. He wouldn’t share the thought with Jason though. He felt like he wanted to do it alone.

The days passed quietly, as they do during the cold season, and Lawson was made very aware it was nearly Thanksgiving. Tess was full of excitement and keeping him abreast of the entire preparation for the big feast. He continued to get a kick out of her “big sister” attitude and the crazy way she acted around him. *Maybe*, he thought, *she has other feelings fer me, but if’n she does she’s careful not ta show it*. He hoped not, because he didn’t want to hurt her. He also didn’t want anything other than the comfortable friendship they shared.

The Thanksgiving feast was as wonderful as everybody had been promised. Tess spent most of the meal teasing Lawson unmercifully. Every time he glanced her way she would get a mischievous grin and cock her head in the direction of one of the single ladies “knockin’ themselves out to get his ‘tention.” He gave her what-for as he escorted her home and she laughed hysterically the whole time. “Tess, I give up on ya!” Lawson told her with a grin. “Yer as bad as mah mom, tryin’ ta git me hitched.”

Lawson spent Christmas with Jason and Kristine, sharing in their joy of the baby that was due in the spring. Jason was a doting husband and Kristine seemed a little embarrassed with the

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fuss he made over her. Lawson enjoyed his visits to their house. It reminded him of home. Jason wasn't as hard headed as his dad was, but they were a happy couple and Lawson felt good when he spent time with Jason and Kristine.

Sometimes, after leaving their place, he wondered what it would be like to "find a pretty girl and settle down." Then he shook himself out of such foolishness. He didn't have the cabin built on his land yet, or the ground cleared for the barn, or the garden space laid out. How could he think of settling down with all that to do? Where would he take his "pretty girl" if he didn't have a place? "No," Lawson told himself strongly, "ya got too much ta do yet - maybe in a year or two."

CHAPTER 3

Catherine couldn't believe her eyes as she stared at the cabin. She advanced slowly, not wanting to surprise anyone and get shot. She took a closer look as she neared the cabin and noticed all the shutters were closed and the grass was knee high around porch. *Was the place deserted or were the occupants in Independence for supplies?* She didn't want to invade anyone's privacy, but she was certainly getting worn out from all this walking. She stepped carefully up to the door, knocked and entered. The hinges creaked as the door opened. It smelled dank and dusty inside, *No one has been here for quite some time*, she thought, *this place is a mess!* She set her bundle on what looked like a table and began to investigate the area. There was nothing of evidence to indicate where the occupants went and it appeared they had packed up in a hurry.

She noted, with relief, that the cabin was adequate for her needs at the present. It was one large room, there was a bed, of sorts, in one corner, a table, a chair made from a large tree near the fireplace and something that looked like it could be cupboards along the wall behind the table.

Catherine decided the first order of business would be to tidy up the place. The dusty, closed up smell made it hard to breathe so she went around and opened all the shutters to let the fresh air in. She found a branch with some dried grass tied to it. She assumed it was a broom and proceeded to put it to good use. The place was small, so it didn't take long to have the floors swept and the cobwebs out of the corners. She collapsed into the chair and was surprised at how comfortable it was. She knew she couldn't lolly-gag too long, there were still things to do before night set in and she wasn't about to be caught without the necessities again. *Especially not when they are all at arm's reach!* She was thrilled as she glanced at the fireplace and saw a

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large, cast iron pot suspended from a hook. *That will be an enormous help*, she thought, then grimaced as the next thought came, *if I just had something to cook!* “Don’t just sit here thinking about what you don’t have, Catherine,” she said out loud to the pot. “Get up and do something!”

She headed out the door, with determination, to supply the little cabin with wood for the next few days. She brought some inside by the fireplace and then stacked some on the porch. Just as she got the wood stacked to her satisfaction, a wind began to blow through the cabin. As much as she hated to, she went around and closed the shutters. She certainly didn’t want the wind to blow a mess back in and undo all her work. She sat in the chair and listened to the wind blowing through the cottonwood trees. *What a soothing sound*, she thought, *I could get used to this*. Just about then the rain hit with a vengeance. It was so sudden and so severe Catherine jumped and let out a squeal. She felt a little foolish when she realized what it was and made a mental note to be ready for such a happening next time the wind blew that way.

The rain didn’t last long, but she was very grateful to have found the cabin. She knew she would be saturated to the skin if she were caught in the open. The minute it stopped, she reopened the shutters. Catherine loved the smell of the air after a cleansing rain. Once she opened all the shutters and the fresh air was circulating throughout the cabin, she grabbed the lump from the bed that must have been a mattress and took it out the door. She shook it vigorously and left it on the rail to air sufficiently. If that was to take the place of the feather bed she left behind, she wanted it to at least smell fresh.

Catherine was going to go back into the cabin. Instead, she decided to have a look around the shed. She lifted her skirt as she walked, to keep the wet grass from soaking the hemline. A quick survey of the shed confirmed to her that no one had been here for a good while. There was a stack of spare fence posts leaning in the corner. *Good*, Catherine thought, *I can either*

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repair the fence or use that for firewood if I need to. Lying on the ground in front of the posts was a tool that really puzzled her. It looked like a hammer but it was extremely large. She giggled as she thought, *It looks like a hammer for a giant.* She couldn't imagine what use it would have, or if she could even lift it, but it may be good for something. The next thing her eyes rested on were a number of small barrels made of wood. The tops were still on and she had no idea what could be inside. She decided that part of her investigation could wait.

Her heart skipped a beat when she saw an ax leaning against the wall between the barrels. "Yes!" she said, "that, I can make good use of." She immediately retrieved the ax and set it by the door. *This, she thought, is a very good find. Even better than the pot with nothing in it.* That thought made her realize she needed to find a way of acquiring some food soon. She picked up the ax, went back to the cabin, spread her bundle out on the table and removed the yarn. "Time to see if you can snag another rabbit," she said to the yarn as she went out the door and made her way down the path toward the river.

With the snare carefully in place, she returned to the shed. When she noticed some mounds of dirt that looked out of place, her curiosity got the best of her. She quickly began to scrape the dirt aside. Packed in the dirt and wrapped in dried grass was a marvelous find – Squash! "What an ingenious way to store food." She was so excited she cried for joy. It was different than any she was familiar with in Austria, but Mums spent many hours teaching all the girls to cook so she knew she could make it palatable. "The time has come, Catherine my dear, to put an end to being nosy and put some sustenance in your gut!" With a chuckle at her humor, she cradled the squash in her skirt and went to prepare some food. It didn't take long to get a fire going and put the large pot to good use.

Lying on the bed, with a fire in the fireplace, a full stomach and a roof over her head, she couldn't help but give herself a little pat of satisfaction. Blissful sleep came quickly this night.

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Catherine slept hard and dreamless for the first time since the massacre.

When Catherine opened her eyes, it took her a few seconds to remember where she was. Then, she felt safe and comfortable. She took time to yawn and stretch and let her body come to life slowly from a good night's sleep. She decided the first order of business today was take the clothes she retrieved from the wagon, as well as the ones she had been wearing for the last three days, down to the river and rinse them out.

At first, she felt a little uncomfortable walking around in her pantaloons. Then she realized, *there is no one to see me*. The air was beginning to have the coolness of fall so she made quick work of her laundry. On the way back up she checked on her snare. "Good thing you found that squash," she said as she kept going up the path, "or you would have a hard time concentrating on doing much today, with your stomach growling continually." She hung the clothes along the rail of the porch and made a mental note to fashion some type of a line from the trees on the side of the cabin.

Time to check out those barrels in the shed, she thought. She turned and picked up the ax off the porch and hummed a little Strauss as she walked to the shed. The barrels were small, about a foot and a half high and maybe eight inches across. There were a number of them stacked, three high, against the wall. She studied them for a few minutes trying to imagine what someone would put in a thing such as that. "Only one way to find out; let's open them and see." She made herself comfortable on the ground, placed one of the barrels between her knees and proceeded to pry the top off. To her surprise it was full of flour.

She inspected the barrel carefully. It was made of thick slats of wood, formed in a circle with bands of metal wrapped around it. It appeared to be airtight and she could see no way that anything could get inside to contaminate the flour. This pleased her immensely. She replaced the lid, secured it and set the flour

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aside knowing she could prepare a good many meals with it if she was thrifty. The next barrel contained sugar; the next dried corn. The following one had some kind of wheat or rye and the next one contained coffee. "I'm not much of a coffee drinker," she said as she set that one aside with her other treasures. "You never know though, I might get company." This struck Catherine as quite funny and she broke into a full belly laugh that bounced off the walls of the shed and brought tears to her eyes.

When she got herself under control, she anxiously grabbed the next barrel. "Oh my," she said as she feasted her eyes on a barrel filled with hard candy! She quickly grabbed one and popped it in her mouth, to savor, while she checked the remaining barrels. One contained jerked beef, which she wasn't too crazy about, but it would fill the gaps in time of need. The next one was filled with little packets of various kinds of vegetable seeds. When she moved the last barrel into place between her knees, she noticed something on the ground. She brushed the dirt away and reached for what looked like part of a deer horn. Attached to the deer horn was a blade. "A knife! Thank you Lord."

Catherine leaned back and stared out the door of the shed. She couldn't help but wonder about the people who had been here. *Why did they leave? Why didn't they take all this with them? What could have happened to cause them to go away from such a nice place?* She realized she would probably never know the answers to all her questions. She said a heart felt prayer of gratitude to the Man Above and set to work transporting her treasures into the cabin. She made sure all the lids were tightly secured to prevent any harm from coming to her newly acquired means of survival. As she carried the last barrel into the cabin, she remembered she hadn't gotten around to opening it, after the joy of finding the knife. "O.K. Catherine, let's see how long you can wait and wonder what's in here" she said as she placed it on the floor beside the others.

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Looking up at the shelves on the wall behind the table a smile formed when she remembered she called this a cupboard upon her arrival here yesterday. It was crudely built, but a cupboard it would be from this day on. While inspecting the shelves, she found a tin filled with wax and some wicks carefully laid out beside it. Grand-Mama taught her how to make candles when she was quite young. "This can wait until a cold evening in front of the fireplace," she said to herself as she continued to look over the shelves. She found some interesting things there - a plate made of wood and painstakingly rubbed to a smooth finish. *It is very plain*, she thought while inspecting it, *but quite lovely in its simplicity*. There was a type of goblet also made of wood, with the same care as the plate. She found herself wondering, again, about the person who put so much labor into the building of this cabin and the hours of love into the making of these simple, but marvelous dishes. "Quit your daydreaming," she said, shaking the imaginary cobwebs from her brain. She picked up a tin bucket with a ladle inside, obviously for bringing water from the river for drinking. Rust had taken its toll on the bucket, however, and rendered it useless. "At least you have the ladle Love."

When she opened a tin Catherine found sewing notions inside and a beautifully made little wooden box. She lifted the lid off the box and discovered that it contained small hooks with sharp points and sinew rolled into tight little balls. "This is wonderful, now I can add fish to my diet." With her search of the shelves complete, she realized she needed to do something with the squash she unbarried in the shed.

Catherine got right to work on building a drying rack with small sticks and some of the thread from the sewing box. She had no idea how long that squash, stored in such an unusual manner, would keep out there in the shed. Nor did she know how long it had already been there. She couldn't bear the thought of it going to waste and the only remedy she could think of was to dry some of it. She knew this would insure its use later

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in the winter and prevent it from spoiling. It was nearing evening before the rack was completed, the squash prepared and placed on it and the rack set on the hearth near the fireplace. "Where has the day gone?" Remembering the careful teaching of her Papa, regarding the best time of day to catch the biggest fish, she took a hook and a roll of sinew from the box, picked up the ax to cut a pole, stopped to dig some worms for bait and hummed her way to the river to catch dinner. Catherine was terribly irritated when she returned to the cabin with her fish. She itched from head to toe. The mosquitos were horrendous and found her to be a tasty meal. *Papa would give me a severe tongue-lashing, she thought, for not remembering to put some mud on my legs, arms and neck to prevent those little creatures from making me so miserable.* "You can bet I won't forget next time, Papa!"

She wished for a flat pan, to fry her fish on, as she placed it in the large pot. "I'm sure, Miss Catherine, it will taste just as good fried in the bottom of a pot as it would on a flat pan." After her meal, she turned the squash drying on the hearth, brought the clothes in from the porch and felt the exhaustion of a good day's work setting in. *Where has the day gone?* She thought again while turning down the cover on her bed. She didn't know how time could pass so quickly when one was alone.

She spent the next days drying squash, putting her meager possessions in convenient places, and wandering around outside. She found the area where the previous occupants must have had their garden. She took the time to clean out some of the weeds in preparation for spring and found a number of plants she knew could be used for medicinal purposes, as well as enhancing the flavor of her food. She carefully harvested them and suspended them from the ceiling in the cabin to dry. She was well on her way to a good supply of herbs when she awoke to frost on the ground. "Well young lady, it looks like you'll soon be spending

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a great deal of time inside.” Not knowing what kind of a winter to expect, she went outdoors whenever she could.

She straightened the shed. All the leaves and pine needles that drifted in the door were scraped into a pile, thinking she could use them for mulch in her garden next spring. She was proud of the way she wielded the ax, chopping up dead wood within a reasonable distance around her little home. She piled a major portion of it in the shed to keep it dry and put some on the porch for easy access on cold mornings. She kept a close eye on her snare and every small animal that had the misfortune of falling into her hands was carefully skinned and eaten with pleasure, if edible. She worked the skins and noticed, with surprise, a goodly amount piled up in the corner at the foot of the bed.

There was a feel of snow in the air and Catherine wished for some books or writing materials. She resigned herself to the fact that she would just have to find other things to occupy her time during the winter ahead. She hoped for a mild one, as foretold by the doe and her set of twins.

Catherine stood on the porch, enjoying the crystalline beauty of the sun on the snow, while she brushed her hair. She was quite proud of her new brush. She spent an entire day boring holes in the small bones from a rabbit's foot and securing them to the branch. The pine gum turned out to be a nice addition in keeping them in place and the brush was actually quite efficient. “Your hair is your crowning glory,” Grand-Mama told her often. Grand-Mama spent hours brushing her hair until it sparkled and shined like the sun. Papa never allowed her hair to be cut, saying it was one of her best attributes. “I hate to tell you this, Papa” she said to the snow, “but at this time in my life, this ‘attribute’ is in my way!”

After days of confinement she opened the door to find the sun shining brightly, she couldn't resist taking a walk. She tied her hair up, wrapped up to protect herself from the cold and left the cabin behind. She walked much farther away from the cabin

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this time, but when she saw the clear path left in the snow by her footprints, she knew she would have no problem finding her way back.

Just then, there was a motion off to her left. She slipped quietly around the nearest tree and stood motionless. "Please, don't let this be something I can't handle," she said with a twinge of fear. She slowly peeked around the tree. Just ahead was a small clearing and four deer were stretching up to eat leaves from the trees. She marveled at the peacefulness of the scene in the woods. Suddenly it struck her, *that is food standing out there!* She studied the clearing and was pleased to notice more tracks than could have been made by the deer that just arrived. *They must frequent this area,* she thought with glee. She stood quietly for a few more minutes, then carefully backed away and followed her tracks back to the cabin.

The trip back was spent in heavy concentration. *How can I kill a deer? I don't have a gun or any other weapon useful for killing an animal of that size, so what can I do?* She admonished herself again for thinking of what she "didn't" have and tried to contrive a method. *The knife,* she thought. *Could I practice and gain enough skill at throwing it?* She mulled that over awhile and then thought of what would happen if she missed a vital spot or didn't throw it hard enough. It would be stuck in the skin, the deer would run off and she would be without her most precious of tools. "No, Catherine, you can't take that chance," she told herself as she stepped up onto the porch.

Still, she spent the remainder of the day practicing with the knife. She had a great deal of difficulty at first. *Must be the shape of the handle,* she thought. She continued to compensate for the design of the knife and, by dinnertime, she felt she could at least make a fairly good show of protecting herself with it. *However,* she realized, *I can not throw it with enough accuracy or strength to kill a deer.* She drifted off to sleep with the thought of venison stew uppermost in her mind.

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Catherine dreamt that night; vivid dreams that she remembered clearly upon awakening. Dreams of Austria and her family. Mums' was giving all the children lessons around the table. Papa teaching survival and his desire for everyone to learn all they could about America. He collected everything he could find on "The Land of the Free." All of them studied the history of the colonies, the land, the people and the Natives. Etched in her mind was the lesson on the Natives regarding the braves hunting with bows. A clear picture of them, returning to the family with a deer across their shoulders, moved in slow motion in her dream world.

She went through the motions of catching the fish for her morning meal, preparing and eating it, without even being aware of what she was doing. Catherine's mind was on the bow. *Could I make such a weapon? Would I be able to pull the bowstring back with enough strength to kill a deer? Would I even be able to teach myself to shoot the darn thing after I make it?* After taking considerable time to think this out, she proceeded to collect the items for construction.

It was after noon by the time Catherine was satisfied with the branch she selected. She worked far into the night, by the light of the fire. Scraping, shaping and forming the branch into what she believed the bow should look like. She soaked the branch and carefully bent it, using string from the sewing notions to tie it into position. She gently placed it near the fire and fell on the bed without even lifting the covers or removing her clothes.

Catherine studied the bow with a great deal of scrutiny upon awakening. She was afraid to untie it for fear it wouldn't be set yet. She had no idea how long it would take to be permanently formed into the curve she so diligently shaped the night before.

Snow was falling again so she built up the fire, consumed a small meal and went to work making candles. She checked her bow periodically and turned it to face each surface toward the fire. She still harbored the fear of untying it. "How will I know

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when you're ready?" She knew the bow wouldn't answer her, but she couldn't help posing the question.

Catherine's mouth was watering for some hard candy. It took three tries to get the right barrel. She came to the conclusion she must mark the barrels somehow, to prevent future frustrations. She mixed some ashes from the fire with a little fat, frayed the end of a stick and began the chore of labeling. During the course of this job, opening each barrel, learning its ingredients, tightly replacing the lid and neatly labeling each in turn - the mystery barrel was opened. *Beans! A wonderful addition to the venison stew.* "If you had the venison now, you'd have the stew," she said to the barrel of beans with a note of seriousness. Too many pieces of hard candy later, all the barrels were labeled and her legs were cramped from sitting on the floor.

Catherine walked the cramp out by going to the shed to replenish her supply of firewood. She rested on the porch, listening to the river, watching the little birds as they flitted through the trees and reveling in the silence of the falling snow. She marveled at the beauty of the sun glistening on the snow and wondered why white snow looked blue from a distance. Suddenly it occurred to her, she had no idea what day this was. She frowned at the realization and went inside to the warmth of the fire.

Catherine spent some time going over in her mind the events of the travel, the massacre, the trip along the river on foot, her arrival at the cabin and the days that passed since. With all her calculations complete, she came to the conclusion it was nearly Christmas! Sadness overcame her as she recalled Christmas in Austria, the family secretly making gifts for each other and Grand-Mama baking for days on end. The memory of Strudel, Stollen, Kuchen and roast turkey, made her mouth water. Tears rolled down her cheeks, thinking of the fact that she was a Christmas baby, which made this time of year all the more special to her. Once the sadness of missing her family crept in, Catherine could not stop the rush of emotion. She cried until her

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head began to hurt and sheer exhaustion took over to drop her off into a fitful sleep. She woke with a chill and the discomfort one can only experience from nodding off in a chair. The fire was out and Catherine felt drained, crumpled and cold. She slipped out of her dress and shoes, noticing they were badly worn and thinking about the new footwear she could fashion. "If I could only get a deer," she said, as she crawled under the covers.

Morning found Catherine wrapped tightly against the cold. When she came out from under the covers, she could see her breath. "Better get a fire going before you freeze your nose." She answered herself with a stiff "Yes Ma'am!" With her morning ritual complete and not knowing exactly how close it was until Christmas, she proceeded to prepare for the holiday.

Looking at the ax, she said, "Papa, Carl and Ernie always cut the tree but they aren't here, so I guess we'll have to see what kind of a team you and I make." She noticed numerous small evergreens around the cabin during her trips and felt certain she would return with, "just the right one." The bucket with the rusted bottom worked nicely to keep her tree in an upright position. "So sorry I considered you useless previously," she said to the bucket as she grinned and gave a slight curtsy in that direction. She stepped back to inspect her tree and was pleased with the way it stood courtly in the corner. "You're awfully barren, Mr. Tree. What can we use to decorate you?" With that thought voiced to the tree, she put her thinking cap on and spent the rest of the day inventing decorative notions for her tree.

She popped some of the dried corn, one for her mouth and one for the string, eventually producing a lovely valance that she placed with pride upon the tree. She pulled up some dry grass along the edge of the shed, took out her sewing kit and with great determination, made an angel to grace the top. She cut small pieces of the purple yarn making sure she had enough left for snares, wrapped it tightly around some of her hard candy and dangled them from the branches.

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“What a masterpiece you have created, Catherine,” she said as she reached up and gave an attempt at patting herself on the back. “How fast the days go by,” she said when she saw that it was nearly dark. She stoked up the fire. Looking down at the bow with a little knot in her stomach, she reached for it and carefully untied the string. It held in position. “Now how do I attach the string? Better yet, what do I use to make the string?” She frowned, trying to remember the descriptions in her lessons of the construction of this weapon. *I’ll come up with something*, she thought, as she gently leaned her half-finished weapon against the wall near the fireplace.

The morning found Catherine, with her tongue cocked partly out of her mouth, concentrating on the construction of the projectile for her weapon. “An arrow, that’s what you are supposed to be when I’m finished. So don’t become a pole for fishing, or worse yet, fire wood!” She glanced at her bow and was pleased with the sinew string she fashioned. She pulled her concentration back to the arrow scraping and cleaning, occasionally charring the wood in the fire. She wasn’t sure why she did that, except maybe, the memory of the tempered steel knives in their kitchen in Austria. Papa explained the benefit of heating the steel during the construction of the knives. *Would it work with the wood?* She wondered. “Only one way to find out,” she said to the arrow, as she placed it back into the fire for a bit then tapped it on the hearth.

Enough of this, Catherine thought, when she saw sunbeams streaming through the windows. She wrapped up against the cold, flung the door open and jumped from the porch into the soft snow. “No one to say ‘act your age’ here,” she said. “The birds don’t care. Do you birds?” She asked, as she tossed a snowball at the nearest tree. An avalanche of snow tumbled to the ground from the branches of the tree and she laughed with delight. She frolicked and played in the snow until her fingers and toes were numb, not wanting to go back indoors. She stopped to pick some branches off the tree she recently blasted

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with snowballs, visualizing them as a wreath to put above the fireplace. When she opened the cabin door, the smell of pine was strong, the heat from the fireplace inviting, and the tree gracing the corner brought a lump to her throat. She quickly removed her wet clothes and warmed herself by the fire. "It just wouldn't do for you to get sick. You've no one to turn to if you do." She slapped the back of her hand in reprimand and nodded her head in agreement with herself. She then returned to the work on her arrow. With the shaft complete to her satisfaction, she became stumped. *I need a point and feathers or something to make it fly straight*, she thought. She set the arrow on the hearth with disgust and began designing, in her mind, some type of containers for her herbs.

With her considerable knowledge of herbs she knew she would have to put them in something to keep them potent. *But what?* She thought of the things she that didn't have, chastising herself for thinking that way. "Could I make something like the barrels, only smaller?" She asked the fire. "Of course you can. Just get some small sticks, some pine pitch and - and WHAT?" She asked perplexed, "How are you going to bind your little baby barrels together?" She chewed on some jerked beef, in no mood to cook, and contemplated her dilemma, while staring into the fireplace.

She woke, with a start, when her head sagged and bumped the side of her chair. "That little romp in the snow must have worn you out," she said as she rose to prepare for bed. "Tomorrow you can work on your little baby barrels."

The day dawned damp and cold. Catherine shivered uncontrollably while trying to get the fire going. She finally succeeded, then crushed some of the dried corn and prepared some mush. "A good hot meal to stick to your innards Miss Catherine." She giggled, thinking of how funny she sounded trying to imitate Grand-Mama. The mush was very tasty with a little sugar to fix it up and she was warm now, from the inside out. She put some beans in the pot, hung it in the fireplace and

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went out to collect sticks for her barrels. During her walk she found some wild onions which she tied into the hem of her skirt. "These will add a nice flavor to the beans," She said, while still trying to come up with a way to bind the sticks tightly into barrel form, but hoped that would come as she worked.

Her search for sticks took her in the direction of her snare. She heard a racket that caused her to take a step backward and her heart raced at the noise. When she realized it was coming from the direction of her snare, she dropped her sticks on the side of the path and ran the remaining distance. She slid to a halt when she saw the turkey, caught by one leg, flapping and squawking. The noise was painful, after all the quiet she had enjoyed for so long. Snow was falling from the tree above the turkey, causing it to get even more excited. She feared, if she didn't act fast, the yarn would most certainly break. "How am I supposed to get close enough to get you if you keep flopping around like that?" The turkey calmed for a second at the sound of her voice, then another clump of snow plopped at its feet and it began to flail again. She quickly scanned the area for a throwing stick, found one, and flung it with all her might. To her surprise, she hit the target! "It looks like its Christmas!"

CHAPTER 4

New Year's Eve was a nuisance for Lawson. He frowned, *people gittin' all liquored up, yellin' 'n shootin' 'n raisin' hell. Don't know why they cain't braing the New Year in the way they plan ta spend the rest a the Year*, he thought, *but folks just ain't thata way. Have ta be a kickin' up their heels 'n makin' mah night mizerble. Shor am glad the partyin' 'n hell raisin' is finely over.* The cells were filled to double capacity with drunks and Lawson was so exhausted he fell asleep with his head on his desk.

Tess came bursting into the marshal's office with far too much gaiety to suit him. "Happy New Year Lawson, ya goin' ta breakfast? I'm starved."

He couldn't help but laugh, in spite of the rude awakening. "Is that 'n invite or jus' a statement a fact, mah silly lil friend?"

"Aw Lawson, quit yer teasin' 'n let's go git some food!"

"Awright Tess, hold on while I check the 'occupants' in the back, 'n I'll be right with ya."

For the New Year's breakfast special, Lady McGraw outdid herself. Everyone knew there was nowhere else in town that served the quality of food offered at the Irish Belle, so anybody with any sense didn't eat anywhere else. Lady McGraw was very proud of that and worked hard to keep her reputation. The meal set out this morning was exceptional. Lawson was always surprised at the amount of food someone as small as Tess could consume. She ate with the same kind of energy that she did everything else.

"Ya keep eatin like that Tess, yer gonna' pass up Kristine."

"Stop teasin' me," she replied between bites of muffin and omelette, "an enjoy yer breakfast."

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“Like mah mom always said,” Lawson told her, “Ya must eat slow ‘n ‘savor’ yer food. It’s much more nutritious thata way.”

Tess giggled and looked at him very seriously, “Why Mr. Lawson, ya tryin’ ta tell me I have ta act like a lady?” That was more than he could take, he broke into a laugh which became quite contagious. Before he knew it, everyone around them was laughing with them. Soon people were slapping each other on the backs and “Happy New Year” was echoing through the hotel dining room.

After turning breakfast into a party, he deposited Tess at the Crooked Horn, released the hung-over occupants from the jail and started walking through town to check things out. He knew it would be quiet in town today. Almost the entire population was kicking up their heels until the wee hours of the morning. When he saw Pete sitting on the bench in front of the Mercantile with his head in his hands, Lawson grinned. “Feelin’ a bit rough this mornin’ Pete?”

“Oh, hi Lawson. Shor would like ta git mah hands on the mule what kicked me!”

“Don’ worry Pete,” he said as he patted him on the shoulder, “ya’ll feel better tomorra.”

“Lordy, is it gonna take THAT long?” He asked with his head down and his hands held against his temples. Lawson laughed and walked on down the street toward the bank.

He tipped his hat, smiled and nodded to the few people out and about. Just as he was even with the door to the bank, it flew open and two men, running toward the horses tied out front, threw him to the street. Three years of doing his job caused a reflex action that always surprised him. Before he realized it, he drew his pistol and fired. One man lay dead in the street. The other one was down, but still alive. People suddenly appeared from nowhere and by the time Lawson got to the wounded outlaw, they had formed a circle around the trio. He stepped down hard, with the heel of his boot, in the middle of the man’s

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back, cocked his gun and very calmly said "If'n ya got any sense a'tall in that there crooked haid a yern, ya won't move a muscle." He looked up at the crowd gathering around and said, "somebody go git Doc 'n find Boss Mills."

It didn't take long to have the money back in the bank, the dead man in the care of the undertaker and the one who called himself Rowdy McGafferty locked up. Boss Mills was pacing back and forth mumbling to no one, while Lawson was trying to get the report done on the foiled bank robbery. "Will ya sit down, Boss. It's damn hard fer a body ta think what with ya carryin' on like that!"

The chair gave a loud squeak of protest as Mills dropped into it. Within a couple seconds, he was up pacing the floor again. Lawson couldn't take anymore. He slammed his fist on the desk, jumped to his feet and shouted "What the hell's yer problem Boss?"

"Well, Lawson, I'm jus' tryin' ta figger what ta do with that Rowdy we got back there."

"Whatdya mean, what ta do with him?" Lawson asked with a slight frown.

"The Circuit Judge ain't due back here 'til the middle a February 'n I don' know as how I wanna have that guy sittin' round here all that time," Mills explained.

"Oh, we got us a problem then, don' we Boss?" Lawson replied, as he sank to his chair trying hard to make the look of despair on his face sincere enough to convince Mills. He chuckled to himself about how Mills was working up into a tither over this and decided he better help him out. He sat there with a puzzled look on his face for a few seconds, making it look like he was in heavy concentration. Then he looked at Mills, seriously and said, "I know, I'll transport'em ta St. Louis. I kin leave first thing in the mornin'."

"By gawd Lawson, that's a helluva ideer! Must be yer brains, the reason I keep ya 'round." Mills said, as he slammed

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his fist on his desk. "I'll even give ya the rest a the day 'n the night off."

"Thanks Boss, that's right kind a ya," Lawson said as he walked out the door.

He didn't care about time off, and he wasn't thrilled about the trip to St. Louis in the middle of winter, but he sure as hell wasn't going to sit around and listen to Mills stewing like that for the next two months!

He went over to the Crooked Horn and ordered a beer. Tess came up to him and told him how proud she was over his stopping the bank robbery. He told Tess about the talk with Mills and how he saved the day. She laughed, then suddenly, what he said sunk in. "Yer not gonna go alone, are ya?"

"Naw Tess," Lawson replied, "Jus' figgered I'd see if Pete found the mule what kicked him 'n was feelin' some better." They both laughed; he finished his beer and went to find Pete.

Pete wasn't happy about "goin' clean 'crost Mizurah in the dead a winter," or about "transportin' no trouble maker." But then, there wasn't much Pete was happy about today. Still, there was no other man Lawson would rather have at his side if there were trouble. Pete mumbled an agreement and said "I gotta git on home 'n git ta feelin' some better, be ready by dawn."

Lawson headed for the Irish Belle. He needed to rest, get his saddlebags ready and find that letter to his mom and dad. He finally found someone 'crazy enough to be going east in the winter.' He grinned at the joke on himself as he unlocked the door to his room.

It wasn't daylight yet when Lawson tied Smokey and a horse for the prisoner to the hitching post in front of the marshal's office and quietly opened the door. Mills was asleep in his chair snoring loud enough to wake the dead. He resisted the urge to shout out, "Good mornin'" or slam the door as he entered. He chuckled thinking how funny Mills was when he got startled and tried to extract himself from behind his desk.

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Pete was lying across the neck of his horse when Lawson came out with the prisoner. "Mornin' Pete."

"Um-Hmm," came the mumbled reply.

"Mount up Rowdy, we're headin' fer St. Louis." He checked the shackles and cuffs then lashed Rowdy to the horse. He'd never lost a prisoner and he certainly wasn't going to have this one be his first. "Wake up Pete, we're headin' out."

"Um-Hmm,"

"Hope ta hell yer gonna have more than that ta say..... it's a far piece ta St. Louis!"

"Um-Hmm."

Lawson felt a twinge when he looked toward Rowdy. *This guy has that look; he thought, better keep a close eye on 'em.* It made Lawson a little uneasy the way only one of Rowdy's eyes looked at him and the other one looked off in another direction. By the time the sun came up, Independence was far behind them. Rowdy was a somber one, and Pete was still mumbling to himself as they made their way across the Osage Plains. Lawson couldn't help thinking about the Osage and being grateful for the treaty of 1808.

The Osage were a prairie division of the Plains Indians, so they were semi-nomadic. They packed up and followed the buffalo, but always went back to their villages along the river valleys to farm. The trio was riding through country now that was once claimed by the Osage. After Jefferson bought the land from Napoleon of France and the Lewis & Clark expedition came through, colonists began to swarm in. The Osage became hostile. In 1808 they agreed to a treaty giving up the better portion of the territory between the Missouri and the Osage Rivers. It was winter, but that didn't mean there wouldn't be trouble, if it hadn't been for that treaty.

About the time they reached the area where the Missouri and the Osage met, they'd be out of the Osage Plains. The trail followed the Missouri all the way to St. Louis and the wooded area along the river kept the snow from getting too deep making

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for very easy travel. Pete kept up mumblin' 'n carryin' on 'bout it not bein' fit weather fer no man ta be aridin' 'round in. "Pete, ya grumble more'n any man I know."

"Um-Hmm."

He pulled his weight when it came time to set up camp though; Pete was a darn good cook. When he was 'fixin' up the grub' was about the only time he was half-pleasant.

There wasn't much game out stirring around this time of year. Lawson was grateful for the food pack Lady McGraw had fixed them. He kept a close eye on Rowdy whenever they stopped. He didn't trust the man. Everytime he looked at his prisoner the hair stood up on his neck. He and Pete took turns sleeping while the other stood watch over the prisoner.

Lawson breathed a sigh of relief when they reached St. Louis with Rowdy in tow. Pete headed for the saloon. "Need ta wash down all the travelin' afor we turn ar butts 'round 'n do it agin." Lawson grinned at Pete's back as he rode down the street. He took his prisoner up to the marshal's office, turned in all the paperwork and smiled at the thought that his "integrity" was, once again, intact.

By the time he found Pete, the ol' geezer was pretty well on his way to washing even the return trip down. Lawson hitched him by the belt, and coaxed him over to the hotel to sleep it off. He definitely didn't want to pick his partner up at the marshal's office on his way out of town. He left the letter for his mom and dad with the hotel clerk, with instructions to send it out on the next stage and went up to his room and stretched out for a much needed rest.

"Whatcha think 'bout that lost kid?" Pete asked, as they were leaving St. Louis.

Lawson sighed with the relief that Pete finally found his voice. He was also feeling the frustration of not knowing what he thought. After a pause he said, "Well Pete, the kid seemed right smart ta me. Not shor he was quite as young as I first thought. Tracks were perty damn faint, indicatin' him not

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packin' much weight, so I jus' figgered he was a young'un but now I'm wonderin' 'bout that. There's that cabin up river the Crosley's left in such an all fired hurry to git on west with the wagon train that come through last year. Then, them stubborn Germans is close ta where we give up the search. Jus' don't know what ta think, Pete. What 'bout you?"

"Wa'll now," Pete started real slow, "if'n he stumbled onto the ol' Crosley place, he'd have it easy 'nough makin' it 'til spring. Lots a trappers stopped by there on the way up into the foothills. I hear it's still holdin' up good. The river bein' right clost will help, 'til the spring thaw comes. Jus' don' know Lawson, ceptin' maybe we might awta take a ride out thata way after we git back ta home."

Lawson remembered how he wanted to go it alone when Jason mentioned it. Now he needed to decide if he still felt that way, or if he should let Pete tag along. "Maybe so, Pete, we'll think on it."

Lawson realized how glad he was he'd brought Pete along. They had known each other since the day after he arrived in Independence and they had gotten along right from the start. They respected each other's silence or talked each other's heads off, depending on the situation. This was a time for just "ridin' 'n thinkin'." The day passed quickly in spite of the lack of conversation.

Around mid-day on the second day out, they stopped to water the horses at the mouth of a creek that worked its way down out of the Ozarks to the Missouri. "Funny sound over yonder, Lawson. Sounds like a kitten mewin'. If'n ya tend ta the horses, I'll be back directly."

"Watch yer back Pete," Lawson warned.

Lawson was leading the horses up from the water when Pete came back carrying a child. "What the hell ya got there?"

"Looks like the kid done sled down the bank 'n broke his leg. Musta bumped his haid too cause he's out plum cold. Jus moanin' 'n groanin' when I come up on him."

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“Lay’em down over here, I’ll git some water, see if we can bring’em to.”

Pete put the boy down carefully on the bedroll Lawson set out and checked to be sure that he was breathing. He seemed O.K., except for the broken leg. It was twisted funny and Pete knew it was broken.

The boy came to, screaming as soon as the water hit him. “Hold the little shit tight Pete. Don’ want him hurtin’ that leg any more ‘n it already is.” They got the boy calmed down and were pleased to find he spoke English. Most of the Osage still spoke the Siouan language. The boy explained that a ‘real snake’ caused his horse to side step unexpectedly and he fell off. He rolled down the hillside. He told them that he remembered hearing a ‘crack’; hit his head and his world went black. The men prepared a travois and gently lifted the boy onto it as he was giving them directions to his village.

The Osage were in their permanent village this time of year. The village was made up of oval or rectangular pole-frame houses covered with woven mats or hides. They were cozy dwellings and Lawson felt comfortable in the village. There was nothing for them to do while the Medicine Man attended the boy. Lawson decided to show off a little to Pete.

“Didja know, Pete, that each one a these here villages got two chiefs?” Pete knew Lawson was about to spout off some more of his fancy learning so he nodded his head and leaned back to daydream.

“It’s true, they each one have two chiefs. A peace chief ‘n a war chief. One clan, the Sky People, under the peace chief, live ta the north. The other clan, the Earth People, under the war chief, live ta the south. Now this here boy we jus’ brung in, he lives ta the north side a the village. That means we got lucky ‘n he’s one a the peaceable ones.”

Pete did his usual “Um-Hmm,” knowing Lawson was on a roll and it wouldn’t matter what he said.

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“So anyway, they have this council a Elders, called the Little Old Men, ‘n them the ones what make all the laws ‘n settle any arguments. Guess it’s kinda like us, you, me, Jason ‘n Burke. Seems kinda odd, people thinkin’ a these folk as savages when they got ‘bout as civilized a Government as us white folk do.”

“Um-Hmm.”

“Back in 1673 the first whites out this way was them French explorers, Jock Markee (Jacques Marquette) ‘n Lew-ees Jo-let (Louis Jolliet). Fur tradin’ got goin’ after that ‘n these Osage called the Whites I’n-Shta-Heh. That means “Heavy Eyebrows,” cuz the white man is so hairy. Why ya figger that is, Pete, that the Natives got so little hair on ‘em?”

“Wa-ll now Lawson, I don’ rightly know, but looks like the Medicine Man’s comin’ out. Reckon we awta go see how the boy’s doin’?”

“Reckon we better,” Lawson said as he unfolded his long legs and brushed off his breeches.

The boy looked a lot better and his mother was carrying on with thanks. The boy translated that his parents would be honored to have the two men, who saved his life, as guests tonight. Lawson didn’t want to offend them so he agreed before Pete could spout off with something embarrassing.

The entire clan turned out to show off their finery and do some fancy stepping for them as honored guests and the party went on until late in the night. When things quieted down, they were both exhausted and not looking forward to a day on the trail with so little rest. They felt good, though, about helping the boy.

Lawson drifted off thinking about another kid that might need help.

The rest of the ride back to Independence was uneventful and they were glad to see the town as it came into view in the distance. Before they separated Pete looked over at Lawson rubbed his chin and said, “next time ya git some fool notion ta be ‘spectable, call Burke.”

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Lawson laughed, “ya don’ mean that Pete, ‘n ya know it.” The last sound that Lawson heard as Pete turned his back to ride on home was “Um-Hmm.” Lawson shook his head and turned Smokey toward the Crooked Horn and a cold glass of beer.

“Lawson, hey Lawson, git on over here ‘n help us celebrate!” Tess was yelling as he walked into the Crooked Horn. He looked in the direction of her voice. She was sitting on the far side with her arm wrapped around Burke’s neck waving at him.

“Awright Tess, calm down. I’ll be there soon as I grab a beer.” He stopped at the bar to get a beer on his way over to his friends. Burke was grinning from ear to ear. Lawson dropped into a chair as he asked, “Whadja do, find some gold or sumpthin’?”

“Guess ya better call the undertaker Lawson. Me ‘n Tess’s gettin’ hitched!”

“Well I’ll be damned!” Lawson said as he looked from Burke to Tess and back again. “Hot Damn! I never woulda guessed. When’d all this happen? Christ, I only been gone a couple a weeks! You two shor ya know whacher doin’?”

“Calm down Lawson,” Tess said, “He’s been sparkin’ me fer near six months now.”

Lawson just sat there with his mouth open. *How’d I missed all this “sparkin’” “she’s talkin’ ‘bout?*

“Lawson, hello, Lawson, are ya in there?” It was Tess bringing him out of his state of shock.

“Oh, uh, yeah. Well, I guess I awta shake yer hand Burke ol’ buddy, ‘n give the lil lady a kiss.”

“Don’ git too friendly, ol’ buddy, ya had yer chance. She’s my lady now, so jus’ light like, on the cheek.” The crowd roared with laughter and Lawson joined in on the fun.

Tess and Burke set the date for February 20th and Lawson was asked to be best man. He was still in a bit of shock when he went to the hotel. *Guess if’n I had ta pick somebody fer a gal like Tess, he thought, I probably couldn’t a found nobody better.*

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Burke's a good, God fearin' man 'n he'll take right good care a her. Wonder if I awta let them take over the place I got staked out on the outskirts a town? Yeah, maybe make it a weddin' gift or sumpthin'.

The days ran into each other, with Tess flying in and out of them smiling and planning. "Lawson, I need sumpthin' borrowed, ya know, ta go with mah weddin' outfit. I can't think a anyone I'd rather borrow sumpthin' from then you cuz yer 'bout the best friend I ever had. Whatcha got that's special, Lawson? It's gotta be sumpthin' REAL special. So whatcha got?"

"Calm down Tess 'n give a body time ta think. I don't know what I got, but don't ya fret, I'll make durn tootin' shor it's sumpthin' special!"

"Thanks Lawson, Yer awright. Ya ever git yerself hitched, ya think I could be in the weddin'?"

"Tess, ya know I ain't gittin' mahself hitched, but if I ever do, I'll try ta fit ya in there somewhere."

After she left, Lawson sat back with a sigh. All this talk about getting hitched was making him nervous. "Shor the hell hope none a them ladies that's 'knockin' themselves out' over me git any ideers" he said to the walls. "This here weddin's makin' me fidgety 'n it ain't even mine!"

