

Bear River

Spirit

Payton Lee

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*“One day the white man will pay for his
atrocities”*

Chief Bear Hunter

Bear River Spirit

“One day the white man will pay for his atrocities.”

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Written in the United States of America

Dedication

I dedicate this book to Pat, my confidant, friend, co-worker, editor, and all around good person. I also dedicate this book to Carol of Stories.com. Both of my friends have encouraged me to continue my sharing the movies of my mind.

I also wish to dedicate this book to you, the reader. It is for you I write. My only hope is that you enjoy the movies of my mind.

I dedicate this book to Moon Dove and my adopted Dove Clan of the Lakota. I dedicate this book to Chief Bear Hunter whose greatness as a northwestern Shoshone chief was eradicated by a violent and horrible act of butchery in the disguise of military action on January 29, 1863.

I dedicate this book to the wandering spirits of the men, women, children, and babies that were slaughtered in the Bear River Massacre. May their crying spirits find rest in the Ghost Trail.

Prologue

I happened upon the story of the Bear River Massacre by accident while researching the Shoshone people. I was appalled that this gross and violent slaughter was lost in history books and few maintain the memories.

In my study of the Shoshone people, I have found them to be family oriented, loving, nurturing, and do not practice violence against or for anyone. It is not in their spiritual beliefs to war or kill. The only evidence of violence has been in the protection of family and home.

We have heard of 'Wounded Knee' and 'Sand Creek', but few people know of or even care about 'Bear River'. The reason for this is that Bear River Massacre occurred during the Civil War. Killing Indians was part of the governmental plan of genocide for the Native American and the Civil War was of more importance at the time.

Today the Shoshone being peaceful people did not try to retake the sacred grounds of slaughter with any type of armed conflict. Instead as they did one hundred and forty years ago still try to comply and use the legal system of the white man whose intent is still to make the Native American people extinct. The 1800's attitude of planned genocide for the Native American population is still practiced. In the new millennium we still take their children to educate them in the white man ways. We still place obstacles for them to practice their spiritualism. We still take away their food, keep them on reservations, deny them civil liberties, give them alcohol and drugs to control them, and even dump nuclear wastes in the backyards of their reservations.

The primary Native American incomes are giving shows to entertain, selling their ancient crafts, making souvenirs, and of course offering gambling casinos. I personally cannot help but feel emotionally this is pure degradation for a noble, peaceful, and spiritual people. The Native American has so much to share with us and help us grow in spiritualism and learn to balance our natural environment without pollution, but we will not listen.

I try to show all Native American peoples in my novels as being what they are, people. My characters will all share emotions of love, anger, hate, and sorrow regardless of their nationality. There will always be good and bad characters of every creed, because that is exactly what we are, good

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and bad. We all make mistakes and we all try to do what is good. It doesn't matter who we are.

When I read the history of the Bear River Massacre I felt compelled to write my own story surrounding it. I hope you will read the story of this fictional family and be touched by it.

Chapter One

November 17, 1860

The gray somber sky added to the sobriety at the gravesite. It was a chilly November day the family and friends of Meredith Woulfe bid her a final farewell. The churchyard seemed completely colorless in grays and blacks while Reverend Steele blessed the coffin of dark mahogany wood.

A six-year-old boy holding his grandfather's firm strong hand placed a white rose on the mahogany coffin. Tears filled his eyes as he looked up to his tall and muscular grandfather. "Grandfather, why did Mother have to leave?" Rory Woulfe understood he would never see his mother again, but he really didn't understand death. He didn't understand that his mother was with angels. He couldn't understand that his mother would rather be with angels than him.

"She didn't want to leave, Rory," Garvey Woulfe answered his grandson. The pain in his grandson's eyes tore his heart in two. He had tried in vain to explain to Rory the tragic accident that took his mother away. Who would have guessed that a political argument at a party would cause the death of a guest? That is exactly what had happened. A violent argument about slavery between Horace Bradley and George McFadden would end in a fight that Meredith walked innocently into. She had been accidentally pushed. Meredith lost her balance and fell down the stairs breaking her neck.

Garvey Woulfe loved his grandson and daughter in law. He had gladly taken them in when Meredith returned from Bear Lake. She had been ill right after Rory was born and Owen sent her back East to recover. Although he disagreed with Meredith and thought she should have returned to his son's side, he never forced her to return. Garvey had loved and taken care of Meredith as if she were his own daughter.

Meredith had recovered and written Owen that she simply could not return to the wild country he so loved. She wanted Rory to grow up with a genteel education and culture.

Although Owen and Meredith wrote to each other and exchanged information and pictures of Rory, their marriage had been strained by the separation. Neither one could understand why the other didn't come home. Neither could understand why the other called a different place home.

"Garvey, will you be coming home with us?" Trevor Stewart asked his lifelong friend. "Reilly wants to spend some time with Rory." Trevor

pulled his daughter into his arms. She had been shivering in the cold drizzle that had begun to fall.

"Yes my friend," Garvey replied softly. "We have things to discuss and I want your help when I write to Owen."

"This was such a tragic accident," Reilly sighed heavily. Tears lingered in her eyes. Meredith had been a friend these past six years whenever she had been home from school. Meredith shared Rory's growing up with Reilly. Reilly helped Rory take his first step. Reilly helped Meredith when she had given Rory his first haircut. Whenever Reilly was at school in Virginia she would purchase a toy or new suit for Rory. They had never spoken about her husband, Owen Woulfe. It was a subject that was rarely breached when they spent time together. "Do you think Owen will return to Maryland?"

"No Reilly," Garvey answered. "Owen is working on our dream of a ranch in God's land."

"I will never understand why he never visited," Reilly said contemptuously. "He missed out on so much. His wife and his son growing!"

"If you knew what needed to be done in Bear Lake," Garvey sighed, "you would understand why he couldn't leave."

"You're right! I don't understand," Reilly choked. She loved Rory so much and treasured Meredith's friendship, she simply couldn't understand why he never came for his wife and son. Tears flowed down Reilly's cheeks. She took Rory's hand. "Let's get into the carriage, Rory. I fear we shall both catch influenza."

Garvey and Trevor walked slowly behind Reilly.

"How do you think Owen will take this?" Trevor asked while watching his daughter help Rory into his covered carriage.

"I have a feeling he'll want his son," Garvey nearly whispered.

"Just like you," Trevor reminisced. "I remember when your sister Sierra died of consumption. You had Owen brought into our camp. He started learning your fur trapping and trading when he was ten."

"It broke my heart sending him off to my sister," Garvey replied. "I really love my boy."

"You couldn't take care of him. How would a man care for a baby out there?" Trevor assuaged. "I was more fortunate with an established business here in Maryland when I brought Reilly back."

"I loved his mother. If only she hadn't returned to the camp that day," Garvey remembered sadly.

"It was a special spiritual thing. You couldn't have stopped her," Trevor comforted. "It seems like just yesterday. I was a young man of sixteen, trying to make my fortune in furs."

"Are you ever going to tell Reilly about her mother?" Garvey asked his friend.

"Did you ever tell Owen about his mother?" Trevor questioned.

"Yep, he knows all about her and what happened," Garvey replied. "I just don't tell anyone around here and I never told Meredith. Owen never told her either."

"Rory doesn't know then either," Trevor guessed.

"No! I can't ever take that risk in the East. You know how these citified snobs are," Garvey noted.

"Don't I ever," Trevor agreed. "There are many times I envy your son. I wish I could go back."

"So do I, but we're old men now," Garvey said wistfully. "So have you told Reilly?"

"No, but I will be forced to soon," Trevor said sadly. "I don't want her to find out from anyone but me."

Garvey stepped back and stopped. "Someone else knows?"

"No, only you and her mother know," Trevor responded shaking his head. "However, yesterday a young Lieutenant came to the house and asked for Reilly's hand in marriage."

"Maybe you shouldn't tell her at all," Garvey suggested.

"She has a right to know the truth," Trevor uttered resignedly.

"We'll discuss this later," Garvey said. "We'd better get in the carriage before we catch a death."

At the Stewart home Lieutenant Philip Madison had been waiting for Reilly and her father. He was hoping Trevor would give him permission to marry Reilly. His mother, Lillian Madison, and his father, Franklin Madison had accompanied him. When their son told them he intended to marry, they wanted to meet Reilly Stewart.

"Phillip!" Reilly exclaimed when she saw him in the hallway. She was still holding Rory's hand when they walked in the foyer of the Stewart town home. "I didn't expect to see you today. I had told you of my friend, Meredith Woulfe's funeral."

Philip walked briskly to Reilly's side. "I wanted to be there with you, but we just missed you. I didn't know which church the service was in so we waited here." Philip took Reilly's hand and brushed his lips across her knuckles.

Rory looked up at the tall blonde stranger wearing a dark blue uniform with gold buttons. "Who is he, Aunt Reilly?" He tugged on her hand pulling her away.

Philip placed his hand upon Rory's head and tousled his hair. "I'm Lieutenant Philip Madison. I have asked your Aunt Reilly to do me the honor of being my wife."

"Nooo!" Rory shouted. Tears flowed down his cheeks as he ran upstairs into Reilly's room. The door slammed and his sobs could be heard downstairs.

"I'll go up and see to him," Garvey said as he began mounting the stairs.

"What did I say?" Philip asked quizzically.

"I'm not sure," Reilly answered and noted the woman and man standing in the parlor door.

Philip noted Reilly's glance and introduced, "Reilly, this is my mother and father. Lillian and Franklin Madison. They wanted to meet you."

Reilly extended her hand in greeting.

Lillian barely touched it and looked at her son. "I believe you told me that she was an only child?"

"Reilly is, Mother," Philip stated.

"Then why did that little boy call her Aunt?" Lillian demanded.

Reilly noted that Philips mother, Lillian, never referred to her by name, only she and her. Reilly found that upsetting.

"Why did he call you Aunt?" Philip asked taking Reilly in his embrace.

"Rory's mother and I were close friends. I have known Rory since he was a baby. He always thought I was his family," Reilly explained.

"Were her friend?" Lillian asked caustically.

"We were at her funeral today," Reilly responded choking back tears.

Philip noticed Reilly's eyes glistening and took his kerchief and wiped her eyes. He whispered lovingly, "I'm sorry my love." He led her to the rose brocaded divan and sat down next to her. Gently he rubbed her arm.

Lillian's eyebrows arched as she watched her son. She watched Reilly with a critical eye, checking her black woolen dress and noted it was the current mourning attire. At least she is fashion aware. Lillian looked at Reilly's jewelry, a simple Cameo brooch, tortoise shell hair combs, and a gold heart locket.

Trevor Stewart walked into the parlor with a middle aged black maid following holding a tea tray. "Abigail, would you please serve us some tea?"

"My pleasure, Massah Stewart," Abigail answered placing the tray on the serving table behind the divan.

Lillian's raised her eyebrows in shock. She was originally from North Carolina and one simply did not ask a darkey to serve. She nodded when Abigail asked her if she wanted cream and sugar in her tea. Silently she held up two fingers when asked if she wanted one or two sugars. In the South one did not speak to a darkey either. Lillian almost dropped her teacup when Reilly asked Abigail, "How is your husband, Zachary? Has he recovered from his cold?"

"Are you alright, Mother?" Philip asked with concern.

"Yes darling. I was just surprised at the familiarity with the Negroes your fiancé has," Lillian cooed sarcastically.

"Abigail and Zachary have been our servants since Reilly was a year old," Trevor responded a bit perturbed at the tone of Lillian's

statement. "I took them in as my servants after they escaped a cruel master and found freedom here."

"Slaves are the property of their masters," Lillian said haughtily. "Those two should be returned to their rightful owners."

Reilly felt her cheeks flush. She couldn't believe the mother of her fiancé was a bigoted Southern sympathizer.

"Now dear, let's not get into another political ballyhoo," Franklin chided. "We are guests here and we simply wanted to meet our Philip's love."

"That's how my daughter in law Meredith was killed," Garvey said solemnly as he entered the parlor. "An argument over slavery. States rights versus Federal rights were the argument. A child just lost his mother over such a ridiculous quarrel."

The silence in the room was deafening until Reilly spoke. "Have you calmed Rory?"

"He's sleeping. The poor child is completely distraught," Garvey sighed heavily. "It upset him more to find out you would be married, Reilly."

"I don't understand," Philip said thoughtfully.

"Reilly is almost like his mother to him. To lose both in a day was too much," Garvey choked almost weeping himself.

"I am truly sorry. I had no idea," Philip apologized.

"It's not your fault, lad," Garvey accepted. "How could you possibly know what is the mind of a six year old boy?"

"I should say it isn't Philip's fault," Lillian sneered haughtily. She couldn't imagine anyone blaming anything on her perfect son.