He slid the chair back, and left the dining room to go up to his room and get a little rest. When he got stretched out on his bed, he tried to think of what to let Tess borrow. *She said it had ta be special*, he thought. *Now what I got that's special? Shor wish mom was here; she'd know what ta do.* He got a big smile on his face as he got up from the bed. "Thanks mom," he said to the cigar box as he removed it from the bureau drawer. He opened the box. Wrapped in a piece of white linen, was an ivory cameo with a black velvet ribbon laced through it. He remembered the night his mom gave it to him. It was the night before he left home. She said, "Son, I want you to take this cameo with you. Mrs. Thompson gave it to me the day I married

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your father. I tried to tell her she had done enough for me getting me out of debtor's prison and all, but she insisted. She said her mother gave it to her the day she married Mr. Thompson and she wanted me to have it for my 'something old'. I want you to take it with you. Someday the right lady will come along and I hope you'll tie it around her neck on your wedding day." He couldn't think of anything more special to let Tess borrow.

Now that he had that taken care of, he knew it was time to make a decision on a wedding gift. He mulled over that piece of land he staked out. *With Mizurah fightin' for statehood, 'n lookin' like it was comin' soon, land could be 'bout the best thing a body could have. If we do become the twenty-fourth state in the union, I can always go farther out 'n stake out another piece.* He decided to give Burke and Tess his stake. Feeling relieved, he fell asleep.

First thing in the morning, he went to the saloon to see Tess. When he showed her the cameo and told her what his Mom said when she gave it to him, she cried. "Tess, does that mean it's awright? Will ya wear it on yer weddin' day?"

"Yes Lawson, it's beautiful. I'd be right proud ta wear it 'n I'll take real good care a it fer yer future wife." She gave him a peck on the cheek and a punch in the arm. "Yer a helluva guy Lawson, some lady is gonna be powerful lucky some day." With tears in her eyes she turned away and went up to her room.

When he rested his arms on the bar, he noticed he was shaking. "All this weddin' stuff is making me nuts!"

"What's that Lawson?" the bartender asked.

"Oh nothin', give me a beer will ya?"

The day of the wedding, he put the paper for his land in his pocket. The president of the bank helped him make the necessary changes to it so that the land now belonged to Burke and Tess. He was nervous, but he was proud to be a part of the lives of his friends.

The wedding was fabulous. Most of the town loved Tess and if they didn't know Burke, it was because they were new in

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town. The church was busting at its seams. When Tess came down the isle on Boss Mills' arm, Burke almost passed out and Lawson got a lump in his throat. She was the most beautiful bride he had ever seen. Kristine produced a dress that would have turned the heads of nobles in Europe. Part of her flaming red hair was piled on top of her head and the rest flowed down her back nearly to her waist. The cameo was laced through blue silk and rested above the bodice of her gown where it sparkled as she walked past the window on her way down to her place beside Burke. There wasn't a dry eye in the house by the time he kissed the bride. Lawson didn't even feel embarrassed about the tears in his eyes. The party that followed lasted for hours, with everybody asking Lawson if he was next. When he got back to his room, he fell across his bed; damn glad it was over! He thought of how pleased the newlyweds were with his gift and felt good about having done it.

Shortly after the wedding, travel opened up from the east. The weather was warming up and the stages were moving across country again. Dandies were arriving in town and Lawson started wondering just what was going on. Over dinner at Jason's, he got his answers. Jason was a deputy marshal, but he was also on the town council. It seemed the push for statehood was in full force and all the new faces in town were politicians. There were a lot of political decisions to make. What town should be the capital? Who would be the governor? Was there a building that could serve as the state house, or would they have to build one?

Lawson's head was spinning with all this when he went to find Pete for a ride out to visit the German settlement. He wanted to see how they fared the winter and then maybe check out the old Crosley place, if the Germans didn't have any word of the lost kid.

Before dawn, Pete was 'fawnchin' at the bit ta be out'a town'. "Jus' hold yer horses there, Pete. I gotta git all these goodies from Lady McGraw packed up fer them nice people out

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there. If she only knew!” As he packed up the spare horse he got, just for that purpose, Pete kept mumblin’. “Fer Christ’s sake Pete..... Now what?”

“Are we leadin’ a pack train, or goin’ ta git news of a lost kid?”

“Ya know how Lady McGraw is, always doin’ nice things fer folk. Now jus take it easy, I’m most near finished up here.”

“Um-Hmm.”

After visiting with the members of the German settlement, they were told no one showed up unexpected in their area. Lawson was ready to head out at first light when he was awakened by the storm. “Hell Pete, looks like there’s nothin’ ta do but sit this out. Cain’t see far ‘nough head ta go out ‘cross the plains t’day.”

“Wa-ll, look at it this way Lawson, ve jus might learn sompthink no?”

Lawson had to laugh at Pete’s attempt to mimic the Germans as he made himself comfortable to wait out the downpour that was sweeping across the plains.

CHAPTER 5

Christmas was over, the turkey nearly gone and the tree was looking much less courtly, drooping in the corner. "Mr. Tree, you've served me well so far. Time to make firewood out of you." Catherine said to the tree as she carefully removed the angel and placed it on the table. "I'll need to find a way to store you for next year. You're much too pretty to toss in the fire." The remaining candy was returned to the barrel and the tree was dragged outside. With ax in hand, Catherine proceeded to remove the limbs and turn the "courtly tree" into a necessity.

As she whacked on the limbs, she couldn't help thinking about the arrow, sitting unfinished by the hearth. Going over in her mind the study of the Natives, she found herself in a morass. She recalled how Papa explained the construction of an arrowhead. It was an art that was practiced by the most skilled in the group, taught to an apprentice and passed down from one generation to another. She came to the conclusion that, without any training or knowledge of the method, she would have no idea how to begin. With that thought in mind and branches scattered about her feet, she decided to whittle her arrow to a point, char it in the fire to harden it and hope that would suffice.

While stacking her freshly made firewood in the shed, she realized the branches were a full supply of sticks for her 'little baby barrels'. She placed the bundle of sticks on the porch and went to check on her snare. "It would be nice to have something other than turkey today." When she reached the snare and saw the muskrat, she grinned. "I'm not sure, little varmint, if you are edible." She clubbed it anyway, took it to the river, skinned it out and left the remains for Mother Nature. "This is a beautiful fur. I think I'll make it into my much-needed footwear!" She gingerly removed the skull, with the brains intact, remembering the saying "every animal has enough brains to tan its own hide"

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and skipped up the path to the cabin. Even though she had done it numerous times already, every time she mixed the brains with ash and began to work it with her hands, she got a little nauseated. While working the hide, she decided it wasn't quite large enough to make something for both feet. She concluded it would have to be set aside for some other purpose. With the worst part of the work on the hide behind her, she went to the shed to retrieve the bent pail. She filled it with hunks of pine gum when she first arrived knowing she may need it when the weather did not permit gathering it. She stopped on the porch to pick up her bundle of sticks and went in by the fire to begin her barrels.

Once she softened the pine gum by the fire, placed the sticks on the platform and put them aside to set, she didn't know what to do next. She went to the shed with the ax, split some slats from one of the fence posts and chopped it in to pieces to make lids, then sat on the ground to think this over. With no solution in mind, she took her supplies to the cabin and wrapped up for a walk.

Before she knew it, she was standing by the clearing. It was too late in the day for the deer to be present so she walked around the edge surveying the tracks. There was evidence of numerous animals having frequented this area which pleased her immensely. She inspected the trees where the bark had been eaten off and the trampled ground around the area. With all this information tucked tightly in her mind, she turned back toward home. "Well Catherine, the bow is complete, the string you made is useable, the arrow is crude, but as sufficient as possible under the circumstances. I guess you're ready to put what little practice you've had with it to the test. O.K., I'll do that, first thing in the morning. From the looks of some of those tracks, I don't really want to take a chance of being out here, alone, after dark." A chill went through her as she voiced that thought out loud.

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BOOK I

When her foot squished in the mud where the sun melted some snow, she felt like she had been struck by lightening! “The Natives made containers out of clay!” With that revelation, she rushed to the shed, scrapped mud into a glob, mixed in some dried grass from her ‘pile of mulch’ until it was thick and then went to the cabin to get one of her barrels. It took a few tries to get the consistency she wanted and make the mud stick to the inside and outside of the stick form. But she finally had, what she felt, was a passable vessel for her herbs. “Now we’ll take you in to the fire, bake you and see what happens.” She was anxious to see how her herb pot was going to turn out. With the excitement of the discovery of mud and the investigation of the clearing, she found it very difficult to go to sleep. Laughing at the thought of what Mums would have said if she had seen her playing in the mud today, she finally relaxed enough to drift off to sleep.

Catherine was awake before dawn preparing for a major test of her skills. As soon as it was light enough to see, she crept quietly to the clearing and was disappointed to see it empty. She made herself comfortable against a tree and prepared to wait. She looked at her bow and was proud of the weapon she produced. She rubbed it for hours with the fur from a mink before securing the fur to the grip. It had a handsome polished look from the oil, as well as being reasonably well protected from the weather. The fur on the grip produced a nice feel against her cold fingers and she was pleased with herself for thinking of it.

When she looked at the arrow rest, her stomach knotted again, for a split second, as she remembered the work and worry of working the small bone into the notch in the wood. She recalled how nervous it made her and the fear of breaking her bow while trying to put the bone in as a ledge to rest the arrow on. She succeeded and wished her Papa could see her work. The little batch of feathers on the top of the bow brought a smile as she thought of the good luck charm that she recited when she

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tied them in place. She wished she had practiced more. She didn't feel very confident at the moment. She knew she was fair with the weapons Papa trained her to use, but this was an entirely different concept. Just as she was confirming doubt of her accuracy with the bow, the small herd appeared in the clearing.

She sat breathless for a few seconds, grateful now that she got here first and reminded herself she should do the same in the future. Then she carefully readjusted her position, brought her bow up, placed the arrow gently on the rest, aimed and fired. Before she could blink, the entire herd vanished. She watched her arrow skidding across the clearing and smashed her fist to the ground. She missed by a considerable distance. One second the deer were standing there eating, the next second they were gone. "Nothing to do but retrieve the arrow and try again another time. Now they will be more skittish, so you better not miss next time!"

She was frustrated and chilled to the bone by the time she reached the cabin. When she walked in the door, the first thing she saw was the container she placed in the fireplace the night before. She quickly disposed of her outdoor wrap, reverently placed her bow and single arrow in the corner and inspected the pot. "It worked! Catherine, you're a genius! Well, you can't take all the credit. The Natives of this New World you are in thought of it first." She spent the balance of the day "playing in the mud." When all of her barrels were coated to her satisfaction she took them inside to the fire. She fell asleep promising herself, *tomorrow, you'll be tending the deer you are going to kill.*

She consumed a large amount of water before retiring. When the need to relieve herself woke her before dawn, she found this, truly was, an excellent way of keeping her from oversleeping. "Clever people those Natives of America!" She was pleased when she again reached the clearing before the deer and settled back against her tree. As she watched the deer step gingerly into the clearing, she reminded herself to try harder this

time. She watched the arrow fly toward the deer. It appeared to be moving in slow motion, like she was in a dream state. Suddenly it hit. The deer stood there for what seemed like hours, then its legs buckled and it crumbled to the ground with red froth bubbling from its mouth and nostrils.

Catherine sat motionless, staring at the animal lying in the snow. Its legs were moving slightly with the muscle spasms of death and it suddenly struck her, she killed her prey! As she jumped from her position beside the tree, the scream that came from her lips startled her. She knelt beside the deer laughing, with tears in her eyes and quickly slit the throat. "I'm sorry to kill you, you beautiful creature, but I, too, must eat." She looked the deer in the face as she expressed her feelings to the fallen animal.

She then gave a heartfelt prayer of thanks to the Man Above and asked that the weeds, she spent hours braiding together, would be strong enough to hold her kill, while she went about the task of skinning and gutting it. After the deer was successfully suspended from a tree branch a slight distance from the clearing, she pulled some bark from a dead tree nearby to place the offal on so she could transport it to the river, whispered a prayer and began the messy job of butchering.

She hummed gaily while she worked. "Papa, you would be very proud of me. You always said I was resilient and self-sufficient. I'm doing my best to prove you right!" She exhibited caution and skill while she skinned. When she got to the legs, she made a cut around the leg a considerable distance from the hoof. She carefully removed the skin turning it inside out as she worked. When she completed two legs and laid the "tubes" off to the side, she rapidly completed the quartering of the deer.

By the time she got her meat back to the cabin, she was grateful she hadn't killed it farther from home. She left the skin in the shed, hoping the cold would keep it for a day or two until she could get to it to tan it. All the meat was piled on the table and the "tubes" were on the floor beside her. She was cold,

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exhausted and hungry. She slipped the tubes over her feet and secured the open end at her toes. She held her legs out, wiggled her feet and laughed. "You're not very fashionable, but you'll certainly keep my feet warm and dry!" She suspended the meat from the rafters of the porch, while she chewed some jerked beef and was asleep before she pulled the covers up.

Catherine spent the next few days cutting, drying and preserving her meat supply. She was extremely grateful for the sage and rosemary she collected and dried shortly after her arrival. She rubbed some of the meat with herbs, packed it in snow and buried it in the shed. She hung strips by the fire to dry and cooked a large quantity to eat as she worked. When all the meat was cared for, she began to crush the herbs that were hanging about the cabin between working on treating her skin. She put each one in its own little pot, labeled them, and lined them up with pride on the cupboard shelf.

The stomach cured nicely and she was happy with a larger means of carrying water up from the river. She previously cleaned and cured the stomachs of all the smaller animals, but it took many containers to hold her supply of water. "Now I don't need so many." She chirped as she carried her newest one filled with water in the cabin door. She gave a little salute to all the smaller stomachs hanging from wooden pegs on the wall, "You will be used to hold other things now." She thought of all the berries and herbs she could gather and carry easily in them and dubbed them all carrying baskets. As time went on the baskets got fancier with pieces of fur attached to flip over the top for a cover and feathers on the straps that had been made from her old shoes. "I have the most fashionable carrying baskets in the forest!"

Catherine looked around for a place to put the new water container. Not having anything to hang it on, she hooked it over the back of the chair. "Come with me ax, I need a coat rack." She went down by the river, cut a large branch from a tree, stopped at the shed for the rusted bucket and went into the cabin.

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“A couple of trips to the river for rocks and I’ll have you standing up in the bucket,” she said to the branch. When she felt it was secure enough, she hung the water bag from one of the branches and put her coat on another. Standing back with her hands on her hips, looking over her new addition, she smiled. “Well now, Catherine, that looks like a good place for your other clothing as well. At least it will keep the wrinkles out and keep them smelling fresher.” With that thought voiced, she shook some of the wrinkles from her clothes and placed them on the branches. “You look almost as good as the Christmas tree that used to stand there.”

She began to practice regularly with the bow and arrow. Every small animal within a reasonable distance from home was a target. She missed some, but she also succeeded often. Her supply of animal furs and carrying baskets was growing rapidly, not to mention her dried meats of various flavors. When she went to hang her most recent basket on the wall, there wasn’t any space left. “Looks like it’s time to come up with another place to put these.” She looked around the room and when she saw the coat rack, she knew what she should do.

The branches she brought up from the river this time were taken into the shed. She dug holes and put each branch in one. She tamped the dirt in around it and liked what she saw. She went into the cabin, removed her baskets to the shed and hung them on her new rack. With them all hung on the branches, they would be easily accessible and out of her way. When she completed her task and got back to the porch, she sat down outside to watch the birds and listen to the breeze whispering through the trees. “You sound and feel different today breeze. Is there a change in the air?” While she ate her dinner, she tried to decide if it might be getting close to spring. “I don’t know the seasons in this strange, new country and I’m really not even sure what month this is, but it feels different outside.”

The next morning dawned clear and crisp. She wrapped up for a day of practice with her bow. This was the day she broke

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her only arrow when she missed her target and it slammed into a rock. "Damn! Oh, sorry Grand-Mama. I know. That's what I get for only making one. Well, I can't be out here with a weapon that has no bullets. I suppose, instead of swearing, I better get to work and make another. No, this time I make a few. Yes Papa, I hear you. Always be prepared!" She spent the next few days replenishing and building her supply of arrows. She alternated between the arrows and tanning the skins of her most recent kills. This kept her so busy; she didn't even notice the snow beginning to melt until she went to the river for more water.

When she slipped coming back up the path, she stopped and looked around. "It's spring! The snow is melting and the song of the birds is more cheerful." She sang as she returned to the cabin. All of a sudden, frightening thoughts crossed her mind. *Will the people who built this cabin return? Will others be out moving around soon and come by here? What will I say when they ask about me being here?* She was quite concerned about being questioned. Being new to America, she didn't know what to expect. She started trying to formulate a story in her mind.

Suddenly, she set her face in that stern Friedbacher look and said "I'll just tell them the truth. Surely no one would have expected me to survive the winter without the help of housing! After all, I haven't done any harm to the cabin. Besides, there was no one here to ask."

She felt she sufficiently settled that situation and returned to work on her arrows. "Either the days are getting longer, or I'm getting better at this," she said as she placed her sixth arrow in the corner. "I need to make a case. I believe it is called a quiver. Holding all of you in my hand would be a bit awkward while walking around in the woods. Now I have a use for some of these furs I have stacked up." She dug through her furs, found a few that would make a nice pattern, got down her sewing box and proceeded to make a quiver. When she completed it, she put all the arrows inside and hung it on the coat rack. "Nice job;

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Catherine, you're getting pretty good at this pioneer stuff." She crawled into bed with a feeling of accomplishment.

She woke early the following day and dressed warmly to walk back to the clearing. With her bow in hand and her quiver over her shoulder, she laughed as she walked through the woods. "You look like quite the hunter, Catherine. Your shoes are rather silly looking, although they dried nicely to the shape of your feet. They definitely don't match your dress, however. Guess you'll have to get another deer and make a dress to match."

When she neared the clearing, she slowed her pace and tried to walk as quietly as possible. The clearing was empty so she went to her tree and sat back to relax. When the small herd of deer entered the clearing she chose to sit and watch them for awhile. Suddenly a scream filled the air and Catherine held her breath. "What kind of animal makes a noise like that?" She whispered in fear. She notched an arrow and scanned the area quickly, not knowing for sure what she was looking for. Just as her eyes returned to the deer, a flash of fur pounced on the smallest doe. She aimed and released without thinking and in a split second the mountain lion lay twitching on the ground.

"My God, Catherine, what have you done?" Everything happened so fast that she just stood there for a few minutes letting the events of it all sink in. As she walked up to the dead mountain lion, she saw a lot of blood around and was sure the doe must be seriously injured. She hated the thought of all that wonderful meat possibly going to waste, but was also aware that she had made a kill and must deal with it.

She made quick work of skinning out her kill. Not knowing about the edibility of this cat of North America, she opted to leave the carcass for the animals of the woods to dispose of. She made a mental note to be sure she always brought one of her small carrying baskets with her in the future to scoop the brains into, so she wouldn't have to continue to take the heads back with her.

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“Your teeth might make an interesting decoration on my quiver, though. Maybe taking the entire head will be good this time.” While tanning the hide, she marveled at the beauty of the fur. “How can something so deadly, be so lovely?”

The deer did not return to the clearing over the next couple of weeks. She rationed her meat supply, adding squash and beans to make it go farther. “I know I can always get rabbits and squirrels, but this deer is much tastier. Maybe they will return before I run out, if I’m careful with it.” Catherine would not have that luxury however, with spring coming, the remaining deer from this herd would go to other areas of the forest.

“The days are getting warmer and the ground is softening up. I think I’ll see if I can repair the fence today.” As soon as she finished eating and straightened up the cabin, she went to the shed to get the fence posts. “I think I just figured out what you are for, giant hammer. If I can handle you, you must be to pound these posts into the ground.” She was amazed at the weight of the sledgehammer. She looked it over to determine its construction. It looked like about an eighteen-inch long trunk from a tree about one foot in diameter. There were metal bands wrapped around it, *apparently to keep it from splitting when in use*, she thought. The handle had been attached by placing another piece of wood in a hole carved in the head of this monster. She had no idea what kept the handle in, but hoped it would stay. With some degree of difficulty and numerous false starts, she finally got a rhythm down and started repairing the fence. As the day was ending, she was frustrated when she saw that only four of the broken posts were replaced and she was worn out. “Maybe this is a job for a man. You are definitely a hammer for a man.” She said to the sledge as she returned it to the shed.

The next morning, on her way to get water, she laughed “I hurt in places I didn’t even know I had places. I think I’ll just leave the fence in a state of disrepair. This day will be spent doing something simple that does not require the use of my

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muscles. My goodness I'm sore!" She groaned as she lifted the water carrier from the river. "It hurts to even lift my arms. I know now, that hammer WAS made for a giant." She spent the day out on the porch, making minor repairs to her clothes, watching the birds and enjoying the beauty all around her.

One morning..... a few days later, when she woke, it was dark. She thought she must have awakened much earlier than usual. But when she opened the door, she noticed the sky was filled with black, threatening clouds. She dressed quickly, in need of water and hurried to the river to fill her water carrier. As she was headed back up the path, the rain hit with a deluge. She started to slip on the muddy path and suddenly found herself face down in the mud. She turned to a sitting position with rain pouring down around her and laughed. "Aren't you a sight." She finally made it to the cabin, stripped out of her muddy clothes on the porch and hung them on the rail. "Maybe the rain will wash some of the mud out of you." She stepped inside and quickly closed the door. She sat down in front of the fire in her wet pantaloons with her long hair dripping muddy water in a puddle on the floor and laughed at how ridiculous she must have looked face down in the mud. "You certainly did sneak up on me," she said with her head back looking up at the ceiling and listening to the rain pounding on the roof. She felt again, a deep gratitude for this deserted cabin in the wilderness. She whispered a prayer of thanks to the Man Above for her safety.

CHAPTER 6

“Pete, tear yerself way from them German pastries ‘n lets git movin’. The storms let up ‘n the days half-gone. If we head out now, we should reach the ol’ Crosley place afor dark.”

“Um-Hmm.”

“Awright Pete, don’ start. If’n I eat any more Stollen, I ain’t gonna be able ta hitch up mah breeches!”

“Um-Hmm.”

“Pete you....”

Pete busted up laughing. “Lawson, yer sumpthin’ else. When ya figger yer ready ta go, ain’t nothin’ stoppin’ ya. Quit bein’ so antsy, I jus’ been funnin’ with ya.”

They followed the storm across the plains. When they reached what was left of the wagon train, Lawson’s sorrow for the travelers was renewed. They skirted around the edge and reaffirmed, by some stray arrows, it was indeed the Comanche accompanied by their allies, the Kiowa, which had attacked these innocent people.

“Time ‘n the weather’ll wipe it out Lawson..... don’ let it gitcha.”

“Yeah Pete, I know, but I cain’t help feelin’ fer’em, not ta mention all the young’uns what got took off.”

Once they passed the wagons, they turned down-river. They rode in silence for awhile. Pete, not knowing what to say to ease his buddy and Lawson being concerned for future pioneers who would probably meet the same fate. Lawson broke the silence. “By gawd Pete, this here country’s too big fer us ta protect all these folk what has dreams a new homes!”

“Um-Hmm.” About then they neared the Crosley place and saw smoke coming out of the chimney. “Looks ta be somebody stayin’ there, reckon it could be a trapper what got hisself a late start?”

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"Could be Pete, guess we better give a holler so's we don't git shot." "Hellooooo in there," Lawson shouted but there was no reply. They rode up closer to the cabin.

"Looks like whoever been stayin' here ain't in. What's say we hitch up the horses 'n wait fer'em out on the porch?"

"Sounds good ta me Pete. Bein' out in plain sight's a right smart ideer." They rode up to the fence, tied the horses to a rail and just as they were going through the broken down gate, they heard the sound of someone sucking in their breath from the direction of the river.

Both men turned at once and Lawson felt his heart stop as he looked into the most intense, crystal blue eyes, he had ever seen. Pete found his tongue first, "Wa-ll, hi there Missy. Names Pete, I'm a deputy marshal out'a Independence. This here's mah pardner, Jim Lawson. Who might you be?"

"I'm Elizabeth Catherine Friedbacher, but my family calls me Catherine." She replied as she tried to remember why the name Jim Lawson sounded familiar.

"Right pleased ta meet ya Miz Catherine, mind if'n we come in fer a spell?" Pete grinned and elbowed Lawson in the ribs.

"Oh, ya, uh, right pleased ma'am," Lawson stuttered, feeling like a schoolboy. He couldn't take his eyes off of the beautiful woman standing in front of him. She stood there, with a semi-nervous smile, her golden hair tumbling down below her waist, one hand holding the hem of her skirt up out of the wet grass and the other holding a dead rabbit. He shook his head, *c'mon Lawson, he thought, ya seen perty women afore. Stop actin' like a fool!* Pete saved the situation by reaching for the rabbit and putting his arm out to assist the lady up the path and onto the porch.

They entered the cabin with Lawson bringing up the rear. As he entered he got a feeling of peace. The cabin was warm and cozy. Pete set the rabbit on the table and Lawson found his voice. "How long ya been her, Miz Catherine?" She didn't get a chance to answer.

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“Good gawd awmighty Missy, where in tarnation’d all them pelts come from?” Pete was staring at the pile of furs, on the floor at the foot of the bed.

“Pelts sir?” Catherine asked with concern in her voice.

“Yeah Missy, pelts. All them furs piled on the floor over yonder.”

Catherine felt a panic. *Have I broken some law? Are these men going to arrest me for killing the animals?* She wrenched her hands, looked at Pete and replied, “I killed them. I mean, well..... I needed to eat and some of the varmints that got caught in my snare I didn’t know if I could eat. Papa always told me not to be wasteful, so I saved the skins and stomachs of the ones I wasn’t sure of. Of course I saved them from the ones I ate also.” She was terribly worried and by the time she finished she was looking at the floor.

“Will ya look at that Lawson. Prime pelts, the lot uv’em!”

Lawson realized he had been staring at Catherine and looked in the direction Pete indicated. His mouth dropped in surprise. “You did that?” He asked; the surprise evident in his tone.

“I didn’t break the law, did I? I didn’t mean to do anything wrong. I just couldn’t waste them.”

“No, no ma’am, ya didn’t do a thing wrong. It’s jus’ that ya got a pile a pelts there’d make some trappers here ‘bouts a might jealous is all.” Lawson said as he walked toward the furs. When he neared the bed, he spotted the mountain lion. He whistled low and looked at Catherine. “Ya didn’t get this in no snare!”

“Oh, no sir, I shot that with the bow I made.”

“Looks like there’s a helluva story here. If’n ya don’ mind sharin’ some a whatcha got in that pot, Pete ‘n me’ll just make ourselves ta home while ya tell it.”

“I’m sorry gentlemen, where are my manners? I don’t have much in the way of utensils, since I’ve been the only one here. I hope you don’t mind eating with a spoon made from the bone of one of the owners of those furs over there.”

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"Not at all ma'am." Lawson replied as he watched Catherine moving gracefully about the cabin.

She served up some stew to each of them and then sat back. Not sure what to say, she began to pick at the frayed edges of her sleeve. The men ate hungrily, making "mm" sounds as they consumed the meal.

"This is right good grub ma'am," Pete stated, as he handed the plate to her. "Got 'n unusual flavor — real tasty. What's yer secret?"

"Secret? It's not a secret Sir. I simply gathered some herbs from around the cabin when I first arrived, dried them and use them to spice the dishes I prepare."

"I see, wa-ll Lady McGraw'd give her eye teeth fer THAT secret!"

"Excuse me sir?"

"Pete's jus funnin' with ya Miz Catherine. Lady McGraw owns the Irish Belle. It's a hotel 'n eatery in Independence. She's reported ta have the best food fer miles 'round. That there is Pete's way a sayin' ya done got her beat."

"Oh, I see. Thank you very kindly, sir."

"Now look here Missy," Pete looked her straight in the eye. "Lets us git one thing clear. I ain't no sir. The names Pete. I 'preciate yer manners 'n all, but feels a bit strange a perty young lady like yerself callin' an ol' geezer like me sir."

"Of course, Mr. Pete."

Lawson nearly choked on a bite of food and began to laugh. He slapped Pete on the back and wiped the tears from his eyes, "I'd say she gotcha with that one 'MR. Pete'."

"That's nough out'a ya, Lawson."

Catherine wasn't exactly sure what was taking place here, but came to the conclusion it was some kind of humor related to her manner of addressing them. "Excuse me gentlemen, please instruct me on the proper way to address you to avoid embarrassment in the future."

"Pete, Missy, just Pete."

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“Most folk call me Lawson, Miz Catherine.”

“Well, ‘just Pete’ and ‘most folk call me Lawson’, you may address me as Catherine.” She smiled mischievously at each man respectively, “Now that we have that straightened out. Would you care for some more ‘grub’ just Pete?”

“I’d be much obligin’ Missy, hope we didn’t hurt yer feelin’s none. It’s a bit unusual in these here parts ta be conversin’ with a perty young lady what has manners ‘n proper speakin’ all wrapped up in one package.”

“No sir, just Pete” she said with a grin, “You’ve not hurt my feelings at all and it appears I have a lot to learn about my new country.”

“Well, Miz Catherine, we got a lot ta learn about you. How’dja like ta start with them shoes ya got on?” Lawson nodded his head at her feet.

Catherine held one foot in the air wiggled her ankle and giggled. “They’re not very fashionable, to be sure. You see, my shoes were getting a bit worn, so when I shot the deer I peeled the skin back from the legs, slid my feet into them while they were still soft and pliable and let them harden to the proper shape. As they dried, I worked the tops to keep them somewhat soft and after a few days I had warm, dry footwear.”

“An ya shot the deer with the bow ya made? The same one ya shot the mountain lion with?”

“Of course Mr. Lawson, I’m afraid the Comanche didn’t see fit to leave me any kind of a weapon. Papa gave all of us training in survival and educated us on America, as well as the ways of the Natives. With that knowledge and no other way of obtaining a weapon, I made one as close as I could to what I thought it should be like.”

“I think, Miz Catherine, its time fer ya ta start at the beginnin’.” Lawson wiggled himself into a comfortable position on the floor in front of the fireplace.

“Yeah Missy, I’m gettin’ curiouser ‘n curiouser,” Pete said, as he moved around to face her.

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Catherine started with the morning of the massacre. Suddenly she looked wide eyed at Lawson, "Why, you're Deputy Lawson. You're the nice young man who stopped to warn us about the Natives being on the, um, raid trail, I believe you called it."

"Yes ma'am, that was me. I feel real poorly 'bout leavin' you folks like that. Shoulda sent ya on back ta Independence. Shorly didn't know them Comanch was so close."

"Mr. Lawson please, you did your best. Papa taught us all to believe everything happens for a reason. The Man Above must have had a big need or He wouldn't have taken all those kind people." There was a tear barely visible by the light of the fire and Lawson reached up to pat her hand gently. "Thank you Mr. Lawson. Please don't blame yourself for what happened out there. Now, where was I, Oh yes," As Catherine told her story, Lawson's gut wrenched at the picture of this sweet, frail, young lady walking up on all that horror after the massacre of her family. He noticed she had to take a few deep breaths and start over a few times while telling about her discovery of the bodies and her search through the wagons for supplies. "You were very much right, Mr. Lawson. The Comanche did take everything of value, just like you said." He nodded solemnly and she continued her story. Her hands began to shake uncontrollably when she told about Joseph being gone when she returned and she stopped to get a drink and regain her composure.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen, it's just that I did everything in my power to protect him and from the looks of the tracks, they got him anyway."

"Yeah Missy, that's kinda the piture we got when we started trackin' ya."

"You came looking for ME?"

"Ya see, Miz Catherine, when I got back from the German settlement 'n seen what happen, well, I started scoutin' round, found yer tracks 'n went back ta town fer help. Ya made fer perty tough trackin' stayin' so close ta the river 'n all. It was

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gittin' late 'n I figgered I better bring a few more pairs a eyes out ta look. We thought we was trackin' a young kid. When the rain come through, it washed out what little trail we had, so we packed it in."

"I'm sorry gentlemen. I was trying to be certain, if there was anyone unfriendly around, that they would have some difficulty locating me."

"Wa-ll, ya did a right 'spectable job hidin' yer trail Missy. Go on with yer story," Pete told her, while helping himself to a drink of water and admiring her water carrier.

When she got to the part where she came up on the cabin, she expressed her concern as to the ownership. "I was very worried the owners would come back and put me out. I didn't know what else to do. I was tired and cold and this cabin looked extremely inviting. It is O.K. that I'm here isn't it? I mean, I still don't know whose place this is and no one has returned all winter. Will someone be coming back from Independence soon to reoccupy their home?"

"No Miz Catherine. A family called Crosely owned the cabin. They had an itchin' ta go west. Not too long afor y'all come through, there was a train what said they could join up. Them Crosleys packed up real quick - like 'n joined up with'em. So I guess ya could say, this here cabin didn't rightly b'long ta nobody, 'til you come along 'n claimed it."

"What do you mean Mr. Lawson, until I claimed it?"

"Well, ya see, Miz Catherine, all this land out here is goverment land. A body comes along, picks out a place they like, stakes it out 'n if'n nobody comes long ta dispute them, it's theirs. Course, then they go inta town, file some papers ta make it legal - like 'n cain't nobody take it from'em then. Since there ain't nobody ta dispute ya stakin' a claim here, I reckon it's yern. Ain't that right Pete?"

"Um-Hmm."

"Oh, I see," she yawned. She really didn't, but these men were so nice she didn't want to tell them how Papa explained all

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
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about the value, as well as the buying and selling of land when they sold their place in Austria.

Lawson saw the yawn. "If ya wouldn't mind scusin' us, Miz Catherine, Pete 'n me'll go lay our bed rolls in the shaid. Been a powerful long day 'n we kin finish this talk in the mornin'."

"Mr. Lawson, please, it's very cold and dirty out there. There is plenty of room here, on the floor and I'd be forgetting my manners terribly if I didn't offer you to sleep inside."

"Wa-ll now, that's right kind a ya Missy. Lawson 'n me'll go tend ta the horses 'n get our saddlebags 'n bed rolls 'n be back directly."

She stood and smiled. The way her face lit up, Lawson thought his heart would get stuck in his throat. "I'll just get myself ready while you gentlemen are outside. There is, obviously, very little privacy in here."

She quickly changed into one of the outfits she took from the wagon that was too big for everyday wear and snuggled down under her covers. She heard the men come back into the cabin and prepare their sleeping facilities. They were being very quiet, so they must have thought she was asleep. Within a short time, Catherine heard snoring coming from quite near her on the floor. She smiled, thinking how nice it was to have the sound of other people.

Catherine had a hard time going to sleep that night. In between confusion over "staking a claim" and the vision of Lawson's wonderful brown eyes, her mind was in a spin. Every time she thought of Lawson her stomach did strange things; feelings that were new and foreign to her. She didn't understand these feelings and kept trying to force her mind back to her claim on the cabin. She drifted off to sleep with the vision of large, smiling brown eyes.

Lawson couldn't believe Pete was asleep already. *How kin he fall asleep so fast with a lady that looks like a China Doll lying within arms reach?* He could hear the sparkling ring of her giggles when she joined in on the teasing with names. He

Adele Marie Crouch

couldn't get those crystal blue eyes out of his mind or the graceful way she moved about. He pictured himself wrapping his arms around her tiny waist and holding her close to protect her from this big country she found herself in, alone. Then he smiled, *She's done one helluva job a protectin' herself, Lawson. What da ya figger she needs you fer?* He sighed and drifted off to sleep.

Lawson rose early, slipped out the door and went down to the river. He splashed water on his face to get the sleep out of his eyes, then frayed a twig and cleaned the night taste from his teeth. On his way back up the path, he saw a fox caught in Catherine's snare. He clubbed, it then unhooked it. Not knowing exactly what kind of a set up she had, he did not attempt to reset the snare. He planned on trying to convince her to come into town with him and Pete anyway. Pete was tending the horses and Catherine was coming out the door when he reached the porch.

"Good morning, Mr. Lawson. Have you been hunting for your breakfast?"

"No Miz Catherine," returning her smile, "this critter was all tangled in some purple yarn down the path a piece, so I figgered I'd put him out'a his misery."

"Why thank you, Mr. Lawson. That would be my snare he was tangled in."

Pete stepped to the porch and slapped Lawson on the back. "What's that ya got there pardner? Ya tryin' ta compete with the Missy fer prime pelts?"

"No Pete, this belongs ta her. I jus rescued it from itself in a whole passel a purple yarn." Smiling, he handed the fox to Catherine.

"Wa-ll, I don' know bout you two young'uns, but this ol' geezer's got a powerful hunger!"

Catherine's story continued over breakfast. She told them about the knife and how it just wasn't built like the ones in Austria, which made it extremely difficult to throw accurately.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

She laughed as she explained how she practiced with it, but gave up on the prospect of it being a weapon.

“Mind if’n I see the knife, Miz Catherine?”

“Certainly not, and if you promise to quit calling me MIZ Catherine, I’ll quit calling you MR. Lawson.”

“Deal, Catherine.” She took the knife down from the shelf and handed it to him. He looked it over, whistled and cocked an eyebrow as he passed it to Pete.

“As you can see, I just couldn’t take a chance of losing something that valuable without a means of replacing it.”

“But Catherine, ya do have the means. In fact ya have enough ta set yerself up clean through ‘til this time nex year!”

“I don’t understand Lawson, I don’t have anything. I told you I lost everything in the...”

“Hold on Missy, ya got yerself a fortune. Lawson here’s talkin’ bout tradin’. Link, down at the Mercantile trades pelts fer merchandise. Then he sends’em back east ‘n makes a helluva profit on’em. Ya see all them pelts ya got stacked over yonder? There’s yer means.”

“I have,you mean,are you telling me those furs are worth something?”

“Yeah Catherine, that’s what he’s tellin’ ya. It’s early in the season so ya won’t have no competition, sides which, ever one uv’ems prime shape. I’d say Pete’s right, ya could set yerself up here fer a good long while. If’n ya was willin’ ta part with that mountain lion, well, who knows what Link would be tradin’ to ya fer that one!”

“That ain’t all she’s got Lawson. Ya need ta go take a peek in the shaid.”

“Pete there’s nothing in the shed anyone could possibly want, is there?”

“Lets us all take a walk. Lawson ya tell me whatcha think.” As they stepped through the door of the shed, the sun hit all the carrying baskets hanging from the branches.

“What the? Catherine, what are all those?”

Adele Marie Crouch

“Remember, I told you I saved the stomachs of all the animals? Well, I cured them and made them into carrying baskets.” She laughed as she explained how she got so many she had to bring some branches from a tree down by the river and move them to the shed.

“Good gawd woman, yer a genius! Catherine, ya could take some a those in ta town ‘n, well, I don’t rightly know. Ain’t never seen the like. I know Lady McGraw would want some ‘n Tess would be goin’ goofy ta get her hands on ‘em. I’d say ya got some powerful tradin’ material hangin’ round in here.”

“You really think so? Do you mean I can take all my furs and a bunch of baskets in to Independence and get anything I need?”

“Yessiree Missy, ‘n a lot ya want, I reckon.”

“Well gentlemen, I need to give this some thought. I’m going up to the porch and have a seat, I’m afraid you’ve caught me quite by surprise.”

“What’s say we take them there fence posts ‘n do a little repairin’ whilst the Missy does her contemplatin’?”

Catherine was vaguely aware of Pete and Lawson swinging the sledge and working on the fence as she sat on the porch lost in thought. *Papa, you taught me never to waste anything, she thought, but I had no idea the fur and stomach of an animal could get me food and clothes.* All of the information she recently received was having a hard time sinking in. Staking a claim and trading were things you didn’t do in Austria and she couldn’t remember Papa having taught her anything like this. Through her fog, she realized the sound of the sledge stopped and looked up to see Pete and Lawson walking toward her.

“We done worked us up a hungry, Missy. Ya got any grub in that pot, or ya want me ta rustle up sumpthin’?”

“Goodness, Pete, I’m sorry. You gentlemen go on down to the river and get washed up while I fix some lunch. I’m afraid the time got away from me. You’ve given me a lot to think about today.”

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“That’s awright Missy, we’ll be back directly.”

As she rose to go into the cabin, Pete and Lawson headed for the river.

Over lunch, Pete noticed Catherine was just pushing her food around and was not saying anything. “Sumpthin’ wrong Missy?”

“I’ve just been going over all you gentlemen have told me and it seems I have a bit of a dilemma.”

“What might that be, Missy?”

“It seems, according to the two of you, I have quite a respectable amount of trading material. This is a concept Papa didn’t prepare me for. Anyway, here I sit with, as you so kindly put it, a passel of prime pelts and no way to get them to Independence.”

“We got us a spare horse that was filled with gifts fer them Germans. We could help ya pack up them pelts ‘n carryin’ baskets, couldn’t we Pete?”

“Wait, Lawson, I wasn’t quite finished. I haven’t any cash money to pay for a room or purchase food while I’m there. Nor do I have a way to get, whatever I trade for, back out here. So you see gentlemen, I do have a dilemma.”

“Catherine, lets take this one step ata time. We pack ya up ‘n git ya inta town. Burke, that’s a friend a ars that’s real good at handlin’ Link, will help ya with the tradin’. Lady McGraw, I’m certain shor, will be pleased ta trade ya a couple a them baskets fer some room ‘n board. Pete’s got an old buckboard he ain’t used in months ta git yer trade goods back ta here. Now that perty well covers it don’ it?”

“Goodness Lawson, Pete, I ... well I guess it does! You make it all sound so simple. Why did I waste half the day worrying?”

“Wa-ll Missy, I don’ reckon we know. Why didja?” They all got a chuckle out of that.

“I was noticin’ yer quiver over yonder, Catherine, that’s some right fine stitchin’ ya done. Kristine, she’s the wife a one a

Adele Marie Crouch

ar other deputies, does stitchin' fer the folks in town. She's due ta be havin' a little one soon 'n might need some help. That would git ya some cash money."

"That's very kind of you Lawson, to make that sort of an offer for someone who isn't here to defend themselves." She gave him a mischievous grin, "Maybe we should wait on a decision to do some 'stitchin' until we talk with Kristine?"

Pete laughed and slapped Lawson on the back, "She gotcha on thatun Lawson!"

"Yeah, I reckon so. What's say we pick up the mess we made out front, git these pelts rolled fer transportin' 'n plan on headin' inta town first thing in the mornin'? We could be there afor nightfall so's we had time ta introduce ya ta Lady McGraw."

"If you gentlemen are sure, then I suppose we better get to work and prepare for the trip."

"Awrighty Missy, lets git ta crackin'!"

They spent the remainder of the day sorting and packing the pelts. Lawson continued to be in awe of her as the day progressed. The number and quality of the pelts was indeed impressive, not to mention the variety of animals. He couldn't believe she had snared or shot fox, muskrat, squirrel, rabbit, deer, mink, raccoon, coyote, wolverine, badger, wolf, and one, very large, mountain lion.

When all the pelts were sorted and packed, Pete looked at the mountain lion spread across her bed. "What 'bout this Missy?"

"No Pete, I think I want to keep that. It's a very warm cover and does have some sentiment to it. I never did get my new dress that day, nor did I get to replenish my supply of venison. No, I believe I'll leave that right there on the bed where it belongs."

"Um-Hmm."