"Lillian!" Franklin snapped in anger. He knew his wife had little feelings for others but she should remember her manners. "I really think we should be going. This seems a rather ill timed visit. We apologize."

"I'll stay with Reilly for awhile," Philip said placing a tighter hold about her.

"Of course, son," Franklin acknowledged taking Lillian's cape and putting it upon her shoulders. He led Lillian out of the parlor and into the foyer. "You shouldn't have said what you did, Lillian."

"What?" Lillian asked while looking at Franklin with hostility.

"This is not the South! Negroes are free here! And I was appalled at your nasty remark to a man that had just suffered a loss. Where have your genteel manners disappeared to?" Franklin reprimanded while opening the door to the outside.

"It is disgusting how these Northerners give work to slaves that belong to their owners," Lillian grumbled. "I can't abide these people. Why, they are just like thieves stealing the property of another!"

"That is your belief," Franklin chided. "It is not my belief or your sons'."

"I know!" Lillian growled. "You have had far too much influence on our two boys!"

"A parent does not influence a child's belief when they are grown, my dear," Franklin snarled.

"I disagree," Lillian scowled angrily. "Our Peter married a New York girl and they never visit. I never get to see my granddaughter, Penelope. It is your fault they were educated in those Northern schools."

"Peter and Melissa never visit because you make their visits miserable," Franklin countered. "You can't even say your daughter in law's name."

"She isn't good enough for Peter," Lillian pouted.

"No one would ever be good enough for your sons," Franklin seethed.

"That's not true!" Lillian contradicted. "Melanie Hodges would be perfect for Philip. Instead he chose this little no one. Society doesn't even know who the Stewarts are."

"Melanie is a whiny nag who would drive Philip crazy in a month," Franklin snapped heatedly. "I'm very happy he doesn't care for her. I couldn't abide her whining one more night at dinner."

"Melanie doesn't whine," Lillian defended. "She corrects. Melanie just likes things proper and in their place. She certainly wouldn't ask about the well being of a Negro slave."

Franklin rolled his eyes and banged his head on the carriage wall. "God help me."

Lillian would not end the conversation but pursued. "Certainly you can't approve of our Philip marrying that that dark woman?"

Franklin sat bolt upright. "What dark woman?"

"You know, her!"

"You mean Reilly?" Franklin asked in confusion.

"Yes her! Didn't you notice how dark her hair is? Why it's almost soot black. Her skin is a much darker tone than her father." Lillian stated. "I wouldn't be surprised if she isn't mixed blood."

"Lillian, you can be so trying at times," Franklin groaned. "Trevor Stewart is Irish. There are olive toned and black haired Irishmen."

"You just refuse to see it and protect your son from tainted blood," Lillian scolded.

"I just want Philip to be happy," Franklin moaned. "Happier than me."

"Just what is that supposed to mean?" Lillian asked angrily. "How much happier could you be? I gave you two fine sons. I care for your home. I see to your well-being. I am hostess for your business parties. What else do you want?"

"A wife with feelings!" Franklin roared.

"Well I never!" Lillian shouted.

"No you never," Franklin bellowed.

At last the discussion had been ended.

Chapter Two

"I apologize for the ill timing of the meeting," Philip told Reilly lovingly. "I just had to know if your father has given permission. Have you sir?"

"Whatever my Reilly wants is fine with me," Trevor replied. "Do you want to marry this man?"

"Yes father, I do," Reilly answered holding Philip's hand.

"I shall take good care of her," Philip vowed smiling.

"Just how are you planning to do that?" Trevor asked solemnly and seriously. "Everyone says there is a war about to begin. You are in the regulars. Just how do you plan on taking care of my Reilly?"

"A war will start. I am certain. Especially if the favorite candidate Abraham Lincoln wins," Philip stated knowingly. "Southern States have threatened to separate from the Union. Lincoln will use all force to keep it together."

"How awful! Everyone touts the freedom of the slaves as the issue, but in reality those poor people are only property," Reilly complained. "The real issue for this war is politics and economics. Federal power versus State power."

"All wars are based on power and greed," Trevor said shaking his head. "It is unfortunate but true."

"The war between the States is inevitable. Still I will take care of my Reilly," Philip informed. "I will meet with my lawyers tomorrow to prepare my will."

"Philip!" Reilly exclaimed. "I don't even want to think of something so dreadful. I just buried my best friend."

"Darling," Philip sympathized. "I won't say another word. I will share your sorrow. Come let us take a walk." Philip took her overcoat from the hall tree and helped Reilly put it on. The two left the house hand in hand.

"Somehow that scene doesn't come through as the love we have known," Garvey remarked.

"I agree my friend," Trevor murmured. "The lad cares and so does Reilly, but it simply is not that wonderful true love we have shared with our wives."

"It was the same with Meredith and Owen," Garvey remembered. "I wished that it would turn into the love we had known. It didn't. It turned sour."

"You still have a wonderful grandson from it," Trevor smiled.

"Rory is the light of my life," Garvey grinned boyishly. "I had so wished that Reilly and Owen would have found each other and the love that created them."

"As was my wish," Trevor agreed pouring a brandy for himself and Garvey. "It seems it is not to be."

"Do you really think Reilly will be happy with that Lieutenant?" Garvey asked sipping his brandy.

"I think that lad will do everything possible to make my Reilly happy and comfortable," Trevor answered.

"I think I hear a but in there," Garvey noted.

"But, her new mother in law will do everything possible to tear them apart," Trevor stated wisely. "I got that feeling right away, and I don't think they will have that heart beating soul soaring love we had with our wives."

"That brings me back to the question," Garvey hesitated. "When are you going to tell Reilly about her mother?"

"The bans will be posted in Washington City and Baltimore Posts next Monday," Trevor told his friend. "I will have to tell her prior to the posting."

"You think that will make a difference with Philip and Reilly?" Garvey questioned raising a brow.

"Not with Philip and Reilly, but definitely with Lillian Madison," Trevor related. "I will leave it to Reilly to tell her fiancé and his mother."

"I don't like that woman," Abigail said butting in. "I don't like that woman at all. She reminds me of my former owner. A cruel and selfish woman she is. I know she is."

"Yes, Abigail," Trevor nodded in agreement. "I sense that also."

"Then how can you let our baby marry into that family?" Abigail protested.

"It's what Reilly wants. It is her decision," Trevor argued. "It is up to her young man to protect her from his mother."

"I'm going to check on young Rory, Massah Stewart," Abigail volunteered. "I still say you should keep Miss Reilly away from that woman."

"I shall think on it, Abigail," Trevor promised.

It was a few hours later Reilly and Philip returned from their walk. Abigail greeted them at the door.

"Master Rory is awake and calling for you, Miss Reilly," Abigail informed. "Massah Stewart wants to see you in the library Lieutenant Madison."

"Do you want me to come with you?" Reilly asked Philip.

"No my darling," Philip chuckled. "I do believe I am man enough to speak with your father alone." He kissed Reilly on the nose. "Go see to your Rory."

Philip followed Abigail to the library. She opened the door letting Philip in and then shut it behind him.

"Ah, Philip," Trevor beckoned. "Have a seat and make yourself comfortable."

"You wish to discuss something with me privately?" Philip questioned.

"There are many things I wish to discuss with you privately," Trevor shared. "I've been thinking while you were on your walk."

"I love your daughter very much," Philip responded hastily. "I am not afraid to discuss anything with you. I shall fight for her if necessary."

"No fighting necessary," Trevor assured the young man. "I'm curious. Where do you plan on living?"

"I thought I might get rooms in Washington," Philip replied. "I'm stationed there under General Sherman. My family lives just on the outskirts of Washington City."

"Do you think my daughter would be comfortable in that busy city in a room?" Trevor queried.

"I could buy a house in Washington if you think that would be more comfortable or she could stay with my parents," Philip suggested. "I was hoping to have her near to me."

"Wouldn't you be quite busy in training at the camps surrounding the Capitol? Won't there be times you could be away weeks at a time?" Trevor questioned.

"There is that possibility," Philip agreed. "As I said, she could stay with my parents."

"That would leave my daughter all alone in that dirty city. Do you honestly think your mother would welcome my Reilly?" Trevor said disapprovingly. "I have an alternative."

"Which is?" Philip asked curiously. He knew Reilly would not be treated well by his mother. He was fully aware of the unhappiness his brother Peter and his wife felt when they were visiting.

"We are less than ten miles from the Capitol. Live here in my house," Trevor suggested. "Visit here whenever you are available and you need never worry about Reilly's care or company."

"I would prefer to have my wife closer," Philip shared.

"With the upcoming war, I would feel more assured of having my daughter safely in my house as opposed to Washington," Trevor said firmly.

"You are correct of course," Philip conceded. "Reilly would be happier and safer here in my absence. However when I am here I do intend to monopolize her time."

"Quite understandable," Trevor smiled broadly. "When do you plan the nuptials?"

"Reilly and I agreed on February 20th, 1861. Will that be acceptable to you?" Philip asked his future father in law. "We have a small family and so do you. I would like a small intimate ceremony. We could have it here if you like."

"I would like that very much," Trevor agreed quickly. "I'll start preparing for it."

Reilly had young Rory on her lap as she sat upon her bed.

"Don't marry that man," Rory pleaded. "I don't want you to go away. I won't have any one."

"You have your grandfather. He adores you," Reilly soothed.

"I love him too, but it's not the same," Rory pouted.

"If we live in Washington I shall only be a few hours away," Reilly suggested hugging Rory tightly.

"Can I live with you and that man?" Rory suddenly thought.

"That would break your grandfather's heart," Reilly reminded.

"You could visit me with your grandfather any time you wanted. How about that?"

Rory nodded his head excitedly.

Reilly held Rory tightly and rocked him gently for a few moments. They both needed each other's comfort.

"Shall we go downstairs now?" Reilly asked. "I'm certain supper is ready and I'm famished."

"I'm hungry too," Rory giggled taking Reilly's hand in his.

Philip stayed for dinner and a brandy with cheroot after dinner with Trevor Stewart. When Philip left it was later in the evening and Reilly tucked Rory in bed. He slept in the room next to hers. That room had been Reilly's nursery. When she went downstairs to say good night to Garvey and her father she was surprised when they told her to have a seat. They needed to discuss things with her.

"The time has come to talk to you about your mother," Trevor began.

"You've never discussed my mother with me," Reilly replied quite shocked. "I've never asked you because it seemed to cause you much pain. Her death must have hurt you deeply."

"We're not certain your mother is dead," Garvey replied stoically.

"What?" Reilly gasped placing her hand upon her throat. She felt quite faint.

"Your mother may still be alive," Trevor repeated in his own words.

"How can you not know if my mother is alive or not?" Reilly demanded.

"Because she lives in Washington territory," Trevor answered. "And she doesn't read or write American."

"How could you have left her there?" Reilly choked out. "Surely there must have been some way to keep in touch with her."

"I'm afraid that really isn't possible," Garvey stated. "Not in the conditions in which she chose to live."

"What ever are you talking about?" Reilly nearly shouted. She was confused to her very soul.

"Your mother was or is a half breed Shoshone," Trevor emitted. It was very hard for him to tell her. He hoped she would understand. "They never camp too long in one place and between the bad whites and the bad redskins, she may even be dead. I would never know."

The shock was great for Reilly. "I'm a quarter breed Shoshone?"

"Yes." Trevor responded concisely.

"Why didn't you ever tell me?" Reilly cried.

"In this society, it was better that no one knew," Trevor replied. "Only Garvey knew."

"Did you know my mother?" Reilly asked Garvey Woulfe.

"I met her when she sent your father and you back to Fairland with me," Garvey answered. "I knew of her and that she had married your father. I also knew you were born."

"Why did you leave mother?" Reilly questioned holding her head. It felt like her head would explode.

"I didn't leave your mother. She sent me away with you," Trevor answered. "I loved your mother. We were good for each other. We were happy together."

"Then your grandfather died and left the business to your father," Garvey related. "They had both worked hard to make the furrier exchange and it was successful."

"I had to return to Fairland. Your mother refused to go with me," Trevor said sadly.

"The Shoshone have a way of divorcing. That's what your mother did to your father," Garvey explained.

"You should have convinced her, forced her!" Reilly said tearfully. "How could she abandon me?"

Trevor went to his daughter and knelt by her chair. He took her small hand in his large one. "Sweetheart, don't ever think your mother abandoned you. She loved you as she loved me. She loved us as certain as the sun rises in the East."

"Then how could she send us away?" Reilly sobbed.

"You don't know how hard it is for the people to live. Many times children die of starvation," Trevor told his daughter. "It was a great sacrificial love that sent you with me. Your mother wanted you to live comfortably and become well educated. She wanted you to have all the benefits of the white society."