"Excuse me?"

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“That’s Pete’s way a not havin’ ta put his foot in his mouth or say anythin’ one way or tother. You’ll git use’ta it, Catherine, everybody else has.”

During dinner, Catherine got a little choked up as she tried to thank them. “You gentlemen have been so kind. So much has happened in the last few months. First my whole world got turned upside down, then I found this cabin, now you tell me it’s mine and well I feel like I’m in a little bit of shock. Thank you Lawson, Pete.” She looked at each one of them in turn and smiled, “I feel I could have kept on going as I was, but then you two came along.”

“Aw Missy, ain’t nuthin’, its ar job, ain’t it Lawson?”

“Yeah, when ya put it thata way I reckon it would be the best part a it.”

They visited throughout the evening with Catherine telling them about life in Austria. She explained the problems with the revolution and how that was the reason her family came to America.

Pete and Lawson told her about some of the people in Independence, stressing how much she would like them and they would like her.

Catherine went to sleep that night feeling like she had a new family.

It was just breaking daylight, when Lawson and Pete finished making the travois and strapping it to the packhorse. Catherine tidied up her place and was coming out the door with an armload of furs when she stopped dead. As she turned to look back at the cabin, she felt a slight panic. “How do I know someone won’t come along while I’m in Independence and stake a claim on my place?”

“That’s easy Missy. Lawson has some paper ‘n a writin’ stick in his saddlebags. Ya jus leave a note on the table tellin’ whoever might stop by where ya gone ‘n ask’em ta leave the place as they found it, then sign yer name.”

“That’s it? Are you sure?”

Adele Marie Crouch

“Shor’s as I’m standin’ here.” Lawson got her the paper and pencil. She went inside to write her note.

“I have gone in to Independence to purchase supplies. Please make yourself at home, if you are in need of a place to sleep. I would be very appreciative if you would leave my home as you found it. Thank You, Catherine.”

She put the note in the middle of the table and set the candle on the edge to hold it in place. “There, now I will have a home to come home to.” She filled her arms with the furs and went out to help pack the travois. When all the furs and some of the carrying baskets were loaded, Pete and Lawson mounted up.

“C’mon Catherine, mount up behind me ‘n lets hit the trail.”

“Lawson, I’m afraid I don’t know how to ‘mount up’. I’ve never been on a horse before.”

“It’s easy as takin’ candy from a baby. Ya jus’ put yer left foot here, in the stirrup, grab mah hand, give a little push with yer right foot, swang yer right leg over the back a the horse ‘n land sittin’ right here behind me.”

“Let’s see, put my left foot here, grab your hand, give a little push....” Smokey picked that very instant to do a little two step. Catherine’s hand slipped and she landed very unladylike on her behind. Pete busted into a belly laugh.

Lawson looked down at her trying hard to control the laugh building up in him as well. Catherine stood up rubbing her backside. “It appears, Lawson, that this is not quite as easy as taking candy from a baby.”

“Sorry, Catherine, Smokey kin be a little kintankerous at times. Pete, how ‘bout ya come over ‘n give her a boost?”

“Um-Hmm.”

Once she was successfully placed on the horse, Lawson reached back and pulled her arms around his waist. “Now ya hold on Catherine, I’d hate ta see ya sittin’ on the ground out there in the prairie.”

Catherine felt very uncomfortable, she had never been this close to a man before. She could feel the muscles across his

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back. Her legs were tight against his and she suddenly felt a little dizzy.

"Ya all set?" Lawson glanced back over his shoulder.

"Um-Hmm."

"Don' tell me I gotta put up with two uv ya doin' that. Whatcha doin', takin' lessons from Pete?"

"Um-Hmm."

Pete started laughing and Lawson joined in as they got the horses moving toward Independence.

While riding out across the prairie, Catherine was experiencing sensations extremely new to her body. She began trying to analyze them thinking, *albeit rather warm and tingly, this really is not an unpleasant feeling, just unfamiliar. I could even get used to it. Catherine, stop this at once!* She chastised herself, *What would Grand-Mama say?* With a big sigh that caused a ripple to run down her back, she tried to concentrate on the countryside.

Good gawd, thought Lawson, *I should'a had her ride behind Pete. This little lady is causin' me ta think things I shouldn't awta be a thinkin'.*

"Hey, Lawson, winds kickin' up an it's 'bout time ta stop fer a bite. How 'bout we mosey on over in the trees 'n rest a bit?"

"You bet!" Lawson replied, maybe a little too quickly, thinking a silent thanks to Pete for rescuing him from the torture of this beautiful woman leaning against his back.

"Here you go gentlemen. I took the liberty of packing some jerked beef and hard candy in one of my carrying baskets."

"Wa-ll now, thank ya Missy, that was right kindaya."

"If ya drink some water with it, Catherine, it causes it ta kinda swell up in yer innards. Since we'll be ta Independence by supper, it awta hold us fine."

By the time they finished eating and watering the horses, the wind had picked up and a few drops of rain were falling. "I'm gonna git mah Serape' outta mah bedroll fer ya ta wrap round ya, Missy. Cain't have ya catchin' a case a the sniffles."

Adele Marie Crouch

“Why, thank you Pete, I’m afraid I don’t have much in the way of wearing attire,” she looked at the furs rolled neatly on the travois. “At least not yet!” Pete got the Serape and showed her how to wrap herself up in it, telling her to be sure she kept her hair inside it so it wouldn’t fly around and hit her in the face.

“Pete, ya wanna give her a boost?” Lawson asked as he mounted Smokey.

“No, please, I’d really like to try this again. I may need to know how to ‘mount up’ someday.” She carefully repeated the steps to herself and then reached for Lawson’s hand. As she was swinging her right leg she realized, a little too late, Lawson’s long legs caused the stirrup to hang down far too low for her short legs to effectively accomplish her task. When her foot collided with Smokey’s rump, she again found herself in a prone position on the ground. This time, Catherine was the first to laugh.

Pete saw what was coming and was beside her within seconds after she hit the ground. He looked at her and, between gulps of laughter, told her, “Missy, I b’lieve we needta find ya a smaller horse.”

“No, Pete, I believe we just need to get me some shorter stirrups.”

Lawson was laughing so hard he was no help getting her on the horse. When Pete had her safely mounted, Lawson reached around and put his hat on her head. “If’n we cain’t keep yer backside off the ground, maybe we kin at least keep yer haid dry.”

“Thank you very kindly Lawson. Now, can you get this hay bag moving?” She smiled and winked at Pete. Lawson grunted and clicked at Smokey.

The remainder of the ride was damp and windy. Catherine was lost in thought over the new and somewhat pleasant sensations she was experiencing while bouncing along, pressed tightly to a very attractive man.

Catherine was shaken from her thoughts by a loud voice, shouting at the top of his lungs. “Lawson, where the helluvya

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been? These damn politicians is drivin' me ta drink. Git down off a that horse a yorn 'n tell me what's kept ya. Who the hell ya got ridin' back saddle? Ya kin find more strays than my kid!"

"Hold on there, Boss. First off, this ain't no stray. Pete 'n me went out ta check on the German settlement 'n see if that lost kid wandered in with'em fer the winter. We got hung up by a storm. There weren't no strangers there, so we went on over ta the old Crosley place."

"Ya mean this here's the kid from the wagonload a folks from Austria what got massacred? Well Christ, Lawson, git him down."

"Yes sir, Boss. Kin ya give us a hand?" Pete was sitting back watching with amusement and couldn't resist a slight chuckle.

"What the hells so funny Pete?"

"Oh, nothin' Boss. Jus been a REAL interestin' few days, that's all."

The Serape' fell from Catherine's shoulders as Boss Mills lifted her from the horse. "Christ awmighty Lawson, this ain't no kid. This is a lady!"

"And one helluva lady she is Boss. Let's git on over ta the Irish Belle. We'll tell ya all 'bout it over some chow. Ya comin' Pete?"

"Um-Hmm."

Boss walked away shaking his head, looking back toward Catherine and rubbing his hand over his bald spot. "Cain't wait fer this report. It awta be a doozy!"

Lawson dismounted and walked beside Catherine chuckling. "That rude man is your boss? How do you tolerate such lack of consideration?"

"He's a good guy, Catherine, just a tad bit flustered. Ya see, Mizurah is fightin' ta become a state. The town's crawlin' with dandies 'n they's some powerful frustratin' folk. Pete 'n me lit out on Boss Mills ta git away from all the politickin'. We kinda

Adele Marie Crouch

left ol' Boss with a handful. We knowed he was gonna be a little put out with us when we come back. Ain't that right Pete?"

"Um-Hmm."

Catherine giggled. She was getting used to Pete and she fully understood how his non-committing response was most appropriate at times.

When they entered the dining room of the Irish Belle, Catherine stopped short. Boss Mills nearly walked right into her. She lifted her hand to her throat. "Lawson, this place is lovely. I can't go in here dressed like this, what will people think? I'm full of dirt from traveling, my dress is old and frayed, my hair is a mess. Lawson, I must look a fright!"

"It's awright, Catherine. Lady McGraw's a terrific person 'n these is jus' local town folk. Ain't nobody gonna mind how ya look. Sides Pete 'n me is 'bout as trail worn as yerself. Now c'mon, 'n lets git some chow." She still didn't budge. She stood staring at the beauty of the place, unable to move or speak.

"C'mon Missy, it'll be jus fine." Pete grabbed her arm as he spoke and she allowed herself to be led along in awe.

"What the hell was that all about?" Mills asked, in his not so quiet or polite manner of speaking.

"Calm down, Boss, 'n have a seat. The little lady's a tad bit nervous is all." Lawson looked from Boss Mills to Catherine, smiled and asked "Ya awright Catherine?"

"Yes, yes Lawson, I'm fine. It's just that I've never seen an eatery quite so lovely and I do feel a bit out of place."

"Wa-ll now Missy, ya jus' set yer backside in that chair 'n relax. Yer 'bout ta see why Lady McGraw's is the only place in town ta eat!"

"Scuse me Pete, Catherine, Boss. While we're waitin' fer our food, I'm gonna go locate Lady McGraw 'n bring her 'round ta meet Catherine." Lawson looked Catherine in the eye as he added, "We'll have some business ta discuss with her after we've filled our stomachs." He looked toward Mills, "'n when I git back we'll tell ya all 'bout our little ride."

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Watching Lawson walk away, Catherine suddenly felt very uncomfortable. She looked over toward Pete with a plea of help in her eyes. "Wa-ll Boss, what's been goin' on 'round here while me 'n Lawson's been gone?"

"These dandies is bein' real pesky. The territorial capital has been in St. Louis, but now they say we're gonna be a real state soon 'n we need ta set up a REAL capital buildin' somewheres that will be pleasin' ta all the folks in the state. So they call meetin's 'n go round town gittin' folks all riled up 'n causin' a big stir. I'm tellin' ya Pete, this becomin' a state is wearin' me out!"

"Wa-ll Boss, ain't nothin' Lawson 'n me coulda done bout all that, even if'n we'd a been here. Sides, we found this here young lady. Now Lawson kin close the report on the massacre."

"Scuse me Ma'am, these politicians got me so riled, I forgot ya was sittin' there. Miz Catherine was it?" Pete saw the mischievous look in Catherine's eye. He put his hand over his mouth, to cover the grin he couldn't stop, just as Lawson was returning to the table. He signaled Lawson with a wink and they both began to laugh as Catherine, expertly, played the name game with Mills. It was such great fun with Pete and Lawson, she just couldn't resist. By the time she was done teasing him, Mills was so flustered all he could do was look from Pete to Lawson and shout, "What the hell's so funny?"

"Sorry Boss, its jus that Pete n me's already been through this. When we seen the look in those blue eyes a hers we knowed what was comin' 'n we couldn't help ourselves."

"That's 'nough out'a the both a ya. Evenin' Lady McGraw." He rose from his chair taking her hand and gently brushed his lips across her fingers.

"Evenin' Mills. I understand there is a guest at your table that I might be very interested in meeting."

"Lady McGraw, may I present Elizabeth Catherine Friedbacher, who will politely inform you, her family calls her Catherine." Lawson said with a slight bow and a grin.

Adele Marie Crouch

Lady McGraw floated around the table and took Catherine's hand. "I'm very pleased to meet you Catherine. Will you be in town long?"

"No Ma'am. I have some business to attend to, with the help of Lawson and Pete. I will be in need of a place to stay, however. Perhaps we can talk after we've eaten." Catherine felt instantly comfortable with Lady McGraw. She loved how her green eyes sparkled like polished emeralds and her cheeks rose up and nearly swallowed them when she smiled. Her flaming red hair was piled high on her head in a style Catherine wasn't familiar with, but found quite attractive. She spoke with a brogue that caused Catherine to have to listen carefully. She knew right away that she was going to like this large, cheerful woman.

"You enjoy your meal then, Catherine. I'll be back a little later and we'll talk. Good evening Boss, Pete, Lawson."

"Evenin' Ma'am," the three of them replied in unison. Lady McGraw curtsied, smiled at Catherine and went back to the kitchen as the meal was arriving.

"Lawson, my furs! They are outside unattended! What if someone takes them while we are in here eating? How will I get my supplies?"

"Don' git so 'cited, Catherine. Ain't nobody gonna mess with'em tied up out front."

Mills looked from Catherine to Lawson, "What furs? What's she talkin' 'bout Lawson?"

"Wa-ll Boss, reckon we better start at the beginnin'. Who wants ta take the lead?" Pete looked from Lawson to Catherine with a grin.

"Somebody better start talkin'. I've a hunch there's a lot ta tell. Lawson?"

"Well, Boss.." As the story unfolded Mills completely forgot about the food sitting in front of him. He occasionally threw a question or two at Catherine, but mostly just sat with his chin resting in the palms of his hands staring wide eyed at her. When

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the three of them, intermittently, finished telling about the massacre, the disappearance of Joseph, Catherine's flight up river and her survival in the cabin, he shook his head. "Little Lady, it 'pears ya done been ta hell 'n back!"

"Not exactly sir, but close," she replied as she smiled at him.

"Good gawd, 'n she's still smilin'! Lawson, I cain't wait ta see how ya git all this in a report fer the U.S. Marshal's office! If ya'd 'scuse me, I'm goin' over ta Burkes. I think he needs ta be prepared afor he meets yer little spitfire. Not ta worry, Catherine. Burke'll help ya with yer tradin'." Mills scooted his chair back, gave a half salute to Lawson and Pete and left the room without even realizing he had not touched one bite of his food.

The three of them busted up laughing as they watched him walk away. "Well Catherine, that's the Boss."

"Ya see, Missy, ya got nothin' ta worry 'bout. He's just a big teddy bear. I reckon Burke 'n Tess'll be here directly. We better have that talk with Lady McGraw so we kin git ya settled with a room afor we have ta go through all this again."

"Lawson, how many more times will I have to tell this? There is some of it that still hurts and I have a hard time. I don't want to make a fool of myself and start crying in front of these nice people."

"Don' worry none, Catherine. We'll cut it short. Sides, I'm sure Boss'll give Burke 'n Tess an earful 'n save ya aheap a talkin'. Be right back with Lady McGraw."

Pete reached out and patted Catherine's hand, "Ya'll be fine Missy, Lawson 'n me'll make sure ya don' have ta go repeatin' yerself to much." Catherine grinned a thank you, gave a sigh and slumped back in her chair. She suddenly felt very tired.

Lawson took the liberty of filling Lady McGraw in on the situation before returning with her to the table. "Catherine, I understand you have some articles that may be of interest to me in trade for room and board?"

"Yes, yes ma'am I certainly hope so." Catherine stuttered.

Adele Marie Crouch

“Well, let’s have a look at them.”

“Of course. Pete, would you go retrieve a couple of my baskets from the travois?”

“You betcha, Missy. Be back in a jiff.”

Lawson seated himself while the exchange was going on and signaled the waitress. “Bring us a round a beer, wouldja Ruth?”

“Oh Lawson, please, may I have a glass of wine? I’m afraid I’m much too tired for a beer and I certainly would not appreciate another experience similar to trying to mount Smokey.”

Lawson chuckled, thinking of Catherine on the ground. “Of course Catherine. A couple a beers ‘n a glass a white wine fer the lady.”

“A bottle a yer Irish Beer, Lady McGraw?”

“No Ruth, I’ll be joining Catherine in a glass a wine.”

“Yes’em.”

“Now what’s this business about mounting Smokey?”

Catherine began to tell her about the mishap. As she told about landing on her backside, she realized how funny she must have looked and began to laugh. Lady McGraw pictured the happening, quickly related it to Catherine getting a little tipsy on the beer and started laughing too. Catherine was amazed at how Lady McGraws entire body shook like leaves on a tree during a windstorm and her eyes vanished completely. She couldn’t control her laughter.

The four of them sat there with tears streaming down their cheeks and their arms wrapped around their stomachs, attempting to control themselves when they heard, “mind if we git in on the joke?”

No one had heard Boss Mills, with Tess and Burke, approach the table. “Boss, glad yer back. Join us. We was just tellin’ Lady McGraw ‘bout a little lesson Catherine had with Smokey.” Lawson was having a little trouble getting the words out between spells of laughter.

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BOOK I

Mills pulled a couple more chairs around, "Burke 'n Tess is with me. If you fools think ya kin control yerselves, we'll be happy ta join ya."

Lawson stood and took a few quick steps to Burke's side, slapped him on the back, gave Tess a peck on the cheek and turned toward the table. "Burke, Tess, I'd like ya ta meet Catherine. Catherine, this here is mah best friend Tess 'n her husband Burke."

Burke tipped his hat toward Catherine and turned to Lawson with a grin, "Oh I see, my wife is yer best friend 'n I'm jus' her husband."

"Burke, now ya know what I meant."

By then Tess had reached Catherine's side. She grabbed her hand with a big smile, "Boss told us all 'bout ya Catherine, I'm so happy ta meet ya. Burke 'n me'll be pleased as punch ta help ya out with Link 'n we'd be obligen ta have ya come stay out ta ar place while yer in town gittin' yer business settled with the old Crosley place 'n all."

"It's nice to meet you Tess. Thank you for the offer, but I've already made arrangements with Lady McGraw for a room in her establishment."

Tess's smile faded for a split second, unnoticed by anyone but Pete as he approached with the baskets. A genuine smile returned quickly, "That's wonderful, Catherine. There's no nicer place 'round ta hang yer hat 'n ya sure can't find any better viddles fer miles!"

"Wa-ll, I don' know 'bout that, Tess. Ya ain't tasted the grub this here Missy kin whip up."

"Pete, what's this ya be a sayin'? Have I got me a bit a competition?" Lady McGraw grinned at Catherine.

"No ma'am, but this here Missy's got some secrets she might be sharin' with ya. Don'cha Missy?" Pete winked at Catherine and smiled.

"It's really nothing, Lady McGraw. I just collected a few herbs around the cabin and I used them to spice the food. Pete,

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here, took a fancy to it and told me I needed to share it with you. You really have wonderful food, I was just making do.”

“Now, now, Missy. We was jus funnin’ with ya. Finish up yer wine ‘n we’ll call it a night.”

“Burke ‘n me’ll take the pack horse over ta Links. Pete, how bout if ya bring Catherine’s personals in while Lady McGraw shows her ta her room?”

“That’s the best thing I’ve heard all evening. I’m exhausted. Thank you Lawson. It was a pleasure meeting all of you. If you’ll excuse me, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Tess put her hand on Catherine’s shoulder. “It’s gonna be nice havin’ ya ‘round. Tomorra I’ll take ya ta meet Kristine. Then, we can enjoy some girl talk without these guys buttin’ in. Good night Catherine.”

“Thank you, Tess. Good night.” Lady McGraw rose from her chair, asked Pete to take the baskets to the kitchen, took Catherine’s arm and led her to her room.

Catherine flopped across the bed. “Sleep, that’s what I need, sleep.” Behind her closed eyelids was a vision of Lawson. Gorgeous brown eyes smiling at her, big, soft eyes like the eyes of the deer in her forest. She shook her head to clear it as the knock came on her door. “Yes, who is it?”

“It’s me Missy, I brung yer things.”

“Come in Pete,” she said as she opened the door.

“Oh no ma’am! I cain’t do that, you be’n alone in here. It wouldn’t be proper. Here.” He thrust his arm forward, her little bundle of clothing clutched in his huge fist.

“Thank you so much Pete. Good night.”

“G’night Missy.”

Catherine closed the door and looked around the room. When she located the closet, she walked over, shook out her change of clothes and hung them. She slipped into her nightwear, washed her face from the pitcher of water on the stand beside the bureau, blew out the candle and slid under the covers.

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BOOK I

Catherine couldn't sleep. Visions of Lawson kept creeping into her mind. His robust laughter; the way his face lit up when he smiled. The feel of his body as she rode for hours with her arms around him. "Catherine, stop this! Make a mental list of supplies you need. Think about the people you will meet tomorrow. Anything!" She tossed and turned. It was well after midnight when she finally succumbed to sleep.

A knock on the door woke Catherine. In a sleepy voice she asked, "Yes, who is it?"

"Miz Catherine, its Ruth. Lady McGraw sent me ta remind ya of a busy day t'day."

"Oh yes, thank you, thank you Ruth. Tell Lady McGraw I'll be down soon."

"Yes Miz Catherine, she asked ta join ya fer breakfast."

"Of course, tell her yes, I'd like that very much. Thank you Ruth." She heard Ruth's footsteps going down the hall as she rose to dress for a busy day indeed.

She washed her face and turned to look at the dress hanging in the closet. *It was such a pretty dress when it left Austria.* The stark white material on the bodice, puffed sleeves and over-skirt were now yellowed and frayed. The tie strings across the midriff had seen their better days and the beautiful waist tie that went around back to make a big, fluffy bow, sagged like a wet noodle. "That's O.K. Catherine, today you trade. New material, new clothes, eating utensils. My! I wonder what all I will get. I must have Lady McGraw help me make a list. Lady McGraw! Goodness she's waiting for me!" She quickly changed, brushed her hair and hurried down to the dining room.

"Good Morning Catherine. Did you sleep well?"

"Very well Lady McGraw, thank you." *Once I finally got to sleep*, she thought.

"Catherine, please, call me Gladys."

"Yes ma'am."

Gladys grinned. "Let's eat and we can discuss the value of these baskets over our meal." Gladys lifted the baskets from the

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chair beside her. She began to examine them carefully, noting the quality and uniqueness of them. Ruth came to the table, Catherine and Gladys ordered, then Gladys turned to Catherine. "These are very unusual as well as being extremely useful and well made. Two of them should cover your room, one more will cover your meals while you are in town. If you will bring more each time you come, you'll have a bed and meals whenever you are here."

"Gladys, that seems much too generous. Are you sure?"

"Definitely my dear. I've already shown them to the kitchen staff and they have listed numerous uses for them. Just one thing, do you think you could devise some means of securing the flap, so the lid would stay closed? That was the only question from the girls in the kitchen."

"I suppose I could think of something, I'll work on it. Gladys..... I need your help. Trading isn't a practice in Austria. I have no idea what my 'pelts' are worth. Could you help me make a list of items to acquire from the trader in exchange for my pelts and baskets?"

"Of course I will dear. But, here is our food. We'll eat first, then I'll get some paper and we'll get to work on that."

Catherine was thoroughly enjoying a wonderful omelette and the best biscuits she had tasted in months when a cheerful "Good Mornin'!" nearly made her drop her fork. "I'm so glad yer up Catherine. Burke's down at the mercantile anxious ta give ol' Link a hard way ta go this mornin'. I'll jus' have a seat while ya finish yer breakfast. What on earth?" She asked, as she lifted the baskets from the chair.

"Those are mine, Tess. I traded with Catherine for her room and meals while she is in town. Aren't they interesting?"

"Interesting? Why, they're adorable. Catherine, didja make these? What are they made of? How'dja do it? Wouldja make me some?" Catherine just sat there, while Tess carried on the way she always does, one question after another, not giving her a chance to answer.

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BOOK I

“Tess, if you slowed down a little, maybe Catherine could get a word in here.”

“Oh, well, it’s jus’ that.... well Catherine, yer sumpthin else. So whatdaya say?”

“Thank you Tess. Now let’s see. Did I make them? Yes. What are they made of? The stomachs of various animals. How did I do it? I dried and cured them, thinking I might need to store or carry things in them. Would I make you some? I just happen to have more wrapped in one of the pelts over at the mercantile. And I guess this is where we get down to business. They are for trade.” Gladys grinned thinking to herself, *this young lady is learning fast.*

“Fer trade. I see. Well, I’ll pick out the ones I want ‘n then we’ll see what I have ta trade. How’s that sound?”

“Great! Now Gladys, about that list.”

“The list, of course. I’ll get some paper. Tess, Catherine would like some help making a list for her trading escapade. Will you give us a hand?”

“Sure Lady McGraw, I’d love ta. Now let’s see. Whatcha need? Do ya sew? You’ll be needin’ some staples ta git ya through the winter. Ya got pots ‘n pans fer cookin’? How ‘bout eatin’ utensils?”

“Tess, my goodness, slow down. Are you always like this? I’ve never known anyone to carry on so! How about if we take this one thing at a time?”

“I’m sorry Catherine, it’s jus’ that this is the most fun I’ve had since teasin’ the pants off’n Lawson at the Thanksgivin’ gatherin’!” At the mention of Lawson, Catherine got a warm feeling and felt a blush coming on.

Gladys saved her from embarrassment. “Ruth would you clear these dishes? We have work to do here. Are you ready ladies?” They spent the next hour and a half making a very complete list. They separated the needs and the wants into two columns.

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Tess reassured Catherine of Burke's ability to work Link and was sure they could get everything on both lists. "I have ta worn ya — it's gonna be a long day. Link's a tough ol' bird 'n he'll want ta trade out each pelt separate. So if'n ya don' wanna spend the whole day there we can go do other stuff after the tradin' gits started. We better git on over ta the store, I wanna git mah baskets out afor Link sets his eyes on'em."

"Gladys, I'll be back for lunch. And, thank you again for everything, you've been so kind."

"My pleasure Catherine, enjoy yourself." She smiled at Tess, gave a slight curtsy and went off to a table to inquire about the food and service.

"The men are waitin' Catherine." She said with a big smile as she grabbed her hand and practically swirled her out the door.

"My Tess, you are going to take some getting used to. I can't recall ever knowing anyone so full of energy and so cheerful."

"I figger if'n ya cain't be happy, why be? I git up ever mornin', thank the Good Lord for another day 'n I'm off ta enjoy the day He gave me." She twirled in a circle in the street and a beautiful ring of laughter followed her.

"That is wonderful Tess, I like that."

"Good, cuz here we are. Are ya ready?" She grabbed Catherine's hand and led her inside.

Catherine hadn't done much shopping. Her Mums and Grand-Mama took care of that. Sometimes her older sisters went into town and came back with all kinds of stories about the wonderful things they had seen, but Catherine preferred her river and her quiet. She stood, just inside the door, trying to get all of it to sink in. The room was full with floor-to-ceiling shelves. The shelves were packed with everything she could imagine and some things she'd never seen. It took a few seconds for her to realize Tess was whispering to her. "What?"

"The baskets. Where are the baskets?"

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BOOK I

“Oh, wrapped in the wolf at the end of the travois. I’ll get them for you.”

“Don’ let Link see’em ‘til I git ta look’em over. I want first grabs.”

The arguing over the quality of the pelts was in full swing. It took Catherine by surprise at first, until she realized it was a game they were playing to see who could out do the other. She handed her list to Burke, pulled the baskets from under the wolf and returned to Tess. “Is trading always this noisy?”

“Sometimes it’s even worse. Don’ worry, it’s jus’ part a the tradin’ ta yell ‘n holler. Link wants ta git as much as he kin ‘n the owner a the pelts wants the same. Link’s a fair man. Whenever it’s over; everbody feels like they got the best deal. Now let me take a look at them baskets.” Tess looked the baskets over, grinning and making little noises. Catherine began to fidget, feeling like she, herself was being scrutinized. Just when she thought she couldn’t take much more, Tess piped “Let’s you ‘n me go ta my place. We can leave this haglin’ ta Burke. It’ll last most all day. I want all these, so we gotta figger what I kin give ya for’em.”

“If you are sure maybe I should.....”

Tess slipped the baskets over her arms and danced out the door. “C’mon Catherine, my place is jus down the street.” Catherine didn’t know what else to do, with a last glance around the mercantile, she followed Tess out the door.

The girls spent a couple of hours talking and laughing. They haggled over some dresses Tess had outgrown. “Yer such a little thing, we may have ta take these in abit, but they shor look good on ya.”

“You just want the baskets.” This brought more laughter. Catherine was beginning to enjoy this trading business and she was having a wonderful time with Tess. She had never had someone close to her age to just be silly and have fun with before. She was shocked when she realized she had spent her

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entire life with her family, on the farm, not knowing hardly anyone but relatives.

Tess was very receptive to people and noticed Catherine was getting somewhat pensive. “Hey now, don’ go gettin’ sentimental on me! Let’s go on down ta the Irish Belle, get some food, then I’ll take ya ta meet Kristine. Yer gonna love her. She’s kinda quiet, but that might be cuz the baby’s due soon. Anyways, she’s real nice. She does the stitchin’ fer lots a folks here in town. Lawson said ya do some perty fancy stitchin’. Maybe ya could help Kristine out with some a her work ‘til the baby comes. She’s got a perty good bunch a work piled up. Whatja think?”

Catherine busted into a full laugh. “Tess, I never know when you are going to quit, so I can’t figure which questions you want me to answer. My goodness, you are going to take some getting used to! I’m hungry, let’s go eat.”

After lunch, Tess took her to Kristines, went through the formality of introductions, then the girls spent the afternoon talking about babies and sewing. They laughed a lot and had a wonderful time getting to know each other. When Tess mentioned Lawson, she noticed the slight blush on Catherine’s cheeks. “Whoa, hold on there Catherine. Let me fill ya in on ar man Lawson. He ain’t the marryin’ kind. Made that real good ‘n clear ta me right after I come inta town. He’s one helluva guy, I woulda grabbed him up in a heartbeat, but he let me know right off he don’ have time ta be settlin’ down. So ya git him out’a yer head afor ya go gittin’ hurt.”

“I see. Well I’m afraid Tess, that may be rather difficult to do. But I’ll try. By the way, what day is this?”

“Le’s see now, I b’lieve it’s the first day a spring. That’d be March 21st 1821. Why?”

“I was just wondering how long it had been since... how long I have been alone, that’s all.”

“I think it’s time ta go see how the tradin’s goin’. Kristine, what time ya expect Jason ta be comin’ in?”

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BOOK I

“He should be in round supper time, why?”

“I figgered we’d all join Catherine fer supper so Jason could talk ta her ‘bout her claim. She needs ta go down ta the bank ‘n get that done afor she goes back out ta the cabin.”

“That’s a good idee. Catherine, kin we join ya fer dinner?”

Catherine’s thoughts were so jumbled that she almost missed the question. “Of course, yes, I would like that. I’ll see you shortly then. Thank you for a wonderful day and we’ll get together before I go home to discuss my helping you with your sewing. It was kind of you to ask for my help.”

“Listen Catherine, I really do need it. I’ve got work pilin’ up bad. I’m gettin’ a good size belly on me ‘n the baby kicks so much it’s hard ta hold the stuff still ta work on it.” The baby chose that very moment to give a hearty kick and all three girls laughed as Tess stepped out the door.

When Tess and Catherine arrived at the mercantile, Burke and Link were shaking hands. “I’ll be back in the mornin’ ta finish up Link. Don’ be gettin’ greedy on me whilst I’m eatin’ ‘n sleepin’.”

“Well now Burke, ya jus took all the fun out’a puttin’ some a this off ‘til tomorra. Good evenin’ ladies.” Link bowed toward Tess and Catherine, grinned at Burke and waved his hat toward the front door. Catherine saw a large pile of what she was certain were her furs and smiled. She hadn’t noticed the buckboard, in the front of the store, piled with trade goods, until she went back out. She stopped short, looked at how full it was and turned toward Burke. “Yep, that’d all b’long ta you Catherine, ‘n we ain’t done yet.” “Oh my,” was all she could say. Burke and Tess laughed, took her arms one on each side and escorted her to dinner.

Throughout dinner her mind kept wandering as she was meeting Jason, eating and answering the questions Jason asked in preparation for staking her claim. She was amazed at the power of trading and very curious what all was loaded on the buckboard. Before she knew it, the meal was over and everyone

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was saying their good byes. After they left she ordered a glass of wine and sat back to relax and let the flurry of the day sink in.

She was nearly finished with the wine when Lawson walked up and tipped his hat. "Evenin' Catherine. How'd the tradin' go? Didja meet Kristine 'n talk ta her 'bout helpin' with her stitchin'?" Did Jason git home in time ta talk 'bout yer claim?" He swung the chair around backwards, straddled it and plopped down with his arms across the back.

Catherine shook her head and looked him in the eye. "My goodness! Does everyone around here do that?"

"Do what?"

"Just start talking and forget to stop."

Lawson rubbed his hand across his chin thinking for a minute, "I never thought much 'bout it, yeah, I reckon so. Do ya always talk so proper?"

Catherine rubbed her hand across her chin trying hard to get a perplexed look on her face. "Wa-ll now, I reckon I do, but a'll work on it," she said real slow and with as much of a drawl as she could manage with her Austrian accent.

Lawson busted out laughing and slapped his hat on the table. "Catherine, ya shor have become quite a card. Ruth, bring me a beer will ya?" Lawson was still smiling from ear to ear when he turned back toward Catherine to look her in the eye. Catherine felt herself start to blush and got a warm feeling inside. She broke eye contact quickly, reminding herself what Tess had told her. *Oh no you don't Catherine!* She thought, *this man is off limits!*

They had a pleasant visit, she answered all his questions, and then excused herself and went to her room. Closing the door gently, she leaned against it. "For the remainder of your stay, you are going to have to do your best to stay away from Mr. Lawson! After all, Tess is his best friend. She should know what she's talking about. Since you can't control yourself around him, you'll just have to avoid him." The knock on the

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door startled her and she jumped back in alarm. "Yes, who is it?"

"It's Ruth, Miz Catherine." She opened the door and stepped back motioning Ruth to come in. "Oh, no ma'am, I cain't go in the room of a guest 'cept ta clean. Lady McGraw don' tolerate no foolishness. I come ta bring ya ta yer bath."

"My bath?"

"Yes ma'am, I fixed yer bath, like Lady McGraw said, 'n I come ta show ya ta the room."

Catherine looked over her shoulder to the spot on the bed where she had left her nightwear. "Oh Miz Catherine, I took yer clothes ta launder after I cleaned yer room. I found a nightgown in the things people leave behind 'n laid it out fer ya by the tub. I'll get yer wardrobe 'n put it up fer ya while ya be bathin'. And Miz Tess come by. She left a trunk downstairs, said it was yer things. Lady McGraw told one a the gents ta bring it on up soon as I let him know ya gone ta the bath."

Catherine followed Ruth down the hall listening as Ruth talked over her shoulder. Too much had happened too fast and Catherine's head was spinning. She couldn't think of anything to say but "Thank you."

The bath was fabulous! The water was nice and warm and there were some small bottles of bath oils on a stand beside the tub. The soap had a pleasant scent to it and she took deep breaths of it while she scrubbed her hair. The nightgown Ruth had laid out for her was very elegant. She felt a little uncomfortable in something so pretty, but decided she might as well accept whatever comfort she could. She knew she would soon be back in her cabin and the work would begin again. "Relax while you can Catherine, my dear. The hard work will be upon you before you know it."

She just finished drying and combing her hair when she heard Ruth, "Yer room's ready Miz Catherine."

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“Thank you Ruth, I’ll be right out.” On the way back to the room Catherine couldn’t help wondering about Ruth. “What is your position here Ruth?”

“Lady McGraw, she bought my indenture from a mean preacher man, when we was passin’ through town. She’s been real good ta me, so I do whatever she asks.”

“Excuse me Ruth, did you say ‘bought your indenture’? What does that mean?”

“Well ya see Miz Catherine, I fell inta debtors prison when my ma ‘n pa got kilt. This preacher man come along ‘n paid my indebtedness. That meant I was his. He come over here ta the New World ta ‘save the savages’ he said. Since he didn’t have no lady ta do his cookin’ ‘n launderin’ he come ‘n bought me ta do it. He was real mean ‘n hard ta please, but it was better ‘n where I was. Then we stopped here in Independence on ar way ta the other side a the Rockies ‘n Lady McGraw bought my papers from him. So now I’m hers. I got three years ta go ‘n I’ll be free ta do whatever I want. I figger I may as well stick on with Lady McGraw though. She’s been right good ta me. G’ Night Miz Catherine.”

“Good night Ruth.”

She sat down on the edge of the bed watching Ruth walking proudly down the hall. She shook her head and looked around the room. Her covers had been turned down, her clothes were hanging clean and pressed in the closet and at the foot of the bed was a large wooden trunk. She rose from the bed, went over to the trunk and lifted the lid. All the things she had gotten from Tess during the trading were packed neatly inside. She stood there for a minute looking at it. She couldn’t even remember what all should be in there and she was too tired, confused and frustrated to care.

“Tomorrow, Burke will finish up my trading and Jason will take me to the bank to stake my claim. I’ll stop by and see Kristine and do my best not to run into Lawson. Then first thing the next morning, I’ll go home.” When the word ‘home’ was

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expressed verbally, she hugged herself and smiled, "I have a home!"

Lying on the bed with the noise of the city coming in the window, she thought of the excitement of being on her own. She realized how glad she would be to get back out onto the prairie where she could, again, enjoy the quiet. Trying desperately not to let Lawson slip into her thoughts, she tossed and turned for quite some time, before the oblivion of sleep took over.

CHAPTER 7

The sun was just beginning to warm Catherine's back as the sounds of Independence faded in the distance behind her. She gave a large sigh of relief to be, once again, entering the peace and quiet of the prairie. There was a pleasant, soft breeze, causing the flowers to wave across the gently undulating plain ahead of the old, sway-backed, mare Pete had loaned her. She watched the mare, with her head down, plugging along and giggled. "Pete said you weren't much to look at, but that you are a hard worker and gentle. Well, old girl, I guess I need to call you something. Pete just called you 'the old mare'. That just doesn't seem kindly enough. Let's see here.....I know..... I'll call you Spring! Yes, that seems appropriate since I got you in the spring." Catherine began to laugh, "there's not much spring in your walk my friend, but Spring it will be."

She glanced back over her shoulder to inspect her merchandise. Pete spread a canvas over everything and strapped it all down in case she should hit wind or rain on the way home. She was still amazed over the beauty of the two chairs Kristine and Jason gave her in exchange for her help with the sewing. She protested vigorously that she hadn't done the service yet, but Jason insisted. The chairs were gorgeously hand made by Jason, Kristine told her how he carved and polished on them in the evenings by the fire and she made the slipcovers for the pads on the seats. A tear came to her eye as she thought of how kind and friendly the people were that she met.

Jason trusted her to complete the sewing and get it back into town before fall and 'paid' her in advance. Kristine hugged her and cried when she left her place this morning and Tess carried on like she was losing a sister. "Are all the people in your town of Independence like that Spring?" The old mare just continued to plod along the trail, swishing her tail, occasionally, at a fly.

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BOOK I

Catherine relaxed when she noticed Spring never veered from the trail. She even nodded off a few times.

Suddenly Spring turned off to the left and headed toward the river. Catherine was taken by surprise and grabbed the reins to bring her back on the trail. Then she noticed Spring was headed for a little clearing in the trees that appeared to be well trampled. Her stomach began to growl and she laughed. "So, Spring, you know it's time to stop for a bite to eat, do you? This must be a regular stopping place. Thank you girl." She pulled the reins forward over Spring's head and dropped them to the ground like Pete instructed her. "Pete says you won't move, except to graze a little, when I do that. I sure hope he's right." She spread the blanket from under the seat, on the ground; got out the meal Lady McGraw prepared for her trip and relaxed.

The sound of the birds and the water flowing down the river were music to her ears. "Oh Spring, I do love the quiet. I was only in Independence a couple of days, but it seemed like months. I can't wait to get home to the creatures of the forest, the breeze in the trees and the smell of the river, although I did enjoy meeting new people." She savored her food and wrapped up the leftovers. As she took one last glance toward the river, a frog jumped. She got a lump in her throat when she remembered Joseph, sitting in the water, so proud, with Grand-Mama's dinner in his hand. She shook her head, wiped a tear and got under way.

She knew it was a long trip to her cabin. She left Independence with first light so she could be home before dark. She didn't mind traveling alone and was surprised when she noticed the red bandanna Pete tied on the tree where she needed to leave the trail to get home. "My goodness Spring, we are nearly home. My backside feels like I've been on this hard seat all day, but the day went by so quickly. O.K. old girl, this is where we leave the trail. Come on now, help me out here. I'm not real good at this." Spring gave a little shake of her head, blew through her nostrils and turned into the trees. "Thank you

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Spring, I'm not sure what I would have done if you argued with me." When the cabin came into view, Catherine jumped to a standing position shouting, "We're home." She nearly lost her balance and quickly sat back down. Spring plodded on through the gate and stopped in front of the porch. She looked back at Catherine as if to say, "Here we are. I'm done for the day." Catherine jumped from the buckboard and ran up to give the old mare a big hug. Tears were streaming down her cheeks and she was laughing as she ran up the front steps.

She stopped short at the door. There was a beaver pelt hanging there with a note attached. "Thank yee J.P." She stood there for a minute staring at it. "Oh my, Spring! We must have had a visitor. Is this how people do around here? I've certainly got a lot to learn. Papa didn't tell me about anything like this!" She ran her hand down the pelt as she talked and marveled at the softness of it. "I'll just be a minute, Spring. I'm going to get the shutters opened to air the place out and then I'll come back and get you set for the night."

More surprises awaited Catherine after she opened the shutters to let air and light in. Three beautifully made arrows, with flint chipped arrowheads, stood in the corner beside her quiver and bow. A raccoon pelt lay across a large stuffed pillow on her bed and an oilcloth wrapped package of jerked meat was on the table beside her note. She slowly walked to the table and lifted the note. Under her carefully written script were numerous spellings of thank you, a few initials and one big X. She sank to the chair, staring at the note. Catherine would learn, as time went by, that trappers passing through would 'pay' for her hospitality with various goods they were carrying. She shook her head, noticed the light was fading and hurried out to tend to Spring. "I'll need to unload these chairs before I turn in for the night. The rest of this can wait. Pete did a wonderful job of covering it, so it will be fine until morning." She took the harness off of Spring, led her over beside the shed and hobbled

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her, the way Pete showed her. "There you go Spring. You've served me well today. Have a nice rest."

She wrestled the chairs in while she chewed on some of the jerked meat the traveler left. Then she went to the river for some fresh water, lit a small fire for light and comfort and drifted off to sleep in the peace and quiet of her home.

Catherine was awake before daylight. She put the necessary ingredients in the iron pot in the fireplace to prepare a stew; went through her herbs to give it her own unique taste, and then began to unload the wagon. With each armload she took into the house or out to the shed, she continued to marvel over the power of trading. She lifted a small barrel of nails with a grunt and turned her eyes skyward. "Papa, I'm certainly grateful for your training. I wonder if you were aware of the way trading works here in America." She smiled and added, "Well, you know now! I know you are all up there watching over me. I hope I'm living up to your expectations." She lowered her eyes and whispered, "I love you."