"What was her name?" Reilly asked tearfully as she bit her lip.

"I called her Rose," Trevor answered. "I never did find out what her Shoshone name was. I never spoke the language to well."

"Why have you never told me?" Reilly questioned.

"I thought it best to wait until you were a woman," Trevor answered. "When the Lieutenant asked for your hand in marriage. I knew it was time."

"Is there anyway we can find her?" Reilly queried hopefully. "I would like her at my wedding."

"Even if we found her, she wouldn't come," Trevor shared sadly. "Rose told me she visited a white man's city once as a child. She hated it. She hated the noise, the dirt, and the disease. Nearly half of her camp died of exposure to cholera. She also told me that she could never be happy in a white man's city and how horrible the people would treat her, you, and me! It was your mother's idea to keep your blood a secret."

"I must let Philip know," Reilly said bravely. "If this will make a difference between us. I should know it now."

"More importantly, does it make a difference with you?" Garvey asked.

"I'm the same person, Reilly Stewart. I am who I am! Skin color and heritage have not a thing to do with the person. Right father? That's the way you raised me all these years."

"The good book makes no mention of skin color. Why should we?" Trevor grinned. "Yes, that is exactly the way I raised you."

"You also raised me to believe that the only prejudice I should hold in my heart is toward ignorance," Reilly smiled to her father.

"You are my daughter," Trevor proclaimed proudly. "I am so proud of you I could bust wide open."

"Then I can tell you my grandson is a quarter breed and Owen is a half breed," Garvey confessed.

"Rory?" Reilly gasped.

"You could never tell by looking at my boy," Garvey said informatively. "He resembles me. And I loved his mother with all my heart."

"Did she send Owen away with you?" Reilly asked curiously.

"No. My Jenny was killed by white settlers. It was a mob of militia that went in and killed the people in the camp my Jenny was visiting," Garvey said somberly. "It still hurt losing her. He still remembered finding her lifeless body shot to pieces. "She was a good and loving woman. I never forgave those people for that useless slaughter of innocents. I had a son to care for. I found him alive next to her. She had used her body as a shield."

"It was right after that Garvey took Owen home here in Fairland for his sister to care for," Trevor continued. "Garvey came back and we worked day and night for our families out in Washington territory. We scrimped and saved every cent to build the businesses we have today. We built them for our children, you and Owen."

"My sister died ten years later. Owen came back to me and the young fellow worked harder than we did. He fell in love with the land. I found that out after we moved back to Fairland with your father when your grandfather died," Garvey elucidated. "I sent the boy to school and he was a real good student, but when he was sixteen he told me he wanted to go back and work the business from Bear Lake where we started. He told me he wanted to build a beautiful house and start the ranch I had always wanted."

"Garvey and I knew Owen had inherited his father's looks, but his mother's spirit," Trevor explained. "Just like you have your mother's beauty but my spirit."

"And stubbornness," Garvey chuckled. "I've seen that trait in you and admire it as much as I admire it in your father."

"Meredith never told me," Reilly thought out loud creasing her brow.

"Meredith and Rory never knew," Garvey explained. "Owen was determined not to let them find out. Why I didn't even tell Owen about his mother until he was sixteen and headed back to Bear Lake."

"That's not fair!" Reilly exclaimed. "We children have a right to know who and what we are all about."

"Not in this society," Trevor contradicted. "Here in the East what you don't know can't hurt you."

"The hate is even carried back into Washington territory by the settlers," Garvey added. "You have to be all grown up to understand it."

"And deal with it," Trevor continued. "I have a feeling it will make no difference to Philip, but his mother will shun you like the plague. That is something you and your Lieutenant will have to come to grips with."

"I imagine how horribly Lillian Madison would deal with it," Reilly said thoughtfully.

"I talked to Philip before he left," Trevor announced. "Philip has agreed to let you continue living here after your marriage. He agreed with me that he would be gone a great deal and with the war approaching you would be safer here with me than Washington City."

"And a lot happier than anywhere near Lillian Madison," Garvey smirked.

"It would be unhappy being so near his mother and all alone," Reilly agreed. "Meredith never told me how or when she met your son, Owen."

"When Owen was twenty-two he came back here to set up a supply route for building materials, furniture, and things he would need to build that magnificent house he dreamed of. He also needed to set up accounts at stores. He was invited to a soiree by one of his school friends that recognized him. He caught Meredith's eye and she wanted him. Owen was attracted to Meredith and stepped out with her while he was here. Three months later we learned Meredith was with child. He took her back with him to the small cabin he had built while he was building the large ranch house. She hated it out there. Meredith got real sick after Rory was born and Owen sent her back to me to recover. Meredith's family would have nothing to do with her or Rory for the scandal it caused. I took her in and raised Rory."

"Meredith could never understand why Owen never came home," Reilly mused.

"This isn't Owen's home," Garvey stated. "Home is where your heart is. Someday you will understand that."

Chapter Three

It was another week before Reilly could talk to Philip. He had returned to Washington and his superiors had sent him off immediately for training in the militia. It was becoming tense in Washington. President Buchanan did his best to keep things together, but the politics were becoming more and more bitter.

Reilly greeted Philip at the steps. She heard his horse approaching and went outside to meet him.

Philip tethered his Chestnut Morgan at the hitching post and hurried to Reilly's side. "Love, you'll freeze out here. Let's get you back into the house."

"Philip, we need to talk," Reilly broached seriously.

Philip ushered her in the house and quickly closed the door. His gloved hand stroked her cheek. While he stared directly into his eyes he surmised this conversation would be quite serious. He gulped, "You want to give me the mitten?"

"No my darling," Reilly answered stretching on her toes to kiss him lightly on the lips. "I'm afraid that you may want to beg off."

"Let's go into the parlor," Philip suggested leading her into the room. He sat her down on the same rose brocade divan he always used when visiting. "Now, tell me everything. Why would I want to beg off of our marriage?"

"I found out on the day of Meredith's funeral that my mother may be alive," Reilly breathed out rapidly.

"That's wonderful!" Philip interrupted. "We can have her at the wedding. Is this the big problem?"

"Philip, no one knows where my mother may or may not be," Reilly stated quietly.

"We'll find her," Philip promised. "How is it your father has no idea where she is?"

"My mother is a Half-Breed Snake Indian," Reilly said gritting her teeth and closing her eyes. "Father told me she still may be alive and lives in the Washington territory with her people."

"Holy Mother of God!" Philip gasped turning ashen.

"Do you want to beg off?" Reilly asked quickly waiting for the bigotry and hatred to show its ugly head. It was better to know now. She braced herself for the worst.

"Love, it makes no matter to me that you have some Indian blood. Heaven knows how many of my ancestors may have a drop or two in their blood. Why even I could have Iroquois or Powhatan blood running through my veins. My father's family has been in Maryland since 1704," Philip consoled. "I love you! That's all that matters to me."

"Oh Philip," Reilly said releasing her breath she didn't know she was holding.

"If you think that little tidbit will get you out of marrying me, you're wrong," Philip chuckled. He took Reilly's hand in his and his lips brushed her knuckles.

"I thought you would detest me," Reilly confessed. "Not many people understand that it only matters who you are. It doesn't matter what you are born."

"Isn't that why we fell in love with each other?" Philip laughed. "We understand each other."

Reilly sighed and leaned her head on Philip's shoulder. He embraced her and she felt his warm sweet breath in her hair. They sat silently for several moments.

"Am I interrupting something?" Trevor addressed when he walked into the parlor.

"I told Philip, Father," Reilly responded. "He knows about Mother."

"What I don't understand is why you know nothing of her whereabouts?" Philip remarked.

"Son, I don't even know if she's still alive," Trevor said sadly. "There is still a lot of senseless killing on both sides of the Indians and Whites. Just like there is going to be a lot of senseless killing in this War between our States."

"Have you tried to find Reilly's mother?" Philip asked. He held Reilly tighter. "I would have at least tried to keep in contact."

"I have tried," Trevor said resignedly. "I've tried for years. I have even asked Owen Woulfe to try and find my Rose. I loved Reilly's mother with all my heart."

Before Philip could ask another question that would burn into her father's soul Reilly commented, "My mother divorced father. She believed it was for our benefit."

"My Rose felt the hatred and bigotry of being mixed blood from both sides. She didn't want that for her daughter. Rose was treated poorly by some Snakes, but they treated her better than all the white folks," Trevor choked. "After she sent us away she disappeared. It pained her as much as me."

Philip sensed the great pain in Reilly's father. He wasn't certain what to say. What came out was, "I'm sorry for you. You must understand this heritage doesn't matter to me. I love your daughter."

"Do you love her enough to protect her from everyone should they ever find out? From your mother?" Trevor demanded. "What of your children?"

"I love her enough!" Philip said firmly. "Our children will be precisely that...our children!"

"Your mother?" Trevor pursued.

"Yes you are right. My mother is an audacious bigot," Philip chuckled. "What she feels does not matter to me. I love her as my mother, but I will not live her life."

"Will you tell her?" Reilly asked Philip.

"I think it is best if we do," Philip sighed heavily.

A streak of a boy ran into the room and put a school slate in front of Reilly's face. "Aunt Reilly, look! I wrote my name in school today! See!" Rory bubbled with pride at his accomplishment.

Reilly took the slate from Rory's hand and saw his name scrawled upon it. "Rory, I'm so proud of you!"

"You helped me learn and my school master says I am a smart boy," Rory boasted.

"Look Father! See what Rory has done?" Reilly beamed while she showed Trevor Stewart the slate. Reilly lifted Rory on to the divan next to her.

"Mother would have been proud," Rory said sadly.

"Oh, she is proud!" Reilly soothed. "I'm certain she is looking down from heaven and smiling."

Rory looked up at Reilly, "I miss my mother."

Reilly put her arms around his little shoulders and squeezed. "I know you do sweetheart. I miss her too!"

"Love never leaves us, ever!" Philip said soothingly. "We may never see our special someone ever again, but the love between us lives for as long as we do."

Reilly stared at Philip. An ice chill ran down her spine as if it were a premonition.

"Why are you here?" Rory asked. "Are you going to take my Aunt Reilly away?"

"Would it make you happy to hear that your Aunt Reilly will be staying here to live after we are married?" Philip smiled hugging Reilly.

"You won't take Aunt Reilly away?" Rory asked hopefully.

"Aunt Reilly will stay here with you and Mr. Stewart," Philip stated. "I'm hoping you will take care of my Reilly when I am away."

"Where are you going?" Rory asked curiously.

"I have my duty to perform," Philip replied. "I am a soldier of the United States and I must serve when called."

Another chill ran down Reilly's spine.

Philip felt Reilly shiver. "What is it?"

Reilly looked into his deep blue eyes. She felt her hand lift and stroke his dark brown hair gently. "I don't know. It must have been a draft."

"I'll take care of Aunt Reilly," Rory bragged. "You can depend on me!"

"I know I can," Philip grinned and reached across Reilly to tousle his sandy brown hair.

"I apologize for the intrusion," Garvey Woulfe said as he entered the parlor. "Rory managed to run off on me. Mrs. Wilson told me she saw him run over here."

"He was showing me his great accomplishment," Reilly responded cheerily trying to shake the feeling of dread she was currently feeling.

"Ah yes, he wrote his name on the slate today in school," Garvey said proudly. "He told me that he had been practicing with you in the afternoons."

"That's true. We practice reading and writing every afternoon," Reilly acknowledged. "He's quite good. Rory can read a few words from the primer already."

A sad smile set upon Garvey's lips. Meredith would take two or three hours every afternoon to read a story for Rory. "I'm happy you have the time to spend with Rory."

"I love spending time with my wonderful young man," Reilly sparkled placing a light kiss upon Rory's forehead.

"We really should leave Rory," Garvey suggested. "It is rude to intrude upon Aunt Reilly when she has a guest."

"Nonsense," Philip protested. "I enjoy Rory. He even promised to take care of my Reilly when I am away on maneuvers in Washington City."

"Won't you join us for dinner, Garvey," Trevor invited. "We'd love to have you."

"I could never turn down an invitation for such delightful company," Garvey accepted. "What do you say, Rory? Shall we join our friends for dinner?"

"Yes, Grandfather," Rory replied eagerly.

"Would you like a cheroot, my friend," Trevor asked offering a box. "Have you posted the letter to Owen yet?"

"I have. I posted it this morning," Garvey answered taking a cheroot and match from the ornate carved wooden tobacco box. "Thank you for helping me scribe it."

"It should take a month or two to get to Washington territory," Trevor said thoughtfully.

"I expect he should receive it about Christmas," Garvey stated. "A bad time to receive such sad news."

"How is he doing?" Trevor asked quietly.

"I received a letter only two days ago," Garvey informed his friend. "The tragedy is he is almost finished with the house and was hoping that now Meredith and Rory would return."

"And the ranch?" Trevor queried.

"Owen said it is starting to be profitable," Garvey said with pride. "The boy tells me it provides enough for everyone in his employ and left over for the markets."

"The forts and Mormons?"

Garvey nodded. "It also provides extra for the Snakes that ask. He told me he sends a regular wagon once a year to Wind River and Chief Washakie as tribute. He also trades some with Chief Bear Hunter and Sagwitch."

"Washakie is a wise chief," Trevor remarked. "He is wise and keeps away from the white settlers as much as possible."

"I'll never forget meeting him," Garvey reminisced. "He is a very impressive man."

"Washakie is an odd name," Philip noted.

"It is Snake for 'Great Rattle'," Garvey told the Lieutenant.

"Great Rattle?" Philip queried with a grin.

"It is said that on his first buffalo kill he took the bladder of the beast, stuffed a gourd with it and put in seeds, and placed it upon a stick, inflated it, and tied it on the stick," Trevor related.

Philip furrowed his brow in question.

"Then he shook it like a rattle, sang, and danced," Garvey chuckled. "I've heard him sing. He has an excellent tenor voice."

"So they call him 'Great Rattle'," Trevor laughed.

"That is quite a story," Philip laughed also.

"I like that story," Rory piped in.

Reilly gave Rory a little hug.

A loud disturbance outside the house called the lighthearted conversation to an end. Philip, Reilly, Garvey, and Trevor pushed the lace curtains aside and saw a Negro man and woman struggling with a tall blonde man dressed in a coarse woolen suit. The Negro man was fighting off iron cuffs the man was attempting to place on his wrists. The Negro woman was slapping wildly at the white man.

Trevor and Garvey were outside first.

"Let these people alone," Trevor shouted.

"Go to hell you advocate of negrophilism!" the white man bellowed. "These are runaway slaves! I'm taking them back for bounty."

Garvey started fighting the obnoxious man and managed to separate the Negro man's wrists from the still opened cuffs.

"This is my property," Trevor screamed over the clamor to the white man. "You are trespassing. Get off my land now!"

Philip warned Reilly to stay in the house and walked outside to support Trevor and Garvey.

The white man yelled horrible obscenities at Trevor and Garvey. He pulled out a derringer from his vest.

Reilly saw him pull the small gun and grabbed Philip's colt from his holster he had left on the hall tree. She aimed the colt directly at the white man's hands through the open door.

A loud explosion turned everyone's head.

"Son of a bitch!" The white man screamed as the derringer flew from his hand. He pulled a kerchief from his vest pocket and wrapped it around his bleeding hand. "What the Hell?" He looked up to see Reilly holding the smoking colt in her hand.

"Leave our property right now!" Reilly ordered aiming the gun for the man's leg. "Leave now or you'll leave using only one leg!"

Philip tried in vain not to smile. "Better listen to the lady!"

"I'd suggest that," Garvey chuckled.

"Right smart advice if you ask me," Trevor laughed boisterously. "My daughter is a crack shot!"

The white man grumbled in pain. He turned to leave but looked back. "I'll contact the law here."

"Go right ahead," Philip dared. "I'm certain Constable Prickett would love to hear your story and how you threatened the lives of two of Fairland's finest citizens and an officer of the United States Army."

The white man glared at the Lieutenant. "I get your message," The man complained. "I just lost out on a large bounty."

"How much?" Trevor asked.

"\$500 a piece," the slave hunter replied.

Trevor pulled out his wallet from his coat and counted out two crisp thousand dollar federal notes. "Here is your bounty and then some. Go away and don't come back."

Garvey pulled out two more thousand dollar federal notes. "Here are 2,000 more. Forget you have ever seen these two. You never found them. Got me?"

"Aye," the slave tracker replied. "Saw who?" Then he turned his back and left.

Philip returned to Reilly's side. "Where did you learn to shoot like that?"

Chapter Four

Trevor heard Philips remark and shouted across the lawn, "You should see my baby girl with a rifle!"

Philip looked at Reilly with surprise. He cocked a brow and mouthed, "Rifle?"

"My father was formerly a trapper in the wild west," Reilly giggled daintily. "Do you think he wouldn't teach his only child to shoot straight and sure?"

"And that's a quote from my very lips on every practice day," Trevor laughed. He reached to help the Negro woman up from the ground where she had been pushed in the scuffle. "My name is Trevor Stewart. You are welcome in my home."

The Negro man stood straight and tall when he spoke, "we been sent here by the Langford family. They done said we cain't go to freedom in the French land. The track done been shut down. They done told me you can help."

"Come inside. Have some food and warm yourself by the fire," Trevor offered. "The two of you look frozen and half starved."

"We shore are a hungry, suh," Jacob Taylor agreed. He and Rachel followed Trevor Stewart and Garvey Wolfe into the house.

"Did you see my Aunt Reilly shoot?" Rory vocalized for all to hear as his grandfather entered the house. "She's really something isn't she? Can you teach me to shoot, Aunt Reilly?"

"We all admire your Aunt Reilly's marksmanship," Philip laughed heartily. "I'm thinking to ask General Sherman to conscript her. Perhaps the South would be afraid to fight if they saw the marksmanship we have here in the North. Even our women!"

Reilly blushed. She wasn't used to such flattery.

Just then Abigail and Zachary came in from the kitchen. Abigail was still covered with flour and wiping her hands in a towel. They heard the gunfire and came out to see what was happening. Abigail held a long mean looking butcher's knife and Zachary was holding a small club.

"What do we have, Massah Stewart?" Abigail asked looking at the gaunt and shivering runaways. "You brought us some more trash?"

"Now Abigail," Trevor reprimanded lovingly. "Where is your hospitality? Our friends need some hot food and drink."

"I'll gets it for ya, Massah Stewart," Zachary volunteered shaking his head. "You takes too many chances Massah Stewart."

Rory followed Abigail and Zachary into the kitchen. "Can I have a piece of pie?"

"Course you can," Abigail replied taking the boys hand. "You shore is a growing boy. You always did love my cooking."

"I should turn you in," Philip confided raising a brow. He was thinking of the law recently enacted requiring that fugitive slaves should be captured and returned their owners even if the slaves had made it to the free North.

"Would you? What have I done except offer food, drink, and hearth fire to a young hungry cold couple?" Trevor asked with innocence befitting a little boy caught stealing cookies from the cookie jar.

"Absolutely nothing!" Philip stated humorously. "Any slave that manages to get this far North deserves freedom."

Reilly had hurried upstairs and returned with blankets. Trevor and Garvey took the blankets and covered Jacob and Rachel. They had taken a seat near the roaring fire. Zachary and Abigail returned with trays of hot soup, warm bread, butter, cooked peas and carrots, baked potatoes and even rice pudding.

Philip took his place by Reilly's side. "It looks like you do this regularly," he noted.

"Not regularly," Reilly whispered. "Occasionally."

The two Negroes ate like they would not see tomorrow. When they were finally sated Rachel looked up to Trevor and said, "Thank you for your kindness suh."

Trevor sat on his large leather chair facing the fireplace and the two refugees. "What are your names?"

"I'm Jacob Taylor and this is my missus, Rachel."

"You said the Langfords sent you to me?" Trevor queried.

"Yassuh," Jacob replied. "We needs your help to get away."

"Far away," Rachel added sipping from the cup that held the hot chicken broth.

"I think it would be dangerous right now to try anything," Philip warned. "Don't ask me anything. Just believe I know what I'm talking about."

"I think we know what you mean," Garvey grinned knowingly.

"I can't help you right now, but I can give you employment until it is safe to send you out west," Trevor volunteered. "Would that be favorable to you?"

Jacob placed his arm around Rachel, "Mighty kind of you suh. What can we do here?"

"Well, what did you do on the plantation?" Garvey questioned.

"I was a smith and my Rachel was a housemaid and cook," Jacob revealed.

"I thought so," Garvey chuckled looking at the massive shoulders and muscles of Jacob Taylor. "I have need of a smith in my livery. I'll hire you for 10 federal notes a month. It's not much, but I'll provide food and shelter in my home."

"And my Rachel?" Jacob asked worriedly.

"I'll hire her as housemaid for 5 federal notes a month," Trevor offered. "Abigail can hone Rachel's cooking skills and my Reilly can teach her sewing. She'll need to know how to do that when we send you west."

"You can both sleep in my house at night," Garvey said and raised his hand to Trevor as he began to protest. "I think they'll be safer in my home. You know that's true, Trevor."

Jacob and Rachel's eyes were wide in disbelief. "Praise the Lord," they both sang out.

"Jacob, we'll get new clothes for you tomorrow," Trevor said lighting a cheroot. "Reilly, do you have some old clothes that might fit Rachel? It will give her more the appearance of a freed working slave when she is seen in town."

"I have several lovely simple dresses that will only need small sewing adjustments," Reilly smiled broadly. "It will be your first sewing lesson, Rachel. We'll start alterations tomorrow."

"Is this what it's going to be like when we marry?" Philip teased. "Unannounced visitors at any time of day?"

"Most likely," Reilly taunted gaily. "Always a surprise. Isn't it grand? Our lives will never be dull."

"Somehow I knew that when I fell in love with you," Philip decreed. He took his lovely Reilly in his arms and kissed her gently on her forehead. "I can't wait until you are mine."

Owen Woulfe was chopping wood into firewood when the wagons, one with Jonah Hammond driving, could be seen in the distance. Owen stopped and looked toward the wagons approaching. He waved his woolen-gloved hand in greeting.

The skies were filling with dark snow clouds. The temperature had dropped considerably. A snowstorm was nearing. It would be a white Christmas. Owen finished his work at the same time Jonah pulled into the courtyard of the ranch Owen and his ranch hands had built. It was a copy of the home of George Washington on Mount Vernon. Owen had seen it as a child and vowed he would build one just like it. After six years of loving labors, the home was built.

"Did everything I ordered come?" Owen asked Jonah while buttoning his woolen coat. He still wore his buckskin trousers and moccasins.

"Everything right down to the kitchen sink," Jonah clucked. "Still don't know what you want such a fancy ranch in the middle of nowhere."

"This home has been my dream since I was a child," Owen said looking proudly at the mini estate. "I'm also hoping I can convince my wife to return with my son when she hears the home is complete."

"Shucks, I forgot!" Jonah declared. "Along with your delivery a note arrived a day later from your Pa." Jonah handed him the post.

Sticking the letter in his coat pocket Owen ordered, "Let's get this furniture in the house quick. You made it back just in time."

Jonah looked up at the dark clouds. "I surely did."

The men quickly unloaded all the wagons with help from the rest of the hands that appeared from the range in time for supper.

"That surely is one huge bed you bought," Jonah remarked wiping the sweat from his dark brown brow. "That for you and your missus?"

"I'm hoping," Owen breathed heavily taking a rest leaning against the bedroom wall. "I hope I'll even get some use from it this time."

"You telling me your son was dropped from the sky?" Jonah chuckled.

"Rory was a surprise from one night of passion. Then there was marriage. Then there was constant sickness with the confinement. Then there was sickness after the birth. Then she went back east to live with my father and stayed," Owen grouched.

Jonah slapped Owen on the back. "I can see why you're hoping. It's bad enough not to have a woman, like me. It's worse to be law married and no wife to warm your bed."

"It ain't fun!" Owen confessed lightheartedly.

"So you talk to your Winter Sun for me?" Jonah asked eagerly. "I'm right fond of your housekeeper."

"It's the same answer," Owen chuckled. "That woman can sure be stubborn. I've known her five years and not once have I seen or heard about a man. She still insists she's married."

"Rough Stone told me that she divorced her man some eighteen years ago," Jonah stated somberly. "Winter Sun went back to live with the people."

"What can I say?" Owen laughed. "You go talk to her."

"I will at first light," Jonah vowed. "I want to be all dressed up and clean on the holy day."

"Also trying to make a good impression?" Owen snorted. "I'm telling you she doesn't want anyone else. She only wants her man."

"Owen? Jonah?" Winter Sun called to the men from the base of the stairs. "Food is on the table. The hands are all here and ready to eat!"

"We'll be right down, Winter Sun," Owen responded. Walking down the hall with Jonah he asked. "When did you run into Rough Stone?"

"Jest outside of Soda Springs," Jonah answered walking down the steps. "Good thing too! We met up with some renegade Bannock out for our scalps and your wagons. Rough Stone and his Snake band was out hunting. Routed them Bannock right quick."

"It is near time for setting up the Warm Dance," Owen related.

Winter Sun heard Owen Woulfe and smiled. "I will go to the Bear River and celebrate with my people."