By the end of the day she had only unloaded half of the supplies. She sank to the porch, put her chin in her hands and smiled. "I'll just cover you back up and let you wait. I need a bath!" She strapped the canvas back over her remaining supplies, got the last of her soap-root from the cupboard, threw some clean clothes and a towel over her arm and headed for the river. "M-m-m-my," she stuttered as she shivered in the river, "I got a little spoiled at the Irish Belle. Well, I'll just have to get unspoiled!" She quickly finished bathing, dried off and dressed. She lounged on the bank combing her hair. She heard a noise up river and smiled while she watched some beavers playing. Suddenly one of them slapped a tail on the surface of the river and they all disappeared in an instant. "My goodness, what an effective warning system you have. I wonder what startled you." As she reached for her toiletries, she felt the vibration that she had come to recognize as a horse approaching. It was coming in

Adele Marie Crouch

rather rapidly, but not frantic. She wondered who it could be as she wandered up the path.

"Missy, hey Missy, ya in there? It's me, Pete come ta help ya git yer supplies put up."

"I'm over here Pete," she replied, waving her towel as she neared the shed. "It's nearly nightfall, what on earth are you doing? It takes about half a day to get here. What brought you out so late? Come inside, I have a stew in the pot with some of your favorite 'secrets' in it." She smiled as Pete grinned a large, partially toothless grin and jumped from his horse.

"Wa-ll now Missy, I hadn't planned on timin' it thata way, but I shorly am right glad I did. I was headed ta the German settlement 'n jus' veered this a way afor I went that away."

"Lucky for you I've unpacked the dishes and the silver and put the chairs at the table. Now you can sit proper and enjoy your meal."

"I don' know 'bout all this here proper bizness, but I do know I'll be enjoyin' the meal!" Pete hung his hat on the back of the chair and dropped easily into the seat, put his elbows on the table and winked at Catherine. "Ya shorly do look difernt, all dressed up in them new duds, Missy. Right perty sight ya are."

"Well, thank you Pete. A 'right perty sight' you are also. I was getting to the heavy things in that wagon and trying to decide how I was going to get them out alone."

"Don' ya worry yer perty lil head Missy. If'n you'd put me up fer the night, we'll make quick work a that wagon in the mornin'."

"I'd be honored, Pete", she told him, as she bowed low, like the pictures she'd seen of the ladies in the court meeting the Queen of England.

Pete dove into his food like he hadn't eaten in weeks, smacking his lips and making "Mmm" noises. He passed his plate for a second helping as he wiped his sleeve across his mouth. Catherine grinned and handed him back a full plate.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

"Pete, look at this paper. Mark, at the bank, says this means I own this land now. I'm still having trouble understanding all that has happened in the last few days. I certainly can't begin to comprehend 450 acres! Jason said that's how much land was on the old Crosley claim and they just changed it over to me. How can that be? In Austria one has to buy land."

"Wa-ll now Missy, I reckon it'd be some confusin' to a new comer. This here land's open territory. Ain't nobody ta buy it from, so ya jus' mark yerself off a piece, do the paperwork, work the land some 'n it's yers. Since the Crosley's already done marked it off 'n built this here cabin afor they lit out fer the west, all a body had ta do was take up a livin' in it."

"I'm sorry Pete, I'm still surprised at how easy it is, but I guess I'll have to get used to it. Now then, how do I know where my land ends? I don't even know how much 450 acres is."

"On yer paper there's a bunch a legal mumble jumble. That explains how ya ride off the distance. Ya'll find the markers the Crosley's put up as ya go 'n that'll tell ya where the edges be. Everthin' inside clean ta the river's now owned by Elizabeth Catherine Friedbacher. I reckon that perty well covers it."

"O.K. Pete, I'll work that over. Now, here's the list I gave Burke to trade for me. As you can see, every item on both lists has been crossed off. On the bottom here, is a note of credit. I still can't believe I got everything I wanted. But what", she said pointing, "does this 'credit' mean?"

"Wa-ll now, that's easy Missy, ya didn't ask fer 'nough."

"Excuse me?"

"Ya had more value in pelts, than ya had on yer list. Link put ya down fer credit. That means if'n ya think a some things ya forgot onest ya git all yer supplies stored, ya jus pick'em up when yer in town."

"Oh, I see." She said quietly, she lowered her head in thought. "One thing I didn't think of Pete."

"What might that be Missy?"

Adele Marie Crouch

"I have all these supplies and I don't have a proper way to store them. Burke was nice enough to add a hammer, some nails and a saw to my list for me, but I'm afraid I am not much of a carpenter."

"We kin fix that up good 'n proper fer ya Missy," he grinned wide as he added, "fer another supper like this."

"Why Pete, you can't possibly have room for another helping!"

"Naw Missy" he said through his laughter. "I mean, I'll help ya git the rest a yer supplies unloaded first thing in the mornin', then I'll put ya up some shelves over yonder on the wall 'n a few out to the shed. Problem is, it'll be a might late ta head on out ta the German settlement, so you'd have ta feed me one more time."

"Oh Pete, you're wonderful," she told him, as she rushed to him and gave him a big hug.

"Now don' go gettin' all mushy on me Missy, I'm jus' an old man with nothin' better ta do."

"Thank you Pete," she said as she yawned and stretched.

"Wa-ll, Missy, its been a powerful long day, ya reckon we awta turn in?"

"I guess I am pretty tired. All the excitement of going into town can certainly wear you out."

"I kin git mahself all set up out ta the shaid. Mind if'n I baree a candle?"

"Not at all, Pete. Here, take this one it has a large bottom and is not as likely to fall over."

"Night Missy."

"Good night Pete and thanks for coming."

"Um-Hmm."

Catherine smiled as Pete went out the door. *What a wonderful, kind old man. I wonder why he isn't married. He would make someone a terrific husband. Now that's none of your business, Catherine,* she told herself as she prepared for bed.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

Catherine woke to the sound of someone singing in her front yard. She sat up with a start, jumped out of bed, dressed quickly and rushed out the door. "I'm sorry Pete, I must have been pretty tired. Here you are out here doing my chores and I'm lying around in bed."

"Ya was sleepin' so peaceful like, I didn't want ta bother ya. I shor could use some vittles now though. If'n ya'd rustle up some grub, I'll jus keep unloadin' the supplies."

"My pleasure, Pete. I'll let you know when it's ready."

The wagon was unloaded by lunchtime. After the meal, Pete began to work on the shelves while Catherine hung the clothes she skillfully traded Tess out of. She tried to find places to put all the little gadgets Tess gave her for the baskets and when she got to the bottom of the trunk, she noticed something wrapped in red velvet. "Now what could this be?" She asked, gently lifting it out.

Just then Pete walked in the door, "Whatcha got there Missy?"

"I don't know Pete, I've put away everything Tess and I agreed on, but there is one thing left here all wrapped up in red velvet."

"Wa-ll don' jus stand there, the suspense is killin' me!"

Her hands were shaking as she slowly unwrapped the velvet to reveal a beautiful; hand cut crystal vase with a note that said "Cuz yer speshal. Luv Tess." She began to cry, sinking to the bed and holding the vase out for Pete to see.

"Wa-ll now Missy, that's quite some present. Tess shorly did take a likin' ta ya."

Pete took the vase from her hands and set it on the table. Catherine continued to cry uncontrollably. "Now, now Missy, ya don' need ta carry on so."

"Oh Pete," she gulped between sobs, "everyone has been so wonderful. I don't know what I would have done without all of you. I've never known such kindness from perfect strangers before and now this lovely gift. I'm sorry.... I guess everything

Adele Marie Crouch

finally caught up to me.” She choked back a couple more sobs, dried her eyes and smiled at Pete.”

“Wa-ll now that’s better. The light be back in them perty blue eyes.”

Catherine jumped up, “Goodness Pete, I almost forgot. How can I secure Spring? She can’t stay hobbled all the time and I have no corral.”

“Spring?”

“Yes Pete, the old mare you loaned me. I had to give her a name. After all, how could I talk to her and just keep calling her an old mare? Why didn’t you ever name her?”

“Wa-ll now Missy, ya never name anythin’ ya might have ta eat some day.”

“Pete, you can’t be serious! You wouldn’t eat Spring?”

“Not no more Missy, but in her younger days, when she wouldn’t a been so tough ‘n stringy, I mighta. It’s tough, even on an old codger like me, ta kill an animal what’s got a name.”

“That, Pete, is a bitter sweet concept,” She smiled, “but we don’t have to worry about eating her now, so her name is Spring!”

“Don’ reckon it fits her Missy, but if’n it makes ya happy. Git me that rope from the shaid, Spring is perty docile. I’ll jus tie a line from the tree to the shaid, hook her harness to it ‘n she’ll have plenty a walkin’ space without the hobbles.”

It was early when Catherine waved to Pete as he headed for the German settlement. He told her there was a wagonload of Germans that just came into town and he was off to fetch the elder of the settlement to go greet them. *Strange things happen around here, she thought. Just because they are German, they will be welcomed into the settlement. I suppose I need to make a welcome sign to put on my door. After all, I’ve certainly been made welcome and one good turn deserves another.* She raised her eyes to the sky, “Doesn’t it Grand-Mama?”

When Pete vanished from sight she went to the shed, got her new supplies for constructing a snare and went down the path.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

She giggled as she thought of the snare that served her so well being made from purple yarn. *What must Lawson have thought when he saw it?* “Oh no you don’t Catherine! You get that man out of your head at once!”

Adele Marie Crouch

CHAPTER 8

Lawson had been antsy for quite some time now, ever since Pete returned from the settlement. *Why'd the Boss have ta make me stay here 'n deal with the Politicians?* He thought. *If I coulda gone out ta the settlement, I coulda stopped ta see Catherine 'n maybe helped her out a bit. Instead Pete got out'a here. Damn dandies anyway!*

Lawson crumpled the paper he'd been writing on and tossed it at the trash can. It missed and skittered across the floor. He slammed his fist on the desk. Rising from his chair he began to pace the floor. He made a few paces across the office and returned to his desk. As he reached for another piece of paper, Mills couldn't take any more. "What the hell kinda burr ya got rubbin' yer backside Lawson? Ya been bouncin' 'round this place t'day like a chicken somebody done throwed on a hot skillet!"

"Fer chris' sake Boss! Cain't a man have trouble concentratin' without a big fuss bein' made?"

"Good gawd Lawson, why don'cha go on over ta the Crooked Horn 'n git yerself a beer? Maybe then ya kin come back 'n git that paperwork done afor the marshal's office back east already has the news." Lawson stormed out of the marshal's office slamming the door behind him. *Why the hell didn't she come ta say good-bye?* He thought, *'n why was she actin' so distant? What the hell did I do? What'em I thinkin'?* Christ Lawson, yer actin' like she owes ya sumptin'. He went into the Crooked Horn, walked up to the bar and ordered a beer.

"Hey Lawson, how's it goin'?"

Lawson turned to see Alice smiling at him as she served some beer to a table of dandies. "Just 'dandy' Alice, how 'bout yerself?" She nearly spilled the last beer trying to control the giggle over Lawson's wise crack.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

"That's not nice Lawson." She wiggled her finger at him and grinned on her way over to his side. "So Lawson, where's that perty little thang you 'n Pete brung inta town while back?"

"She's gone back ta her place, why?"

"Oh no reason, jus' got the ideer, from Tess, she was kinda sweet on ya, that's all. Figgered she'd hang 'round awhile 'n try ta git yer 'tention."

"Well she left town without even lettin' me know she was leavin'. Now does that sound like she's sweet on me?" Lawson realized his voice sounded a little too defensive just about the time Alice began to laugh.

"I'll be damned Lawson, ya got a hankerin' fer that lil cutie!"

"Knock it off Alice!" He finished his beer, turned and walked to the door with the sound of full-throated laughter at his back. *Great, he thought, now I'm gonna have her teasin' me, Tess'll git wind a this 'n I ain't never gonna hear the end a it!* He wasn't watching were he was going. He walked right in to a man dressed in a black suit, with a ridiculous looking derby cocked sideways on his head. "'Scuse me."

"No problem. Hey aren't you Deputy Lawson?"

Lawson looked the man over and thought he looked somewhat like a weasel. He had dark beady eyes, an attempt at a mustache, a fake grin and he was short and rather plump. "That would be me. Who wants ta know?"

"The names McPhearson, Henry James McPhearson." The man said as he grabbed Lawson's hand and began to shake it vigorously. Lawson tried to gently release his hand from the fat, sweaty palm. The weaselly little man slapped his other hand over the top, still shaking, "I've been wishing to speak with you. Let us talk over a beer." Lawson had no desire to have a beer with this man, but he couldn't think of an excuse fast enough and wanted nothing more than to have his hand freed.

"If'n yer buyin' Mr. McPhearson."

Adele Marie Crouch

“Henry, call me Henry. Of course I will be buying, I wouldn’t be much of a gentleman if I asked you to join me and then made you buy your own.” Lawson wiped his hand on his pants once he finally got it released and turned to follow Henry into the Saloon.

“Hey Lawson, ya back already?” Alice waved and winked.

“Don’ start with me Alice. This here’s business. Now jus’ be a good girl ‘n git me ‘n Henry here, a beer.”

“Sure thing, Lawson. Ya don’ have ta be so testy!”

Henry plopped into a chair, removed his derby and grinned. “My, my Lawson, you know everyone it seems.”

“Well Henry, I’m a deputy marshal here ‘bouts, been in these here parts fer lil more’n three year now. I wouldn’t say as how I know everyone, but I do now most a the folk ‘round. Now whadja want?”

“Well, Mr. Lawson,” he leaned forward across the table putting his face much too close to Lawson’s for comfort. “I’m the chairman of the committee for the proposal of an appropriate location for the state capital. You are aware we are going to be a state before the year’s end?”

“Yeah Henry, I been made all too aware a that. So, I ask agin. Whadja want?”

“I wish to call a town meeting. We, that is the committee, need to get all the people living here to vote on the various places up for consideration. Since you are the man with influence in this town, I came to ask you to help me get the meeting organized.”

Lawson set his empty glass on the table with a smile and looked Henry in the eye, “Ya got the wrong man Henry. That would be Boss Mills ya need ta talk ta.” He slid his chair out, tipped his hat as he stood and walked away.

“Wait, Lawson, he told me to speak with” Lawson was out the door before he could finish his sentence.

Henry turned his head when he felt someone touch his arm to see Alice standing beside him grinning at the swinging door.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

"Looks like yer business was kinda short. How 'bout 'nother beer Henry?"

"That is a splendid idea! Have you got a minute Miss Alice?"

"Soon as I git yer beer."

She set the beer on his table, "Please, sit down. I seem to have need of your advice."

"Whatcha need Henry?" Alice lowered herself to the chair he indicated.

"It is in regard to that man Lawson. Rather rude fellow isn't he?"

Alice saw he was frowning, looking toward the door. "Naw, Lawson's jus' a bit testy these days. He's really a nice guy. He's been a lil tough ta put up with ever since he come up on that wagon train a families what was massacred by the Comanch."

"Oh my, how terrible!" His frown faded and a look came across his face. A look Alice had come to recognize, as phony concern "Well, Miss Alice, I'm the chairman of the committee for the proposal of an appropriate location for the state capital. People around here don't seem very friendly to those of us from the east and I really need Mr. Lawson's help to call a town meeting. Now how do you propose I go about getting it?"

"Don' reckon ya do, lessin' he wants ta give it." She smiled and stood, bowed her head slightly and walked away. *No wonder people ain't friendly, she thought, yer a politician fer certain shor.*

Henry sat there nursing his beer, frowning as he watched Alice smiling and joking with the local town's people. *It seems, he thought, my position means nothing to these fools.*

Alice smiled when she saw Henry going out the door. "Good riddance to ya, chairman a the committee!" A few of the customers, sitting close by, roared with laughter when they heard her remark. She bowed low at the waist, "thank ya gentlemen. It 'pears I'm not alone."

Adele Marie Crouch

Lawson reached the front of the Irish Belle just as Pete was crossing the street. "Evenin' Lawson."

"Um-Hmm."

"Hold it Lawson, that's MY line! Whats eatin' ya?"

"Nothin' Pete — jus havin' a bad day. Ya goin' in fer some viddles?"

"Shor am, wanna join me?"

"Only if'n ya don' talk 'bout no damn committees or Mizurah becomin' a state!"

"Deal."

Lawson and Pete found a table in a corner, away from all the hubbub of the other customers. Lawson sunk down in the chair, put his elbow on the table, rested his chin in his hand and stared across the table with a frown. Pete sat down, studying his partner and decided to let it set a bit until after Ruth had taken their order. Lawson never looked up while he told Ruth what he wanted. Pete was a little concerned. He kept quiet knowing Lawson would open up soon and then there would be no stopping him.

Pete jumped when Lawson's fist hit the table. "Christ Pete, I cain't git her out'a my mind! Cain't concentrate, Boss Mills is on my back. Cain't sleep. Alice is givin' me a hard way ta go 'bout it. Hell, I cain't even eat! Now Alice'll tell Tess 'bout our lil set to t'night 'n I'll never hear the end a it."

"Wa-ll now," Pete rubbed his chin and raised an eyebrow, "Lets us take this slow. Who cain't ya git out'a yer mind?"

"Catherine! Who else?"

"Ohh, I see." Pete covered the grin on his face with his hand. "Now, what little set to with Alice?" Lawson told him about the conversation, with a very irritated tone to his voice. Pete started to laugh, slapping his hand on the table. "Lawson ol' buddy, sounds ta me like yer in love!"

"Christ Pete, not you too! I hardly know'er."

"Yep, yer in love."

"That's jus' terrific! So what do I do 'bout it?"

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

Pete was still trying to control his laughter, "Whatcha mean, what do ya do? Ya could shoot yerself! Or ya could pay her a visit, like I did."

Lawson's face got red with anger, "Whatcha mean, like you did? Ya didn't go out ta her place alone?"

Pete put his hands out, "whoa there, don' be gettin' jealous on me. I went out ta help her unload her supplies, built her a few shelves 'n et summa her cookin'. It was a neighborly gesture, thas all, on my way ta the German settlement."

"Sorry Pete, its jus that I've never felt this way afor. I reckon I am a little testy like Alice said."

"A LITTLE testy? My friend, yer a LOT testy! Reckon the first thing ya ought'a do is git yerself under control. Eat yer viddles, kinda mull stuff 'round in that pea brain a yern 'n don' say nothin' so I kin enjoy my food. Sure the hell don' want ya hollerin' at me whilst I'm tryin' ta eat!"

Lawson relaxed a little and grinned, "awright Pete, enjoy yer food."

"I intend ta do jus that and..... might I suggest ya do the same"

Lawson pushed his food around his plate, occasionally putting a bite in his mouth and chewing without tasting it. Catherine's blue eyes danced in front of him. He thought of how innocent and frightened she looked when Pete mentioned the furs piled in her cabin and the graceful way she moved while she prepared their food. "Christ Pete, she's so small 'n defenseless. She's out there all alone. What if she needs help?"

"She is small," Pete said through a mouth full of food. "But I don' know 'bout the defenseless part. She does have her bow 'n the arrows she made. Don' forget 'bout how handy she is with that there knife she totes 'round. Naw, I wouldn't say she's defenseless."

"Damn it Pete! Ya know what I mean."

Adele Marie Crouch

“Awright Lawson. How ‘bout if’n we go on out ta her place tomorra ‘n pay her a visit?” Lawson sat there for a minute with a blank look on his face.

“Yeah, that’s a right good ideer. We could finish fixin’ the fence ‘n see if’n she needs anythin’. That’s what we’ll do!” Lawson dove into his food with gusto.

Yep, yer in love ol’ buddy, Pete thought with a grin.

Lawson sauntered over to the marshal’s office early to tell Boss Mills he’d be gone for a couple of days. He ran in to Alice on the way.

“Ya feelin’ any better t’day Lawson?”

“Much.” He grinned and tipped his hat as he walked on by. *No ya don’ Alice*, he thought, *Ya ain’t gonna git no chance ta start with me t’day*.

He heard her giggle and say, “well I’ll be damned.”

Boss Mills grabbed his arm as he walked in the door. “Lawson, what a sight fer sore eyes! Ya gotta git on over ta the town hall quick as ya kin. Them dandies done got some a the town folk real upset ‘n all hell’s ‘bout ta break loose.”

“But I...”

“NOW Lawson! Afor they do sumpthin’ stupid, like burn the buildin’ down!”

“What ‘bout Burke?”

“Burke’s down river settlin’ a dispute with some trappers.” Mills was pushing him out the door as he spoke.

“What ‘bout....?”

“NOW Lawson!” Lawson stood, frustrated, as Mills closed the door in his face.

“Business afor pleasure Lawson,” he said to the door.

“Ya ready Lawson?” He turned to see Pete riding up on his horse.

“Naw, gotta go over ta the town hall first. Some kinda ruckus goin’ on. Boss Mills is a huffin’ ‘n a puffin’ ‘bout folks gettin’ upset ‘nough ta burn the place ta the ground. C’mon Pete, might need some help.”

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

A block away they could hear people shouting. Someone was trying to calm them down and get some kind of order. "This is NOT what I had planned fer t'day!"

"I know what ya mean Lawson. Shor will be glad when all these dandies leave town. Reckon we could load'em all on the first stage leavin' fer the east 'n be done with'em?"

"Sounds like a durn good ideer ta me Pete, but I don' think we could do that."

"Yer probly right Lawson, let's step it up 'n see what all the fussin's 'bout."

When they tried to go in the door they discovered the place was packed. Arms were waving around and there was so much shouting they couldn't make sense of any of it. Pete hollered, trying to quiet the place down, but only a few people noticed. No one could hear him over the roar in the room. Lawson calmly removed his revolver from his holster, pointed it out the door toward the sky and fired off two rounds. The sudden silence was nearly deafening.

Before he realized what was happening, a sweaty paw grabbed his hand and he looked down into a pair of beady eyes. "Lawson, am I glad to see you! I went to Marshal Mills like you told me. He said you were the man in charge, so I spread the word around town that you would be hosting a town hall meeting. I can't seem to get any order here. This is supposed to be an organized vote and these people want to add other towns to the ballot. Lawson, they can't do that. Explain to them that they can't do that! The proper way to have an election is to vote on what is printed on the ballot. Talk to them Lawson." He was dragging Lawson to the front as he talked. Lawson politely said "'scuse me," tipped his hat and called people by name as he was dragged through the crowd.

Pete stood at the door with his hands on his thighs, bent over in a fit of laughter. "Well ol' buddy, fer a body who don' want nothin' ta do with no politician', ya shor did git yerself right smack in the middle uv it!"

Adele Marie Crouch

When they reached the podium, McPhearson grabbed the gavel and pounded it a couple of times, then pushed Lawson over behind it. "Tell them Lawson. Tell them they have to vote the ballot the way it is written. Tell them to just mark an X on the one of their choice, put it in this box and they can be on their way." Lawson felt out of place, but made the explanations and left the front of the hall.

It was way past noon before Lawson and Pete got everyone to cooperate and the voting was completed. "Its too late now ta go see Catherine. C'mon Pete, may as well go git some viddles." As they walked over to the Irish Belle, Lawson slapped his leg with his hat. "I'd love ta put my hands 'round the neck a that little weasel 'n squeeze, reeeal slow, 'til those beady eyes pop right out'a his haid!"

"Um-Hmm." Pete decided the safest thing to say right now was as little as possible.

When they finished lunch, they walked back over to the marshal's office. "Shor am glad ya got more book learnin' than me Lawson. That-a-way I git out'a all the reportin'." Pete mounted his horse smiling at Lawson. "Sides I gotta do a bit more trainin' with that lil paint, fer Parkins, over at the Blacksmith's shop. Meet ya fer supper?"

"Yeah Pete, back in the corner. I'm gonna be in a powerful fowl mood by then. Don' wanna see or be seen. I'd hate like hell ta have ta be nice ta people." Pete laughed as Lawson walked in the door to the marshal's office.

Lawson gave Mills a piece of his mind, while telling him about the near riot he had caused by encouraging McPhearson. "Took me half the day ta bring some kinda order ta that mess. Fer gawd sake Mills, cain't we load all these trouble makers on a stage 'n kick'em in the butt on their way out'a town?"

"Calm down Lawson 'n git them reports finished. The days near over 'n the lil woman's gonna be lookin' fer me ta git home ta supper." Lawson sat down at his desk and started working on the reports, with visions of Catherine running through his head.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

It was dark by the time he gave it up for the night, left the office, entered the Irish Belle and walked to the corner table to meet Pete for supper. As he sank to his chair, he was glad Lady McGraw had put one table out of sight of the rest of the dining room.

Pete arrived just as Ruth was delivering a couple of beers, smiled, a half smile, and seated himself across from Lawson. "Evenin' Lawson. Yer mood as fowl as ya promised?"

"Fraid so Pete." He raised his glass to clink it against Pete's. "Here's ta statehood!" Pete couldn't resist a little chuckle when he clinked glasses with Lawson.

"Um-Hmm."

CHAPTER 9

Catherine yawned, stretched and opened her eyes. The first thing she saw was the beautiful vase from Tess sitting on the table, right where Pete left it. She smiled and said, "Thank you for another day." She stretched one more time before getting out of bed. After her morning chores, she walked up to Spring. Patting her neck she said "Spring, we have a project that must be done. Bear with me girl, this isn't going to be easy."

She led Spring to the buckboard and attached the harness. As she stepped up to the seat, a tear dropped to her skirt. "That's enough Catherine, you have to do this. Now make your Papa proud and let's go!" She headed Spring out onto the trail that led toward Independence. When she reached the spot where the wagon train veered off to set up camp, she stopped. She was amazed at how close it was to the cabin. *Surely I traveled much farther than this!* She swallowed hard, took a few deep breaths and turned Spring in the direction of the wagons. By the time she stopped near the wagons her hands were shaking. She sat there for a bit looking around, unconsciously wiped the tears from her eyes and stepped down. She slowly walked around. Nearly six months had turned all the bodies to nothing but bones. The animals of the wild had gnawed and scattered them, until they no longer resembled humans. The wagons were just the way she left them.

Catherine went back to the buckboard, removed the shovel she put in the back, went down by the river under a big tree and dug a hole. When she finished, she went back to the buckboard, gently leading Spring around the area as she gathered the bones of her traveling companions. When she had loaded all she could find into the buckboard, she took them to the hole and buried them. While she was covering them with dirt she recited, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside still waters. He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for You art with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; You anointeth my head with oil; My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; for I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." When she finished covering the bones, she walked to the river, lowered herself to the ground and cried. She cried for a long time until her sides ached and her throat hurt. When the tears finally subsided, she said good bye to the good people of the wagon train who escaped the Revolution in Austria, only to perish on land that would someday be Kansas. She slowly rose and walked toward Spring.

Catherine put her arms around Spring's neck and hugged her tight. "Spring, my faithful friend, we still have more work to do." She climbed into the buckboard and returned to the wagons. After picking up some of the articles too heavy to blow away and returning them to the nearest wagon, she unhooked Spring from the buckboard and hitched her to the first wagon. It was a slow tedious job, but she and Spring took the wagons one by one back to her cabin.

After a couple of days of moving the wagons from the area by the river and parking them in some kind of order near her cabin, she was exhausted. She slept much later than usual and felt like she had wasted half the day by the time she began the work of sorting through the wagons. As she was neatly folding items that had been thrown around and replacing them into a trunk for storage some gold coins dropped from a dress she picked up. She bent slowly and lifted them off the floor. She stared at them. The sound of her own voice startled her when she asked, "Why did the Natives leave these behind?" She slid down to a sitting position with her eyes glued to the coins in her hand. She raised her eyes toward the canvas top, "Papa?" Just

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then a breeze raised a flap of the canvas and a ray of sunlight caused the coins to sparkle.

She clutched the coins tightly in one hand as she reached for the hem of her skirt with the other. She jumped down from the wagon and began to run to the wagon containing her family's belongings. As she was running, she recalled how Papa asked every family to purchase a metal box to put their money in, for safe keeping. She remembered Papa instructing everyone where to put it. She scrambled up to the seat of the wagon, lifted the board on the seat and looked into the compartment. There, right where her Papa put them, were the boxes with the Friedbacher life savings and the remainder of the money from the sale of their land in Austria, less the expenses of the trip to America. She reached in and reverently removed one of the boxes and hugged it to her breast. "You're still taking care of me, aren't you Papa?" She took all four boxes to her porch and began going to each wagon in turn, lifting the board and looking for the boxes. Not everyone had done as her Papa suggested, or she would never have found the coins in the first place. After she completed the task, she counted the boxes stacked neatly on the porch. Out of twenty wagons, she retrieved twenty-three boxes filled with the life savings of the now departed travelers.

Catherine sat on the steps, put her chin in her hands and looked skyward. Her mind refused to comprehend how much money could possibly be sitting there. She knew some of the families didn't have much. She also knew her family had a pretty fair amount, although she really didn't know just how much.

Catherine glanced toward the wagons and decided she had done all she could handle for one day. She slowly walked up the steps to her front door, glanced at the boxes as she passed them and went inside. She lit a fire in her fireplace for the comfort of the flames, fixed a simple meal, sat in front of the fireplace and watched the beautiful ballet. After resting for awhile, she found

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menial tasks to occupy her time inside the cabin and then turned in for the night.

The new day found Catherine hard at work at the task at hand. She folded and sorted. Stacked and straightened. She went to every wagon and put everything in order.

Catherine had pulled the plugs on all the water barrels to drain any water that might still be in them. After completing the task of putting each wagon in order, she went around and removed all the water barrels. She rolled each one to the side of her shed and lined them neatly against the outside wall. Then she began the chore of emptying each wagon. Having straightened them ahead of time made it easier, but it was still a lot of work transferring everything to her shed. She had no clear idea what she was going to do with all of it, but couldn't live with the thought of it staying out there on the prairie. She knew the sentimental value of what was in the wagon of her family, and felt the other travelers had the same sentiment for their belongings. True, some things were beyond use by anyone, thanks to the Natives, the weather and the animals, but a lot of it was still in reasonably good shape.

She worked through spring rains, wind and sun until everything was secured in the shed. Then she began to dismantle the wagons and stack the lumber next to the water barrels. She removed all the canvas, folded it neatly and put it under her porch. She put some nails in the wall on the backside of the shed and hung all the harnesses. She lined all the wagon wheels up along the fence and when the last one was stood in its place, she collapsed on the porch. "I'll find some flowers to move over there in front of the wagon wheels in memory of all the people they represent."

Seated in front of her fire that evening she spoke to her Papa. "I've cleaned the prairie, put everyone to rest and stored all their valuables in my shed. I'll always remember you and try hard to live up to the family name. Thank you for the gold and the

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courage to go on. I love you.” She pushed herself up from the chair with every bone in her body sore and prepared for bed.

The new day was cool. The sun occasionally peeked through the clouds and the smell of spring was strong in the air. Catherine went to the shed, retrieved her hoe and rake and headed for the garden area. The hoe was big, awkward and heavy. She tired easily trying to use it and found she had to stop and rest often. By the end of the day, she only had a small section of the garden cleared. She was frustrated with herself as she ate her supper. She was determined to work harder the next day.

One day passed into another as Catherine prepared her garden area during the day and worked on the sewing from Kristine by the light of her fire at night. Sometime near the end of April her garden was planted and she leaned against a fence post with a sigh of relief and accomplishment. Walking back to the shed to put her tools away, she saw the water barrels. She stopped short, looked back toward the garden, then the barrels. “What a marvelous plan!” She began rolling them over to her garden. She placed one at the end of each row. After making a number of trips to the river to carry water up, decided to bring extra each time she went down from now on. Stepping back to take a good look, she found herself quite proud of her irrigation system.

She spent the next two weeks finishing up the sewing and placing it neatly in the trunk from Tess. She put some baby clothes on top, including a beautiful, hand made Christening gown and closed the lid. She pulled the trunk out the door, backed the buckboard up to the porch and loaded it. She put the ungainly hoe and rake in beside it, along with some baskets for Lady McGraw. Early the next morning, with her noon meal packed and all the boxes of gold loaded into the buckboard as well, she headed for Independence.

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“Kristine, look who’s here!” Jason hollered as he opened the door. Kristine waddled across the room with a big smile on her face.

“Catherine, what a surprise. What brings ya ta town?” She asked as she wrapped her arms around Catherine and gave her a big hug.

“I’ve completed the sewing you sent with me. It’s all packed in Tess’s trunk outside. I also have some business with Mark at the bank and a little problem to take up with Link.”

“We’re powerful glad ta see ya, aren’t we Kristine? Ya planned on stayin’ with us t’night, right?”

“If I won’t be imposing, I’d be happy to. Thank you.”

Jason went out to bring the trunk in while Catherine and Kristine made themselves comfortable in the living room. “How’s it goin’ out ta yer place Catherine?”

“Very well, thank you. I have my vegetable garden in. Now that was a job! Are all the tools in Missouri made for giants?”

Kristine looked at her with a quizzical look on her face. “Whatdya mean?”

“Among the supplies Burke got for me is a hoe and rake that would take a full grown man and two boys to handle. I had the devil of a time getting my garden plot cleared and planted.” She laughed as she described the tools to Kristine.

“I think Catherine, the problem is, yer jus’ so small that things seem big,” Kristine laughingly told her as she patted her hand.

“I admit that Mums and Papa didn’t divide equally when they passed out size to their children, but I really need to get some tools I can handle. Do you think Link would trade them for something smaller?”

“Gee Catherine, I don’ know if they come in different sizes, but first thing in the mornin’ we’ll go find out.”

“Oh my, Kristine — I have something I need to bring in, for safe keeping, until I can get over to the bank in the morning. Jason would you help me please?” She rose quickly from the

Adele Marie Crouch

divan, threw her shawl over her shoulders and started for the door.

“Whoa, slow down there! Let me git my coat. It’s a bit nippy out.”

“Sorry Jason, it’s just that....well, you’ll see.” She waited impatiently while Jason slipped his coat on then they went out the door. She reached into the buckboard, pulled out one of the boxes and handed it to Jason.

“Catherine, this is heavy! What’s in it?”

“Gold.”

“What?”

“I said, gold. I went back to the wagon train I had been traveling with and Oh Jason, I’ll tell you about it after we get these in the house.” They made several trips with all the gold.

Jason fell backwards onto the divan and looked at Catherine in dismay. “Awright, I’m ready, let’s have it.”

She told the story to Jason and Kristine while they both sat there with their mouths gaping, barely breathing. When she finished, she folded her hands in her lap and lowered her head with a sigh. “Catherine, how much money’s in them boxes?”

“I have no idea, Jason. I just put them all in the buckboard. I knew what was in them so I didn’t feel the need to open each one. I know Papa had a fair amount of money from the sale of our land in Austria. I don’t know how much, for sure. Or how much any of the other families had left after the expense of the trip to America and the purchase of the wagons. I guess I’ll find out in the morning when we take it to the bank. Now, if you wonderful folks will excuse me, I’ll go down to the Irish Belle for some supper.”

“Catherine, please, ya needn’t do that, let me fix ya sumptin’.”

“That’s kind of you Kristine, but I’ll be putting you out enough. I won’t be long.”

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

"We'll fix ya up a place ta sleep while yer gone." Catherine put some coins in her handbag, went to the buckboard to retrieve the baskets and headed for the Irish Belle.

Walking along the boardwalk, she wondered if Lawson would be having dinner there when she arrived. She gently slapped her wrist and shook her head. *No, no girl, that's enough of that foolishness!* When she entered the Irish Belle, she found herself still amazed at the beauty that surrounded her. She did not, however, feel quite so out of place this time. She was proud of the lacy, Austrian style dress she had made, her feet donned real shoes and her hair was brushed and hung, like a golden cape, down her back. She walked gracefully into the dinning room to be greeted by an excited Ruth.

"Miz Catherine, how wonderful ta see ya. Ya look lovely this evenin'! Will ya be havin' dinner with us?" She was holding both of Catherine's hands in hers and smiling broadly.

"Yes Ruth, I'm starved. Is there any place in particular I should sit?" She did a quick scan of the dining room and gave a sigh of relief, mixed with regret, when she didn't see Lawson.

"Set where ever ya like Miz Catherine, I'll be with ya directly."

"Thank you Ruth" she said over her shoulder as she glided to a table to be seated.

Lawson's fork froze in mid air when he heard the familiar laughter that could belong to no one other than Tess. His heart began to pound as her cheerful voice rang through the dining room.

"Catherine, how great ta see ya! I jus' stopped by ta check on Kristine 'n heard ya come ta visit. Thanks fer bringin' my trunk back. How long ya gonna be in town? Heard ya had some business with Mark at the bank 'n a little 'situation' ta settle with Link. Cain't b'lieve ya got all that stitchin' done so quick. So how ya been?"

Adele Marie Crouch

The sound of Catherine's laughter caused Lawson to choke on the food, still unchewed, in his mouth and Pete started to laugh.

"Tess! You'll never change. Slow down, for heaven sakes. I'll be here a day or two and it's nice to see you also. Now sit down, have a glass of wine with me and tell me how you and Burke are doing."

Pete got his laughter under control, stood up and took Lawson by the arm. "C'mon ol' buddy, grab yer beer..... it's time ta go visitin'."

"Pete I.... what'll I say? I don' have anythin' interestin' ta talk 'bout. Aw hell! Awright! Let go a mah arm, I'm quite capable a walkin' by mahself!"

Catherine looked up as they approached the table. "Good evening Pete. Lawson. Won't you gentlemen join us?"

"Shorly will Missy, nice ta see ya. How's Spring?" Pete chose the chair across from Tess leaving the seat, directly across from Catherine, empty for Lawson. Lawson spun the chair around and straddled it, as he put his arms on the back of the chair he found himself looking into those beautiful eyes again. *My gawd, he thought, a man cain't think with them eyes smiling' at him like that.*

"Spring is just fine, thank you for asking. She seems to have adapted well to her new temporary home, not to mention her name." Catherine winked at Pete.

Lawson snapped out of his daze. "Wait a minute, who's Spring?" Catherine and Pete, between giggles, explained to Lawson about naming the old mare. When the story was over, all four of them were in near hysterics. In the midst of all the laughter Jason burst into the dining room.

"Catherine. Tess. Thank God I foundja! It's Kristine. The baby's comin'. Pete, git the Doc wouldja? C'mon girls, hurry up! I done told ya, the baby's comin'!"

Catherine smiled as she rose gracefully from her chair, "Relax Jason. These things take awhile. We have a lot of time.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

You have a seat, here with Lawson, and have a beer. We'll send for you." She patted Jason on the back, pushed him into a chair and flashed a large smile at Lawson. She and Tess hurried down the street to Kristine. They arrived just as Pete and the Doc came running from the other direction. "Pete, you go on back to the Irish Belle and join Lawson and Jason. Tess and I will help the Doc and send for you gentlemen later." Catherine gave him a gentle shove in the right direction.

Kristine was holding her stomach when she responded to the tap on the door. "Am I glad ta see y'all! Where's Jason? Oh my!!!!" Kristine doubled over, just as Doc stepped through the door.

"We left the men at the Irish Belle. I felt it would be best. Now you come on over and lie down." Catherine said, taking her arm and helping her to her bed.

It was a long night. At 4:00 a.m., on May first, Catherine walked into the Irish Belle. "You have a very healthy son and born on May Day. Kristine and the baby are fine. You can go home now."

Jason sat, momentarily stunned. Suddenly he jumped up and screamed, "Ya-hoo, I got me a son!" Swinging his jacket and ya-hooing as he left the Irish Belle, Jason was followed only by very tired smiles.

Tess and Catherine dropped to chairs at the table with Pete and Lawson. They grinned at each other then laid their heads on the table. Suddenly Catherine raised her head, "Tess, I have no where to sleep. I was going to stay with Kristine and Jason tonight. I can't possibly do that now! I certainly don't want to wake Lady McGraw, to arrange for a room, at four in the morning."

Lawson quickly spoke up, "ya shorly are mor'n welcome ta sleep in mah room, if'n ya won't feel uncomfortable. I kin grab a piece a the floor in Pete's room."

"That's very kind of you Lawson, but I don't want to run you out of your bed."

Adele Marie Crouch

"It ain't nothin' Catherine. Please, I don' mind. I kin share yer floor. Cain't I Pete?"

"Um-Hmm."

Tess raised her head slowly, glanced around, through half closed eyes and said, "Since ya'll got that settled, I'm goin' home." She pushed herself into a standing position and left.

After Pete and Lawson had shown Catherine to Lawson's room and closed the door behind her, she walked over and sat on the bed. She felt very strange knowing she was in a man's room about to sleep in his bed, but exhaustion won out as she lay back on the pillow.

Catherine opened her eyes to see sunlight streaming in the window. She had no idea what time it was, but was certain she had wasted a lot of the day sleeping. She sat up feeling rather foolish she did not undress or get under the covers. She was so tired that she fell asleep right where she layed. She straightened her dress, tried to smooth out her hair and let herself out of the room. As she headed down to get some food, she saw Ruth. "Ruth, could you tell me what time it is?"

"Yes'em it'd be 'bout ten."

"Thank you. Could I get something to eat?"

"Yes'em, I'll be down directly."

Catherine went to the dining room, found a seat and tried to decide if she wanted last night's dinner, this mornings breakfast or lunch. By the time Ruth came to take her order, she had chosen breakfast. Just as her meal was arriving, Pete and Lawson came up to her table. "Care if'n we join ya Missy?"

"Of course not Pete. Please ... both of you, have a seat."

The conversation during breakfast was pleasant. Catherine was careful to avoid eye contact with Lawson. She directed most of her conversation toward Pete. When Lawson asked a direct question, she answered it politely. The entire situation was awkward and uncomfortable. Pete was aware of the tension and decided it was time to put "Daniel into the lion's den."

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BOOK I

“Wa-ll Missy, I got a heap a work ta do over at the Blacksmith’s. Lawson, I’ll stop by the marshal’s office ‘n tell the Boss yer tied up ‘n awta be in later.” Pete pushed his chair back, smiled at Catherine, gave a quick wink in Lawson’s direction and left.

The silence that followed Pete was deafening. Catherine fiddled with her silverware, looking down at the table. Lawson sipped his coffee feeling very uncomfortable. “Catherine, we gotta talk!” He blurted out.

It was so sudden that Catherine jumped. “Yes Lawson, is there something in particular on your mind?”

“Well....uh... yeah. I mean, yes. I jus’ wondered, well how come ya lit out so fast when ya was in town last time? Ya didn’t even let me know ya was leavin’. ‘N how come ya been so distant? Did I do anything ta upset ya or hurt yer feelin’s or sumpthin’?”

Catherine could feel her heart pounding so hard she thought it was going to come right out of her chest. *What do I do, she thought, tell him how I feel? No, I’ll tell him what Tess said.* “Well, you see, the day I spent with Tess and Kristine, Tess told me very bluntly that you don’t want any women to get close to you. She said she was your best friend and she knew, so I was to keep my distance. I felt like in order to continue to be your friend I should do as she said.” She watched Lawson’s face to see if she could read his feelings.