"What are we going to do without your cooking?" Jonah complained. "Would you leave all of us starve?"

"Jonah, she goes every year," Owen chuckled. "Is Washakie and Bear Hunter going to be there?"

Winter Sun nodded.

"I'll send my usual tribute of wheat, sugar, tobacco, and beans," Owen told Winter Sun.

"The people are grateful for your foods," Winter Sun said gratefully. "It helps during the long winter when hunting is bad."

"It pays to stay friends with the people and especially honor their great Chief Washakie," Owen replied. "He is a good, just, and wise leader."

"He tells us to stay away from all settlers. The people do not go near the places whites live or travel," Winter Sun said and suddenly grinned broadly. "I am foolish and do not listen. Instead I live with the white settlers."

"You are wise," Owen laughed. "You have warm clothes, a warm home, and good food."

"I am what you call...lucky," Winter Sun giggled after straining to remember the white word. "I came here to good people."

"We're the best!" Jonah declared loudly. "Now that we've settled that, marry me Winter Sun!"

"I wait for my man and child," Winter Sun stated angrily. "They will come back. I know this!"

"Lord you are a stubborn woman," Jonah complained. "I'll still keep asking til I wear you down."

"I don't wear down," Winter Sun said stubbornly. "They will come back to me."

Jonah shook his head and piled his plate high with the boiled potatoes and carrots.

The current political situation in the east was discussed the rest of the evening.

After a warm brandy and the hands retreated to the bunkhouse, Owen returned to the kitchen and sat down at the table. He pulled out the letter from his father. He had forgotten about it until a few minutes ago. Owen treasured the letters he received from Maryland. His father would tell him everything about Rory, his son. When they could, Garvey and Meredith would send pictures of Rory. Sometimes he even got a letter from Meredith telling him about something wonderful happening to Rory. She wrote when he got his first tooth, when he took his first step, his first pony. He loved reading about how much Rory looked like him. Owen pulled out the photograph of his son he always carried. He gently stroked the photograph. Meredith had sent this picture in early spring when Rory turned six years old.

"I'll get you back soon, Rory," Owen whispered sadly. Then he opened the letter carefully and began reading.

Winter Sun was in the kitchen with Harriet Bower, a runaway slave sent to Washington territory by Trevor Stewart and Owen's father. The two men sent many slaves to freedom in Owen's care. Owen would offer them work in his ranch or find jobs for them in the forts and cities of the territory.

After a few minutes Winter Sun saw a look of pain on Owen's face. A tear threatened to fall from his eye. Suddenly Owen combed his fingers through his hair and took the letter in one hand crushing it.

"These marks make you sad?" Winter Sun asked softly taking a seat next to Owen. She motioned Harriet to leave the kitchen.

Owen's face had paled when he looked up at Winter Sun. "They make me sad, relieved, frightened, and confused."

"What do the markings say?" Winter Sun questioned placing her small delicate hand over Owen's hand that held the crushed paper. "Who sent you this sad paper?"

"It's from my Pa," Owen choked. "Meredith is dead."

"Meredith was your woman?" Winter Sun asked curiously. In the five years she had known Owen Woulfe he never once mentioned the name of Rory's mother.

"Only once," Owen remarked absentmindedly.

Winter Sun cocked her head at that remark but thought better of asking Owen what he meant. "How did this Meredith pass on to the ghost path?"

"Pa said she was attending a party when a fight broke out between two men. They were arguing about politics. They accidentally pushed Meredith. She fell down the steps and broke her neck," Owen choked. "Pa says she died instantly. She didn't suffer."

"I weep with you," Winter Sun consoled taking her hand and gently stroking Owen's face.

"That's just it, Winter Sun," Owen confessed. "I don't have feelings about her death one way or another. She was my wife, but she was a stranger."

"She was the mother of your son," Winter Sun whispered. "That is why you hurt and are in pain."

"God," Owen wailed letting tears fall. "If only I had finished this house sooner. I would have my wife and son here safe with me. I would have tried to make the marriage work. I swear!"

Winter Sun rose and placed Owen's head on her bosom. She stroked his head gently as he wept into her apron. "Weep my Owen. Weep my son of Garvey. Weep my father of Rory."

Owen sobbed in Winter Sun's arms for a few minutes. "You are like a mother to me. Thank you for being here. I really needed you."

"So what are you going to do about, Rory?" Winter Sun asked soothingly.

"I don't know," Owen admitted.

"You may not be able to bring your woman to your big house, but you can still bring your son," Winter Sun said reassuringly.

"I can!" Owen exclaimed. "I can bring my son home! He is my son! He doesn't have a mother! He really needs me! Doesn't he?"

Winter Sun smiled and nodded her head.

"I can't send a letter back now," Owen sighed. "The winter storms are already blowing. I have to wait until spring, but by summer my son will be with me!"

Chapter Five

"Is everything ready?" Reilly asked nervously.

"Lawsy chile, you is as nervous as a cat getting a flea bath," Abigail chuckled. "If you straighten that picture one more time the holding wire is going to break from wearing out."

"Abigail, I have a right to be nervous," Reilly stated biting her lower lip.

"Don't let the witch called Philip's mother worry you none chile," Abigail soothed placing the last plate on the dinner table. "He loves you. He don't care what his mama thinks of you."

"I know," Reilly sighed. "It just that she's so..."

"Nasty?" Abigail finished.

"Well yes, but I was going to be nicer," Reilly said showing a little smile.

Abigail snorted, "That woman could make a rabid dog run and hide."

"Abigail, it's Christmas!" Reilly said trying very hard not to laugh but failing miserably.

"Merry Christmas Aunt Reilly," Rory effervesced walking into the room. "I got so many presents! I want to show them to you." Rory took Reilly's hand and pulled her into the parlor."

Rory and Garvey had spent the night after attending Christmas eve services with Trevor and Reilly Stewart.

Jacob and Rachel had brought the presents and placed them under the Christmas Tree late last night when they were certain Rory was asleep.

"Oh my goodness!" Reilly declared pretending surprise after Rory pulled her into the parlor. "I do believe it will take you all day to open your presents."

"Can I start opening them?" Rory asked excitedly.

"Patience Rory," Garvey reprimanded entering the parlor. "Remember you manners. We are expecting Reilly's Philip and his family."

"Awww!" Rory objected sadly. "Can't I open just one?"

Reilly looked at Garvey beseechingly. "With all those presents I'm sure one would be alright."

"I never could say no to a woman," Garvey chuckled. "Very well Rory, open one present."

"Yippee!" Rory screeched in happiness. "Which one can I open?"

Reilly knelt by the tree and selected a package. "What about this one? It's from your father."

Rory grabbed the package eagerly and tore the wrapping. Paper flew everywhere. Rory's eyes opened wide. "Wow! Can I put them on?"

"I don't think you should with your current clothes," Reilly laughed. The brown-tooled leather cowboy boots would look strange with the dark blue cashmere suit with black trim he was wearing.

"Those are mighty fine boots," Trevor noted when he entered the parlor. "Reilly, I do believe your fiancé's family is approaching."

Reilly ran from the parlor and grabbed a hooded woolen shawl she had left hanging on the hall tree. Quickly donning the shawl she opened the door as the carriage arrived in front of the house. Zachary was already outside. He put the step down and opened the door. His white-gloved hand assisted Lillian Madison from the carriage. Her husband, Franklin and son, Philip, followed her.

Lillian walked immediately into the house allowing Trevor to remove her dark red velvet ermine trimmed great coat. She revealed a lavish red satin gown. It had layers of flounce over a wide crinoline. The dress was high collared boasting a diamond brooch at the neckline. Black velvet bows accented the bell sleeves of the tight waisted bodice. Sprigs of tiny holly decorated her sausage curls in her gray streaked hair. Large diamond earrings hung from her pierced ears. "I thought I should freeze to death before we arrived here," Lillian complained. "It is a dreadfully cold day."

"Come into the parlor and sit by the fire," Trevor invited leading Lillian into the parlor. "We have some hot spiced cider ready."

"Oh how delightful," Lillian acknowledged walking into the parlor. "You do have a lovely home, Mr. Stewart. It is especially lovely the way you have decorated for the Holiday."

Franklin and Philip brought in large cloth sacks loaded with presents. Franklin removed his Inverness coat. He was dressed in a fine cashmere black suit. His shirt was pleated white satin and a black-knotted tie accented the suit.

Philip held a cloth sack in one hand and Reilly's waist in another. He was wearing his dress uniform and cut a handsome figure in dark blue military cape and coat with lighter blue trousers. Dark black boots accented the look.

Garvey and Trevor wore simple brown woolen suits with cotton-pleated shirts and matching vests. They were sitting in over stuffed chairs talking politely to Lillian.

Reilly removed her shawl with Philips assistance. "You look lovely!" Philip exclaimed looking at Reilly in her off the shoulder deep blue velvet dress. A tight V bodice and short cap sleeves accented the flounced gown. Blue satin roses accented the gathered sleeves and flounces. Reilly's hair was pulled back in a simple chignon and a blue satin rose garland decorated her hair. Philip pulled her into his arms and kissed her lips lightly.

Reilly felt a little giddy. It was the first time Philip had been so bold. Until now he would hold her but politely kiss her hands, cheek, or forehead. "You are an extremely handsome figure today yourself," Reilly whispered into Philip's ear.

"Let's join the family before I lose control and ravish you," Philip whispered back.

Reilly smiled as she looked into Philip's eyes. "Ravish me? I have such an affect on you?"

"Indeed my lovely, Reilly!" Philip grinned. He took her hand and placed it upon his hardened manhood.

Reilly blushed right down to her toes. "Oh dear!"

"Sometimes I fear I cannot wait two more months my darling," Philip whispered huskily.

Reilly removed her hand from his. "We should join the family before I lead you astray, sir."

Rory ran up to Philip when they entered the room. "Hi Philip!" he greeted cheerily.

"Hello Sergeant Wolfe," Philip said sternly. "Have you forgotten you salute a superior officer?"

"No sir!" Rory stated solemnly. He stood straight and raised his hand in salute. "Merry Christmas, Lieutenant Madison, sir!"

"Merry Christmas, Sergeant Wolfe!" Philip returned the salute with a broad smile.

"Are we going to practice our military tactics?" Rory asked enthusiastically.

Philip had spent a great deal of time with Rory whenever he visited Reilly and had become almost a father figure with the boy. They had become very close to each other.

"Not today, Rory," Philip replied. "I am certain we will be very busy opening presents today and will have little time to practice."

"Did you bring me presents?" Rory blurted out.

"Rory!" Reilly reprimanded immediately. "That is rude young man! Mind your manners."

"My sweet Reilly," Philip chuckled. "Rory wouldn't be a boy if he didn't ask about presents on Christmas. I remember how excited I always was."

Rory peeked into the cloth sack.

"Put all the packages by the tree and then take out the biggest one in the sack with your name on it," Philip ordered gaily.

Rory placed all the packages under the tree and then held one up. "This one?"

Philip nodded his head.

Rory tore apart the package and pulled out a miniature blue army uniform just like Philip's. He didn't have epaulets but he did have yellow master sergeant stripes on the sleeves. "Wow! Oh Wow!" he exclaimed

holding up the uniform. "Can I change grandfather? Oh please! Wow! This is the best present ever! Ever!"

"You have other presents, Rory," Garvey reminded his grandson.

"Yes sir, but none as grand as this!" Rory moped. "Please grandfather?"

"Very well," Garvey relented. "Find Abigail and have her help you change."

Rory ran out of the parlor crushing the uniform close to his chest in his haste to find Abigail.

"I think your present was a great treasure," Reilly said smiling at Philip.

"And you are my great treasure this Christmas," Philip complimented leading her to sit on the red rose divan. "Here is your Christmas present, he said handing her a small package. "I hope you react with the same delight."

Reilly carefully removed the wrapping and slowly opened the black velvet box. It was a diamond choker a center pendant of blue sapphire surrounded by diamond baguettes. On the side were matching earrings. "Oh Philip," she gasped.

Lillian looked at the present. "Philip, aren't they a bit extravagant for a betrothed?" she chided.

Franklin glared at his wife, "You didn't think so when I was courting you and I gave you a diamond choker."

Lillian was piqued and responded, "Those times were different and you were a wealthy tradesman. Philip is in the military and his future wife should be aware of the limitations of military pay."

"Mother, are you still upset that I joined the Army?" Philip questioned angrily.

"You could have a safe and comfortable life working with your father and taking part in the business," Lillian rebuffed.

"The Army is my life, my choice, what I want," Philip explained. "Father has Peter in the business. He doesn't need me."

"But you would be safe," Lillian reprimanded. "I don't want you going off to war!"