His face turned red and he slammed his fist on the table. “She’s done took this big sister thing to far! I kin see I need ta have a good, long talk with her.”

Catherine felt a sudden wave of relief. “Big sister?”

“Yeah, she started it afor her weddin’, makin’ sure the women folk in town new I wasn’t the marryin’ kind ‘n all that stuff. Well ya know how it is ... some guys, they don’ want people tryin’ ta push’em. What Tess don’ understand is most men are like that until the right woman comes along. What I’m

Adele Marie Crouch

tryin' ta say is, how'em I gonna find out if'n it's the right woman, if'n Tess keeps tellin' em ta keep away?"

"I'm afraid I don't know Lawson." Catherine looked down at her hands. "Is there someone in particular you had in mind?"

"Of course there is. That's what I been tryin' ta tell ya."

"Maybe, if you wouldn't mind telling me who, I could pass the word on to Tess, so she wouldn't try to be so helpful."

"Dammit, Catherine, yer makin' this powerful hard on a guy! The woman is YOU!"

"Oh, I see." She felt herself turning red, the strange feelings returned to her stomach. She couldn't find her voice and felt very uncomfortable.

"Catherine, how 'bout we meet fer dinner t'night? Lady McGraw has a table, back there in a corner, kinda hid from the rest a the dining room. We could have a nice dinner 'n jus' git ta know each other. How's that sound?"

"That would be nice. I have some business to attend to after I check on Kristine. What time would you like to meet?"

"Let's say 'bout six."

"Six it is. I'll see you then."

Lawson left and Catherine sat there trying to get her emotions under control. *My goodness, she thought, he's interested in me and I almost pushed him away.* "Ruth, could I have my check please? I need to get over and see how Kristine and the new baby are doing."

"Right away Miz Catherine." As she left the hotel and walked to Jason and Kristine's, she was in a daze. *I need to talk to Kristine about this, she thought. I don't know the first thing about a dinner date with a man.*

When she arrived, Tess was already there. "Good mornin' Catherine! What a night! That was so excitin' I cain't believe I actually got ta help deliver a baby! How'd ya sleep? Whadja have planned fer t'day? Is there anythin' ya need help with? Kristine said ya had a lot ta do while ya was in town."

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

Catherine couldn't help herself and she started to laugh. "Tess, my dear friend. Please stop. I can't think fast enough to keep up with you. Actually, I only have a couple of things to do. Jason is going to help me with one of them and the rest I really need to do myself. Thank you so much for offering. Now how are Kristine and the baby?"

"Wonderful! The baby's name's Jason Allen Jr., 'n he's 'bout cute as a button. Kristine's tired, but she say's she feels great. I was gittin' ready ta go, so if ya don' need any help, I'll git on home."

"I'll be fine. I'll see you before I leave. You have a good day Tess." Tess gave her a hug and danced out the door.

Catherine went to the door of Kristine's room and whispered "Kristine, may I come in?"

"Catherine, c'mon in. The baby jus' went back ta sleep. Jason's out back gittin' some wood. Have a seat. Thanks fer all yer help las' night. I don' know what I'd a done without ya."

"Oh Kristine, you did all the work. I was just here. You would have done fine." After Catherine seated herself she told Kristine about the conversation with Lawson. Kristine began to laugh and said "I'll be!"

"Excuse me, did I miss something?"

"I'm sorry Catherine. It's jus' that Alice was tellin' folks that Lawson was sweet on some cutie. Tess had a fit when she heard it 'n insisted Lawson wasn't the kind ta git sweet on no body. I tried ta tell her some day the right one would come 'long, but she wouldn't listen. You have ta understand Tess has taken Lawson under her wing. She thinks it's her job ta keep the women away so's he won't have ta hurt nobody."

"Oh, I see."

Catherine sat there quietly wondering if she was being made a fool of. *Should I just forget the whole thing and get back to my sanctuary as quickly as I can? That's it, I'll hurry up and get my business taken care of and leave right away.*

Adele Marie Crouch

“Catherine, are you awright? Did ya understand what I was saying? Lawson’s a great guy, I’m sure he’s sweet on ya ‘n he’d be good ta ya. Catherine, are ya listenin’?”

As the words Kristine was saying began to sink in Catherine felt a little giddy. “Lawson asked me to meet him for dinner tonight. Do you think I should go?”

“Of course! Ya ain’t gonna’ know how he feels if ya don’, now are ya?”

“I guess not, O.K. I’ll go to dinner with him. But, are you sure Tess isn’t going to show up and tell me to get away from her little brother?”

“I’ll take care a Tess. Don’ ya worry yer perty little head ‘bout that.”

Both of the girls were smiling when Jason walked into the room. “What’s got ya both smiling’ like that? Ya look like yer up ta sumpthin’.”

“Oh, no Jason. Kristine was just explaining some women things to me that’s all. Do you have time to help me load the boxes back on the buckboard and go over to the bank with me? I’d feel more comfortable if someone was with me when I do this.”

“Kristine, will ya be awright fer a bit while I go with Catherine?”

“I’m fine Jason, ya go on ahead. Jus’ bring me some water afor ya leave.

Catherine arrived at the Irish Belle a little early. She still had a strange, uncomfortable feeling about this. She wanted to be at the table before Lawson arrived. Maybe the tension would be lessened that way.

“Miz Catherine. Good evenin’. Ya kin set anywhere ya like.”

“Thank you Ruth. I understand Lady McGraw has a private table located somewhere in the back of the dining room.”

“Yes’em, wouldja like me ta set ya there?”

“Please, I’ll be expecting Lawson to join me.”

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

Ruth led her to the area she requested, then pulled her chair out for her, "Ya have a real nice dinner with Jim, Miz Catherine."

"Jim?"

"Well ma'am, don' ya reckon, if'n yer havin' a date with a gentleman, ya awta git on a first name basis?"

Catherine grinned, "I would suppose you are most probably correct. Is it that obvious I have never had a date with a gentleman before?"

"Well.... I guess, maybe. I weren't tryin' ta be bold, jus' wanted ta help, yer such a sweet lady 'n ya been through so much 'n all."

"You weren't being bold Ruth, just honest and I am grateful. If you see anything else as the night progresses, please, feel free to help me out."

"With pleasure, Miz Catherine." She grinned broadly, feeling quite proud of herself. "Now, how 'bout a drink while ya wait?"

"What do you suggest?"

"Coffee, fer now, might be 'propriate."

"I'm not much of a coffee drinker, but I'll give it a try."

Ruth left and Catherine felt her stomach tighten. *What am I going to say to Law... no Jim? My I hope we don't just sit here and stare at each other all evening.* Her thoughts were in a whirl when Ruth arrived with her coffee. Just then Lawson came around the corner into their private dining area. "Evenin' Catherine, ya been waitin' long?"

"No Laws... uh, Jim, I just arrived. Ruth was just delivering my coffee." Lawson caught the use of his first name and it took him by surprise. Actually, it made him feel good.

"I'll have the same, please." He smiled at Ruth and was careful not to spin the chair around before he sat down. "Didja git all yer business takin care of? How are Kristine 'n the baby? How's Jason holdin' up?"

Adele Marie Crouch

Catherine began to giggle. She just couldn't help herself. "Jim, some day, I know I'll get used to all you people forgetting to stop talking. Forgive me when I laugh, I just find it very amusing. Kristine and the baby are fine. Jason is being quite the mother hen and driving Kristine crazy, but it will all calm down soon. Yes, I did get all my business takin care of so I'll be going home tomorrow. I had a little problem with Link. But we worked it out."

"What kinda problem?"

Ruth came with Lawson's coffee and asked if they were ready to order. They ordered their dinner and Catherine began to explain about the giant hoe and rake. Lawson laughed at her antics as she described the problem she had getting her garden in. "Jim, are you laughing at me or with me?" She tried to put just enough indignation in her voice to test his reaction.

"Laughin' with ya. Shor wish'd I could'a been there! So what'd Link do ta fix it? Them things only come in one size ya know."

"I found that out. Link got out a saw and hammer and went to work. He made both tools to fit me nicely. I should be able to handle them with no problem now."

Their dinner arrived as Lawson was asking her what her business was with Mark. "Ya don' have ta tell me if'n it's none a my business. I was jus' curious if everthin' is awright with ya."

"Oh everything is fine." She glanced at Ruth, who smiled and left. *That must mean I'm doing O.K.*, she thought. Over dinner she told Lawson how she had gone back to the wagon train. She explained about cleaning up the prairie and about finding the boxes of money. "That was the business I had with Mark. According to him, it appears I'm very well off. I'm afraid I had my mind on our dinner together and didn't listen to him very carefully. He did give me a little book with an accounting in it though. I put it in my handbag without even looking at it. I just don't feel like it is important right now."

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

Does that make sense Jim? I mean, I feel a little uncomfortable about the fact that I became 'very well off' at the expense of others."

Lawson reached across the table and placed his hand over hers. "Catherine, I know all this's been hard on ya 'n ya been holdin' up right good. I remember ya told me 'n Pete 'bout yer dad sayin' everthin' happens fer a reason. I think ya awta know, it's common practice fer them Comanch ta burn wagons after they raid'em. Now, ya figger this here money ya come inta had a reason?" Catherine's heart was doing flip-flops and her stomach was full of butterflies from the feel of Lawson's hand on hers. She looked right in his eyes in an attempt to concentrate on what he was saying and that just made it worse. "Catherine, don' ya think there was a reason?"

"Oh....Yes, I guess you must be right," she replied as she removed her hand from under his to straighten her napkin. *There, now you can think!* She composed herself and continued to converse.

Before she knew it, dinner was over. They were having an after dinner glass of wine and Ruth was clearing the dishes away as she smiled at Catherine. Catherine leaned toward Ruth and whispered "Did I do alright?"

"Ya did jus' fine Miz Catherine, jus' fine!" Lawson grinned as he watched the exchange. He realized Ruth was helping Catherine through the dinner and liked it.

"Is this yer first dinner date with a man..... alone?"

"Yes Jim, it is. I have to admit I was a little worried that I wouldn't know what to do. You see all of my life was spent with my family. When we had company, it was almost always relatives. I wasn't old enough yet to see men, especially unchaperoned. So Ruth kind of gave me a few pointers."

"I don' b'lieve ya needed ta have help, but I'm flattered ya felt ya did. I'm jus' an ordinary guy, who finds ya rather attractive, 'n would like ta git ta know ya better."

Adele Marie Crouch

"I have very much enjoyed this evening and do feel more comfortable. You know I have to leave in the morning and go back home? Will you have time to come out to visit? I mean..... You and Pete? It just wouldn't be proper if you came alone."

Lawson liked the idea. He gave her one of his famous grins that Tess said 'knocked the ladies out'. "You betcha! Pete 'n me'll try ta git out there on a reglar basis ta check on ya 'n help ya out some."

"In that case Jim, I'm afraid it is getting rather late and I have a long day tomorrow. Thank you so much for a wonderful time."

"Yer mor'dn welcome ma'am. May I walk ya ta yer room?"

Catherine panicked. She hadn't anticipated this. Now what should she do? Just then Ruth peeked around the partition, grinned and gave a slight nod. Lawson saw the exchange and had to put his hand to his mouth, to hide the smile, he knew would embarrass Catherine. "Certainly Jim, thank you," she told him as she raised up from her chair.

Lawson sat at his desk going over the events of the evening. He gave her a light peck on the cheek at the door to her room and felt her blush. *My, he thought, she shor is a shy one. Ya better be careful ol' boy or you'll scare her off! Wonder if I awta offer ta ride out ta her place with her? Naw, better not be too pushy. Hell, this is tough on'a body not knowin' how ta act. If'n she wasn't such a proper lady, it'd be easier. Ya fool! If'n she wasn't such a proper lady, ya wouldn't a been attracted ta her in the first place!* He gave up arguing with himself, checked on the couple of drunks in the cell and went back to the hotel.

Catherine closed the door to her room as Lawson walked down the hall. She put her hand to the spot on her cheek where he kissed her. It felt warm and tingly. She sighed as she walked to the bed and lowered herself. She glanced around the room. Her clothes were hanging neatly in the closet, the covers were turned down and the water basin was filled. She grinned as she remembered her first night here. "My goodness, your life

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certainly has changed since then!” She changed into her nightclothes, washed her face and lay down on the bed. “Your head is in a spin. You need to think this out. Grand-Mama would be very upset with you if you didn’t act like a lady. How does one entertain a man when she is the only one living there? My this is getting complicated!” She layed back and closed her eyes. She tried to go to sleep, but those big brown eyes and that wonderful smile made her stomach turn to mush again. She sat up, slapped her hands on her thighs and said “Catherine, you must get control of yourself! You need to get some sleep. Tomorrow is going to be a very long day and you have things to do!” She put her head back on the pillow, still seeing big brown eyes behind her closed lids, sighed knowing it was going to be tough to get to sleep. She tossed and turned for quite some time and finally drifted off.

Lawson closed the door to his room and looked toward his bureau. “Awright mom, I found that perty little gal ya been wantin’ me ta find. Now how do I go ‘bout settlin’ down? Shor do wish you ‘n dad was here, ya could help me out some. Guess I’m on mah own.” He went to bed with visions of the most beautiful blue eyes he’d ever seen and a smile that melted his heart.

Catherine was up early. She asked Ruth to have the kitchen fix her a lunch to take with her and was eating a leisurely breakfast when Pete came up to her table. “Mornin’ Missy. Shor am glad I caught ya afor ya left. I got a lil’ sumpthin’ fer ya.” He smiled broadly as he seated himself.

“That’s very sweet of you Pete, but I really don’t need anything.”

“Wa-ll now Missy, ya might not need it, but I figgered ya might like it. Ya ain’t gonna hurt an ol’ man’s feelin’s now ‘n refuse it, are ya?”

“Of course not Pete. Do you mind if I ask what IT is?”

“Gotta show ya. Ya ‘bout done with yer meal?”

Adele Marie Crouch

“Actually, yes, I was just finishing. Will you show me now?”

“Shor will! C’mon outside.”

When they stepped out of the hotel lobby onto the boardwalk, Pete reached for her arm. “This-a-way Missy.” He guided her over to where she had tied Spring to the hitching post. He pointed toward the back of the buckboard.

Her eyes followed his hand, “Oh my goodness! Pete, that is the prettiest horse I have ever seen. You can’t be serious, that’s not for me?”

“Shor is Missy ... been workin’ hard gettin’ that lil filly trained special, just fer you. I got her nice ‘n calmed down so’s ya wouldn’t have no trouble ‘mountin’ up’. I trained her good ta understand when ya want her ta do sumpthin’ so’s she’d be real gentle with ya.”

“Pete, that’s wonderful. She might understand when I want her to do something, but I don’t have any idea how to let her know I want her to do something.”

“Wa-ll now Missy, if’n ya want ta hang ‘round Independence fer an extra day ‘r so I kin teach ya.”

“I suppose that would be a very wise thing for me to do then. I certainly wouldn’t know what to do with her if I didn’t, now would I?”

“It’s settled then. We kin start yer ridin’ lesson’s soon as ya go down ta Link’s ‘n git ya some ridin’ duds.”

“Ridin’ duds?”

“Course Missy, ya don’ figger ta learn ta ride in that there fancy gidup do ya?”

Pete was feeling very proud of himself as he led Catherine down to Link’s to purchase some proper riding clothes. He felt good inside about giving her the horse and he was pleased that she would be staying in town a few more days. *This’ll give Lawson a little more sparkin’ time, he thought, afor she heads on out ta her place.* He walked, with a happy bounce, thinking about what a good deed he had done, for his friend and for this

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
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young lady gently resting her hand on his arm and walking gracefully beside him.

Catherine and Pete entered the mercantile and began to look through the racks of clothing. Pete explained to Link that Catherine needed appropriate clothing to go riding. Link pulled some pants, a shirt and a pair of boots from the shelves and showed Catherine to a room where she could try them on. She looked at herself in the mirror and blushed deeply. She was almost too embarrassed to go out of the dressing room. After a couple of deep breaths to compose herself, Catherine stepped out for the inspection by Pete.

"Ya look real comfy in them ridin' duds Missy. Ain't they a sight more comfortable then all that other gear ya had on?"

"To be honest with you, Pete, I feel a bit strange in men's clothing. But if you are sure this is the proper attire for riding, I'll learn to adapt."

"Yes'em, that would be the right stuff ta be wearin'. Now lets us git on over ta the Blacksmith's."

"To the Blacksmith's? What on earth for?"

"That there is where the corral is that I been workin' with the filly in."

"I see, but shouldn't we go back and get 'the filly' first?"

"Wa-ll I'll be damned! Ain't that jus' like an ol' fool? Done forgot the horse I'm 'sposed ta be teachin' ya ta ride." They both laughed as they walked back up the street to get Catherine's gift. Pete led the filly to the Blacksmith's and the training began.

By lunch, Catherine's leg muscles were aching from practicing the proper tension, on the proper sides, to make the filly turn when she wanted her to, in the direction she wanted her to. Pete explained briefly how to use the reins, but told her he trained the filly to respond to the rider. He told her to expect to be a little achy at first, but assured her it would go away. She felt every bit as achy as he promised.

Adele Marie Crouch

“Pete, if you don’t mind, I think I’ll go visit Kristine for a little while after lunch. My body feels like it needs to rest just a little. You have put it through some pretty grueling exercises!”

“Shor thing Missy, I gotta do some things fer the Boss after lunch. I’ll be gone a couple hours. Will that be a long ‘nough rest?”

“Yes, I believe that will do just fine.”

“Meetcha at the corral in ‘bout two hours then.”

Catherine leaned back in her chair after Pete left wondering if her sore, tired legs would even carry her to Kristine’s. She decided they wouldn’t so she would take the buckboard. She still felt a little strange in the clothes she had purchased for her riding lessons, but agreed they certainly were very sensible for this activity.

Pete was feeling pretty good about the way things were going when he walked into the marshal’s office. “Lawson, why don’cha let me take over fer ya here? Take a couple hours off ‘n go over ta Jason’s ‘n see if’n he needs ya ta help with anythin’.”

“Ya feelin’ awright Pete? Ya never offer ta work unless ya ain’t feelin’ right or yer up ta sumpthin’.”

“Aw Lawson, give a guy a break. I jus’ thought ya might wanna git out’a here fer a bit, that’s all.”

“Well ol’ buddy, I still think yer up ta sumpthin’, but yer right, I could use a couple hours rest.”

Lawson couldn’t figure out what had gotten into Pete as he grabbed his hat and closed the door of the marshal’s office behind him. *Jus’ not like him ta volunteer*, he thought, *wonder what he’s up to?* As he walked past the Crooked Horn, Tess stopped him. “Lawson, I feel real poorly ‘bout what I done ta Catherine. I didn’t know ya was sweet on’er. Kristine done told me off good ‘n proper ‘n said I awta mind my own business from now on. Ya fergive me don’cha?”

He gave her a hug and reassured her that everything was fine. “Things was a little rocky at first, but we got it all fixed

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now. Only thin' I cain't figger is, she was gonna stop by the office afor she left this mornin' 'n she ain't been in yet."

"I seen her in the buckboard jus' a minute ago, she was headin' tords Kristine's. I reckon if'n ya hurry on over there ya could meet up with her afor she leaves."

"Thanks Tess, I'll do that." *That sneaky ol' codger*, he thought as he walked away, *he done set up a meetin'.* *Guess I better not mess up his fun.*

Catherine was sitting on the divan holding the baby, cooing and thinking of Joseph, when Jason opened the door and let Lawson in. Lawson stopped short when he saw her in her riding clothes. "Catherine! What in the name a the Awmighty ya doin' dressed like that?" Catherine looked up, her mouth dropped open, she went pale and a tear rolled down her cheek. Lawson took a few quick steps, dropped to one knee, put one hand over hers and gently wiped the tear away with the other. "Gosh Catherine, I'm sorry, I didn't mean ta upset ya. Ya took me by surprise bein' dressed in them breeches."

"To be honest with you" she replied as she tried to get her composure back, "I do feel kind of uncomfortable dressed this way. Pete helped me pick this out. He said if I was going to learn how to ride my horse, I needed proper 'ridin' duds'. So he took me to Link's and this is what we ended up with."

"Yer horse?"

"Jim please, get up off of your knees. Have a seat. Let me put the baby down and I'll tell you all about it."

While Catherine was laying the baby down, Jason went to sit beside Kristine. Catherine returned to the room and sat next to Lawson. She proceeded to tell him about the gift from Pete and what had transpired since breakfast. Lawson smiled as he listened to her story. After she finished, she asked, "Why do you suppose Pete would give me such an exquisite gift? I know he has put a lot of his time, not to mention money or trade goods, into that filly." Lawson sat quietly for a minute as the realization of what was happening occurred to him.

Adele Marie Crouch

“Catherine, I think I finely understand what’s up with Pete. Ya see a couple years back he lost his wife ‘n daughter ta the cholera. It tore him up perty bad.”

As Lawson was talking, Kristine reached down and took Jason’s hand. She rose from the love seat, pursed her lips, put one finger over them, in a motion for him to be quiet and led him out of the room. When they got to the kitchen Jason looked at her funny.

“Wha’s goin’ on?”

“Jason, cain’tcha see, Lawson’s done fell plum head over teapot in love? Let’s go out on the porch fer abit ‘n leave the two uv’em be.”

“Ohhhh,” Jason glanced over his shoulder toward the living room as he followed Kristine out the door.

By the time Lawson finished telling Catherine about Pete’s wife and daughter, tears welled up and she began to cry. Lawson instinctively wrapped his arms around her in a protective gesture. Catherine instantly responded in kind. He held her until she calmed down and stopped crying and then kept his arms around her just a little longer because he liked the feel of it. Catherine got control of herself and realized they were alone in the room. She gently pulled away. “Jim ... I.... Well.... We are unchaperoned and I’m not sure this is proper. For you to be holding me like this I mean.”

Jim got a sheepish look on his face “Scuse me ma’am. I, uh, we got us a tuff sit’ation here.”

“What do you mean Jim?”

“Well, ya got no pa fer me ta ask proper like, so how’em I gonna go ‘bout courtin’ ya? If’n it ain’t proper fer me ta hold ya, how’em I gonna go ‘bout lettin’ ya know how I feel?”

“Oh my. I don’t know. I’m afraid Mums and Papa didn’t discuss these things with us. Do you think Kristine and Jason could help us out here? Or..... maybe we could ask Pete? If what you say is correct and he is feeling fatherly towards me, he might be able to settle this.”

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

“That’s a helluva idee! He’s at the marshal’s office. Lets us git on over there.” Jason and Kristine came back inside just as Lawson and Catherine, hand in hand, were going out the front door.

Lawson rushed into the marshal’s office with a winded Catherine in tow. “Pete, ya gotta help us out here! I wanna court Catherine ‘n she’s got no pa fer me ta ask proper like. She’s feelin’ some outta sorts ‘bout bein’ with me unchaperoned. She lives alone out ta the cabin, ‘n I cain’t take ya with me evertime I wanna go see her. So whatcha think we awta do ‘bout all this?” By the time Lawson finished carrying on, Catherine had nearly gotten her breath back and Pete was doubled over laughing in his chair.

“I’ll be horn swaggled! It worked!”

“Whatcha talkin’ ‘bout ya ol’ geezer? Stop yer damn laughin’ ‘n give us some a’vice.”

Pete continued to chuckle for a few more seconds. He got himself under control, rubbed his hand on his chin, looked Lawson in the eye and said “Wa-ll pardner.... seems ta me the lil’ Missy ‘n ya awta jus’ git ta courtin’. There ain’t a lot a proper folks here ‘bouts ‘n it seems ta me most uv’em jus’ do what comes natural.”

Lawson turned slowly toward Catherine, wondering what her reaction was going to be to Pete’s explanation. Catherine’s eyes got real big, she began to blush and a soft “oh my” came out. Lawson grinned, went down on one knee and taking Catherine’s petite hand in his, looked up at her and said “Miz Catherine I’d be mighty obligen if’n ya’d let me court ya.” Feeling nearly faint and blushing deeply, she nodded her head with a smile. Lawson jumped up, threw his arms around her, lifted her off the ground and swung her in a circle as he shouted “Hallelujah!”

“Jim, for heaven sakes, put me down!”

Pete came out from behind the desk. “Awright ya two love birds, it’s time ta git back ta work. Lawson sit yer butt in that

Adele Marie Crouch

there chair 'n do whatcha do best, paperwork. Missy, foller me on over ta the Blacksmith's 'n let's git back ta trainin'!" With a groan, each one of them did as Pete directed.

Upon arrival at the Blacksmith's, Catherine looked up at Pete then over toward the filly, then back at Pete. "Pete, I really have to give my filly a name. It's quite important, you know, that a member of the family be named. Give me just a minute to think on this before we begin our lessons please."

"Shor thing Missy, if'n it's that 'portant to ya." Pete went into the Blacksmith's, to visit with Parkins, so Catherine could be alone with her filly. Catherine walked up to the horse, leaned her head against the fillies neck and began to pet her as she talked. "You are a very special part of my life now. If all that Jim told me today is true, and I have no reason to doubt it, you are definitely a gift from the heart. You need a lovely name." The filly snorted and nosed Catherine in the back. "I know, I'll call you Princess!" "Pete! Pete come out here and let's get to work! What are you going to do, waste the whole day in there gabbing?"

Pete walked into the corral grinning. "Awright Missy, awright. So whatcha gonna call her?"

"Princess."

"Wa-ll now that's right fittin'. C'mon Princess, time fer a bit more uv'a work out then ya kin rest fer the night."

Pete and Catherine spent the next few hours working. Pete taught her how to turn, stop and start Princess by the movement of her body and the pressure of her legs. Since Princess was already trained, it was just a matter of teaching Catherine what to do. She bounced a lot and had a little trouble keeping her seat, but as the day progressed she got more comfortable with the movement of the horse.

By the time they quit for the day she ached all over. "Pete, I feel like someone has beat on me with a switch!"

"Afor ya know it, ya won' be feelin' no pain 'tall when ya git done ridin'. Jus' takes time fer yer body ta get used ta it."

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
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"Well if you don't mind, I think I will go to the Irish Belle, take a nice hot bath and relax over a good meal."

"Sounds like a good ideer Missy. Ya have yerself a good evenin' 'n I'll see ya in the mornin'. We needta git started first thin' so's ya kin git the hang a this good 'nough ta take Princess on back ta yer place 'n work with her there."

With a groan and a grin she looked up at Pete, "Yes sir." Pete led the filly into the stall, unsaddled her and began to wipe her down as Catherine headed back to Kristine's to get her buckboard and go take a bath.

Catherine located Ruth in the dining room, asked if she would get her bath ready and told her she would be in her room. She sat down on the edge of her bed wanting desperately to lay back and relax. She knew that could be a fatal error. *If I ever lay down I'll never get up!* She had just gotten her fresh change of clothes ready when the knock came at her door. "Thank you so much Ruth, every inch of my body hurts."

"Miz Catherine, are you awright?"

"No Ruth, I've been learning to ride and I feel like someone has taken a switch to me."

"I can help ya with that. Jus' go on ta yer bath. I'll be there directly with some sage."

"Sage?"

"Yes'em, I learnt it from the Osage when I was with the Preacher man. They soak in sage water when there's hurts that ya cain't see."

"That sounds good. I'll be expecting you."

When she returned to her room after her bath, she did feel better, not great, but better. She decided to let her hair hang down, mainly because she just didn't have the energy to put it up. After brushing it until it shined, she went down to have a bite to eat, then went to see Kristine. She had a pleasant visit, played with the baby and returned to the hotel before dark. When she entered the lobby, Lawson was just going into the dining room. *Should I go in and join him*, she thought, *or just go*

Adele Marie Crouch

on up to my room? I don't want to be forward, but I don't want to be rude either? Oh my..... why can't I decide what to do in the simplest of situations?

"Miz Catherine, Jim is in the dining room... alone."

"Thank you Ruth..... maybe I'll join him."

"Yes'em." Ruth smiled as she walked away.

As she closed the door to her room she was glad Ruth had showed up when she did and helped her make up her mind. The evening with Jim had been very nice. They talked about her horse and the technique Pete was using to train her. They discussed the various things she had in her garden and methods of preserving them. He had suggested she purchase a gun before she returned home. She liked the way it felt to know he was concerned about her. The entire evening was very relaxed.

I will stay one more day, get some more training from Pete then I will have to be going home. I have already been in town much longer than I planned. I'm a little concerned about my home sitting out there empty. The note on my table has worked in the past, but I'd still like to get back home.

The new day was brisk, the spring air fresh and there was a smell of rain. After breakfast she hurried to Links and asked, "Do you have a Flintlock smooth bore, Brown Bess 69 Cal.?"

He looked at her with a grin, "Well now Miss Catherine, ya talk like ya know jus' whatcha want."

"To be honest with you Link, Jim told me what I needed to get. I am quite familiar with handling weapons of that sort, however, I can't always remember all the statistics."

"I got jus' whatcha need right here 'n she's a beaut! Try this one on fer size."

"Excuse me?"

"Take hold a her 'n see how she feels."

By the time she left, she was set up with the weapon, black powder, round balls and a very nice powder horn. Link insisted that she had enough credit to cover it all and refused to take any

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
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form of payment. When she pulled the buckboard up in front of the Blacksmith's, Pete was waiting for her.

"I figgered ya'd be a bit sore t'day, so I'm gonna teach ya how ta care fer Princess and let ya do the rest a the beatin' on yer body when ya get home."

"Thank you Pete. You are right, I'm very sore!"

"Pete, can we talk for a minute first?"

"Shor Missy, grab a bail a hay 'n have a set."

Catherine seated herself beside Pete and gazed out the door. Pete watched her quietly. Just about the time he was going to speak, she said "Pete?"

"Yeah Missy, wha's troublin' ya?"

"I've been wondering. Why do the Comanche steal children?"

"Wa-ll now Missy, I cain't say fer shor, but I heerd from some they do it ta build up their numbers. Others say they do it ta replace the young'uns been kilt by the white man."

Catherine sat without saying a word, rubbing the back of one hand inside the palm of the other. Pete watched her, thinking how much like Lawson she was. He knew if he waited long enough, she'd get on with it.

His patience was rewarded as she began to speak quietly. He had to lean closer to hear her. "What will happen to Joseph, and the other children?"

"I ain't never been in a Comanch camp," he replied. "All I kin tell ya is what I heerd from trappers 'n traders 'n the like."

"That will be fine, Pete. I'd like to know what you've heard."

"Wa-ll I don' know how true it would be, but I'll pass on wha' I know. One a the traders what comes ta town ta git supplies says the young'uns is bad spoilt. Says he ain't never seen any of the young'uns touched by older people in the camp. He told a story one night over ta the Crooked Horn 'bout how an older boy had been bad 'n all that happened was he got a good

Adele Marie Crouch

talkin'. Said he couldn't figger why the kid didn't git whooped fer it. I reckon that's jus' the way a things with'em."

"Are you saying children are NEVER reprimanded?" She asked with her eyes wide and a shocked look on her face. "How do they learn to be good, for heaven sake?" She ended with a note of disbelief.

Pete put his hands up, "Whoa! Ain't sayin' that a'tal! The trader says the young'uns gits lots a love. Even when they mess up. They git put in thar place real nice like 'n then git extra lessons."

Catherine's head snapped up, "Lessons? Do the Comanche have schools?"

"Not so's ya could tell. More like the school a certain Missy wound up in, when she found herself alone, out there 'long the river. Difference is, them Comanch young'uns got people 'round what could show'em.

"I see. So life is my school and the world is my classroom. Is that it?"

"I reckon Missy, that there'd be a right nice way a puttin' it. Yes siree, that awta cover it perty darn good, by Joe!"

"This is very interesting Pete. Now that we understand each other so far, what do they learn?"

"Wa-ll now Missy, like I said afor, I ain't never been thar. I sure the hell ain't never walked up ta one 'n as'ed! All I kin tell ya is ..."

"Yes Pete, I know! Now will you get to the point?" Catherine cut him off with an irritated tone.

"Awright Missy! Jus' calm yerself down 'n I'll tell ya what I heerd."

"I'm sorry Pete."

"Wa-ll, the story goes that when the Spaniards come this-a-way, they called them Comanch 'Camino Ancho'. That means 'Wide trail'. On accounta them Comanch cover a lot a territory on both sides a the Rockies. I even heerd tell of a tribe way out west called Apache's; 'sposed ta be dern good fighters. Some

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say them Comanch even give them a helluva run fer thar money."

"Pete." Catherine was getting frustrated. "What does this have to do with what they learn?"

"Missy?" Pete put his hand over Catherine's. "Think fer jus' a minute. If'n them Comanch is gonna travel over that much territory, how ya figger they know how ta git there?"

"Oh Pete, I'm sorry. I guess I'm not being a very good student, am I?"

"S'o.k. Missy, yer worried 'bout yer boy Joseph, that's all."

"I'll try to listen with BOTH ears from now on. O.K.?"

"Sounds good, now whar was I? Oh yeah. S'been said them Comanch been 'round fer over a hundret year, ridin' fer miles jus' ta steal some horses or fetch'em a few more young'uns. That ol' trader says, the boys start learnin' how ta travel fer days without never been whar they's headed afor. Says it's some perty tough trainin', sittin' fer hours whilst some old man with a bunch a sticks shows'em how ta git there. I'm tellin' ya Missy, them Comanch kin travel further, steal more booty, 'n kill more white men then any other tribe."

"You mean all Joseph will learn, is to travel far, steal and kill?"

"I reckon it do sound thata way, don' it? But I promise ya Missy, yer boy's gonna learn a lot mor'dn that! Ain't never seen any man better on a horse then a Comanch. Now this here I seen with mah very own eyes. Them Comanch ride like theys part a that horse. I seen'em hang under the belly whilst the horse was at a full gallop. They kin lean over, ta use that horse fer a shield, whilst they shoot arrows from under it's neck. Ain't never seen the like. They's some damn good riders, by gawd, damn good! One trapper said he was hidin' in the bushes when a bunch a bucks went by 'n he swore they made them horses do wha' they wanted by leanin' over 'n whisperin' in the horses ear."

Catherine grinned, "Now your teasing me, aren't you Pete?"

Adele Marie Crouch

“No Missy, I shor ain’t. That trader, he said it was darn certain true. Since I ain’t seen it, I cain’t say. I shorly cain’t call the ol’ boy a liar, now kin I?”

“I guess you can’t. That would be rude, wouldn’t it?”

“Shor would Missy, shor would.”

“It’s good to know Joseph will be a good rider. That is important out here. Thank you Pete. Do you think we should get to work now?”

They spent the remainder of the morning going over the care of the horse and picking out a saddle and all the other tack she would need. Parkins wasn’t a bit shy about taking payment for the goods and everything was put in the buckboard for the trip. She made arrangements, to stop by in the morning, to collect her horse and went to visit with Tess.

She had a wonderful time. She loved the way Tess was so full of life and laughter. Alice joined them and they all went to the Crooked Horn, “jus’ ta watch the people,” Tess said. Catherine had never gone anywhere and just sat and watched people before. At first she felt a little like a nosey old woman. Then she began to enjoy the antics of others. Alice teased her unmercifully, but Tess came to her rescue and as the afternoon progressed, she realized she was learning a lot about interaction just by watching. When they all separated, Catherine gave each of them a big hug, “I am so grateful to you for the lesson today..... it was wonderful!”

“I never thought uv it like that, but ya shorly are welcome Catherine. It was a bunch a fun, don’cha think?”

“Yes Tess, it was ‘a bunch a fun’. I’ll be leaving first thing in the morning. Please come out to my place if you have some time.”

“I’d love ta. Burke ‘n me’ll plan on that real soon. Ya take care a yerself ‘n keep that man Lawson in line.” She grinned as she walked away.

The excitement of returning to the comfort of her cozy cabin caused Catherine to awaken before daylight. Once she was

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
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dressed she retrieved the carpetbag from the closet and began to fold her clothes and place them inside. *"Such a convenient way to carry your personals,"* she thought. *"It appears to be made of a piece of carpet and this clasp is a very nice touch to keep things from falling out."* She giggled as she was folding her "ridin' duds" remembering Jim's reaction to the way she looked in them. Once all of her clothes were packed and her toiletries were lined up neatly across the top, she latched the bag and let herself out of the room. She left the door ajar so Ruth would know she could prepare the room for the next guest and quietly went down the stairs.

She stepped out onto the boardwalk, took a couple of deep breaths of the fresh morning air and headed for the stables. It didn't take her long to have Spring harnessed up to the buckboard and Princess tied to the back. Her saddle and other supplies were already loaded and secured for the trip. Catherine noticed an addition to the items she had carefully packed the night before and began to laugh. Strapped to the side of the buckboard was a large crate with chickens in it and a big bag of cornmeal inside the wagon. "Now what am I going to do with you?" She asked the chickens. "I guess I'll have to fix up a pen for you and a roost. Fresh eggs!" *I wonder where they came from?* Catherine shrugged her shoulders and led Spring out onto the street, climbed up into the buckboard, glanced back at Princess and headed out of town.

Catherine was happy to be home. It had rained most of the day. Her clothes were saturated, but with the excitement of being home, she didn't care. Spring rains can be bone chilling, so she hurried to get a fire going, change into dry clothes and find something for a quick meal. She again found little gifts of appreciation from traders who stopped by in her absence. This custom was so foreign to her that she had a hard time accepting it. "Such a nice thing for people to do. I wonder who thought of it?"

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When she woke the next morning it was cold and damp. She finished her morning chores, while keeping a watchful eye on the sky. "Looks like it's going to be another wet day Spring, old girl. Maybe I should work on a shelter for you and Princess as soon as I can. I'm sorry, the two of you will just have to deal with the weather for now." She took her saddle into the house, got the saddle soap Parkins sold her, sat down on the floor in front of the fire and began to work the leather like Parkins and Pete instructed her.

She found plenty of things to fill her days. Each night she went to bed tired and with a feeling of accomplishment.

CHAPTER 10

Joseph was adapting well to his new family. When he arrived at the village he was given to a couple whose only child recently died. At four and a half years of age, the adjustment was reasonably easy both for him and his new parents.

He was having some difficulty with the language. His new family would say “Tohobt Nabituh” when they looked at him. He was confused, but decided that must be his name in their language. He would soon learn it meant “Blue Eyes” and was indeed, his name. But with the other children, language was not a barrier. Blue Eyes did not realize that life would be his classroom with these people. He and his peers played great games. They raced up and down hillsides and swam from one side of the river to the other with a stick in their mouth. All of this, of course, was to strengthen their bodies and build their stamina. Every type of game had a reason.

He, like all other Comanche children, started training at a very young age. An unrelated older male trained him. Since this was true of each child, to eliminate the possibility of being too lenient, the training varied somewhat due to individuality. During the summer months, when all the villages came together, the boys were encouraged to form hunting parties. They didn’t go far or hunt any big game, but they learned to work together. Through this interaction, the different methods of training were inadvertently adapted among the group.

Blue Eyes was still a little confused about the method of addressing older men. Most men around the age of his father were called “Uncle.” The older men were called “Grandfather.” The concept, of respect for elders, was lost on him. He would grasp it as he got older. There was one particular Grandfather who worked with him. The old man enjoyed working with him and watching his expressions of joy when he learned something

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new. *This boy will be a great addition to our fighting men*, he thought, as he watched Blue Eyes practicing with a throwing stick. Grandfather liked to sit and watch him. His enthusiasm and unbounding energy was like a breath of fresh air to the old man.

Blue Eyes was given his first pony shortly after his arrival. Both boys and girls began to learn to ride at four or five years of age. They worked hard to become skillful riders. This too, was done by way of games. Races were a daily thing, as well as lifting their peers off the ground, while at a full run or throwing a spear through a hoop. As teenagers and young men, they used these skills in warfare.

A Comanche rider, galloping at full speed, could lean over, to use his horse as a shield, while he shot arrows from under its neck. He could also rescue a fallen friend, by pulling him up onto his horse, while in motion. The Comanche horses were so well trained, in fact, that they responded to spoken and touch commands.

Without realizing this was what was he was doing, Blue Eyes was learning all these skills. His daily games were his lessons. He was given free reign to come and go as he pleased and was never physically reprimanded. He didn't fully understand this, but found he rather liked it.

Since he had a very strict beginning in the Friedbacher family, he was basically a well-behaved child. This was to his advantage in his new home. His new parents were very pleased with their "son" and treated him with kindness. Parents encouraged the qualities of spirituality, pride, and respect for elders, conformance to the tribal code of ethics and to the standard rules of etiquette. Every mother sang instructive lullabies, which included lessons in morals and bravery. Tribal historians taught history, and other elders gave instructions in national loyalty.

One of Blue Eyes' favorite times was the story fire. He would snuggle down in his Mother's lap and watch the

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storyteller weaving a tale of mystery or excitement. Due to his limited vocabulary some of the words were lost to him. But the animation and reaction of the other children was quite clear. During these times, while snuggled up to his mother, he had fleeting memories of another lap. He could see a pretty young lady with long blonde hair and blue eyes, just like his, holding him and telling him stories. He soon got to where the language in his memory was hard to understand and eventually seldom thought of the woman.

Blue Eyes knew he was different from the other boys. His eyes were blue, while theirs were such a dark brown they almost looked black. He had hair as white as snow, compared to the raven black hair of his friends. When he removed his breechcloth to swim or bathe, he saw that his skin, where the sun never touched it, was much whiter than that of the other boys. Yes, he was indeed different. He asked Grandfather about this, but couldn't seem to get his point across or understand fully what he was being told. It soon became unimportant.

He continued to become proficient in the ways of war through games. War was a way of life for the Comanche. Many died at their hands, including travelers heading to New Mexico from Missouri on the Santa Fe Trail. One of these attacks, of course, is what changed Blue Eyes' life forever. He would never know what it would have been like to be a permanent part of the white man's world. He would learn the ways of the Comanche so completely and become such a part of Comanche life that nearly all memories of life with the Friedbacher's would be erased.

Life in the Comanche village was simple. The men went hunting and raiding, to provide for their families. The women worked very hard, but didn't complain. There were times of relaxation and pleasure, such as the story fires. They also had celebrations for their various Spiritual ceremonies. Blue Eyes loved these times. The dancers were so full of energy that he felt a strong wish to be a part of it. The costumes helped to emanate

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a sense of mystery and spiritualism that was not lost on him. He watched everything with an intense desire to learn and understand. These sessions were a great deal of help to him in learning the language.

Blue Eyes often went off alone, into the woods. He practiced the dances, trying very hard to get every move just right. He sat and watched the animals and listen intently to the sounds of nature. He felt a closeness to something when he did this, but he wasn't sure what it was.

When spring came, his village packed up and moved out across the plains. They joined up with other villages who were also moving and soon set up a large camp where they were joined by many of the Comanche who had broken up into smaller groups for the winter. The celebrations were larger, the story fires longer and there were a lot more children for Blue Eyes to interact with. He noticed a few of them were lighter skinned, like him. He wondered about this, but kept his thoughts to himself.