"That's enough, Lillian," Franklin growled. "Let's open our presents."

"Shouldn't we wait for Rory," Reilly suggested.

"Since most of these presents are for him, perhaps we should wait," Lillian sniped sarcastically.

Zachary brought in a tray of small pastries and passed them out. It was quiet as everyone waited for Rory to return. The party engaged only in light conversation primarily centering on Philips recent maneuvers and military training.

Almost thirty minutes later Rory entered wearing his new uniform. He was wearing the shiny boots Philip had bought to go with the uniform. Stiffly he saluted when he entered the room. When Philip returned the

salute Rory ran into his arms. Rory hugged Philip with all his might and said, "Thank you!"

Philip tousled Rory's hair. "I take it you like my present."

"So do I," Reilly grinned. "Very much!"

After the presents were opened, Reilly played Christmas carols on the piano. Rory was taken upstairs for a nap following the meal. He was exhausted. After dinner the families again entered the parlor. Philip took his seat next to Reilly and held her hand.

"Mother, Father," Philip announced. "Reilly and I have something to share with you."

Lillian placed her hand upon her breast and breathed heavily, "You haven't gotten Reilly with child have you? The scandal would ruin me."

Reilly felt herself turn crimson. What kind of woman does she think I am? Does she think I have such loose morals? Her hand trembled in Philip's.

Philip put his arm around Reilly's shoulders and embraced her as a show of support. "No Mother, nothing like that!"

"What is it son?" Franklin asked.

"I think I should say this," Trevor interrupted.

"Father?" Reilly gulped.

"It's alright sweetheart," Trevor said raising his hand in protest.

"Oh do get on with this," Lillian complained. "What horrible family secret are we about to hear?"

Trevor walked to the serving table and poured himself a brandy. He stood straight and looked directly at Lillian. He knew it would be she that would be a problem. Best get on with it. "My father was a furrier and we had a small business here in Fairland. We had heard of the new fur business in the west and I went there to seek my fortune. I found it. During that time I spent a great deal of time with the Snake Indians. I met a half-breed Shoshone woman I called Rose. We were married and she gave birth to a little girl."

"I knew it!" Lillian stood and shouted pointing her finger. "I knew you were mixed blood!"

Reilly inhaled and stopped tears from falling.

Philip tightened his embrace. "Mother, you needn't shout," Philip reprimanded.

"Franklin, we're leaving," Lillian ordered walking toward the door. "Come Philip! We'll end this travesty of an engagement."

"I have every intention of marrying Reilly," Philip shouted to his mother heatedly. "I love her!"

Lillian spun around, "You do not and can not love a savage, Philip Madison! It would be an embarrassment beyond words if you married an Indian!"

"Reilly is neither a savage or an Indian," Garvey countered. "Reilly is an intelligent, educated, and schooled woman."

"My grandchildren would be savages!" Lillian roared ignoring Garvey Woulfe. "Have you thought about that Philip?"

"Shut up Lillian!" Franklin commanded taking her arm and pushing her down into a chair. "Reilly, we would be proud to have you in our family."

"What?" Lillian screamed angrily. "How dare you speak for me? I'll simply die when everyone learns that Philip married a savage!"

"Just how would they find out Lillian?" Franklin questioned threateningly. "It would be you telling everyone, wouldn't it?"

"I'll tell everyone and create such a scandal that Philip could never marry her!" Lillian threatened menacingly. "I'll ruin her and this family! They'll have to go back to the wilderness that they crawled out of."

"In that case I shall have to reveal that your children have Powhatan blood my dear," Franklin stated sarcastically.

Lillian glared at Franklin, "Just what do you mean by that?"

"You didn't check my bloodline when you fell in love with my money," Franklin snorted. "My great great grandmother was Powhatan. Her name was translated into English as Water Flower."

"I guess that means that I have some Indian blood running through my body," Philip smirked. "Will you accept me Reilly?"

Lillian sank into the chair. Her breathing became erratic and she fainted.

Reilly jumped from Philips arms and pulled the smelling salts from her pocket. She put it under Lillian's nose for a moment and Lillian woke up.

"Philip, will you get a cool cloth for your mother?" Reilly asked while she was fanning Lillian's face.

Philip left the room to retrieve a cool cloth from Abigail in the kitchen.

"Trevor," Franklin addressed, "where is Reilly's mother? What happened?"

"My Rose refused to come back East with me when my father died. Rose did not like woman like your wife," Trevor related.

"That I understand," Franklin snorted. "Sometimes I can't abide her either."

Lillian choked and rolled her eyes backward. She laid her head against the side of the chair.

"Rose divorced me and sent Reilly back East with me. Rose wanted the best for Reilly even if meant sacrificing her daughter," Trevor said sadly. "I gave into Rose and I regretted it ever since. I have been trying to find her and bring her back to me."

"I take it there is no trace of her?" Franklin queried.

"I've been searching for eighteen years. We haven't found a trace of my Rose," Trevor replied. "I still haven't given up hope I'll find her."

"Even my son Owen is looking for her," Garvey added.

"Your son?" Franklin queried.

"Rory's father lives in Washington territory," Garvey answered. "We've asked him to see if he hears about a Shoshone woman named, Rose."

"I wish you well. You must love Reilly's mother a great deal," Franklin stated quietly.

"Reilly is the image of her mother and just as wonderful," Trevor replied allowing a tear to seep from an eye.

"I understand why you want to find your Rose," Franklin soothed. "I think we should be going. I am certain Lillian is going to be very ill."

"Should we continue to plan the wedding?" Trevor asked.

"Absolutely!" Philip uttered entering the room with the cloth and handing it to his mother.

"Don't worry about Lillian," Franklin snorted triumphantly. "If she causes one problem I'll tell all her friends about my Grandmamma!"

"Take me home," Lillian groaned pathetically.

"Yes my little dove," Franklin chortled helping Lillian from the chair. They left the celebration to return home.

Lillian was quite ill that night.

Chapter Six

"Welcome back home, Winter Sun," riding his Palomino mustang Owen greeted her. He had been worried about her returning from the Warm dance. The weather had been bitter cold and snowstorms were fierce this January. Winter Sun had been a day late returning. He mounted up that morning to find her.

"How nice you came to meet me," Winter Sun smiled. "Why are you out riding in this cold? Were you worried for me?"

"Nah, I just missed your cooking," Owen chuckled. "Of course I was worried about you. It wouldn't surprise me to see you riding like this all alone and helpless."

Winter Sun stroked her Appaloosa. "You think I'm alone?"

"You look alone," Owen teased stretching his neck in a circle.

Winter Sun looked toward the East Ridge and waved.

A band of six Shoshone warriors appeared.

"My escort," Winter Sun laughed.

Owen pulled his horse next to Winter Sun and hugged her. "I've really missed you." He had missed her. She was like his mother and company he enjoyed. It had been a blessing when she showed up a week after he returned from sending Meredith and Rory back East.

"I bring you news the trappers at our Warm Dance brought with them," Winter Sun shared with Owen as they rode towards his estate. "The trappers told us your people now send words over wires."

"It's a telegraph," Owen explained. "Nothing to miraculous. It's actually vibrations much like your drums."

"You must explain this to my brothers," Winter Sun chuckled.

"They believe the trappers are great medicine men."

"I'll do my best to change that idea right away," Owen laughed.

"So tell me of this news."

"They tell us that your people elected a new chief, his name is..."

Winter Sun spoke the name slowly and carefully, "Abraham Lincoln."

"Sorry to hear that," Owen sighed. "That means a war for sure."

"Your people will make war between your peoples?" Winter Sun asked.

"Much like the Snakes and the Crow only far more bloody and terrible," Owen shared.

"This is a sad thing," Winter Sun sighed shaking her head. "We must get Rory back from there before he is hurt."

"I've written the letter to my father asking to send him to me," Owen shared. "As soon as the first thaw comes I'll ride into Soda Springs and send it back East."

"We will make a happy home for your boy child," Winter Sun promised.

"I know we will. I can't miss with you by my side helping," Owen agreed. "Was Washakie at the Warm Dance this year?"

"He was and thanks you for your gifts," Winter Sun told Owen. "Today he and his people return to Wind River."

"How do your people travel such distance in this weather?" Owen asked.

"We do it with the experiences learned," Winter Sun answered.

"I should have known I couldn't get explanation," Owen laughed. They slowly rode together in the deep snow.

Reilly had been busy with wedding dress fittings and hadn't spent every afternoon with Rory like she used to do. Philip kept Rory occupied whenever he came to visit Reilly during the prenuptial time. Philip and Rory developed a close friendship. Actually Rory adored his hero, Philip. Rory wore his uniform so often that Garvey had two more made identical to the first. That way Rachel could wash one occasionally. Philip also had requested a quiet intimate wedding in Trevor's house. It would just be his family and his best friend Lieutenant John Dresden. Peter and his wife, Melissa, would also be there with their four-year-old daughter, Penelope.

Two days before the wedding Melissa and Penelope came to visit Reilly.

"This is a surprise," Reilly remarked after Abigail had roused her from bed in the morning informing her of visitors. Reilly quickly donned a cotton day dress of green taffeta. She despised the tight bodice fashions of the day and the crinolines were simply irritating. Reilly only wore them when necessary. "I didn't expect to meet you until the nuptials."

"I hope you don't think we're intruding," Melissa apologized. "I was hoping I could help you with something, anything!"

"Help me?" Reilly asked raising a brow. She hadn't expected her sister in law to volunteer to help.

"Actually, if truth be known, I'll volunteer to wash dishes if it means I can get away from Lillian," Melissa sighed in exasperation. "I simply cannot abide being near the woman."

Penelope came into the parlor at that moment. Abigail had taken her into the kitchen to get a cookie and glass of milk.

"This is my daughter, Penelope," Melissa introduced opening her arms to her daughter.

"Pleased to meet you," Reilly acknowledged smiling warmly.

"Are you Aunt Reilly?" Penelope asked innocently. "That is a funny name for a girl."

"Penelope!" Melissa reprimanded. "That is impolite and disrespectful!"

"I'm sorry," Penelope replied quickly. "I didn't mean it."

"That's perfectly alright," Reilly forgave. "I think Penelope is a funny name." Reilly tweaked Penelope's nose lovingly.

Melissa looked up to see a boy standing in the doorway wearing a blue uniform of the army regulars. "Is this young Master Sergeant Rory Woulfe?"

Rory saluted, "It is ma'am."

"Philip has told me so much about you," Melissa related. "I do believe he thinks of you almost as a son."

"Really?" Rory beamed proudly.

"Rory, why don't you take Penelope into the garden shed and show her Puff's puppies?"

"Aunt Reilly, she's a girl!" Rory objected.

"Are you not a gentleman non commissioned officer?" Reilly shot back.

"Yes ma'am," Rory shrugged. "Come along, I'll show you the puppies and my pony."

"Pony?" Penelope perked. "You have a pony?"

"Sure do," Rory boasted proudly. "Her name is Vanity, cuz she's so pretty."

The two children donned their coats with Abigail's help. Zachary went with them to keep an eye on them.

"Did you want to talk to me privately?" Melissa queried.

"Yes, how did you know?"

"The way you scooted the children out of here," Melissa giggled. "What is it?"

"Has Philip told you we want to adopt Rory after we are married?" Reilly questioned wondering how much of anything Philip had confided in his brother and sister in law.

"Yes he did. We are ever so excited for you," Melissa bubbled. "How tragic to lose a mother and never know a father."

"I was told Rory's father visited twice while I was away in school, but Meredith told him never to return again," Reilly shared with Melissa. "As far as I know he never did come back. "

"How sad. He must be an awful man," Melissa concluded. "I mean to have one's wife tell you never to come back while she was living with his own father."

"Philip shared a lot with you," Reilly noted.

"Is that alright? I mean Philip adores you madly," Melissa said contritely. "He just can't stop talking about you."

"It makes me feel good, actually!" Reilly exclaimed. "I don't know if Owen Woulfe is a horrible man. Meredith never talked about him. I asked her if he was a drunkard or beat her and she immediately declared he hadn't and defended him. As a matter of fact, the only thing she ever told me that he was ever too wonderful by words. She told me it was she that kept him away. She simply could not abide the wilderness and if she were near him she would be swayed to return. She thought the wilderness would be the death of her. Instead it was the city that killed her."

"How tragic," Melissa said sympathetically. "Did she say anything else about Rory's father?"

Reilly blushed, "Yes! She told me that he was magnificent in bed. He made her shiver and shake and scream in ecstasy."

"No!" Melissa whispered afraid that someone would hear the two women engaging in private talk. "I'm envious."

"That's what she said," Reilly giggled quietly. She liked her new sister in law and had immediately felt comfortable with her. "It was one of the reasons she tried to keep him away from her. She enjoyed him so much she was afraid he could take her back with him."

"Peter is loving and considerate, but I don't shiver and shake," Melissa chuckled.

"Is it good? The marriage bed I mean," Reilly whispered.

"The marriage bed is wonderful," Melissa shared softly. "I get to cuddle next to my husband every night. He is gentle and loving. He keeps my feet warm in winter."

"You know what I mean," Reilly blushed once more.

"Yes, it is good but I certainly don't shiver and shake," Melissa laughed. "I wish I did."

Trevor Stewart entered the room to retrieve a cheroot. "I beg your pardon. I wasn't aware Reilly had a visitor."

Melissa and Reilly blushed crimson to their toes hoping they had not been overheard.

"Father, this is Melissa Madison, Philip's sister in law," Reilly introduced.

"Enchanted," Trevor said politely. "I thought I heard Rory in here?"

"He was. He took my daughter Penelope to see puppies," Melissa replied. "You must be so excited about Reilly and Philip adopting Rory."

"What?" Trevor inhaled.

"Philip and I hadn't discussed it with Father," Reilly gulped.

"Oh dear! Always putting my foot in it," Melissa apologized.

"It's alright my dear," Trevor soothed. "Reilly, I think it's wonderful that you and Philip have such good intentions, but Rory does have a father."

"A father that hasn't seen him since he was three years old!" Reilly said heatedly. "Even if Meredith did tell him to stay away, he could have tried to see his son."

"We don't understand what was between Meredith and Owen," Trevor reprimanded. "I taught you not to judge people."

"It's just that Rory is so special to me and he loves Philip," Reilly retracted. "We would be good parents."

"I'm certain you would be good parents, but Rory has a father," Trevor insisted. "I don't think Owen will give Rory up. Garvey tells me how it hurts Owen to be separated from his son. Owen sends Christmas, Easter, and birthday presents to Rory every year."

"He must have received the news of Meredith's death," Reilly related. "Why hasn't he come to get Rory, or even write?"

"Baby girl, you have only lived in cities. You don't know what it is like in the territory. When the snows come you are cut off from civilization. Passes and trails are closed. You have your neighbors, the Shoshone, maybe a close fort, and trappers that are an untrustworthy motley lot."

"Father, you only call me baby girl in that tone when you're upset with me," Reilly noticed. "And as I recall, you and Mr. Woulfe were trappers."

"I am upset with you and that's how I know about trappers," Trevor smiled at his daughter. "I'm certain we will get a letter from Owen in spring, and he will want us to send him his son."

"I won't let him!" Reilly declared stubbornly. "Philip and I can give Rory a good loving home."

"Well all this remains to be seen," Trevor resolved by ending the discussion. "I'll let you two ladies continue with your jawing."

The day of the wedding came. Melissa was Reilly's matron of honor and she and Penelope had spent the night to be there and help in the morning. Abigail did Reilly's hair. A large chignon on the back of the head with sausage curls behind the ear. The hair was pulled back with waves on the top and sides.

Melissa helped Abigail dress Reilly in her White taffeta dress with a wide fringe topping the dress and with white silk cording at the hem. White lace crisscrosses to form squares bordered with fringe formed a top layer. A taffeta belt accented the dress at the waist and draped down the back of the dress ending with fringe. The bodice had a high neck with lace and pearl buttons. The sleeves were simple with fringe at the shoulder and the square lace at the cuff.

A satin rosebud tiara topped Reilly's wedding dress with a long white tulle veil falling down to the skirt hem. She wore simple white satin gloves. On her ears she wore the diamond earrings Philip had given her for Christmas.

Melissa wore a striped taffeta mauve dress with saw-toothed hem. Like Reilly, she did not like the tight-laced bodice. In the short time they were together they had formed a sister like bond. Penelope was dressed in a white satin dress, pantalets, and patent leather shoes. Penelope was to be the flower girl. Rory wore his new Army regulation dress uniform his grandfather had made for him. He was to be the ring bearer.

Trevor knocked on the door. It was time. He took his lovely daughter in arm and walked her down the steps. Melissa walked into the parlor in front of Penelope as she scattered the rose petals for Reilly to walk upon. Rory stood straight and proud next to Philip in his best dress uniform. By Philip's side was his good friend, Lieutenant John Dresden.

Philip stared lovingly at Reilly as her father walked her to the preacher. Extending his arm, Philip took the hand of Reilly in matrimony.

The ceremony was simple and brief. Abigail could be heard sobbing. Lillian was silent and aloof. Franklin, Trevor, and Garvey celebrated for all of them. They became a bit foxed. Trevor and Garvey shared their tales of trapping with an avid listener, Franklin. Melissa and Peter spent the evening talking to Philip and Reilly. Rory played soldier with Penelope. Lillian was miserable and unhappy.

In the evening Franklin took Lillian back to their house. He was then so foxed even her sour mood didn't bother him.

Melissa and Peter stayed the night at the Stewart house. Garvey took Penelope home next door with Rory. The two had become friends and enjoyed playing together. It turned out that Penelope was somewhat of a tomboy.

Melissa helped Reilly prepare for the wedding night. She had bought Reilly a silky revealing peignoir. When Philip walked into the bedroom he found his bride in her bed wearing the white enticing gown. He smiled and quickly went into the dressing room. He couldn't believe how quickly he undressed and put on a silk pajama set his father bought him. Philip literally jumped into the bed and took Reilly in his arms.

"God, you are beautiful," Philip said huskily. He kissed her lips and then her neck.

Reilly felt Philip's hands raise her gown and fumble with the strings of his pajama trousers. He lay upon her and bracing himself on his forearms so not to place his entire weight upon her, he entered. "Ohhhh!" Reilly gasped as she felt a sharp pain.

"I'm sorry," Philip whispered stopping for just a moment. "It must be done. I had to break your maiden head." He continued his thrusts.

Reilly found it to be painful for his first few thrusts but she soon felt something wonderful and responded. Her response sent Philip over the edge. He groaned loudly and lay on top of her breathing heavily.

"I love you, Reilly!" Philip repeated over and over. He rolled on to his back and took Reilly in his arms. He fell sound asleep.

Reilly felt a little let down but safe and secure in her husband's arm.

Chapter Seven

In April Garvey entered the parlor waving a letter in his hand. "Owen sent a post!"

Trevor pointed to a chair for Garvey to have a seat. "What does the boy have to say?"

Reilly was in the parlor sewing with Rachel. Rory had been playing on one of the parlor tables with the pewter toy soldiers Philip had brought him from Washington City. Rory was spending more and more time in the Stewart home. Philip was gone and Rory kept his promise to stay near Reilly and protect her for him. Philip and Reilly had even made a room for him in the house.

Trevor loved having Rory in the house but consistently warned Reilly not to get her hopes up for adopting Rory.

"He tells me he wrote this letter Christmas Day. He just received our post the day before," Garvey stated.

"How sad to get the news on Christmas Eve," Trevor sighed soberly.

"The estate is finished and although he was hoping to bring his family back this summer he still wants Rory to come and live with him," Garvey told Trevor.

Rory had been listening and stood stamping his foot. "I won't go! I don't like him! I want to stay with Aunt Reilly and Uncle Philip!"

"Son, your father wants you with him," Garvey said soothingly.

"I won't! I want to stay here!" Rory pouted. "I don't like him!"

"How can you say you don't like him?" Garvey asked firmly. "He's your father!"

Reilly stood up placing the sewing down on the chair. Reilly would reassure him not allowing him to remain upset. She walked to Rory. "I'll write to your father. I'm certain he thinks since your Mommy is with the angels, you must need him," Reilly soothed. "I'm certain once he finds out how much Uncle Philip and I love you, he'll let you stay with us."

"Promise?" Rory asked hopefully.

"I promise," Reilly stated. "I'll write to him right this minute!"

"Reilly, that's Owen's son! He is the boy's father, you have no right," Trevor reprimanded.

"I have every right!" Reilly said stubbornly determined that she and Philip would keep Rory. "I love Rory and Meredith was like my sister. I can love and care for Rory like she. Philip and I love Rory."

"You can't deny Rory to his father," Trevor growled. How could he make his daughter understand she could not keep the boy?

Reilly stomped her foot and left the room with a scowl, "Watch me!"

"Let her write to Owen," Garvey interrupted. He winked at Trevor. Suddenly it became clear to him that there were powers above that could be working, and he needed more time to close a few loose ends. "It won't hurt to ask."

"Well if you think it is alright," Trevor conceded.

"I do," Garvey chuckled. "Rory, go in the kitchen and see if Abigail will give you a cookie. Rachel, will you leave Trevor and I alone for a moment."

"Yassuh," Rachel obeyed. She got up and followed Rory out of the room.

"Just what is that all about?" Trevor demanded. "You and I both know Owen enough to know that he won't give up his son."

"Yes, but it gives me some more time before I have to take my grandson out to his father," Garvey chuckled. "And it gives us time to get the papers for Rachel and Jacob." Garvey was concerned about the increasing hostility between the Federalists and the Confederacy. More and more slaves that had made it to safety were being captured in the North and returned. Although Philip's army rank had kept Rachel and Jacob safe for the moment, it was becoming more perilous.

In the afternoon Reilly left to post the letter she wrote to Owen Woulfe. Trevor and Garvey were playing chess when Philip suddenly burst in the room.

"Where is Reilly?" Philip asked breathlessly. He looked windblown, disheveled and worried.

"She'll be back momentarily," Trevor answered quickly. "Reilly just went to send off a post."

"What is it boy?" Garvey asked worriedly.

"The Confederacy attacked Fort Sumter," Philip gasped taking short breaths. "The Confederates have taken it."

"God no!" Garvey exclaimed.

"This means war," Trevor declared solemnly.

"The rest of the Southern States seceded," Philip replied soberly. "President Lincoln will be forced to take action soon. I've been called with 75,000 others of the militia. We are to stand by to stop the insurrection."

"Good God," Garvey sighed sitting down on a huge stuffed leather chair. This was bad news indeed.

"I have leave for two days," Philip said quietly after regaining his breath. He had ridden hard to make good use of his two days. "I want to spend every minute with my Reilly."

"Have a brandy boy," Trevor offered rising to get the canter and a glass. He poured a glass for Philip and handed it to him.

"I'd like one myself," Garvey requested wanting to calm his nerves.

Trevor poured a glass for his friend and himself. They silently sipped the warm liquor each in their own thoughts.

"Philip?" Reilly asked surprised when she entered the room removing her great coat. "I thought you wouldn't be able to return home for two weeks." Then she noticed his strained face. "God, what is it?"

Philip strode to his wife's side in three long steps. He lifted her in his arms and then carried her upstairs to their room. He quickly removed her clothes and placed her in their bed. He kissed her lips, her neck, slipped off his boots and opened the buttons on his trousers. He made love to her and whispered. "I have two days and then we are called up. The Confederates took Fort Sumter."

Reilly felt tears streak down her cheek. She suddenly felt cold and full of dread. This meant war and her husband would serve the United States Army. She realized he would face the enemy and great danger. "My darling," she whispered into his hair as he thrust into her.

Exhausted from his trip and his physical need for his wife, now sated, Philip fell asleep. Reilly rose and put on a cotton nightgown. She climbed back into bed with her husband and snuggled next to him. Philip's presence in bed made her feel safe, warm, and secure. She would spend every minute of these precious two days next to her husband's side.

"Just heard this, Owen," Jonah yelled into the kitchen. "Got it from Fort Hall two days ago while I was there!"

Winter Sun rose from bending over the soup pot.

Jonah saw her first upon entering the kitchen. "Sorry Winter honey. I didn't mean to shout."

Winter Sun rolled her eyes and smiled, "What is this important news?"

"Did you get all the supplies I asked," Owen asked disinterested in the news of the world. He was happy in his own world.

"Yes Boss," Jonah laughed. "You're gonna hear anyway! Them telegraph things are working now at Fort Hall. I just heard that them Southerners seceded and took Fort Sumter!"

"Great!" Owen ignored. "That means the bloody people will kill some more and call it a war." He bent over his bowl of soup and began eating and tearing apart a fresh roll Winter Sun had just baked.

"Where is this Fort Sumter?" Winter Sun asked worriedly.

"I heard it is the State of South Carolina," Jonah answered. "You got any hot soup ready for a cold hungry man, honey?"

"I am not honey!" Winter Sun grumped. She took a bowl and ladled hot soup from the pot placing it on the table for Jonah. "Here eat!"

"You will be my honey someday," Jonah chortled quickly scarping down the delicious hot soup.

"Why did you ask about where Fort Sumter is?" Owen asked Winter Sun. "You don't really care what happens out East do you? It means the bluecoats will be more busy killing each other and not the Shoshone."