Blue Eyes learned quickly, if he just kept quiet and watched, he would eventually learn anything he wanted to know. He found that he was grateful for the light haired, blue eyed, lady who had taught him to sit quietly and listen. He wasn't sure who she was or why she taught him that, but he was glad she did.

Blue Eyes realized that his uncanny ability to catch frogs was an asset to his popularity. He enjoyed the attention, although he didn't consider it any kind of a special talent. He shared his knowledge with anyone who wanted to learn and noticed he had a good size following when he would go on a frog-catching venture.

The adults enjoyed this immensely, for frogs were quite good to eat. When Blue Eyes headed out, followed by a large number of other children, they knew they would have a tasty meal that night. This made his parents extremely proud and to show their pride they made sure to include a give-away during the meal.

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The Comanche were not a material people. If anyone had a surplus, they shared freely with other members of the village. A give-away was a way of doing this without making someone feel like it was charity. Tabbenoca (Sunrise), Blue Eyes' mother made it a point to make special things from the hides her husband brought in so she would have something nice to give away.

It wasn't long after the villages came together that Grandfather, Tuhani Huhtsu (Black Bird), presented Blue Eyes with a small bow. He measured him and made the bow to fit him perfectly. With the help of other Elders, the lessons began for all the children close to his age. Even the girls became a part of the classes. It was just as important for the girls to become proficient with the weapon. In later years, they too, would need the skills for hunting and protecting the village in the event of an attack when the warriors were away.

Many of the children were better with the bow than Blue Eyes. Still, he practiced with his usual enthusiasm and was just as competitive as the rest. He particularly liked to learn things that involved movement. He loved the running, jumping, swimming, throwing and riding. He had a hard time standing still long enough to concentrate on his lessons with the bow and arrows.

One day Black Bird realized this and decided to teach him to shoot from the back of his horse. Blue Eyes' skill developed quickly, once the excitement of movement was added to his lessons. As spring progressed into summer, his horsemanship surpassed others of his age. It appeared that he was a natural and he and his horse became as one. Some of the other skills were quite difficult for him, but Black Bird knew that everyone couldn't be good at everything and tried to reassure him. Blue Eyes wasn't easily convinced, however, and sometimes brooded over his lack of skills.

One evening Blue Eyes sat at the story fire. He was glad he finally learned the language because the storyteller began to tell

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of man who had only one skill, but he was so good at that one skill that the Spirits smiled on him. As he sat there listening intently, he realized Grandfather was right. He made a vow to get better at what he was good at and stop worrying about what he wasn't. Once he made that decision, life was easier for him. He developed his strong skills and felt comfortable with himself.

Black Bird was pleased that he talked to the storyteller and confided his concerns. He was happy to see Blue Eyes, again, showing his enthusiasm and spreading joy and laughter about the village. He wondered, sometimes, when the boy went off by himself what he could be doing. But Blue Eyes had become so completely a part of his Comanche family that Black Bird didn't dwell on it. He knew that the day would come when the boy would share it with him.

Black Bird watched, one day, as Blue Eyes walked to a knoll, where he could overlook the large encampment and lowered himself to the ground. He knew the child was a thinker. He came to the Comanche village after some of his training should have already been started. Since the training was frequently in the form of games, or around the story fires, Blue Eyes' enthusiasm and inquisitiveness helped him to reach his peers quickly. Children's games were educational, and as such, played a significant role in their development. Play between girls and boys was common, and received strong encouragement by the parents. Parents made little tepees, travois, and weapons, with which the children could imitate the activities of their elders. The entire play scheme became, in fact, the basic pathway over which the child made a smooth adjustment to adulthood.

Blue Eyes did not understand this, any more than the other children did, but his young mind and body was developing exactly according to the overall way of life among Nermenuh (The People). Blue Eyes was developing something else that did not go unnoticed by Black Bird. He calmed down considerably over the last three years. He was a cheerful, happy child. He

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still won his way into hearts and hearths. He had become quieter, however. He watched and listened more in the last couple of months. He went off, away from the others, and thought.

Black Bird knew enough not to concentrate on the boy too hard, lest his thoughts enter the young ones head by mistake.

Blue Eyes looked out over the village with sadness. *Grandfather has explained why The People split into smaller groups for the winter. I understood, but that doesn't mean I have to like it. It has been great fun having so many my own age to play with. I know we will all come back together next spring, as we have in the past, but I will miss them.*

Today his thoughts were also on something that he heard as he walked by the Grandfathers resting in the shade. They were talking about the alliance with the Kiowa. They mentioned some recent raids for horses and captives. Then they started to talk about the war party that left early this morning. The group was going on a revenge strike against a tribe called 'the-white-man'. Blue Eyes listened carefully. 'The-white-man' was a strange tribe. They didn't follow the rules. They didn't raid for booty or horses or captives. They just killed for no reason. They waited until the warriors were gone, then attacked a village and killed everyone. This did not follow the etiquette of the Plains. Even enemies from the north followed the protocol of war. He learned that this strange tribe came from the direction of the rising sun. He made a promise to himself to be very careful to avoid this tribe called 'the-white-man', as soon as he could learn what they looked like.

Then there was the fair-skinned woman who flashed through his mind every so often. She was pretty. She had hair the color of the dried prairie grasses. Her eyes were the color of the sky, just like his. He saw her standing with her head down, looking very sad. Then she would shake her head, smile and turn away. Sometimes she stood with her arms wrapped around a horse. Sometimes she was stirring something in a big iron pot over a

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fire. These flashes of the woman confused him. He didn't understand why he saw her or who she was.

Blue Eyes was much too young to understand. The bond between he and his sister had been so strong that every time Catherine thought of him, a vision of her flashed through his mind. Nor was Catherine aware that she was sending mental messages to her brother.

Blue Eyes decided it was time to ask Black Bird about these things. He rose and went back to the village. Black Bird saw him coming. He also saw the wisdom, beyond his years, in his eyes. Black Bird got a chill as he thought of the way the boy's eyes seemed to look into his soul. *There is something special about that boy*, he thought.

Blue Eyes approached and lowered his head as he sat in front of Black Bird. *How well he has learned*, Grandfather thought, as he reached out and touched a shoulder to indicate he was free to speak. He tried to answer all the questions with complete honesty. Each time Grandfather thought he finished, there was another question. "Blue Eyes, I think it is time for you to join the other children now. I must go speak with your father on these matters. We will talk again soon."

"Yes Grandfather." He was feeling a little frustrated until one of the other boys ran by and touched his head. Blue Eyes knew he just lost at the game of counting coup. Grandfather watched him instantly break into a run, laughing and waving his arms. He smiled at the departing flurry of dust, rose and walked to the lodge of Quinna (Eagle), Blue Eyes' father. "We must speak of Blue Eyes. I have been watching him closely." Sunrise sucked in her breath and got a fleeting look of fear. Black Bird touched her arm in reassurance. "Come let's sit and talk. I have noticed there is something special about this young man. He thinks a lot. He asks questions the other children his age don't ask. He watches and listens. I would like your approval to speak with the Medicine Man about him."

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Both parents sat quietly for a minute. Then Eagle spoke. "Are you sure this is wise Black Bird? He is different, do you think he would be accepted?"

"The Medicine Man is old, he has not yet picked an apprentice. He is a very wise man, I will just suggest he watch and see what he thinks. He will know. I'm sure, if he chooses the boy, there will be some who will protest. There are always some who protest" He smiled at the couple and waited.

"If you believe it should be, than so be it." Eagle replied, with a worried look in his eyes.

After Black Bird left, the couple sat looking at each other. Blue Eyes was a wonderful child. He filled a large void in their lives. But apprentice to the Medicine Man? They finally agreed that it was the way of the Great Spirit to determine the path a life would follow. They did a prayer smoke asking the Great Spirit to smile on their son.

The training continued as the day of separation neared. Speed was a secondary aim in their games. Skill, endurance, daring, and the ability to withstand pain were placed at the top of the list, for each of these developed the qualities necessary for national survival. Therefore, the method of choosing leaders in the games was identical to the method of selecting the ranking men for adult activities. They were chosen in accordance with their demonstrated abilities and their successes in contests.

Blue Eyes wasn't a leader, but he followed well. Like all the other boys, he learned, as a group, to become one. Screech owls, coyotes, wolves, and birds were common to all parts of the Plains. Boys learned to imitate such special animal and birdcalls as were chosen by their tribe to be used for communication with each other while hunting, raiding, or fighting. Blue Eyes loved to watch and listen to the animals. Because of this, he learned to imitate them quickly and proficiently. This was his biggest asset in a group setting.

One afternoon Blue Eyes noticed a gathering of braves and couldn't resist the temptation to watch and listen. The youths

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were seated in a circle. In the center was one of the elders with a bundle of sticks marked with notches to represent days. Commencing with a stick with a single notch, the older warrior placed each stick in succession along a travel line. The end result being a crude map in the dirt which marked the distance to be covered each day. After a stick was placed, the larger rivers and streams, which would be encountered on the next day's journey, were indicated, as were the hills, valleys, ravines, and hidden water holes in dry countries. Every natural object, especially those which were peculiar or easily remembered, was located and marked. Once a given day's lesson was thoroughly understood, the stick representing the next day's march was used the same way. This continued to the end, of however many days, the journey would take.

When the lesson was completed and the group began to disperse, Blue Eyes felt a touch on his arm. He turned and looked up into the face of the Medicine Man. He instantly wondered if he had been wrong to listen in on the lessons of the older boys. He took a step backward. "Come my son, I would speak with you." The Medicine Man turned and walked to his lodge. Blue Eyes dutifully followed, with a knot in his stomach. "Tell me what you learned today." Blue Eyes hesitated a little, but after a few false starts, gave the directions to the raiding party's destination. The Medicine Man listened carefully, watching the boy as he talked. "Thank you, we will talk again. You may go."

He watched the boy as he walked away. He was amazed at the abilities of one so young. *Yes, he thought. I will watch this one closely.*

Blue Eyes was feeling very uneasy as he left the Medicine Man. *Should I go and see Grandfather? Am I in some sort of trouble? I should have known better than to go over where the older boys were!* He chastised himself all the way to the lodge of his parents. Not wanting to interrupt them, he lowered himself to the ground outside the door. Blue Eyes didn't intend

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to eavesdrop, but when he heard his father mention the Medicine Man, he couldn't help himself. His father had seen him with the Medicine Man and came home to discuss it with his wife. After overhearing the discussion, Blue Eyes got worried about his ability to live up to their expectations and quietly raised up and left the area of the lodges.

Blue Eyes went to where the horses were kept. He located his pony and wrapped his arm around the pony's neck. Instantly he saw, in his mind, a fair-skinned lady with blue eyes doing the very same thing. The difference was, she had tears in her eyes. He tried to concentrate on this morning's incident and the discussion his parents were having but kept getting interrupted by the fair-skinned lady. Just as he made the decision to let his life take whatever path the Great Spirit chose and was going to go back to the village, his friends came running up to him. "Blue Eyes, we must hide. A white trader has come to the village and we cannot let him see you."

Blue Eyes didn't understand all the excitement, but went with his friends. They went out across the prairie and down into a dry riverbed where they frequently went to play. Once there, the friends explained to Blue Eyes that the white trader brings wonderful things to the village. But he also looks for members of the village that are lighter skinned then goes back to the white-man and tells them. "That is very bad for our village," Raven told Blue Eyes, "because the soldiers come. They try to trade for our lighter skinned brothers and sisters. When the elders won't trade they sneak into our village like a thief in the night and steal our people."

Blue Eyes looked at Raven with fear and confusion. Raven was his best friend and he knew Raven wouldn't make up stories about something like that. "How long must we wait? Will the trader leave soon?" Blue Eyes asked in a whisper. Raven told him the trader would be there at least today and maybe tomorrow. He explained that the boys would camp out where they were and Raven was going to return to his lodge and get

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them supplies. He instructed Blue Eyes not to leave the hiding place as he left.

Even though Blue Eyes was not alone, the situation caused frightening memories of another time when he was hiding. He was given the same instructions by the fair-skinned lady but left the spot where she told him to stay. He wasn't sure if it was scenes from a terrifying dream or something from his past. He snuggled down in a little cove in the bank of the dry riverbed and forced his mind to the journey of the older boys that he witnessed early in the day. He concentrated very hard on the sticks and the directions given by the Elder. In his minds-eye, he went with the older boys on their exciting trip to a far away place.

Blue Eyes was jolted back to reality when Raven returned with the supplies and the boys began to set up their camp. Due to the fact that part of the "games" while growing up in a Comanche Village involved setting up camps, all the boys, including Blue Eyes at less than eight years of age, were quite adept to handle the task. After there camp was completed to their satisfaction they decided to play at sneaking and spying. They talked over the strategy, based on the information from Raven and snuck into the village to spy on the trader. They were extremely careful not to be seen by any of the Elders lest they find themselves in more trouble than they wanted.

Blue Eyes stopped short when he saw the trader. His mouth went dry, and his heart skipped a beat. He was a horrid looking specimen. His hair was wild, his clothes were filthy and he was the biggest man Blue Eyes ever saw. The trader looked mean and dishonest. When Blue Eyes looked at the trader's face, he noticed both eyes didn't look in the same direction. He quietly backed away and once he was safely out of earshot took off on a dead run for the safety of the camp in the dry riverbed. As he slid down into his sanctuary, he noticed he was gasping for breath, his palms were sweating and his heart was beating so fast it felt like a ceremonial drum in his chest. He made a silent vow

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not to leave this spot until word came from the village that the evil looking person had departed. *If that is what "the-white-man" looks like, I don't want to have to see him again.*

The nightmares that Blue Eyes had that night caused him to wake numerous times clawing the air and soaked with sweat. He dreamt of an entire army of wicked white men, all of who looked just like the trader in the village, grabbing him and his friends and hauling them away into the darkness. It was the worst night of his life that he could remember and he was relieved when daylight took the demons away.

Around midday Raven went to the village so see if the trader was gone. He returned to inform the boys that it was now safe to return. Blue Eyes was apprehensive about returning for fear the trader would still be near. The other boys finally convinced him and they broke camp and went home. Blue Eyes went directly to the safety of his own lodge and remained there for the rest of the day where he sat quietly in his sleeping area thinking about the events of the last two days. His young mind was in chaos and he was unable to unscramble a lot of what he learned. One thing he knew for certain, he wanted nothing to do with the wicked tribe called "the-white-man!"

CHAPTER 11

Catherine found her thoughts going often to Joseph when she sat by the fire in the evenings, or when she was working in her garden. She wondered where he was and if he was doing well. When she felt the tears welling up in her eyes, she forced herself to think of all the things that Pete told her about life in a Comanche Village.

One afternoon Joseph was heavy on her mind and she knew she had to do something to get her mind elsewhere. She went into the cabin, got her papers on her claim and went out to saddle Princess. "Princess, we are going for a ride. You be a good girl while I get some things together." She put her gun in the sheath, placed her bedroll behind the saddle, put carrying baskets with food and other necessary items in them on the saddle horn, slung her bow and quiver over her shoulder and mounted up. "O.K. girl, lets see if we can understand this paper and find the markers on the property." She decided to head east first.

She knew the river bordered her property, so she stayed up on the ridge and kept the river in sight. Before too long she came to the spot where she knew she had gone down to the river and buried her families remains. "Oh my goodness Princess, the grave is on my property!" She turned her horse down toward the river, stepped down, and went over to kneel in the fresh, fragrant grass. "I haven't any flowers to place on your grave, but you are on property that now belongs to me. I will erect a monument for you soon, I promise." She got back on her horse and went on her way. She had a little difficulty locating the first marker, because she wasn't sure what she was looking for. Once she found it she turned her back to the river and continued to follow the directions. By the time she located the next corner, it was getting late so she set up her camp.

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Having done this in the past, during her flight down the river, it didn't take long to have a comfortable campsite arranged to her satisfaction. With a sigh she lowered herself to the ground and leaned against her saddle. Looking out across the prairie she found herself in awe of Mother Nature. Hundreds of beautiful wildflowers with their pretty little heads dancing in the breeze. The sun splashed the sky with an amazing show of colors as it dropped below the horizon. High overhead a hawk soared in the air currents then screamed and dove toward the earth. She sat with her mouth open, holding her breath watching in fascination of such a magnificent creature. She tried to imagine how much force would build up from the time the hawk layed his wings back and began his dive until it actually connected with the prey it had spotted from so high in the air.

Catherine lay back and closed her eyes and wished that by doing so she could freeze the beauty of this moment in mind forever. She took a deep breath through her nose taking in all the fragrant flowers mingled with the fresh prairie air. Mixed with the smells that were so familiar and refreshing was a scent that slightly resembled cucumbers. She wrinkled her nose and opened her eyes. Princess snorted, shook her head, rolled her eyes back and stamped her front feet. Catherine sensed danger and reached out for the bow she remembered to place close at hand. Even though she had never heard a rattlesnake before, she knew the second it's tail began to shake what it was. The hawk that dove past her and snatched the snake up in its talons startled Catherine. She noticed she was shaking as she placed her bow on the ground and rushed to an excited Princess. "That was abit too close, wasn't it girl?" She said as she wrapped her arms around the neck of the horse in an attempt to calm them both.

Once they were relaxed, she prepared her evening meal and sat back to rest. The combination of the campfire and thousands of stars gave her a feeling of euphoria. She had a difficult time going to sleep only because she didn't want to miss one second

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of the beauty of the night. At some point during the calm she succumbed to a dreamless sleep.

The cheerful chatter of a squirrel woke Catherine just as the sun was rising. She prepared a light meal, packed up her gear and continued on her quest. When she completed the journey and returned to her cabin, she was in awe over the amount of land she acquired simply by 'staking a claim'. The outing had been good for her; she felt relaxed and at peace with the world.

She was just putting Princess up when she heard Jim's voice. "Catherine, are ya here?"

"I'm in the lean-to, I'll be out as soon as I take care of Princess." She was excited as she quickly removed the saddle and bridle from Princess. "Nearly two months have passed since I've seen him, Princess, my stomach feels like a nest of moths have taken up residence."

As she stepped into the open, Jim grabbed her in his arms. "Ya look lovely Catherine, Gawd it's good ta see ya!"

She wrapped her arms around him and was surprised at how natural it felt. "I'm glad to see you too. How are things going in town?"

"That's the reason I come out..... well, one a the reasons. Mizurah is now a state! The whole thing got made legal a couple weeks ago. On August tenth we became the twenty-fourth state in the Union. Shor am glad it's finely done. I was gettin' plum sick a them dandies!"

She separated from his embrace, "Jim, is this good news?" she asked as she took his hand and they walked up to the porch. They sat down and talked about the status of the state of Missouri for awhile.

Then Jim realized she had an addition to her shed. "Didja build that?" He asked as he pointed toward the lean-to.

"I know it isn't the best carpentry in the world, but yes, I put it up. I used some of the lumber from the wagons."

"Ya did a right good job, yes ma'am, a right good job."

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They visited until it started to get chilly, then went inside and Catherine fixed them something to eat. Over dinner, she told Jim she was just returning from riding her property line when he showed up. "Ya went out alone, spendin' nights out there with no one ta protect ya?"

"Jim, I had the gun you told me to buy and my bow and arrows. I was fine. Besides it was very peaceful, I loved it!"

"Catherine, I guess I'm jus gonna have ta marry ya so's ya won't be doin' foolish stuff like that!"

"Why Jim Lawson, was that a proposal?"

"I, uh, well.... Yeah I guess it was! Now whatdaya say, will ya marry me?"

"Jim, this is rather sudden," she said quietly, looking down at her hands. "Don't things like this usually take longer to happen?"

"Catherine, I don' know nothin' 'bout usual, I jus know I love ya 'n I want ta marry ya."

"I see."

The silence that followed made Jim so nervous he started tapping his foot on the floor. When he couldn't stand it any more, he reached over and took her hand. "Well, ya gonna answer me or leave me sittin' here wonderin' all night?"

"I think I need to talk to Pete."

"What in tarnation fer?"

"Jim, I have no family. I feel like I need a father right now. Please humor me and let's go into town so I can talk to Pete."

"It's too late now ta leave fer town. How 'bout if we go first light?"

"Thank you."

Lawson was quite flustered when he went to the shed to lay out his bedroll. He looked at Smokey and said, "Women! Strangest creatures the Lord done put on this earth. Nothin' ta do now 'cept humor her. Best get some rest Smokey ol' gal we're gonna be on ar way back ta town at first light." With a sigh he settled in for the night.

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Catherine and Lawson arrived in Independence early in the afternoon. Catherine was amazed at how much shorter it seemed on horseback. It had taken the wagons a full day to travel the distance she and Lawson covered in about 6 hours. The trip was painfully quiet however. Lawson was afraid of saying the wrong thing and Catherine had no idea what to say. She felt a great release of tension when they stopped at the marshal's office to inquire as to Pete's whereabouts.

"Boss Mills says he's over to the town hall; still a lot a excitement over this statehood thing. C'mon, we'll go fetch'em."

"Jim, if you don't mind, I think I will go secure a room at the hotel. Then I'll go visit Kristine and see how the baby is doing. I'll wait for Pete there. You can tell him where I am."

"Oh, I...uh."

"Jim please, I just need a little time to think."

"Shor, awright, I'll take the message ta Pete yer wantin' ta see him. Kin I meetcha at the Irish Belle fer dinner?"

Catherine got a big smile on her face, "Yes, I'd like that. Thank you for understanding Jim. I'll see you this evening."

Jim tipped his hat as she rode away and mumbled to himself, "good gawd awmighty mom, I shor wisht I hadja here!"

Catherine poured her heart out to Kristine. Kristine knew it was best to just let her talk and not interrupt. When Catherine got to the part where she suggested talking it over with Pete, Kristine couldn't control herself and started to laugh. "Kristine, what is so funny?" There was a slight tone of indignation in Catherine's voice.

"Oh Catherine, I'm sorry. It's jus' that yer so wonderful. Lawson's been such a stick in the mud fer so long. Tess 'n I been tryin' fer ever ta git him hitched. Now he's fallen plum loco over ya 'n yer response was ta talk ta Pete."

"I don't see the humor in that, but I know I still have a lot to learn about life in America. I'm sure, someday, I'll look back on all this and laugh, but right now I'm very much at a loss."

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Kristine went to Catherine's side and put her arms around her. As she gave her a hug, she said "Things will be jus' fine honey. Pete'll know what ta do. I'm sorry I laughed atcha, it jus' kinda tickled my funny bone. C'mon now, help me get Jason Jr.'s dinner ready. He'll be wakin' up soon." They spent the rest of the afternoon playing with the baby and talking girl talk.

When Pete and Jason arrived, Kristine took Jason's hand, gave him that look and led him out of the room. Pete sat beside Catherine on the divan, put his hand over hers and smiled. "Wa-ll now Missy, I heerd ya need a lil fatherly type 'sistance."

"Yes Pete, it appears that I do." She explained the situation to him just as she had to Kristine. She expected him to laugh also when she got to the part where she told Jim she wanted to talk to him. Instead he raised an eyebrow and did his famous "Um-Hmm." She cocked her head and frowned. *Oh no*, she thought *that's what he does when he doesn't want to say anything*. Her stomach tightened into a knot and she got a feeling of panic.

Just then Pete started to talk. "Wa-ll now Missy, 'pears ta me ya got no problem 'tall here. Less acourse if'n ya don' love him. Do ya?"

"Pete, this is very difficult for me. You see I've never been alone with a man other than relatives. I'm afraid there were a lot of things that just weren't proper to speak about in my way of life. I know this would be difficult for you to understand, but I never even saw my parents kiss each other. Where I come from it just wasn't done in front of the children."

"Um-Hmm."

Pete continued to question Catherine to understand her feelings. He was also trying to get her to understand exactly how she felt about Lawson. He finally decided the best thing to do was tell her he would be honored to walk her down the aisle, then see what her reaction was. When she began to cry, with a

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smile on her face, he took that as a “yes.” “Wa-ll Missy, does this mean ya plan ta say yes ta Lawson?”

“Yes Pete, if you promise to be there to hold me up!”

“I’d be right pleased ta do jus’ that. I think ya better git on over ta the Irish Belle afor ar man Lawson wears out the floor.”

Catherine’s stomach was full of butterflies and she was shaking so hard when she went into the Irish Belle, she wasn’t sure if her legs would do as they were told. She knew Jim would be at the table in the corner. She took a few deep breaths and unconsciously smoothed her hair before heading in that direction.

“Miz Catherine, welcome. Jim’s havin’ coffee....alone.”

Catherine couldn’t help the smile that came to her lips, “Thank you Ruth, I believe he is waiting for me.”

“He shorly does seem flustered ‘bout sumpthin’. Hope everthin’s awright.”

“It will be soon. Would you bring me a cup of coffee and then give us a little while alone before you come to take our dinner order?”

“Yes’em.”

Thanks to the short conversation with Ruth, Catherine stopped shaking. She stepped around the partition and saw Jim with his chin in his hands, frowning at a full cup of cold coffee. He didn’t even realize she had come up beside him until she spoke. “Jim” at the sound of her voice, he jumped and spilled the coffee. This caused Catherine to jump and let out a little squeal. They both began to laugh at themselves just as Ruth arrived with Catherine’s coffee.

“Miz Catherine, yer amazin’!” She set Catherine’s coffee on the table and walked away shaking her head. She just couldn’t believe how quickly Lawson’s mood changed.

Catherine seated herself across from Lawson. “Jim, if you have no objections, Pete would like to walk me down the aisle.” She felt a little foolish after she said it, but she couldn’t think of any other way to start the conversation. Lawson sat there for a

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second staring at her. "Does that mean....I mean are ya sayin'...Well, is that a yes?"

"Yes Jim, that is a yes." Before Catherine knew what happened, Lawson jumped out of his seat, came around the table and lifted her off the floor. She didn't realize she let out a squeal until Ruth came running in to see what was going on.

"Oh my, I guess yer jus fine!"

Lawson set Catherine down, still holding her around the waist. He turned to Ruth, with a big smile on his face, "Ya bet we are! Catherine 'n me's gettin' hitched!" Ruth instantly began to cry as she went to Catherine to give her a hug.

"Miz Catherine, that's 'bout the best news since Tess 'n Burke." Then she looked at Jim, "Lawson, ya better take good care a her, else I'll have ta wup ya good!"

"Yes ma'am," Lawson bowed toward Ruth grinning.

Ruth punched him in the arm, "Ya stop teasin' me Jim Lawson 'n set yerself down so's I kin take yer dinner order!"

By the time their food arrived, Ruth had spread the news. People came, throughout the meal, to congratulate them and offer little bits of advice. Lady McGraw made her appearance with tears in her eyes and a smile on her lips. She hugged Catherine so tight it took her breath away. Then she turned to Jim and teasingly threatened him if he didn't promise to be an ideal husband. Catherine wasn't sure she liked all this attention, but some of the comments were rather amusing. "Catherine, do ya think Pete told Kristine 'n Jason?"

"I think he probably did, why?"

"Well, if Kristine 'n Jason already know, I reckon we awta git on over ta Tess 'n Burkes. Their feelin's is gonna be hurt if'n we don' tell'em right away."

"Oh goodness, I think your right."

The look on their faces when Tess opened the door told her all she needed to know. "Burke!" She hollered over her shoulder as she stood in the doorway, "Get out yer fancy dud's! I think there's a weddin' comin'." Tess reached out and pulled a very

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embarrassed Catherine in the door. She didn't realize the expression on her face was so obvious. Lawson was pulled in behind her since he still had a hold of her hand. "Awright you two, out with it!" They both began to talk at once looked at each other and laughed. "Dammit Lawson, stop laughin' 'n tell me whats goin' on!"

"The lil lady, she done said Yes!"

The balance of the evening was filled with laughter and plans for the wedding. Tess carried on the way she always does and had Catherine laughing so hard she was crying. By the time Catherine and Lawson left, Catherine's sides ached, her mind was reeling and she was exhausted. They walked all the way back to the Hotel without speaking not due to lack of things to say but because they were each wrapped up in their own thoughts and plans. Jim kissed Catherine on the forehead and they set a time to meet for breakfast.

Over the morning meal, Catherine told Jim she would be on her way home right after they finished. "I have a million things to do and so little time to do them all. You do understand, don't you Jim?"

Jim chuckled and reached for Catherine's hand, "Not 'xactly, but then I never been the groom before. I do remember how Tess flew 'round this town like a swarm a bees though."

"In that case I'm glad I'll be at home because I'm sure she will be much like a whirlwind making preparations for us. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to get my things together so I can get home while there is still plenty of daylight." Jim reached for the back of her chair while sliding his out and standing up. He pulled her chair out for her as she rose and his arms slid comfortably around her waist. He pulled her to him and kissed her, holding her tight. When their lips parted, she gently placed her hands on his chest and pushed. "Jim Lawson you keep that up and I'll never get going!"

Jim took hold of her hand, laughed and said "That's perty much what I had in mind." He walked to the stables and helped

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her get Princess saddled. He kissed her again and told her he would be out to check on her soon. "I love you Catherine, please take care of yourself out there alone." The plea in his eyes caused a temporary knot in her stomach.

"Don't you worry about me, Jim Lawson, I'll be just fine. I have plenty of protection and Princess lets me know if anything is amiss." She smiled, squeezed his hand and gave Princess the silent command to go. As she rode out of town, she looked back over her shoulder to see Jim standing at the door of the livery stable waving. She waved back and pressed Princess into a lope.

So much was going through her mind that for the first time she wasn't even aware of the scenery on the trip back to her cabin. Princess sensed her delima and voluntarily alternated her pace. The trip was over before she knew it.

Catherine's head was in a spin and she was totally exhausted as she took the bridle off Princess and hung it up. She took her bow, arrows and carrying baskets and headed for her cabin. As she started up the steps, she saw Spring lying under a tree "You didn't even welcome us home Spring, are you feeling O.K.?" She went in and emptied her arms. On her way out to remove the saddle from Princess she stopped to greet Spring. As she stepped up beside her, she knew something wasn't right.

Catherine's heart skipped a beat and tears welled up in her eyes. "Oh Spring, you wonderful old mare." She looked her over carefully and saw no sign of injury. The only conclusion she could come to was that Spring died of old age. She sat there beside the old mare, for some time, with tears flowing down her cheeks. The memory of how and why Spring came to her was fresh in her mind. As her tears dropped onto the ragged old hide, she knew she had to keep a part of her faithful friend.

Princess was very skittish from the smell of death by the time she finished helping Catherine roll Spring around to remove the hide and get it into the shed. Catherine fixed a rope, like the one Pete made for Spring, outside the fence. She moved Princess out there in hopes it would be far enough away to get

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her calmed down. She brushed her and rubbed her down the way Pete taught her. She took much longer than usual, both for the need to be close to Princess, and knowing it would help to calm the filly.

Catherine was grateful there was still enough daylight to dig a hole to bury Spring. This was one carcass she did not want the creatures of the wild to feast on. She buried her under the tree where she died. When she climbed the steps to her porch for the last time that evening, it was with a mixture of sadness over the loss of Spring, and excitement over the coming wedding.

It was early when a whinny from Princess woke her. She dressed quickly and hurried out the door to check on her horse. She turned her head in the direction Princess was looking and saw a man walking up to her gate. "Good morning sir," she smiled as she greeted the man while quickly taking in all she could about him.

"Good mornin' ma'am, is the Mr. in?" She didn't want to let this stranger know she lived here alone. She knew it wouldn't take long for him to discover, however, that there was no "Mr."

He looked very tired. His clothes were wrinkled and his hair disheveled. The only weapon he appeared to have was a pistol. He looked to be in need of help. "No sir, Mr. Lawson isn't home at the present time. May I help you with something?"

"Don't know that you could be much help ma'am. Broke a wheel on my wagon. Wife and kids are waiting back on the trail. I don't have another wheel." The way he spoke reminded her of Lady McGraw. He looked sincere and her heart went out to him.

"I see Mr....?"

"O'Neill ma'am."

"I have some wagon wheels over there by the fence. We can put one in my buckboard and take it to your wagon. I would be happy to bring your wife and children back here while you do your repairs."

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“Thank you so much ma’am. Are you sure we won’t be putting you out any?”

“Not at all Mr. O’Neill, please come up to the porch and rest while I get things together.”

When they approached the wagon, Catherine felt a twinge of pity for the O’Neill family. There were seven children, all dressed in clothes that had seen better days. Mrs. O’Neill looked tired and frightened. She smiled as Mr. O’Neill jumped down from the buckboard and ran to wrap his arms around her. He told his wife the news, pointing toward Catherine with a broad smile. With introductions over and the children loaded up, Catherine headed back home. “I’ll bring the wagon on in to your cabin as soon as I get it repaired.”

“That will be fine Mr. O’Neill. Don’t worry about your family. They will be fine at my place until you arrive.”

The children were very well behaved on the ride. Catherine was impressed with their manners. Mrs. O’Neill was friendly, but rather shy. When they arrived at the cabin one of the older children insisted on taking care of Princess. Catherine hesitated at first, but then relinquished the reins.

Mrs. O’Neill complimented Catherine, to the point of embarrassment, on her home. Catherine came to the conclusion that this family was just one of many of the ‘poor immigrants’ Pete and Lawson told her about. Her suspicions were confirmed when Mr. O’Neill pulled in. She could see into the wagon and their supplies were meager.

How can I give them some things, she thought, without hurting their feelings. I know there are clothes that will fit these children in my shed. I’ll invite them to stay the night, then maybe something will come up. “Mr. and Mrs. O’Neill, I’d be happy to have you all stay here for the night. It’s too late now to get far anyway. As you can see, I have plenty of room for you to set up a camp.” Mr. O’Neill looked like he was going to refuse until he glanced at his wife. She had tears beginning to form and a pleading look on her face.

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“Thank you Mrs. Lawson, that’s very kind of you.”

Catherine felt a little uncomfortable with the deception of being married. Knowing it would soon be the truth made her feel less guilty. This caused a genuine smile toward Mrs. O’Neill.

The O’Neills were on their way early. Catherine was pleased she was able to help them. The children were thrilled with their new clothes. Mrs. O’Neill cried a lot and hugged Catherine so tightly she had trouble breathing. Catherine sat down on her porch with a contented feeling of accomplishment. “Now I know I did the right thing bringing all those things back here. That’s why, isn’t it Papa?” She smiled in the direction of the departing O’Neill’s.

Suddenly Catherine remembered the hide she rolled up and put in the shed and jumped up to get it out. She had to get to work on it before it was too late. As she worked the hide, her mind began to go over the events of the last few days.

Kristine had taken all her measurements and promised her a wedding dress so lovely, there would never be another like it. Tess was her usual self, going in fifteen directions at once. Lady McGraw was going to take care of all the arrangements for the reception. Everyone she knew was in on the plans and making the preparations. “Oh my, I wonder if I’ll make it through this without fainting!” The wedding was set for October first. It suddenly struck her that it would be one year from the time she found herself alone. “It seems much longer. So much has happened in the last year. I think I need to take a walk in the woods and let Mother Nature slow my brain down!”

The walk didn’t help. There was so much to do. She had to finish harvesting her garden. She wanted to fix some special carrying baskets for Lady McGraw. She had to come up with something for Tess and Kristine. The exchange of gifts at a time like this was very important to her. She knew there would be gifts for the bride and groom and she needed to be able to give gifts in return. Along with all of this, there would be at least two

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trips to town for fittings prior to the wedding. "Oh my, I feel like I'm in the middle of a hurricane!"

"Catherine! Stop spinning and get to work. You need to get organized. One thing at a time!" She took a couple of deep breaths, planned her line of attack and set to it with gusto. She decided to wait to harvest her garden until she returned from her next trip to town. Link promised her that the jars should arrive soon. What a time that was explaining the canning procedure to Link so he would get her the right product. She remembered the look of complete confusion upon her request.

Since the jars should be arriving soon, she would take the buckboard on this trip. She realized, with a groan, this would slow her down considerably. "Catherine, what's gotten into you? You need to calm down. Oh my God, I'm getting married in a month!" She flopped onto her bed with her arms spread out looking up at the ceiling. The next thing she knew it was morning. She felt calmer and much more relaxed.

After her morning chores were over, Catherine set to work on the gifts. She went to the shed and retrieved two of her finest carrying baskets. With two of the teeth from the mountain lion and some thin strips of leather she fashioned a clasp on each one. Then she mixed some berries with animal fat and proceeded to put pretty colored designs on them. When they were completed she was quite pleased with the result and set them aside for Lady McGraw. Then she went to work crocheting two shawls. A green one with little red rosettes for Tess and a powder blue one with one stars for Kristine. She made belts for all the men and painstakingly burned each one with the name of the recipient. As an afterthought she went to the shed, found a cute pair of baby booties and put blue trim on them for Jr.

It was a full week before she headed into town with the buckboard loaded. She went straight to Pete's. "Evenin' Missy, ya look some frazzled."

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“Pete, I have the buckboard filled with gifts for the members of the wedding party. I need a place to put them so no one will see them. May I leave them here until the wedding?”

“Shor ya kin, Missy. How ‘bout if’n we put ‘em in the barn?”

Together they unloaded all the items Catherine brought. As she was about to get back into the buckboard, she suddenly turned and threw her arms around Pete. “I’m so terribly nervous! My stomach is full of butterflies and my legs feel like jelly. Papa, please, tell me everything is going to be fine.” Pete was momentarily stunned by her use of the word Papa. He could feel her shaking and a tear soaked into his shirt to dampen his chest. At first he was at a loss for words so he just stood there with his arms around her.

“Now, now, Missy. Its perty normal ta be gettin’ the jitters. Yer gonna be jus’ fine. Don’ ya worry none. Ol Pete, he’s gonna be right there with ya.” He patted her back and comforted her and she began to relax.

“I’m sorry Pete, I guess I kind of lost control. I’m O.K. now.”

“Shor ya are” he reassured her as he helped her up into the buckboard.

The entire day was a whirlwind. Cathrine went to the Hotel, secured her room and then walked over to Kristine’s. When Kristine pulled the dress from the closet, Catherine couldn’t believe her eyes. It was the most beautiful dress she had ever seen. Layers of lace from the high waistline flowed down the back to form a train that trailed for about five feet. The neckline was lined with small pieces of abalone shell that sparkled like diamonds. The long sleeves were made entirely of lace. They were puffed at the shoulders and came down to a point across the top of her hands to end just before they touched her fingers. Standing in Kristine’s living room wearing such a magnificent work of art, she felt like the Queen of England. Kristine clucked and fussed and had her turning this way and that way all the

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while pinning and folding. When she was satisfied with the alterations, Kristinie helped Catherine out of the dress and went right to work.

Catherine's next stop was the mercantile. She was thrilled to discover that her canning jars arrived as promised and took them immediately to the buckboard. She then returned to the mercantile in search of shoes that would do her wedding dress justice. She settled on a pair of white heels with lace that was similar to what was on her dress. The laces ran through pearls and tied just above the ankle. "These will make a stunning addition to my attire, Link, I'll take them." She thanked him and asked him if he could have them delivered to Kristine's.

The day had completely slipped away. She missed lunch and realized that if she didn't hurry, she would be late for dinner with Jim. She rushed into the Irish Belle just as Ruth was seating Jim in their private corner. They had a pleasant dinner and Catherine retired to her room. Early in the morning she stopped by the marshal's office, told Jim goodbye and left for home.

The day of the wedding arrived before she knew it. Since there wasn't enough room in the church for everyone who came, the wedding was held outside. She was amazed at the number of people. It looked like the entire state of Missouri had come to the wedding.

Jim's mother's cameo felt warm against her skin as she walked down the aisle on Pete's arm. Pete walked tall and straight. He looked, every bit the proud father. Tess made a lovely Maid of Honor, dressed in a green satin gown that accented her flaming hair. Jim was the most handsome man she had ever seen. Lady McGraw, with the help of numerous ladies from town, put on a reception bigger than the celebration of Statehood. Catherine realized, in the whirl of the affair, she had a wonderful family and they all loved her as much as she loved them. By the time she and her husband were on their way home everything was a blur.

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She leaned her head on Jim's shoulder. "Jim, tell me again the story of this lovely Cameo." As they rode along in the dark Jim told her about the Cameo. She fell asleep on his shoulder feeling safe and loved.

Boss Mills had given Lawson a month off. As Lawson rode across the prairie with Catherine asleep on his shoulder he began to go over the addition to the cabin in his mind. He would discuss it with Catherine. After all they couldn't sleep in the same room they would entertain guests in, now could they?

By the time Jim and Catherine arrived home, Jim decided the 'dog-trot' variation would be very appropriate for their needs. He would definitely discuss it with Catherine soon. For now he needed to help his sleeping wife from the buckboard and into the house. Catherine was so exhausted, when he lifted her and carried her into the house, she only mumbled. Jim wanted to spend their wedding night in town, but Catherine begged to go home. He couldn't resist her when he looked into her pleading, beautiful, blue eyes.

Catherine was shy and had no knowledge in the field of sex. Jim wasn't exactly a man of the world, but he was patient and gentle. Their bond as husband and wife developed into a strong, lasting relationship. The love between them was so deep, that her shyness soon became a thing of the past. After spending some time 'getting to know each other', a daily routine began to develop. It was a few days after the wedding before Jim decided to discuss the addition to the cabin with her.

One afternoon, over lunch, Catherine told him about the visit from the O'Neill's. She explained how she gave away some of the items from the shed and decided that anyone passing by who was in need, should get the same reception. "Jim, I certainly hope you agree. I feel so bad for some of these people. I really want to help them and it would be a way to put all of those items to good use." Jim smiled; he thought of Lady McGraw. If she hadn't made him take so much to the Germans, he wouldn't have needed the spare horse when he and Pete found Catherine. He

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thought about how Catherine told him her Papa said, "everything happens for a reason."

"I reckon that's a darn good ideer. I'm certain shor the news will spread fast. One person in town gits wind a it 'n ever immigrant what comes through will be stoppin' at the Lawson place."

Catherine sat quietly for a minute, looking at Jim with a perplexed look on her face. "Oh my Jim, I..... are you sure? Do you think, maybe, that wouldn't be such a good idea then?"

Jim began to laugh. "Sweet Catherine, I was funnin' with ya. I know word'll git out. We may have quite a few folks stoppin' by. But that don' mean ya gotta be handin' out things ta all uv'em. I know ya kin tell which one's is really in need." He hugged her with a feeling of great pride in his new bride.

"Catherine, there's sumpthin' I been wantin' ta talk over with ya."

"Why Jim, you sound so serious. Is something wrong?"

"A course not. I jus' got this thing goin' in mah haid 'n I wanted ta talk it over with ya."

"Start talking!"

"I been thinkin' we awta add onta the place. Ya know, make it a little bigger 'n git the bedroom somewheres sides in the kitchen." He grinned at Catherine who blushed deeply.

"I guess it would be more comfortable for entertaining guests. How, exactly, did you plan to do it?"

"I been thinkin' maybe a 'dog-trot' awta be the best way ta go."

Catherine got a quizzical look, "A what?"

"A 'dog-trot', it's seems like 'bout the best a all the choices."

"Now it's your turn to 'start at the beginning' Mr. Lawson. I have no idea what you are talking about."

"Well, ya see there's all difernt kind a log cabins. Them people over in Europe, where you come from, they been buildin' em fer hunards a years. The Swedes 'n the Finns was the first ta

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do it here in America. Back in 'bout sixteen sumpthin', up 'round the Delaware they started puttin' up the simple kind. A lot like this'n here is done. Ya see there's a row a logs right on the ground. That's makes a foundation. Then ya cut notches in the next ones 'n lay'em on top. Ya jus' keep a goin' till ya get ta the top." Jim pointed to the roof and smiled.

Catherine nodded her head in agreement. "That makes sense. But I don't see the 'dog-trot' part yet."

Jim grinned, "I shorly did married a lady what's in a hurry ta git ta the point!"

"Stop teasing me and get on with the story." Catherine laughed and punched him playfully in the arm.

"Awright woman! If ya don' beat me ta death, I kin finish. 'Bout a hunerd year ago, these German folk come over 'n started gittin' fancy. They shaped the logs 'n done sumpthin' called 'dovetails'. Don' know 'xactly what that is, but it had sumpthin' ta do with the way they made the notches. Then all kinda folk started comin' up with difernt ones. They got Russian styles 'n French styles 'n even a French-Canadian fur tradin' style. Its nough ta make yer head go round-n-round." Jim grinned and wiggled his head all around, making funny faces. Catherine laughed at his playfulness.

"Anyways, so's ya won't git antsy 'n go ta punchin' on me agin ... one a these styles is called a 'dog-trot'. It's perty simple really, we jus' put a porch 'round the side a the place. Then we put up one more cabin, jus' like this one. When we put the roof on, we bring it over the porch 'n hook it ta this roof. We put a door goin' out a this one onta the porch. We put a door goin' off'a the porch into the other one. Then we kin git from one ta the other without gittin' wet when it's rainin'." He smiled proudly and puffed up a little.

"So what does the dog have to do with all this?"

"Oh, I forgot that part. Anybody what's got a dog. The dog lives on the porch, under the roof. See? A dog-trot."

"Jim," Catherine looked very sad, "we don't have a dog."

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Jim slapped his thigh and began to laugh. "Lets git the dog-trot first, then we'll see 'bout the dog."

"That sounds wonderful Jim. When can we start?"

"I reckon I'll have ta git on it right away, now won't I?"

Catherine pushed her chair back as she was standing up and she smiled, "Yes, I guess you will. I'll clean up from lunch while you get started." Jim was shaking his head and smiling on his way to the shed to get the tools.

Late that evening, a couple of wagons pulled up to their gate. "Hellooo in there."

As Jim went out the door, he started to laugh. "Well Catherine, 'pears the news done spread on the wind!" "Evenin' folks, Welcome."

"Evening sir, my wife's gone into labor and it was too far back to Independence. I saw this road looked somewhat traveled. I was hoping I would find a place we could camp for a couple of days until the baby comes and my wife is ready to travel."

Catherine came out and was standing beside Jim listening to the conversation. "Oh my!" She put her hand to her mouth and grabbed Jim's arm with the other. "Of course you may stay here. Please, bring your wife into the house and we will make her comfortable." Jim smiled, shook his head a little and helped the woman to their bed.

Catherine was no stranger to mid-wifery. She pushed Jim and Carl out the door and set to work on the business at hand. Rebecca saw her husband hesitate for a second. Then another pain gripped her as he allowed himself to be sent outside. Rebecca began to relax when she felt the calm emanating from Catherine. *What a blessing, she thought, for Carl to have found these people.*

Jim and Carl went to the wagons. The Francis children were beginning to set up their camp when the men arrived. Peter, the eldest at 15, had things under control. Carl looked around,

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feeling very helpless. "Lets us go on up ta the corral 'n check on the horses. Looks to be we ain't needed much 'round here."

"Thanks Jim, I do feel abit helpless right now. I am a blacksmith however and I'd be happy to check your horses out for you."

"Right kinda a ya Carl. Don'cha think it's a bit late ta be blacksmithin' now though?" Jim felt sorry for Carl the man looked so lost. After checking on the horses and making sure the children were bedded down for the night, they went to the porch to visit.

Carl was a good blacksmith. He and Rebecca met, married and settled down in Chillicothe, Ohio. They put up with all the politics of Chillicothe being the Capital from 1803 - 1810 and then again from 1812 - 1816. The town grew considerably, which was good for his business, but stifling to his sense of space. The Francis family had done well for themselves. It required two wagons to bring their belongings across country. Carl was extremely proud of his children. He told Jim about a preacher's wife who started a school not far from their place and taught all his children to read and write.

Jim started to laugh. "That preacher's wife..... she wouldn't a been called Florence?" "Yes, she was. How did you know?"

"Well ya been carryin' on so I couldn't a cut in even if'n I'd a wanted ta. I was raised in Chillicothe. Florence was the one done taught me ta read 'n write. Fact is I was her first student. Shor is a small world, ain't it?"

"Indeed it is Jim, indeed it is! Lawson? Your parents wouldn't be John and Marcella would they?"

"Ya know my mom 'n dad?"

"Being the only blacksmith for a number of years, I know just about everyone. Yes, I know John and Marcella. In fact I have some interesting news from home for you. They took in a little girl that lost her family in a fire. I'm pleased to tell you Jim, you have a sister." The first cry of a newborn came to their ears just as Carl spoke the word 'sister'.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

They looked at each other for a minute, then Carl jumped up and bounded in the door. Jim kept his seat. The sound of a newborn cry made him feel a little funny inside. The news of having a sister left him in a bit of shock. He thought of the Francis children, peacefully sleeping just outside his gate. *Good gawd man*, he thought, *ya ain't been married long 'nough ta be thinkin' a kids awready!* Catherine came out the front door, placed her hand on his shoulder and let out a sigh. He looked up into a smiling, tired face. "Mrs. Lawson, ya look plum tuckered out."

"That I am Mr. Lawson, but what a wonderful feeling. Bringing new life into the world gives a person a feeling inside that just can't be explained."

"How 'bout the two a us set up camp under the stars?"

"I'd like that very much."

The Francis family stayed for five days. Catherine enjoyed her role as the doting mother hen. Jim and Carl worked on the addition to the cabin. Peter spent a lot of his time with Smokey and Princess. The other children took advantage of the beautiful fall weather to traipse around in the woods. The fresh dew on the morning grasses tickled their bare feet. The pine gum had the strong smell of the trees and made a mess of their hands. They all laughed and made faces when Jim tried, in vain, to convince them they could chew on it. "It's durn tootin' tasty" he told them. But none were willing to try.

When it was time for them to be on their way, Catherine was sad to see them go. "We really have appreciated your hospitality, but it's a long way to the other side of the Rockies. We need to get on our way."

Catherine looked at Carl as he talked. Frustration overcame her. There was that expression again. *How far was it to the other side of the Rockies?* She shrugged her shoulders as she went to each child in turn to give them a hug. *I'll probably never know*, she thought, *but I guess it doesn't matter now.*

Adele Marie Crouch

A few days after the Francis family departed, Catherine heard a racket outside. As she stepped out the door, she was nearly knocked over by Tess. Tess and Burke, Jason and Kristine and the baby, along with Pete all came to pay the Lawson's a visit. They brought spare tools and food. "Time we jumped in there 'n helped ya make room fer more Lawson's, don' ya think Missy?"

Catherine blushed deeply as she smiled at Pete. "You certainly have a way with words Pete. Welcome."

After all the hugs and the initial greetings, the men set to work helping Lawson with the addition. The ladies began to prepare a feast for the evening meal. When Catherine pulled out some of the jars of the things she canned from her garden, Tess and Kristine stopped dead in their tracks. "Catherine, what kinda 'traption ya got there?"

"I canned my harvest this year Tess, why?"

"Well all be. Ya gotta tell me all 'bout this cannin' business. That's 'bout the darndest thing I ever did see. How 'bout you Kristine? Catherine, yer probably the smartest person I know."

"No, Tess, just raised different. You and Kristine have taught me a lot. I'd say we are all pretty equal, just different, that's all."

"Maybe yer right, yer jus' so full a surprises!"

"It's really nothing," Catherine smiled while walking to the trunk at the end of her bed. "I have a book here somewhere," she opened the trunk and began to dig through it. "Ah, here it is," she turned toward Tess and Kristine, waving a small booklet in the air. "It's all right here. You see," she continued as she returned to the table and sat down, "a little over a hundred years ago some Italian guy, Spallanzani, or something like that, did it first. He sealed meat extracts into glass flasks and heated them. He found out they would last a week or so."

"Catherine," Kristine giggled, "we kin save meat longer 'n that the way we do it!" Tess was giggling also and shaking her head at Catherine.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

“O.K. you two if you are finished having you’re fun, I’ll tell you the rest.” She smiled at each one in turn.

Tess snapped her face into a serious expression, looked at Kristine and winked. “Yeah, there’s gotta be more ta tell. If’n that were all there was, she wouldn’t a put her stuff in jars like that.”

“Thank you Tess.” She lifted the booklet and wiggled it a little. “About a hundred years after this Spallanzani guy gave up on it. A candy maker in Paris decided to experiment with the idea a little. This is his book.”

“Catherine, where’d ya git the book?” Kristine leaned toward her, looking very interested now.

“One day when Mums and Grand-Mama went to town, they found it in the store. It was quite fun when they got home with it, trying new things. The guy who wrote it, Nicolas Appert, worked out a way of canning where food gets packed in glass jars. Then you seal them tight with a cork and put them in boiling water for about an hour.” Catherine held the booklet towards Tess, “I’d be happy to loan it to you, if you like.”

Tess blushed and lowered her head. “Truth is Catherine, I cain’t read good.” She raised her head, got a big grin and piped “but I’d be real happy if’n ya’d teach me!”

“Tess,” Kristine joined in, “that’s a great ideer! Wouldja Catherine?”

Looking from one pleading face to another Catherine smacked her hand on the booklet that was sitting on table and laughed. “I’d be very happy to! This spring, when I harvest the garden, you ladies can come out for a couple of days and we’ll have a canning party.”

When the meal was ready, the men stopped for the day. Over dinner and throughout the evening, they filled Lawson in on what was going on in town. Catherine told everyone about the O’Neills and how her heart went out to them. Jim began to laugh, “yer gonna love this. Catherine’s decided what ta do with

Adele Marie Crouch

all the b'longin's she stored in the shaid. She wants ta give things ta any family what needs it as they come passin' by."

"Wa-ll now Missy, that's 'bout the kindest notion I heerd in some time. Reckon yer Papa would a liked that there ideer."

"Thank you Pete, I have to admit I was a little concerned when Jim and I first talked it over. He made it sound like there would be people lined up for a hand out. Then when the Francis family came in so soon after we talked," she began to laugh, "I was afraid he might be right."

Jason reached over, put his arm affectionately around Kristine and smiled at Catherine. "A little kindness never hurt nobody. I think it's a right nice ideer." All too soon the evening was over. The table was cleared and everyone settled in for some much-needed rest.

It was early when the men, again, began working on the cabin. Catherine fixed Kristine up with a back sling to carry Jr. in and they went for a walk. She took them to the clearing where she killed her first deer. It looked so peaceful with the sun shining through the trees and bouncing off the lovely fall flowers in bloom. Unfortunately they knew they couldn't dawdle too long because there would be four hungry mouths to feed soon. Taking in deep breaths of the fresh air, almost in unison, they let it out with a sigh and headed back. On the way they stopped and cared for the horses. Kristine made a comment on what a great job Lawson did of building the lean-to for the horses to get out of the weather. Catherine blushed when she corrected Kristine with the news that she was the one who built it.

Tess slapped Catherine on the back and laughed, "See what I mean? Yer jus' full a surprises!"

By the time everyone left, the addition was complete and the furniture all rearranged. Catherine liked having the bedroom separated from the eating area. She placed Spring's hide on the floor beside the bed. A tear came to her eye as she put her arm around Jim. "That's a good place for it, don't you think?"

"A right fittin' one, yes sir, right fittin'."

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

"Come out to the shed and help me. There are some pieces of furniture that will fit in the cabin now."

They brought in a love-seat, a couple of chairs and a hutch. "Now, that looks better. It's not so empty in here."

"I reckon now yer gonna be lookin' fer stuff ta fill the hutch."

"Jim Lawson you are a terrible tease." She laughed as she gave him a hug then led him to the love-seat. "Jim."

"What is it? Is sumptin' wrong?"

"No. I just realized. Your time off is almost over. I know you can't make the trip to town and back every day. How is this going to work? I mean with your job."

"It's perty simple. Since I'm a U.S. Deputy Marshal, not a Mizurah State Marshal, my jurisdiction has changed."

"What does that mean?"

"Well, now I start on the West Side a the Mizurah border 'n go west from there. I reckon that means I only need ta go into Independence 'bout onest a week ta make reports 'n git brought up ta date." Catherine liked the sound of that and snuggled into his arms with a sigh of relief. "Course that means Pete might be spendin' more time here, cuz it'll put'em a day closer ta his work."

"That's O.K. We'll build him a cabin!" She smiled, wrapped her arms around Jim's neck and kissed him.

"Um-Hmm!"

With winter coming on, Jim's job didn't require much of his time. He took Catherine with him when he went to pay his respects to the Germans. Catherine enjoyed the visit immensely. She conversed with them in her native tongue. She shared news from her homeland. It was old news, but more recent than most of the settlement had gotten. She became close with Gertrude Von Houten, who promised to come visiting in the spring. There were also promises to help her put her garden in. She left there feeling guilty that she could give nothing in return. "Yer powerful quiet Catherine. Is sumptin' wrong?"

Adele Marie Crouch

“No, not really. Those people are so nice. They’ve offered to come help me. I have nothing to give them in return.”

“Catherine, ya don’ have ta always give back ya know. Ya kin repay gifts from one by givin’ ta someone else. That-a-way it kinda gits spread ‘round some.”

“Oh my, I never thought of it that way. So whenever I give to the immigrants that stop by our place, I’m repaying a kindness from someone else?”

“Shor ya are. Now let’s see that beautiful Catherine smile.”

They went into Independence before going home. Jim did the necessary paperwork and Catherine spent time with Kristine and Tess. She went by Link’s to purchase a few supplies and they had a wonderful meal at the Irish Belle. Lady McGraw was thrilled that Catherine remembered to bring her a couple more carrying baskets. She paid them with a room for the night, just as she agreed.

It was snowing when they started for home. Pete decided, the night before, to go out to their place with them. He followed along behind, wrapped in his serape and mumbling. “Oh no ya don’ Pete! Ya ain’t gonna mumble all the way ta the house.”

“Um-Hmm.”

Catherine looked at Jim and giggled, “This is going to be an interesting day. Yes, very interesting.”

When they got to the house, Pete took care of their mounts while Catherine and Jim unloaded the packhorse. Pete insisted on ‘rustlin’ up the grub’. Catherine and Jim just smiled and started putting the supplies away while Pete prepared the meal. After dinner Pete and Jim discussed the area they would now be patrolling. Catherine listened and threw in a question now and then. They talked about building a corral and various other things they would like to do, weather permitting.

“Wa-ll now Missy, ya think ya could teach an ol’ man how ta shoot that thar bow ya made?”

“Reckon I could, ol’ man. If’n ya reckon ya kin pay ‘tention.” Catherine’s face was twisted funny as she tried to

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

imitate Pete. By the time she had finished, she was laughing. Pete and Lawson were laughing so hard they nearly missed the end of her sentence.

“Missy, ya shor kin throw a body fer a loop ever so often!”
The sparkle in her eyes told Lawson she wasn’t finished yet.

“Wa-ll now thank ya Pete, ya shor did make my day, yes siree, ya shor did.”

One of the things Lawson loved about Catherine was her cheerfulness. She seemed to have a way of making any situation into a happy time. He watched her as she went about her daily tasks. She sang, smiled and danced through the day as if she didn’t have a care in the world. He observed, as time went on, the way she spread her cheer to anyone around her just by being herself.

Pete and Lawson both noticed there was one trunk in the shed that caused Catherine’s mood to change. She always shook her head slightly and put a forced smile on her face as she turned away from it. One day Pete couldn’t stand it anymore and questioned her about it. “Mums saved all of Joseph’s baby things. She said they were for her first Grandson. They are all packed neatly in the trunk you are referring to. Every time I see it, I can’t help thinking of Joseph. You don’t think I’ll ever see him again, do you?”

“Wa-ll Missy, I cain’t say fer certain. But I reckon it ain’t likely.”

“I see.” She turned away and walked slowly over to Princess. She wrapped her arms around the filly’s neck and sighed. Pete knew it wasn’t what she wanted to hear. But he also knew he had to be honest with her.

CHAPTER 12

Just before daylight Jim saddled up, kissed Catherine goodbye and headed into town to report in. Jim and Catherine became so close that she didn't like being separated from him for even an hour. After only two days, Catherine was feeling like a part of her was missing.

"Pete?" Catherine pushed her food around on her plate, like a child in trouble.

"Yeah Missy?"

"How long will Jim be gone?"

"Wa-ll now, that all 'pends on how much paperwork Boss Mills saved up fer young Lawson ta git done."

"I don't understand all this paperwork business. It seems like it is the most important thing Jim does."

"Wa-ll Missy, it kinda is. Ya see, Boss Mills is gittin' short 'n he's a might worried ta be shor everthin' is done up right proper."

"What do you mean 'getting short'? Why is this paperwork so important? And why is Jim the one who does it all?"

Pete pushed his plate back and rested his elbows on the table. "It's all politics, Missy. Ya see back in seventeen and eighty-nine, George, that's President George Washington, he signed a act ta set up law 'n order. Then he 'pointed hisself thirteen U.S. Marshals. These marshals is only 'pointed fer four years. They git ta hire themselves deputies 'n make shor the folks in the area they been 'signed uphold the law 'n such."

"I still don't understand the importance of all the paperwork, Pete." Catherine frowned and pushed her plate back also.

"It's like this. If'n the President don' like the job a marshal be doin', then he jus' puts 'nother one in. Ya see each marshal, he reports direct ta the President hisself. He has ta make shor the reports good 'n clear. If'n the paperwork ain't proper, wa-ll he

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BOOK I

ain't got no job. Boss Mills, he's been here fer little over three year already. That means times 'bout up. When young Lawson come along, jus' after Boss Mills got his 'pointment here, with some good schoolin', why the Boss, he put him in charge a all the paperwork. Ya see, the U.S. Marshal is the local po-lece, but he's got a perty 'portant boss." Pete leaned back in the chair with his arms crossed, watching Catherine.

"What happens if the president decides not to keep Boss Mills for another four years?"

"Most times when a new marshal comes in, he picks his own deputies. That would mean all a us, Jason, Burke, Lawson 'n me'd be out on ar tails."

"Pete, that's terrible! What will you do then? How will Jason and Kristine get by? Tess and Burke are just getting set up in their new place. What will happen then?"

"Now Missy, don' get all 'cited! There'd be lot a ways fer a body ta git by 'round here. It ain't like loosing a hundred eighty dollars a year'd be the end a the world. 'Sides Boss Mills, he's done been a dern good marshal. Lawson's right good at proper writin'..... takes pride in doin' a all fired, bang up job a it. 'Sides all that, I don' think the president is gonna find nobody crazy 'nough ta wanna marshal clear out here. 'Specially since Mizurah jus' become a state 'n all. I figger we all got jobs fer at least the next four year. Even the president ain't dumb 'nough ta put a new marshal in when things is as mixed up as this. Naw ... he'll wait 'til we git it all calmed down first."

Catherine let out a sigh, slumped back in her chair and smiled. "Thank you Pete, I was really concerned. I didn't realize Jim's job affected so many people."

"It ain't nothin' ta worry yer perty lil haid 'bout Missy. We all knowed when we hired on 'bout the four year time limit. Now if'n ya don' mind me 'scusin' m'self from the table, I'll git on down the road ta that "Welcome" arch ya got us puttin' up 'n git ta work."

"Do you think that is a foolish idea, Pete?"

Adele Marie Crouch

“Oh no Missy! I figger it’s a right nice thing ya come up with. Words gittin’ ‘round ‘bout the Lawson place bein’ at the end a the first day outa town. Makes it easier fer the folks passin’ through ta find where ta turn off the trail ‘n find ya.” Pete grinned, walking toward Catherine to give her a hug.

“Pete, I get the feeling you’re laughing at me under that beard of yours!” Pete turned to walk out the door.

“Um-Hmm.”

Catherine smiled and began to clean up the breakfast dishes. She knew Pete would be gone until lunchtime. Tidying up the place, she wondered what she could do to pass the time. She thought of the arch and was pleased both Jim and Pete went along with it. She suggested they put two large poles at the turn off to their place, with a big arch across. The three of them spent days stripping the branches and nailing them into the arch to spell out “Welcome to the Lawson’s”.

“That’s it!” Catherine said out loud. “I’ll take some tools and go down and work on my monument. I can let Pete know where I am on the way. I’ll just fix us a lunch and we can eat down by the river.” She smiled as she prepared a lunch for her and Pete. She was proud of how her monument was coming along. Jim and Pete agreed to let her do it herself and praised her work.

Catherine hummed as she got Princess saddled and loaded up for her trip to the river. Princess flicked her ears and nickered. “That’s right girl — we are going on an outing. You just be still while I pack things up here.” Princess flipped her tail and turned her head to put her nose in Catherine’s back. Catherine laughed as she turned around to hug her. “I swear sometimes I think you know exactly what I’m saying to you.” Princess nodded her head up and down and Catherine laughed again. “Alright, that’s enough playing around. We need to get moving or it will be lunch time before we get there.”

Catherine went over her supplies in her head to be sure that she hadn’t forgotten anything important. *Let’s see now, gun,*

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

ammunition, powder horn, hammer, saw, lunch, nails. “Oh my! Princess, I forgot my bow and quiver!” She hurried back to the house to get, what had become, her favorite weapon. As she mounted her horse, she leaned forward to pat her neck. “This gun I bought is pretty handy, but it only has one shot. I feel a lot safer with the bow. At least I have a chance to get off an extra shot if I need to.” Princess nodded her head up and down and started down the road. Catherine grinned, wondering if the horse really did understand what she was saying. It was a beautiful day and Catherine was happy to be out. It wasn’t long before she got to where Pete was working and let him know where she would be. She vaguely heard the “Um-Hmm” as she went into the trees.

Catherine could smell the river before she got close enough to see it. The birds were singing and she couldn’t resist humming a little tune. The monument was coming along nicely and it gave her a warm feeling of closeness whenever she came to work on it. She talked to her family and the other people buried there while she worked.

The river was lovely this time of day. The rays of the sun danced on the riverbank as the leaves swayed in the soft morning breeze. Catherine could swear the trees were whispering secrets to each other as the breeze blew through them. *Surely there is not a more peaceful place anywhere in America*, she thought as she arranged her tools to prepare for her self-appointed task.

A blood-curdling scream ripped through the air and a deafening growl shook the trees. Catherine’s blood ran cold and a chill crept up her spine. She grabbed her weapons and ran toward the sound. The scream was closer this time and the growl made the hairs on the nape of her neck stand up. “What could be happening?” She asked herself, as she ran along the riverbank shifting her quiver to a comfortable and easily accessible position across her shoulder. Her rifle was primed and she carried it in her right hand as she ran.

Adele Marie Crouch

She rounded a bend and came upon a sight that caused her mouth to go dry and her heart to skip a beat. There in front of her was a bear! On the ground was a man, bleeding and unconscious. The bear raised his head and looked her right in the eyes causing her throat to tighten and sweat broke out on her forehead. There was blood dripping from his mouth. He shook his head and made strange “Hmpf Hmpf” noises. The blood was spraying everywhere. It took a couple of seconds for the severity of the situation to sink in, then she raised her rifle and fired. She quickly dropped the rifle, swung her bow around and notched an arrow. She had fired three arrows into the bear before it dropped to the ground. She stood riveted, for what seemed like an eternity, before she began sinking to the ground, staring at the bloody scene in front of her. The musty odor of the bear, mingled with the strong smell of fresh blood made her nauseated.

“Missy! Missy whar the hell are ya?” Pete came running up with a look of panic on his face. He ran to Catherine, helped her stand and wrapped his arms around her in a protective gesture. “Christ Missy, what the hell’s goin’ on? Are ya awright?” Catherine was shaking all over. She nodded her head and pointed toward the dead bear and the man lying on the ground. Flashes of her dream, over a year ago, flitted through her mind. Reality seemed mixed with fantasy. She shook her head a couple of times. Suddenly, she realized she had “lived” this scene somewhere before. Pete looked where she pointed. His arms fell to his sides and his mouth dropped open. “Oh Lordy Missy, we got us a passel a trouble!”

Catherine looked from Pete to the scene on the ground and back to Pete. She was still numb with shock and was having a hard time getting the last few minutes to sink in. Her senses were clearing and she started towards the man lying there bleeding. “Pete, we have to help that man!”

Pete grabbed her arm, “Hold on Missy! We got a BIG problem here!”

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

"Pete, I don't know what you are talking about, but that man is bleeding badly and we can't just stand here talking. Now let go of my arm and help me!" Pete released her. He was shaking his head and mumbling as they walked over to the fallen man.

"Take your shirt off Pete. I need something to stop this bleeding. Thank God. He's still breathing."

"Don' know if'n that would be a blessin'." Pete mumbled, mostly to himself.

"What did you say?"

"Wa-ll Missy, this here man. He's black."

"Pete, I can see that! I'm not blind you know! Now stop your fussing and help me."

"Um-Hmm".

They worked in silence, with Pete frowning the entire time. When Catherine told Pete to go get the horses so they could transport him back to the house, he jumped up and grabbed her by the shoulder. "Oh no Missy! I cain't leave ya alone here with this man. If'n ya got ta do this, I'll stay put and make a travois, whilst YOU go fetch'em."

Catherine spun around. She was furious over Pete's reaction to this situation. "For heaven sakes Pete. I don't understand what your problem is. I'll be right back!" Watching her walk off with her shoulders squared and her back stiff, Pete felt like he had a rattlesnake in his bedroll!

By the time Catherine returned with the horses, Pete had the badly injured man rolled onto the travois. They hooked him up to Pete's horse and started for home. The silence was deafening and Catherine was getting very annoyed. "Pete, you better start talking! I've never seen you act like this before. You didn't expect me to leave this man out there in the woods? Did you?"

Pete slowly shook his head, "No Missy, I don' reckon I did." Silence again overtook her.

"PETE!" When she yelled at him, he jumped. She felt bad for getting so upset, but he was acting very strange and she wanted to know what was going on.

Adele Marie Crouch

“Wa-ll Missy, Yeah see, this here man is black.”

“Pete, you already said that. I can see he is black. What does that have to do with anything? He is hurt badly and we have to help him.” More silence followed her statement. Just as she was about to yell at him again, he began to talk.

“I reckon this here black man, he’d be a run-a-way. Most likely we could be in a passel a trouble here.”

“What do you mean ‘a run-a-way? And why would we be in trouble for helping someone who is hurt?” She had calmed down now that Pete had finally started to talk. She was still somewhat frustrated over Pete’s reaction and terribly confused. They arrived at the house as she spoke. “Help me get him into the house Pete. I need to doctor his wounds before he gets an infection.”

“Oh no ya don’ Missy. This here black man cain’t be goin’ inside yer house!”

Catherine put her hands on her hips and stamped a foot. “Pete, I’ve had just about enough of this foolishness. Now you tell me what the hell is going on in that head of yours right this minute!” Pete took an involuntary step backwards. The shock of hearing Catherine swear, along with the fire in her eyes gave him a start. He lowered his eyes to the ground and began moving one foot around in the dirt. “Pete, I’m telling you. I’m getting pretty damn mad.”

“Awright Missy, set yerself down here. Ya see, this here man, I reckon he mus’ be a run-a-way slave. If’n the owner comes a lookin’ fer’em, we shor the hell don’ want him ta be inside the house a no white woman, who’s husband is gone. Jus’ ta be on the safe side, we better put’em up out ta the barn with me.” Catherine still didn’t understand but resigned herself to the fact that Pete was not going to take this man into her house.

“Well then why are we sitting here? Help me with him.” She got up in a huff and went to lead the horse to the barn. Pete followed behind her, shaking his head and mumbling. Once they got the man off the travois, Catherine told Pete to build a fire.

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

"I'm going up to the house to get some herbs and bandages. You make sure you make this man comfortable while I'm gone."

"Yes'em Missy."

Pete shook his head again and Catherine could hear him mumbling as she ran for the house. While she was getting things together, she worried about Pete's reaction. She couldn't understand what had come over him. "Well, right now the only thing that matters is to save that man's life. Pete will just have to get over whatever his problem is." She hurried back to the barn and began preparing a poultice to doctor the wounds.

"Missy?"

"Yes Pete?"

"I reckon I better fill ya in on the trouble we likely got here."

"I think that would be an excellent idea. You don't mind if I don't stop while you talk, do you?"

"No Missy, Ya jus' go on with yer doctorin'. But don' get all riled 'n start hollerin' at me agin. I'll jus' be tellin' ya the way it is."

"I'm sorry Pete. I didn't mean to yell at you. I lost my temper."

Pete couldn't help but smile, "I ain't never seen nothin' like it afor! Ya shor did git riled." Pete watched Catherine cleaning and bandaging the wounds. He wasn't sure how to start. Pretty soon he cleared his throat, "This here man, if'n he's a run-a-way, could bring a bunch a folk out this'a way a lookin' fer'em. There ain't no free blacks 'round these here parts. The man what owns him is gonna be right mad when he finds him."

"Pete you aren't making any sense again. What do you mean 'the man that owns him'? A person can't OWN another person. You're talking foolish!" She leaned back and looked over her work. "This cut here is real bad. I need to go get my sewing notions and see if I can stitch it up. I'll be right back."

Pete layed the man close to a support beam inside the barn. While Catherine was gone he tied his ankles together and secured him to the beam. Then he bound his wrists with some of

Adele Marie Crouch

the material left over from bandaging his wounds. He had just finished making sure the slave was secure when Catherine came back.

“What in the name of the Good Lord are you doing? Pete, you untie that man this instant!” She ran over and began to loosen the bonds on his wrists. Pete pulled her back and held onto her, afraid she’d punch him if her hands were free.

“Hold on there Missy. Ya gotta leave this here feller tied up.”

Tears welled up in Catherine’s eyes, “Pete, this man is barely alive. How can you be so cruel?” He loosened his grip on her and lowered his head. With tears flowing down her cheeks, Catherine slowly lowered herself beside her patient and began to stitch the gash in his chest.

She bandaged the wound and turned toward Pete. “I know you must have a very good reason for this Pete. I certainly hope you will make it clear to me. If you don’t, I’ll be untying this man faster than you can blink an eye!”

“Les the two a us go on up ta the house ‘n have a cup a coffee. This ain’t gonna be easy ‘n I need ta set where I kin think.”

“Just let me put a cool cloth on his head and make sure he is comfortable. I’ll be up in just a minute.”

“Missy, I don tol’ ya, I cain’t leave ya ‘lone with this here slave! Now finish up what ya be doin’. I’ll wait fer ya.” Catherine frowned, shook her head and finished with her patient. Pete put his hand out to help her up. There were new tears beginning to well up in her eyes.

“I really hope you can make all this make sense, Pete. I don’t like having to leave this man out here in the barn when he is so badly hurt.”

“B’lieve me Missy, it’s the smartest thin’ ta do.” The two of them walked hand in hand up to the house.

Catherine sat in shock, her mouth open, tears welling up in her eyes, nausea growing and overtaking her. She felt like she

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was about to vomit. Unknowingly, her mind, picturing the horrendous things Pete was telling her.

“Missy, I see that look a growin’. Now ya jus’ calm yerself down ‘n pay ‘tention. I ain’t sayin’ I ‘gree with slavery. I’m only tellin’ ya how it is.” Pete watched her jaw tighten. He glanced at her fists; squeezed so tight her knuckles were white. The tears were about to spill from her soft blue eyes any second. He sat, ready to spring from his chair. He saw the explosion building and was poised to run!

Catherine took a few deep breaths. She glanced at her fists, clenched in anger and disgust. Trying desperately to relax, she concentrated on opening one finger at a time.

Pete sat frozen, watching her every move, afraid the slightest motion would disrupt her attempt to calm herself. As she raised her head and looked at him, the tears won. Her eyes overflowed. Huge gushes rushed down her cheeks like a flash flood crashing down a hillside during a spring rain. Instinctively, Pete jumped to his feet. One step put him close enough to embrace her. She threw her arms around him, her body shook. She swallowed back the gulping sobs that overcame her.

“‘S awright Missy, ya git it all out.” Pete patted her on the back, reassuring her in a soft voice. He felt the shaking lessen. Soon the sobs subsided and she whispered into his shoulder, “Pete, that man, trussed like an animal, in my barn, is a human being.”

“Yes’em Missy, he is, but ya gotta understand, he ain’t a FREE human being.” She brought her arms around from Pete’s back, placed them against his chest and gently pushed away. At her silent request, Pete let her go. He watched her drop to her chair, limp, hurt, frustrated and pale.

“Pete,”

“Yeah Missy?”

“I know there has been slavery for thousands of years. I learned about the Roman Empire and Ancient Greece. But those were a conquered people. It was different. Entire countries were

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won in wars. The inhabitants became the spoils. They worked for their freedom. They had an opportunity to regain their dignity!”

Catherine realized she was getting louder with each word. She placed her hands, palms down, flat on the table, sucked in a huge breath of fresh clean air, then pushed herself into a standing position and slowly let the air out.

Pete sat at the table, staring into a cup of cold coffee, wishing he could turn back time. “If’n I could turn the time back, Missy, ‘n have this mornin’ go away, I shorly would.”

“Could you turn it back a couple of hundred years? Could you stop the greed of those disgusting men who went into the villages of innocent people? Could you keep the ships, whose bellies were filled with the booty of pirates, from ever setting sail? Could you wipe out the market, in the center of town, filled with sick, power hungry Masters, fighting for the right to own these poor souls?” She lowered her head, “No Pete. Not even you, could have stopped the atrocities you’ve revealed to me today.”

“I reckon yer right Missy. The part what nips at my gut now is, I cain’t stop what I gotta do ‘bout that man in the barn neither.” Her jaw tightened. Her eyes shot fire. Her hands, involuntarily, clenched into fists. “Whoa Missy”, Pete put his hands up. “Ya look like a mountain lion ready to spring on a prey. I ain’t the enemy. I done tol’ ya how it is. We gotta turn this man over ta the marshal ‘n we gotta do it quick afor the owner comes a totten a gun!”

Catherine stood for a second, frozen, barely breathing. A huge gush of air escaped her lips, she dropped to a chair and laid her head on her arms. Her voice was almost inaudible when she said, “I can’t do that Pete.”

“Oh Missy, Please.” Pete put his hands on her shoulders, pleading with her to be reasonable.

Catherine lifted her head and turned to face him. Tears, again, flowing freely over her cheeks. “Be reasonable? I’m

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eighteen years old. My family came here from a country gutted by a revolutionary war. We came HERE, to America, the land of the free! My entire family is dead, except myself and little Joseph. Even you admit there's no way to know his true fate. I saw the scars and the raw, open cuts on that man. NO PETE, I will NOT be reasonable!" She hollered and slammed her fist on the table.

"AWRIGHT!" Pete couldn't control his sudden burst of anger. He knew big trouble was on the way and his only back up was a, four-foot ten-inch, female with a bow and arrow. *Don't forget the knife Pete ole man*, he said to himself.

Calmly Catherine looked at Pete and said, "I refuse to return this man to slavery. That's all there is to it. I don't know what I'm going to do, just yet, but I'll figure it out. I need some time to think. You go deal with the carcass of that bear, we can't have all that meat going to waste. And clean up your tools at the arch. I don't want to hear one word about leaving me here alone with him, either."

"But what if'n someone....."

"Anyone coming this way will have to go past you. I'll reload the Brown Bess and keep my bow close at hand. Now get!"

Pete mumbled as he headed for the door, "Lawson's gonna skin me alive ... he shore 'nough is."

Catherine watched him walking toward his horse, shaking his head. She couldn't help but grin. "It's going to be alright, Pete, you'll see."

"Um Hmm," came clearly to her ears while she watched him check the travois and head off down the road.

"First things first, Catherine. It's time you checked on your patient." She went to her horse, grabbed her quiver and bow off the saddle horn, took the Brown Bess out of the scabbard and headed toward the barn. Upon nearing the barn, she could hear moaning coming from inside so she picked up her pace. When she stepped inside she got mad all over again. Her patient was

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soaked in sweat, moaning from the pain and trying to move about. With his arms and legs bound, he was unable to do so.

She immediately went to the pail of cool water setting near by, dampened a rag and began to mop the mans face. She spoke to him, softly not wanting to startle him if he should come around while she was working to cool him off. Once she had stopped the profuse sweating, she started removing the bandages to check his wounds. She glanced periodically at his face to watch for any signs of pain in his expression. After examining the stitches and being pleased with her work, she glanced up, again, at his face. His eyes were open; wide open and he looked frightened. The large whites of his eyes and the blackness of the center momentarily stunned her. She stared for a split second. "It's O.K. The bear is dead and it looks like you are going to be all right. You have nothing to be afraid of. I won't hurt you."

She could feel his breathing increase. He rolled his large, black eyes and looked around the barn. She realized his heart rate was increasing. This worried her. With the intensity of his wounds, she certainly didn't want him to get excited. "Please, relax. No one is going to hurt you. I promise!" He looked back at her and went limp. Catherine quickly soaked the rag and gently placed it on his forehead. She started talking, just to be talking. "I'm sorry you are tied up like this. Pete said if we didn't tie you, that wicked man, who is probably looking for you, would shoot you on sight. I certainly don't want someone to shoot you after I went to all this effort to save you!" She continued to mop his brow, being as gentle as possible. She noticed he watched her every move. "What is your name?" His eyes scanned the room again and came back to her. He didn't say a word. "Now listen. If we are going to work together to get you well. I'd like to be able to call you something besides 'that man'. So I ask you again. What is your name?"

He licked his lips, cleared his throat, looked her in the eye and said "Names Ezra, ma'am. Ize jus' a lowly slave. Why you save my worthless life?"

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“Now you stop that talk this instant! We are going to get one thing straight, right away. You are NOT worthless! You are a human being, just like me. You were hurt and I helped you. Further more, I intend to continue to help you until you are well. Do you understand that, Ezra?”

“Yez’em.”

“Yes ma’am. You will say it correctly, if you must say it!” Ezra’s face broke into a big grin.

He looked at Catherine and said “Yes ma’am!” Catherine noticed the thick drawl was still present, but the lazy way of sliding the words together into one was not.

“You teach Ezra talk good? You help Ezra be better than lowly slave?”

“Yes, Ezra. I will teach you to speak properly. I do not have to help you be better. We have already been through that. Now you relax while I go up to the house and fix you something to eat.”

“Yez...uh yes ma’am.”

Catherine smiled and patted Ezra’s hand. She noticed he jerked his hand, in an attempt to move it. “I’m sorry, Ezra. Does your hand hurt? Did I miss a cut somewhere?”

“NO! White lady not touch, Ezra. Boss man, he beat me. Nigger not get close to white lady.” He was rolling his head around and talking so fast Catherine could barely understand him.

“Ezra!” She raised her voice to get his attention. “Ezra, there is no ‘Boss man’ around here. No one is going to beat you. You didn’t touch me. I touched you. I told you, I wouldn’t let anyone hurt you anymore. Do I make myself clear?” He nodded his head in acknowledgment and closed his eyes.

With a weapon in each hand and her quiver over her shoulder, Catherine went back to the house. After she re-heated the stew, she cut some bread. Once her hands were full with the ingredients of lunch, she realized she couldn’t carry the Brown Bess. Frustrated over this impossible situation, she set

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everything down. She put her bow and quiver over her arm and picked the lunch up again. "This is the most irritating situation I've encountered so far! I wish Jim would hurry up and get home so we can do something about this. Goodness, I wonder what he will say." Catherine continued her conversation with herself until she reached the barn. Not wanting Ezra to think her daft, she stopped talking to herself. She stepped in the door with a smile.

"Now we have a situation. Ezra?"

"Yes ma'am?"

"I think you are quite old enough to feed yourself. The problem is, you can't do it with your hands tied. If I untie you, do you promise not to give me any trouble?"

"Oh yez'em. This nigger, he not give no trouble. This nigger be good nigger."

Catherine lost her temper. "That's enough! I do not want you to refer to yourself as 'nigger' ever again! That is a disgusting slang word for 'Negroid', which designates color. You are a person, not a color. A simple 'yes' or 'no' will suffice." Catherine was untying his hands as she spoke.

"I will have to leave your feet tied. When you finish eating, it would be in your best interest if I retie your hands. Now sit up here and eat this stew."

"Ma'am?"

"Yes Ezra?"

"Waz I sposeta call ya?"

Catherine smiled, "What am I supposed to call you?" She looked at him and waited. He didn't say a word. "Repeat it Ezra." Ezra repeated what she said, between bites of stew. "Very good. You may call me 'Catherine' like everyone else does."

Ezra nearly choked on the food he was trying to swallow. He started to say something. Catherine put her hand up to quiet him. "Ezra, please stop arguing with everything I say. I'm very

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tired and this has been a VERY trying day. I'm in no mood to tolerate it any longer. You will call me Catherine."

"Yes ma'am." He finished his meal in silence. After he had eaten, he lay back down and put his hands up to the pegs he had been tied to. "Ezra ready, Catherine."

Catherine was just finishing with the knots when she heard a sound behind the barn. She quickly signaled Ezra to be quiet, pulled a tarp up over him, grabbed her bow and arrows and silently went out the door. She flattened herself against the wall of the barn and crept around the side. When she heard the sound again, she notched an arrow. She continued to move, silently, in the direction of the sound. Rounding the second corner, she saw movement in the trees.

"Don't move an inch, or you're a dead man!" She took in his appearance quickly, as he froze in his tracks. His rifle was pointed at the ground. He was fat and ugly. His clothes were disheveled. He had a dirty beard and hair. He grinned, one front tooth missing, when he spotted her.

"Afternoon Ma'am." He flashed her an attempted friendly smile. When he started to raise the rifle Catherine adjusted her stance.

"If you even look like you are going to bring that rifle up, I'll put an arrow right through your heart. Now step out, away from those trees, and put that weapon on the ground. I am in no mood for foolishness."

Pete stepped up behind him just as Catherine finished what she was saying. "If'n I was you, Mister, I'd do as the little lady be sayin'. She ain't no perty sight if'n ya git her dander up." The stranger glanced around to see Pete, rifle in hand and decided he'd better comply. He slowly raised his left hand in the air while stooping to place his rifle on the ground with his right. Catherine didn't relax her stance, "that's better. Now who are you? What are you doing on my property? And what do you want?"

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The stranger surveyed his situation quickly, then began to speak. "Beggin' yer pardon, ma'am. I've lost some of my property. I follered the tracks to a thicket a piece back. Saw a good 'mount a blood. There weren't no body. So I scouted 'round abit 'n seen the tracks from the travois. When I got mahself up close ta the house, I figgered I'd kinda look 'round a little afor I come on in."

"Sneaking around is a damn good way to get yourself shot!" As soon as Catherine realized this was the 'disgusting man' she had expected, she was furious. When Pete heard her swear he knew he better jump in quick or she would shoot this man for sure.

"Awright Mister, step on way from that there weapon. Les us go on up by the house 'n have a little talk."

Catherine's eyes shot fire. Pete looked at her, sternly and shook his head. She spun in a half circle and went toward the house. The exchange was not lost on the stranger. He was aware the old man had just saved his life, but had no idea why.

"Whew..... that lil lady — she don' take kindly ta strangers, does she?"

"Les jus' say yer damn lucky I come along when I did. Git movin' now afor she looses her temper."

"Name's Johnson, Calvin Johnson. I'm the over-seer of a plantation in Virginny." He spoke as he walked, feeling very uncomfortable. "The Master, he done sent me ta find hiz run-a-way. I don' spose ya seen no run-a-way nigger 'round these parts lately?"

"Ain't seen no nigger, run-a-way or otherwise. If'n that's what ya be after, ya may as well keep movin' on." Pete knew if this man mentioned his purpose to Catherine, she would be out of control. Trying desperately to think of a way to get rid of him, before he revealed his motives to Catherine, an idea suddenly came to him. "Hold up there, Calvin. I got me 'n ideer. How 'bout if'n ya go on back, pick up yer piece 'n jus' kinda disappear?" Pete was looking hard and cold into Calvin's eyes.

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Calvin felt a tremor, nodded his head and took off into the woods. "Now all I gotta do, is deal with one lil, pissed off, Blue-eyed-blond! Lordy be, I ain't lookin' forard ta this a'tall. No siree, I shor ain't." Pete leaned against the side of the barn, working up the courage to face Catherine. He let out a sigh, pushed himself away from the wall and started walking, slowly up to the house.

Pete felt Catherine's ire the minute he walked into the house. She didn't look at him or say a word. He decided the smartest thing to do was to keep his mouth shut and go back outside where he wouldn't be available for a tongue lashing. Catherine busied herself inside, prepared dinner and ate in silence. Pete took some food out to Ezra and stayed out of Catherine's way for the remainder of the day.

Catherine stared at the ceiling. She felt slightly nauseated. The eerie light of the false dawn, coming in the windows, cast strange shadows on the walls. *Why do I feel puny? True, I didn't get much sleep last night. But my stomach shouldn't be this squeamish just from lack of sleep.* She sat up and swung her feet over the edge of the bed. Suddenly she felt like she was going to vomit. She quickly put her head back on the pillow. "Goodness Catherine, what is wrong with you?" Her voice sounded a little shaky. "Now listen here! Just because you got up a couple of times in the night to check on Ezra, doesn't mean you have the right to be sick this morning!" While she was chastising herself, she was raising up into a sitting position.

"That's much better. Now, you need to quit this foolishness and get breakfast for Pete, Ezra and yourself." She moved slowly as she went about her morning chores, for fear another wave of nausea would overtake her. She was feeling almost normal by the time she headed for the barn. "Pete, breakfast is ready. Would you be so kind as to untie Ezra and help him into a comfortable position so he can eat?"

"Missy I....."

Adele Marie Crouch

“Pete! We’ve been through this already. He is injured too badly to be of any danger to anyone and he can’t possibly eat all tied up like that. Besides, he gave me his word. Now help me out here before his food gets cold.” Visions of her, standing with her hands on her hips and stomping her foot with fire in her eyes, passed through his head. He quickly began to prepare Ezra for his morning meal.

“Ezra, you eat slow now. You’ve been hurt badly and I don’t need you to eat so fast that you make yourself sick. Pete and I are going into the house and have our meal. If you have a need to go out and relieve yourself, please stay out of site and get back in here as quickly as possible. We don’t want anyone to see you before we have a chance to talk to Jim and get this mess straightened out.”

“Yez’em Miz Cathern.”

“Yes ma’am, Miss Catherine.” Pete wasn’t all too happy about the way things were going, but he couldn’t help grinning over the way Catherine was handling the situation. Ezra looked from one to the other lowered his eyes and slowly repeated “Yes ma’am, Miss Catherine.”

The nausea began to return as soon as the first bite of food hit her stomach. She pushed her food around her plate afraid to take another bite.

“Ya awright Missy?”

“Pete, what are we going to do about Ezra? Jim should be back any day now and I’m pretty worried about all this. I don’t understand all the laws in America yet and I don’t want to jeopardize Jim’s or your job.”

“Wa-ll now Missy, I reckon ther’d be a way ta straighten it out. Ya see ever thang has a price.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Wa-ll, the way I figger it, the man what owns this here run-a-way jus might be open ta ya givin’em a fair price.”

“Do you mean BUY Ezra?”

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“Calm down Missy! Don’ go gettin’ yer dander up on me agin. If’n ya buy’em, then ya kin do whatever ya please with’em. That’a way cain’t nobody come along and take’em back ‘n you won’t be in no trouble with the law fer havin’em. Ya see?”

“No.....not really, but I’ll give it some thought.”

Pete pushed his chair back and excused himself from the table. As he carried his plates to the cupboard, he said over his shoulder “Ya eat up now Missy. We left a ton a stuff undone yesterday.” She watched him walk out the door and then pushed her plate way. Her stomach was violently protesting what little bit of food she had put in it and she wasn’t about to push her luck. She was cleaning up the breakfast dishes when Pete came in with Ezra’s plate. “How is he feeling this morning?”

“Seems ta be a might better. He looks ta be powerful sore, but ain’t utterin’ a word a complaint.”

“I’ll be out to check his dressings as soon as I get things straightened up in here. Please do not tie him back up.” The pleading look in her eyes caused his heart to melt.

“Awright Missy.”

Catherine finished cleaning up the kitchen, gathered her medicinal supplies and went to the barn. “How are you feeling Ezra?”

“Ize a hurtin’ some, but I ain’t hungry no mo.”

“I’m hurting, but I’m not hungry ANY more.” Catherine corrected while lowering herself to the ground beside him. “I’m going to take the dressings off and take a look at your wounds. This may hurt a little, but I’ll try to be as gentle as possible. You tell me if I hurt you too much, O.K.?”

“Yez....ah yes ma’am.”

“That’s very good Ezra!” Pete smiled, winked at Ezra and walked out of the barn.

“Ezra, do you mind if I ask you a few questions while I work?”

“No ma’am.”

Adele Marie Crouch

“Good, if you are thinking of other things while I’m doing this it may not be quite so uncomfortable.” She gently removed the dressing from the area she had stitched and began to apply an herbal poultice. She saw him wince at her touch. “How much did this man in ‘Virginny’ pay for you?”

“Don’ know ma’am. He jus tell Ezra he pay too much for worthless nigger like me.”

Catherine cringed when he again referred to himself as a “nigger”, but decided to let it pass this time. “I want to help you, you know that, don’t you?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Pete and my husband are U.S. Deputy Marshals and Pete tells me I could be in a lot of trouble with the law over this.” She felt him start to shake and looked up to see his eyes wide and little beads of sweat forming on his forehead. “It’s alright Ezra, relax. Pete was explaining to me that the only way I can help you is to buy you from this man. Is that true?”

“Ezra don’ know nothin’ ‘bout the law ma’am. Ezra jus know Masah Canon im – po - tent man in Virginny. He done send the overseer lookin’ alrady. I heerd’em out yonder when you ‘n Pete made’em go away. Overseer Johnson, he’s gonna come back. He don’ like Ezra.”

“Well, that’s quite a speech. But it doesn’t help me much. I don’t know what an ‘overseer’ is, I have no idea where ‘Virginny’ is and I’m completely at a loss as to HOW to buy you. There now, I’ve got your wounds taken care of. I want you to move around some today but don’t tire yourself out. Do you understand?”

“Yes ma’am. Ma’am?”

“Yes Ezra?”

“You ain’t gonna tie me back up?”

“No Ezra, I’m not. I don’t believe I have any reason to fear you and if you are tied you won’t be able to hide or warn me if that Johnson man shows up again.”

“Ma’am, what you want I should do?”

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS
BOOK I

“Do?”

“Yes ma’am. If Ize yo slave I needs ta do whatever I told.”

“You are NOT a slave Ezra! The only thing I want you to do is rest. You can move around a little so you don’t get stiff, but I don’t want you to DO anything that will open those wounds back up. Is that clear?” Catherine spun on her heels and stomped off to the house not even giving him a chance to answer.

“Pete, are you going back out to work on the arch?”

“No Missy, thought I’d stick ‘round close. Maybe help ya with gettin’ all that bar meat taken care a.” The minute the smell of the bear hit her nostrils the nausea won out and Catherine ran for the railing to vomit. Pete was at her side in seconds. “Missy!” He held her arm until the dry heaves stopped and then helped her to a chair.

“I don’t understand what is wrong with me. I woke up feeling rather puny this morning. Then when I tried to eat breakfast it came back. Now, as soon as I smelled that bear, it just got the best of me. I’ll be all right, just let me go in and lie down for a few minutes.”

“Let me help ya. ‘N don’ ya worry none, I’ll be right here if’n ya need anythang. You jus holler.”

“Thank you Pete, I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

Pete helped Catherine to the bedroom and then went out to find Ezra. “Ezra, I need ya ta help me out some if’n ya be feelin’ up ta it.” Ezra looked at Pete, not exactly sure how to respond. He wasn’t used to being asked and didn’t really know what was expected of him. “The Missy, she’s feeling rather poorly ‘n we got all this here bar meat what needs ta be taken care a so’s it don’ spoil. I’d be abligin’ fer ya ta give me a hand.”

He looked at Pete, then lowered his eyes to the ground. “Ezra don’ know nothin’ ‘bout taken’ care no bar meat. Ize been workin’ in the fields all mah born days.”

“Wa-ll now, I reckon it’d be time ya learned then!”

“Yezsah masah Pete.”

Adele Marie Crouch

“Aw now, don’ be givin’ me no fancy titles, jus get on out here ‘n give me a hand. I kin show ya what it is I need ya ta do.” The two men began butchering and hanging the meat. Pete warned Ezra not to work too hard and take a chance of messing up all Catherine’s hard work to save his hide. He told Ezra how fired up she got over the situation and said, “I promise ya this, ya don’ wanna go getting her dander up. No siree, ya shor don’”

When Catherine came out, after her short nap, she found them both sitting under a tree. She noticed the drying racks were partly filled and there were two knives on the porch.

“How ya feelin’ Missy?”

“Much better Pete. I truly don’t know what came over me, but I’m all right now. I see you two have been working quite hard while I was being lazy. You didn’t let Ezra overdo did you?”

“No Missy, but he shorly is a good worker. Yes siree he shorly is!”

“Well, I can take over now. Ezra, I want you to go get some rest.”

“Ize doin’ fine ma’am. Masah Pete, he don’ let me work too hard. Ize gotta earn mah keep.”

“All right, but if you start to hurt or get tired I want you to rest. Is that clear?”

“Yezem...ah Yes ma’am.”

She cut a nice hunk of meat and went back inside to get it started cooking for dinner. When she returned she found both of them back to work. Ezra had started a fire in the pit, put some nice cuts of meat on a spicket and was slowly turning it so it would smoke evenly. Pete was slicing strips and hanging them to dry. She had grabbed her herbs and went over to Ezra. “This is sage and rosemary, rub them on the meat as it smokes and it will make it tastier and help to preserve it.” Ezra reached for the containers with a rather puzzled look. “Here, let me show you.” She gave him a quick lesson and left him to attend his portion of the job.

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BOOK I

Her task would be the hide. Pete had lain it out for her since it was extremely heavy. She was very grateful she would not have to deal with the brains today. There was a considerable amount of work to be done on the hide before that step was required. The three of them carried on a pleasant conversation as they all attended to a self appointed task. Catherine periodically corrected Ezra on his pronunciation and grammar. But for the most part let the conversations flow comfortably. Pete smiled occasionally, grateful that she wasn't giving him English lessons as well.

Catherine insisted that Ezra join them at the table for dinner, in spite of protests from him. "You have worked as hard as the two of us have today. You deserve to sit at the table and eat comfortably. Now that is the end of this discussion! Both of you get washed up for dinner."

Pete put his hand on Ezra's shoulder and shook his head. "Best not ta argue none with the Missy, she gets a bit riled if'n ya do. We'd be wise ta jus' git ourselves washed up 'n go eat like she said."

That is VERY good advice Pete, she thought, as she went into the house.

The following morning Catherine went through another bout with nausea upon wakening, but got it under control and they all went back to the task at hand.

Jim arrived to find them resting in the shade of the tree. "Jim! I'm so glad you're home. You are not going to believe what happened." Jim did a quick scan of the drying racks, the hide stretched in the front yard and the meat smoking on the pit. When his eyes came to Ezra, he stopped dead in his tracks. His mouth dropped open and he turned to Catherine as he raised his arm to point in the direction of the run-a-way slave sitting by the fire pit. "Wha.."

"Jim please" Catherine ran up to him, put her arms around his neck and stretched up to kiss him lightly on the cheek. "Come sit down, Pete and I have something to explain to you."

Adele Marie Crouch

"I think you have a LOT to explain!" He dropped into the chair on the porch, still staring at Ezra who had lowered his head and was shaking slightly while still slowly turning the meat.

Pete and Catherine, alternately, told the story of the new arrival. Jim was beginning to relax until they got to the part when Calvin Johnson arrived. Fire sparked in his eyes and his hands balled up into tight fists.

"S awright Jim, the Missy done sceert the tar right outta that there Johnson fellar. He lit outta here like his pants was afire." Pete was grinning from ear to ear and Jim felt his temper calming down.

After the explanations were over and Jim had questioned Ezra, he sat back and thought quietly for a few minutes. "Well, I never heerd a this Canon feller, but I know where Virginny is. My gawd man, how'd ya git so fer 'n not git caught 'r kilt?"

"Ezra jus' run 'n hide 'n run 'n hide. I still be runnin' cep fer that bar don picked me up 'n tossed me 'round some."

"Durn sure lucky fer him that the Missy was close by! Shorly do wisht I coulda seen it. That thar bar had one round from the Brown Bess 'n three arrows in it by time I could get to it. Poor ol' thang didn't stand a chance!"

It was early in the morning when Jim and Catherine began preparing for the trip into town. "Ezra, Catherine 'n me's goin inta Independence ta discuss things with Boss Mills. I want ya ta stick close ta Pete 'n help'em with the chores while we're gone."

"Yesah masah Jim." Being called "Master" gave Jim a start. He was about to say something when Catherine called out that she was ready to leave. He shook Pete's hand "Ya make sure nobody comes up ahind ya while ahm gone, ya here?"

"Ezra 'n me, we'll be watchin' each others backs. Don' ya worry none 'bout that!"

Jim swung up on Smokey and pulled in beside Catherine who was sitting proudly on Princess trying desperately to hide the fact that she was fighting back the usual morning nausea.

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As Pete waved them off he noticed the sickly look on her face. He turned to Ezra, slapped his arm up on Ezra's shoulder, grinned and said, "Ezra, I got a feelin' the Missy jus' may come home with the news that she's gonna be a mama!"

CHAPTER 13

Jim and Catherine walked into the marshal's office just as Boss Mills was tacking up a wanted poster. "Whatcha got there Boss?" Jim asked.

"Man named Johnson come in this mornin'. Said he tracked his run-a-way all the way from Virginny. Offerin' a ree-ward fer anyone what brings 'em in."

Catherine's eyes shot fire and she clenched her fists. Jim quickly jumped in front of her, put his hands on her shoulders, looked right into her eyes and as he slowly pushed her backward said "Catherine, sit down on the bench 'n stay calm. Ya let me handle this," Jim told Boss the story while Catherine sat on the bench with tears flowing down her cheeks.

"Oh Lordy, that man Johnson was perty het-up. Don' know how we awta go 'bout this. Reckon ya better send the missus over ta Kristine's or Tess's afore we go lookin' fer 'em." Boss Mills was all too aware of how Catherine's temper could start a range war and wanted to be sure she was nowhere around when they found Johnson.

Jim took Catherine over to Kristine's, he decided it was best to keep Tess out of this for now. When they arrived he gave Jason a run-down on the situation, kissed Catherine and reassured her everything would be just fine. Jim and Jason went back to the marshal's office to get Boss Mills because they had no idea what Johnson looked like. The three of them went out in search of Johnson and found him at the Irish Belle having a bite to eat.

Boss Mills flipped a chair around, straddled it and looked at Johnson, "Mind if'n we join ya?"

Johnson looked from one to the other and shook his head. Jim and Jason flipped their chairs and joined the table. By the time the discussion was over, Johnson agreed to sign a paper

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turning Ezra over to Jim for a fee of \$500. The men shook hands and Jim agreed to meet Johnson at the bank to take care of the paperwork.

Boss Mills went back to the marshal's office to take down the poster. Jason and Jim went to Jason's place to let the girls know how things went and get Catherine. Jim held Catherine's hand as they walked down the street. "Now Catherine, ya gotta promise me ya won't skin this man Johnson alive when we get ta the bank."

Catherine smiled sweetly, "I'll be good, I promise. You just promise me that when we leave that horrid man will have no ties on Ezra."

When they walked into the bank, Jim could feel Catherine tense up the second she spotted Johnson. "Catherine, ya promised", he whispered. He could feel her loosen up a little and was relieved. They walked over to Mark's desk and pulled up three chairs. Jim made sure he seated Catherine on the opposite side of him as Johnson. It didn't take long to get the paperwork completed and the money handed over to Johnson. Johnson thanked them, tipped his hat and rushed out of the bank.

Everyone got together at the Irish Belle for dinner and laughed at the way Johnson lit out of town like a scared rabbit. Catherine made the comment that she needed to see the doctor before they left to go back home. Jim got quite upset and wanted to know if she was O.K. She insisted that she was fine, she just wanted to be sure she was doing all the right things with Ezra's wounds. Kristine grinned and winked at Jason who sat there very confused.

Jim was still in shock over the news that he was going to be a father when he and Catherine arrived back home. Boss Mills promised to assign Jim to menial tasks that would not keep him away from home for more than a day until after the baby arrived. Tess and Kristine promised to come out and help when the time was close for delivery. Lady McGraw was thrilled and promised her assistance also, whenever she was needed. Ruth started to

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cry and carried on so, that Catherine couldn't understand her at all. After all the fuss that was made over her, Catherine was relieved to be back home.

Pete and Ezra helped with the supplies that Catherine and Jim brought back from town. They decided to take advantage of the trip to stock up on a few things. Since there was a child on the way now, they purchased a milk cow. Catherine insisted on another horse so Ezra wouldn't have to be on foot if he went to help Pete with anything that was not within walking distance of the house.

Shortly after they returned, work was started on two cabins, one for Pete and one for Ezra. With the addition of new stock, Catherine refused to let them continue to sleep in the barn. It was bad enough that they had to sleep with the chickens. Ezra was having a difficult time understanding just what his position was and was shocked when he realized that one of the new cabins was for him. Jim and Catherine explained that they reached an agreement with his previous owner and showed him the paperwork that released him to Catherine. "I would burn these papers right in front of you Ezra so you would know that I don't OWN you, but if I do that we can't prove that no one else does. I'd like very much for you to be a part of our family, just like Pete, for as long as you want to stay here. If you ever want to leave, you just tell me and I'll find out what to do to make it legal. Is that O.K. with you?"

"Yes MA'AM, Miss Catherine! YES MA'AM!" Catherine saw a hint of tears glistening in his eyes.

Everyone settled into a comfortable routine. Fences began to go up, corrals were built and the arch was finished. One evening, while everyone was relaxing on the front porch, Catherine smiled at Jim and asked, "Jim, can we name our place?"

"Didja have sumpthin' in mind?"

"How does The Lazy L Ranch sound?"

Jim giggled, "kinda like we sit on ar butts a lot."

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Ezra put his hand to his mouth so he could cover the grin that he felt coming up and Pete slapped his knee and began to laugh. "Now you guys quit!" Catherine said with a grin as she punched Jim, playfully, on the shoulder.

"Wa'll now Missy, it sounds right fine ta me...it shorly does."

"Yes-sum Miss Catherine, sounds real fine."

"Two out of three isn't bad. Jim?"

"Awright, awright, you win."

"Thank you! Now, Jim, would you be kind enough to go to town and get Tess?" Catherine looked from one to the other of them, very calmly, stopping last with her eyes locked on Jim.

Jim jumped to his feet, knocking over his chair in the process. "Good gawd, Catherine is it time?"

"Relax Jim, I'm just having some tightening and I've noticed the baby has dropped rather low. I think we need to get ready for a little excitement around here in the next day or two." While Catherine sat calmly in her chair all three men scrambled around trying to remember who was supposed to do what. Catherine began to rock her chair as she smiled.

"Gentlemen! We've been over this a thousand times. Ezra, would you go saddle Jim's horse?"

"Yes-sum Miss Catherine...right away!"

"Why me? Why do I have to leave you at a time like this? I should be..."

"Now Jim, I told you, I don't want you hovering over me like a mother hen. You go into town and get Tess. I'll be fine until you get back." Jim looked like a whipped puppy, but he began getting his gear together for the trip into town.

"Pete, would you get the trunk from the shed? We need to get the clothes and other items out and get them washed and aired out."

"Ar ya shor ya want the clothes outta THAT trunk Missy?"

"Yes Pete, I'm sure."

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Ezra came up leading Jim's horse and looked rather confused by the discussion going on between Pete and Catherine. All of them knew better than to argue with her, so Jim mounted up, said his good-byes and headed for town. Pete and Ezra went to the shed to retrieve the trunk she asked for and Catherine closed her eyes with a smile.

After the two men set the trunk up on the porch, Ezra went about filling the tub and getting ready to help Catherine launder the clothes for the expected new arrival. Pete mumbled to himself as he walked along beside Ezra. "Pete, quit that mumbling! You knew, long ago, that these items were going to be used for our first born."

"Yes Missy, but ya jest git real strange 'n distant when ere ya get near that thar trunk."

"I'll be fine, don't you worry." She waited until the men were out of sight and then walked over and layed her hand on the lid. She closed her eyes and saw Joseph running across the prairie with the frog in his hand, grinning from ear to ear. When she felt her throat start to tighten, she shook her head and slowly reached down and lifted the latch. The old trunk creaked as the lid raised and a tightening went across her abdomen. "You just relax in there, little one. It isn't time yet."

The nursery had been completed weeks ago. Everything was ready except the things in the trunk. The cradle, that the men spent hours sanding and carving, was a work of art. Catherine spent the evenings making blankets and quilts to fit it perfectly. There was also a lovely crib, since the baby would quickly outgrow the cradle, which had been made with as much care and love. Ezra carved so many toys out of wood that everyone began to tease him about leaving some wood for the stove.

All that remained was the contents of the trunk. Catherine took a deep breath and began removing the articles that once belonged to Joseph. She shook each item and then took them down to the pot of water Pete had set over the fire. Carefully cleaning each piece, she daydreamed of Joseph and all the

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precious memories. She couldn't resist a giggle when she thought again, of him sitting on the bank of the Mississippi with a frog clenched tightly in his little fist. The chore was complete before she knew it and all the clothes for the new baby were hanging out to dry.

It was getting late in the day as Catherine gave instructions to Pete and Ezra on how and what to prepare for the arrival of a new Lawson. She was exhausted when she finally went in to lie down. The tightening in her stomach continued throughout the night and she was nearly as tired when she got up, as she was when she went to bed the night before. By the time Jim returned with Tess, the tightening was becoming pain.

Tess flew in the door with her usual vigor. "Catherine, how are you doing? How close are the pains? Is everything ready?"

Catherine had to giggle, in spite of the pain. "Tess, calm down. I'm fine. Now help me get comfortable and let's get this over with, I have things to do."

It was several hours before it was 'over with'. But little Joseph Allen Lawson was born screaming and healthy. Jim looked like he was the one who had gone through the labor. Pete acted like a typical grandfather and Ezra was amazed at the perfection of such a tiny human being.

"Kristine'll be here tamorra so I kin get on back," Tess said as she layed little Joseph in the cradle. "Lady McGraw says she's gonna send Ruth out ta help ya bit. She's been real busy at the hotel and can't leave herself, but with the extra help she done hired on she can spare Ruth fer a few days."

Catherine was exhausted and very grateful for the help. All she wanted now was sleep. "Thank you, Tess, for everything. I think I just want to get some rest now."

Jim bent down, kissed her on the forehead and told her he loved her. Tess quietly left the room and Catherine drifted off into a much needed, peaceful sleep.

People came and went for nearly a week. Everyone pampered Catherine and spoiled the baby. Ezra greeted

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everyone politely and catered to them with the same kindness he believed Catherine would have. He felt like a part of the family and was pleased with the respect and consideration he was shown in return. Pete tended the animals and tried to keep Jim busy doing chores so he wouldn't be under foot.

The baby was asleep and Jim and Catherine were relaxing on the porch swing. "Jim, I am so glad everyone is gone. I really need to get back to doing things for myself. If I keep lying around, I'll be so lazy I'll never get started again."

Jim put his arm around her, gave her a hug and let out a big sigh. "It will be kinda nice ta have ya back ta yer old self agin. But ya need ta be careful 'n not overdue. The girls'd be skinnin' Pete 'n Ezra 'n me alive if we letcha do too much."

"Evenin' Missy, how ya feelin'?"

"Much too lazy and ready to get back to doing some chores, Pete. Where is Ezra?"

"He's in the barn. That ol' milk cow ya got just decided ta drop a calf. We was all so 'cited bout little Joseph, weren't none a us payin' no 'tention. Didn't even notice. Thought the ol' gal was jus' fat."

Catherine's eyes sparkled and her face lit up. "Oh, Jim, let's go see! This is so exciting. A little calf of our very own." They walked into the barn just as the calf stood up on wobbly legs. It looked at them and then nudged its mom and grabbed a teet. Catherine knelt down and put her arms around the little guy. "What a cute little thing you are. Welcome to the family, Sparky." She looked up at Jim and grinned.

"Now Catherine, ya can't go namein' ever thin fer miles. We're planin' ta get more cattle here soon 'n if'n ya name the lot of'em, people will be splittin' their sides a laughin'."

"Jim Lawson, you quit! This is our first one and I am going to make it a pet."

Pete stood quietly watching. He just couldn't hold back any longer and broke out laughing. "Hold on there, Missy. That thar

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“pet” is gonna be a big bull one a these here days. I don’ reckon its gonna wanna be all that friendly.”

Catherine took her arms from around the calfs neck. Her face turned bright red as she put her hands over her eyes. “Maybe I better go back to the house and tend to Joseph and leave the animals to you men.” She went to the house with the sound of uproareous laughter coming from the barn.

With so much going on at the Lazy L, time seemed to slip away. Joseph took after his namesake in looks and energy. Once he started to walk he wore everyone out on a daily basis. When he was two years old Jim got him a horse. Pete and Ezra worked with the horse for over a month before they felt comfortable with setting Joseph in the saddle. It was a day of excitement. Joseph’s face lit up with a huge smile. He bounced and clicked but the horse stood still until Ezra took the reins and led him around the yard. Catherine watched in silence, feeling somewhat nervous and realizing her little boy was going to grow up much to fast. She placed her hands on her stomach and smiled, happy that she was again with child. Joseph would soon have a little brother or sister to play with. *Maybe then these men will quit spoiling him so much.*

The horse was a blessing for Catherine. When she had work to do outside, she would put Joseph in the saddle, drop the reins and go about her business. Joseph loved being up so high and squealed and laughed loud enough that Catherine was sure he could be heard all the way to Independence. Ezra or Pete walked by occasionally and led the horse a few steps to keep Joseph from getting bored.

Jim purchased a couple hundred head of cattle and hired on another hand. At first Ezra’s feelings were hurt because he thought he wasn’t making Jim proud. Catherine explained that he was to help around the house and with Joseph. Clint, the new hand, was strictly a cattleman and his wife Adrienne was an angel in disguise for Catherine when James Jr. came along.

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James Jr. was a calm, quiet little boy. He occupied himself for hours and very seldom ever cried. He was considerably smaller than his brother seeming to take after his mother. Unlike his brother's soul piercing, crystal-blue eyes his were a golden brown with yellow specks that looked liked the sun had kissed them. Even though he was quiet, he was a happy child.

It didn't long for Ezra to realize that Catherine was right, they had their hands full with the little ones and there wouldn't have been time for Ezra to work the cattle also. With Jim and Pete gone for a week or two at a time doing their job, the extra help turned out to be a much-needed addition to the ranch. Joseph had a way of occupying so much of Ezra's time that he was grateful Catherine had Adrienne to help with the chores and James Jr.

Burt and Jason, along with Tess, Kristine and Jason Jr. showed up shortly after Clint was hired on and another cabin was raised. Catherine picked a spot down the river from Pete and Ezra for the new cabin. She wanted to be sure they were close enough to the river for easy access to water, but far enough from the rest of the cabins for privacy. Adrienne was amazed at how quickly they had a home. She and Clint traveled a lot from ranch to ranch before settling with the Lawson's. She didn't have any friends and found she enjoyed the company of Catherine's friends immensely. The first night in their new home Adrienne cried over having the security she always dreamed of.

An easy routine fell automatically into place around the Lazy L. Joseph picked whoever was most active at the time to follow around and Catherine and Adrienne loved it when he picked one of the men. One evening at dinner Catherine realized two years had passed since Clint and Adrienne became a part of their lives. She decided to have a big dinner to celebrate and to announce that she was expecting again. Pete and Jim were due back any day and she would plan the celebration around their arrival.

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Ezra and Adrienne jumped in to help make the preparations and two days later when Jim and Pete came in everything was ready. When everyone was seated Catherine stood up, "I have an announcement to make. First I would like to thank Clint and Adrienne for your devotion over the last two years." Everyone clapped and Adrienne blushed a deep red. "And I want to express my appreciation to all of you for being such hard working, tolerant members of the Lazy L. I know Joseph," she smiled and bowed her head to her eldest son, "Has been a test of everyone's nerves and stamina." Joseph frowned and everyone else laughed. "I just hope none of you will leave us when the next child comes along." She smiled at Jim and took her seat.

"Catherine," Jim was on his feet so fast that he knocked his chair down, "Is this your way of telling us there is another Lawson on the way?"

"Yes, Jim, I'm afraid so." She said as he threw his arms around her and swung her in the air. The dinner acquired a festive atmosphere and during the course of the meal, Adrienne informed them that she too, was with child. Clint was speechless while Jim, Pete and Ezra took turns slapping him on the back and congratulating him. It took awhile for the shock to wear off and for Clint to join in.

Time simply flew by and before anyone knew it preparations were complete for the new arrivals. It turned out that Adrienne and Catherine were both due at the same time. Ruth and Tess came to help with the deliveries and Kristine showed up in time to help ride herd on Joseph and James. Catherine had a girl and insisted on naming her after Jim's mother. Jim consented on the condition that her middle name be Elizabeth, after Catherine. Adrienne's son was born less than an hour later. They proudly announced the name "Clinton Ezra" which pleased Ezra to the point of severe embarrassment.

The Lazy L was becoming well known as one of the largest cattle ranches in the area. Catherine had built a reputation as the savior of travelers, which made their place a regular stopping

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point. During the months when wagons were headed west, the Lazy L was alive with visitors. A building was constructed near the entrance for repairing wagons and a forge for black-smithing was included. Ezra became extremely adept at the trade and began teaching James as soon as he was old enough to understand. Joseph began to spend more time with Pete, when he was around and Clint during cattle drives. There was a lot of action there and it fit his personality perfectly. Jim didn't particularly want his boys in the law enforcement field so he never encouraged them to go along on the outings. Jim and Catherine discussed this in great detail and even though it didn't give the boys as much time with their father, it was a tremendous relief to Catherine.

Marcella and Clinton, being the same age, were nearly inseparable. Since Adrienne did not have any more children, she loved having Marcella around and Catherine didn't mind sharing. During the summer months 'family' dinners were enjoyed outside under a kiosk the men put up just for that purpose. A large pit was constructed in the center to enable them to cook a half a beef and tables for all the food and guests were situated in an octagon shape around it. It became one of Catherine's favorite places during the winter months after a snow. There was a certain amount of protection from the weather and no walls to block her view.

Life at the Lazy L consisted of a lot of hard work. But it was also rewarding and being situated so close to the main route of travelers, they were the first to get any news coming from the west. Trappers stopped in throughout the season and carried with them reports of new settlements, Indian wars and news for families from loved ones. Occasionally, news of Comanche raids would cause Catherine to think of her brother and wonder what kind of life he had. She tried not to dwell on it and found something to get her mind off the subject as quickly as possible.

The garden was always a good deterrent since it was nearly two acres of everything anyone could think of to plant.

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Catherine had one section she reserved for her herbs. The rest was community space and anytime a traveler came through with something they didn't have, they added it. At first Jim teased her about planting things she had never heard of, but when it came time to harvest and new products were tested on the pallet he began to enjoy the experimentation.

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CHAPTER 14

With fall in the air, the cool breezes were a welcome change. Catherine wiped her brow and went out to the porch swing to relax. She looked around at all the changes in the place since she had arrived. Catherine couldn't believe how quickly the years passed or the changes that took place. The shed that once held the belongings of her traveling companions was now a tack room. Most of the possessions had been given out to weary travelers over the years. The little cabin she was so relieved to see was now twice as big. Down the path where she shot her first deer were two cabins, one for Pete and one for Ezra. Further down the path was Clint and Adrienne's place. The garden was still in its original location. But considerably larger and all the vegetables had been harvested and the winter crop planted.

Pete and Joseph were out mending the fence so this year's calves wouldn't wonder off. They were all branded in the spring with the Lazy L brand but that wouldn't stop someone from roasting one if they were hungry. *My, how Joseph has grown. He has turned into a strapping young man right before my eyes,* she thought. *Goodness I can't believe it has been 12 years!*

Word came in on the last stage that Jim's parents were coming out for a visit. They should be arriving any day now so Jim went into town to get his paperwork up to date. Ezra was down by the river fishing with James and Marcella. Catherine was a little nervous about meeting her in laws after all these years. She so hoped they would like her. Jim was thrilled when she asked if it would be O.K. to name their daughter after his mother and she was anxious for the two of them to meet.

Marcella was a miniature image of her mother. She worshipped her father and both of her brothers. Catherine worked hard over the years to give all the children and Ezra a

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proper education. She ordered books from back east and taught them all to read and write. She insisted they have a good education in "life" as well. Jim taught them all to handle weapons. Pete and Clint taught them to ride and tend the cattle. Ezra shared his carving knowledge as well as teaching James the trade of being a black smith. Of course the training from Ezra was more fun than work and the only one that really showed a talent for carving was James. Catherine reached into her pocket and took out the tiny carving of Princess that James gave her for Mother's Day last year. A tear formed in the corner of her eye as she thought of how proud he was when he gave it to her. "This is your good luck charm," he told her. "You keep this with you always." Every day since then, she made sure she had it in her pocket.

"Hellooo, anybody home."

Catherine slipped the carving back into her pocket, wiped the tear from her eye and stepped off the porch to meet the stranger. "Good afternoon, sir. May I help you?"

"Just a little trail weary. Mind if I rest a spell?" The man stepped down off of his horse and slapped his hat on his leg. Dust flew and he grinned a slight apology.

"Of course not, have a seat Mr?"

"Rowdy. My friends just call me Rowdy." He made a show of looking around and asked, "Where's the Mr.?"

"My husband and the boys will be here soon. They went to mend a fence. I expect them back any time now. Can I get you something to drink?"

"That's right nice a you miss."

Catherine went into the house. She had her back to the door and never heard the man enter. Suddenly her world went black.

"Awright Mr. hotshot lawman. Ya took three years a my life. Lets see how ya feel when ya come home an your pretty little missus is gone." He picked Catherine up like a ragdoll, threw her over his shoulder and went out the door. When he had her secured, he led his horse with the precious cargo out into the

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woods. He retrieved the other mount he had stashed on his way in and headed west.

Ezra, James and Marcella were the first to get back. They yelled and searched and couldn't find Catherine anywhere. Marcella thought it strange that a glass was on the floor. She pointed it out to Ezra and James. James ran out the door, jumped on his horse and headed to where Pete and Joseph were mending fence.

"Pete!" James slid off his horse while it was still in motion. "Mom is gone. There is a glass on the floor in the kitchen and a puddle of water around it. We searched all over and can't find her anywhere."

Pete dropped his tools and told Joseph, "ya best git yer butt inta town 'n git yer paw. I'll go back ta the house with James and see what I kin figger out." Joseph jumped on his horse and lit out for town. James and Pete spurred their horses into a lope to get back to the house. When they arrived Marcella was crying and Ezra was trying to comfort her.

Marcella flew into Pete's arms. "Uncle Pete! I just know something has happened to mother! See the glass there on the floor like it dropped out of her hand? Princess is in the corral and her bow and quiver are hanging right where they belong." Marcella was nearly hysterical. Pete tried to calm her while surveying the situation.

Just then James came in. "There is a spot just outside the yard, under a tree where someone tied a horse. Looks like they led another horse over there with a heavy load and headed out toward the west."

Pete told Ezra to stay with Marcella and followed James into the woods. He looked the area over being careful not to mess up any of the sign. "Yer paw is gonna be a might upset when he gets back, James. Don't be too awful surprised at what he might do."

James nodded his head trying not to cry. He realized Pete was telling him that someone had kidnapped his mother. He

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took the reins to his horse and with his head bowed low, he led it back to the corral. *It just doesn't make any sense*, he thought. *Why would someone take my mother?* When he got into the house, Ezra had calmed Marcella and was reaching down to pick up the glass. "Don't touch that, Ezra. I think we better leave everything just the way it is until dad gets here."

"Yes sir, Master James." Ezra suddenly realized the message that James was sending and reached out to hold Marcella's hand. She looked from one to the other and began to cry again. "Now Miss Marcella, it's gonna be OK. Your paw will be here soon and we'll find your mom. You just stop you're cryin' and don't worry none." He didn't feel as sure as he sounded, but Marcella stopped crying and put her head in her arms on the table.

It was early the next morning before Joseph and Jim returned from town. Pete took him out and showed him the tracks in the woods and Marcella told him they hadn't touched a thing in the kitchen. He stood there, not saying a word, just staring at the glass on the floor. Then he turned and looked at his family, grabbed his hat and went to the barn. When Pete came into the barn, Jim was cinching up his horse. "You 'n the boys stay here 'n take care a the place. Tell Ezra ta pack me up fer travelin' then take Marcella ta stay with Adrienne."

Pete saw the fire in Jim's eyes and chose his words carefully. "Awright Jim. Ya sure ya don' want me ta go long with ya?"

"Thanks, Pete. I wancha ta stay here 'n take care a things. If I needja, I'll send word."

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COMING SOON

CATHERINE'S TRAVELS BOOK II

“LAWSON’S SEARCH”

Watch for it on www.1stbooks.com
Or ask for it at your local bookstore.

CHAPTER 1

Rowdy McGafferty was feeling pretty proud of himself. He managed to avoid the hangmans noose, with the help of a crooked lawyer, for three years. When he was being transported from St. Louis to Lexington, Kentucky his big break came. Two of the prisoners had friends on the outside and their friends planned to break them out. Rowdy just happened to be in the right place at the right time and escaped during the confusion. His first thought was revenge. Now here he was, on a stolen horse with the wife of the man that killed his partner and put him away. He laughed when he thought of the look on that hotshot deputy's face when he got home and found her missing. *I wonder how long it'll take fer him ta figger what happen ta her? By the time he gets hisself together, we'll be half way to the Santa Barbara Mission.*

Rowdy had plenty of time to plan during those three years. He stole and stashed trade goods before he kidnapped Catherine and set up a route that would take him through the Native villages he traded with the last ten years and all the way to the Pacific Ocean. He knew Lawson would have a hard time tracking him as soon as he caught up with the wagons. "Thinkin' ahead's what's gonna give me the edge on ya law man." Rowdy laughed again at his genius and nudged the horses so he could catch the wagon train just a short distance ahead before dark.

Catherine's head was pounding and she felt disoriented. *Why am I rocking? Why can't I move my hands? Why does my head hurt so much?* She opened her eyes and saw the underside of a horse. Her heart starting pounding so hard she was having difficulty breathing. She turned her head so she could see the man ahead of her leading the horse she was tied too. "Who are

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you and what do you want? My husband is a deputy marshal and when he catches up to us you are going to be very sorry!"

Rowdy turned around and laughed. A wicked, evil laugh that caused a chill to go down Catherine's spine. "I wouldn't git too cocky if'n I was you, yer man Lawson ain't gonna be comin' anytime soon. Ya jus keep yer mouth shut or I'll havta gag ya. Ya got that?"

"Um-hmm." Catherine was shocked that this man knew her husband and her head was pounding unmercifully. She couldn't think of any response except Pete's standby. *You have to stay calm Catherine. Maybe if you are cooperative, you can get this man to untie you and put you on this horse properly. At least then you will be able to think and might come up with a way to get out of this.* Just then the horse stopped and Rowdy untied her and flung her off the horse onto the ground. She landed with a thump and felt like she was going to black out again. *Oh no you don't, Catherine, you have to keep your wits about you!*

"Roll over on yer stomach woman so's I kin tie yer hands b'hind yer back." Rowdy gave her a kick and stood over her with a wicked grin as she groaned and rolled over like he ordered. He tied her hands so tight that it hurt, then he grabbed her and tossed her up into the saddle. "I'm gonna truss ya jus like yer ol' man did me." He grabbed her ankle and tied a rope around it then tossed it under the horse's belly. He came around to the other side and tied her other ankle to it. "Now you jus' sit up there like a good little girl or yer lible ta end up under this here horse." He laughed again, went to his horse, mounted and started off through the woods.

Catherine had no idea where she was. She studied the landscape trying to find something that looked familiar. They didn't appear to be on a marked trail, but the man seemed to know exactly where he was headed. She forced herself to stay calm and tried not to move too much. She could already feel the ropes cutting her wrists and knew she was bleeding.

About the Author

Adele Marie Crouch was born in Nevada City, California to Robert and Elizabeth Deschwanden in 1948. Her life's dream was to be an artist. Over the last 30 years, while raising three children, she has sold nearly everything she painted and won many ribbons at County Fairs and fine-art shows.

Adele has been published in Phoenix Home & Garden as well as numerous newspapers for her research on herbal history. She and her husband also owned and published the "Tombstone Independent", a free newspaper "For Tombstone – About Tombstone."

Her eldest daughter, Charlie, while serving in the Marine Corps as a journalist, pestered her continually to write. In August of 1997, Adele sat down in front of the computer Charlie bought for her the previous Christmas and began her story.

Adele brought her relatives to America and then let her imagination run wild. The end result — Catherine's Travels – Book I.

Adele and her husband, Doug, are Realtors® and owners of Tombstone Real Estate L.L.C. in Tombstone, Arizona. The ambiance and history of "the town too tough to die" have been an inspiration to both her artwork and her writing.

Adele is in the process of writing Lawson's Search; Catherine's Travels - Book II, soon to be published. She is the author of a series of children's books, Stories My Grandmother Told Me, also to be published.