"Your son lives in the East still," Winter Sun reminded Owen. "I worry for his safety."

"I didn't think about that," Owen replied thoughtfully. "Fort Sumter is far enough away, but Fairland is near Washington City. The war will get close soon enough."

"You must get your son here, soon!" Winter Sun said worriedly. She did not share her other worry with Owen.

"I sent the post last month," Owen stated suddenly standing and starting to pace. "I asked my father to bring Rory here right away." He started rubbing his hands through his hair. He began to worry.

Rory held Reilly's hand as they bade farewell to Philip Madison. He mounted his Morgan and waved as he left for Washington City. Philip returned home whenever he could after the Fort Sumter defeat. It was late June and the weather was warming. A boy ran up to the porch and gave Reilly a post from Washington territory. After recognizing it was from Owen Woulfe, Reilly told Rory to find his grandfather. She walked into the study and opened the letter.

It read,

Dear Mrs. Madison,

Although I appreciate the love and care you and your husband offer to my son, please be advised I want Rory here with me.

I would appreciate you giving the enclosed note to my father, Garvey Woulfe. I expect to have my son returned shortly.

Your servant,

Owen Woulfe

Reilly crushed the short letter. "This is short and sweet! What a rude man!" So he won't let me have Rory? I'll see about that! "Rachel, see that Mr. Woulfe gets this note when Rory brings him. I'm going into town for a little bit."

"Shouldn't you take an escort?" Rachel queried with concern. She had seen the increased influx of crude militia coming through the town heading toward Washington City for training at Camp Hamilton.

"I don't have time to gather one," Reilly replied. She walked briskly into town. Concentrating on Rory's adoption, Reilly did not notice the crude men or comments of their noticing her. Her point of interest was the law firm of Henry and Mullins. Reilly spent several hours talking to Jonathan Mullins only to learn that she and Philip could not pursue a legal action and adopt Rory.

Reilly left the lawyer's office defeated and really was not paying attention. A rough hand grabbed her arm and yanked her backwards. "Hey pretty little lady. Where are you headed?"

Reilly shrugged and pulled away from the rough militiaman. "I'm returning to my home."

"Well I got a little home I'd like to take you too," the ruffian leered.

"Sir, I am a married woman," Reilly retorted. "Let me go!"

"I don't see no man!" the ruffian growled menacingly. He pulled Reilly closer. "How about a little kiss sweetheart? A little kiss for a lonely man?"

Reilly thought she would vomit. He reeked of tobacco, liquor, urine, and sweat. She struggled with all her might but his lips clamped down on hers. Then she heard the sound of a gun cocking.

"Let the lady go, or you'll have air flowing through your brain in your coffin today," A voice said menacingly.

Reilly thought she recognized the voice.

The ruffian released Reilly's lips but brutally held on to her arm. He turned his head and stared in the barrel of a Colt 45. "Who the hell are you?"

"An officer and a gentleman you louse," the voice replied. "Let the lady go or I'll have you brought up on charges and hanged."

Reilly then saw the face of Philip's friend, "John?"

"At your service, Mrs. Madison," Lieutenant Dresden smiled. He waved the Colt at the ruffian who quickly ran off. "Just what are you doing alone in town?"

"I went to see our solicitor, but he was certainly no help," Reilly replied wiping her dress off vigorously with her hands. "I hope that vile man didn't leave any of his friends on me."

"I should like to know why the wife of my best friend is wandering around town without escort?" John questioned.

"I just didn't think about it," Reilly apologized for some reason. She didn't know why she felt she had to. "My mind was preoccupied. I never had a problem like this even before I was married. Of course I don't remember riff raff like him in town either."

"Well, I'm happy I was passing through and recognized you," John said to her and took her hand. "Things are different. The coming war is changing things. The Confederates are massing in Virginia not far from Washington City."

"No!" Reilly gasped placing her hand upon her breast. "My Philip!"

"Your Philip would be worried if he knew you took such chances and he has enough to worry about," John stated firmly. "Allow me to walk you home."

"Oh yes, please," Reilly answered honestly a bit unnerved by the incident.

Lieutenant Dresden took the reins of his Calvary pony and walked Reilly home.

"Can you come in for a refreshment?" Reilly offered. "Perhaps lemonade?"

"Thank you, I'd like that," John accepted. "Did Philip leave yet?"

"Philip left this morning," Reilly said conversationally as she opened the door. "I thought you were at Camp Hamilton?"

"I was allowed a respite to visit my family in New York," John answered. "That's how I managed to be coming through Fairland. I had intended to stop in and ask for dinner and a bed. I've been traveling since dawn."

"Of course you're welcome," Reilly offered. "We would be upset if you didn't stay with us. You must tell me everything about your family and send my love to Philip."

"Reilly? Is that you baby girl?" Trevor was heard to say.

"Dear, I'm in trouble," Reilly said softly.

"How do you know you're in trouble?" John queried.

"Father calls me baby girl when he's upset with me," Reilly explained. "Yes father, it is I and I brought company."

"Where did you go baby girl?" Trevor said angrily turning the corner from the study into the hall. "Things have changed. It's dangerous in town. You can't go there alone anymore!"

"I know," Reilly confessed. "I learned the hard way, but Lieutenant Dresden saw me home safely."

"Were you hurt?" Trevor asked worriedly.

"Only a little bruised," Reilly answered rubbing her arm where the ruffian had grabbed on to her and held her.

"Thank you boy," Trevor said gratefully. "It's a good thing you were in town. Is Philip with you?"

"No sir. I'm on my way to Camp Hamilton from a leave in New York with my family," John answered. "Mrs. Madison invited me for dinner and a hospice before I finish my ride."

"Of course! Welcome," Trevor invited. "Tell us all about Camp Hamilton. Any news of the Confederates?"

"Lieutenant Dresden told me the Confederates are massing in Virginia near Washington City," Reilly informed. "Excuse me, I'll get some refreshing lemonade for us."

"What's going to happen?" Trevor asked curiously leading Philip's friend into the study.

"War, I fear," Lieutenant Dresden said somberly. "President Lincoln is receiving pressure from everyone to retaliate on behalf of Fort Sumter and the Capitol is endangered by the Confederates camping so near."

Trevor shook his head and took him inside his study. There the three men, who included Garvey, talked for hours. When dinner was served

the conversation was lighter and John went to bed early. He was tired from his ride.

The next morning Reilly saw to it that Lieutenant Dresden had a large filling breakfast and she sent a new white shirt she had finished sewing for Philip with John. She felt such dread yesterday morning when Philip had left she forgot to give the shirt to him. John promised to give it to Philip.

Chapter Eight

"Trevor," Garvey addressed. "A young uniformed soldier is approaching your gate."

Both men knew what it meant. They had heard General McDowell had been ordered to dispel the Confederate troops camped near Bull Run River. General Sherman and his militia were part of that action. Philip would be one of the first commissioned officers on the front line.

Trevor caught Abigail in the hall polishing the banister. "Abby, find Rory and keep him in the kitchen with you." Trevor and Garvey walked briskly and met the young soldier outside on the lawn. It was exactly the dreaded news they preferred never to hear.

Garvey went immediately to the livery and prepared the carriage. Trevor took the young soldier inside and offered him a warm brandy. Once the young lad was comfortable Trevor set about issuing orders. When everything was accomplished, he walked upstairs to Reilly's sewing room. She and Rachel were working on a new dress. As he opened the door he heard, "This is simply lovely, Rachel. You have a natural talent." Trevor watched his lovely daughter dip and sway looking in the mirror at the new simple day dress of deep green cotton. He stepped in.

"Father, look at what Rachel has finished?" Reilly said cheerfully. "Isn't the dress grand?" She looked at her father closely and noticed his strange strained face. Reilly knew instinctively it was Philip. "God no!" She screamed.

An explanation was unnecessary. "Garvey has our carriage ready," Trevor stated calmly. "We leave for Washington City hospital immediately."

Unthinking Reilly bolted from the room and ran down the stairs. Her feet barely touched the floor. She stopped at the door in the foyer trying to figure out what she must do next. Suddenly she felt as if she hadn't a brain in her head. Reilly's body began to tremor. Her Philip! Her husband!

Trevor caught up to her and handed her a silken hood cape he retrieved from her room. "Private Dawson," Trevor called.

A young man appeared at the parlor door. "Yes sir?"

"We're ready to leave," Trevor stated taking his daughter's trembling arm and leading her out the door.

A fresh horse was saddled and ready for Private Dawson. Zachary was waiting to assist Reilly and Trevor Stewart into the carriage. Garvey

was already waiting inside. Garvey's driver had reins in hand and the horses even sensed the urgency.

Trevor turned to the young soldier. "Ride like the wind, lad. These are the finest bred horses in Maryland. They'll keep up with your Morgan."

"Yes sir," Private Dawson saluted and mounted.

The carriage ride to Washington was far from comfortable, but it didn't matter. The inhabitants of the carriage desired only speed.

Trevor consoled his distraught daughter, "He's wounded. That's all we know." Trevor did not have the heart to tell his daughter Lieutenant Dresden had sent for her posthaste. He did not tell his daughter Philip Madison was mortally wounded and not expected to live.

"Can't we go faster?" Reilly sobbed. Her emotions screamed in her brain. He was wounded, that meant he would be well so. Didn't it? She would fix him. She would make him better. "Philip needs me!"

"We're going as fast as God allows any horse flesh to go," Garvey comforted patting Reilly's hand.

"My Philip, my Philip!" Reilly choked on her hysterics. "I'm on my way to you my darling!"

Reilly babbled incoherently. She was beside herself in her worst fears. The carriage ride normally took almost two hours. They found themselves on the outskirts of Washington City in an hour. David Richter was the best driver in the county. He had won several ribbons in the State Fair contests. That is why Garvey had requested him to drive. Even David Richter slowed the horses in the city. Private Dawson led them down several side streets.

Reilly was impatient and distraught. "Where is that blasted hospital!"

Never had they heard Reilly raise her voice or use cursory language, but Trevor and Garvey did not reprimand Reilly. They understood her anxiety.

Nearly a half hour later Private Dawson stopped in front of a private hospital.

David Richter reined the team of horses to a halt.

Trevor opened the carriage door and jumped out. Garvey followed and helped Reilly out of the carriage.

"This way," Private Dawson indicated. "Lieutenant Dresden will be waiting for you in the reception area."

"I don't want to be received!" Reilly snapped testily. "I want to be taken to my husband."

"Ma'am, I don't know where Lieutenant Madison is," Private Dawson stuttered nervously. "Lieutenant Dresden does and can take you to him."

"Yes of course," Reilly said apologetically suddenly ashamed of her unusual and unladylike behavior. "I'm not thinking correctly."

"I understand ma'am," The young soldier acknowledged. He took them into the hospital reception area.

Even outside the family heard the moans and groans of the wounded and dying. Inside the hospital the stench of burnt flesh permeated their nostrils. Reilly felt light headed but did not give in to it. She straightened her back and waited nervously as an orderly was sent to find Lieutenant Dresden.

Reilly saw him first and cried, "John!" She leapt from the chair and ran into his arms. "Where is my Philip?"

"This way," John indicated with his arm. It was then Reilly noticed the blood on his uniform. A sleeve was missing and part of his shirt cut. His forearm was bandaged.

"You're hurt," Reilly uttered softly. She looked up at her husband's best friend and saw his pained face. It was blackened with soot and he smelled of cannon powder. She followed John up two flights of stairs, passing wards of the wounded and dying. Army and private doctors weaved in and out of the mangled bodies. Reilly heard them shouting orders over men screaming. Reilly prayed silently that her husband was not in such a ward. John stood outside a closed door. Reilly heard a soft moaning. It was Philip calling her name. Slowly John opened the door. Reilly entered a dimly lit room.

"Reilly. Reilly," Philip cried softly.

A private nurse sat by the bedside and rose as Reilly entered. "You must be, Reilly. You are his wife?"

Reilly nodded. Like a wafted breeze she walked silently to her semi conscious husband. He was wearing the shirt she had made him only a few weeks before. It was the shirt she had given John to give to her Philip. Her face wrinkled at the bloody shirt and looked questioningly at the nurse.

"He wouldn't let us remove the shirt," the nurse responded. "Considering his wounds, we felt we should allow him to keep it on. He's been calling you since he arrived. Lieutenant Dresden explained to the doctor that you had made him the shirt."

Reilly choked back the tears. She bent over her husband's face and kissed his lips gently. Reilly looked into Philip's glassy eyes. She knew he was dying. Her entire happiness had been shattered by this war. First she lost her best friend, and now her husband. Suddenly she realized that was part of being an adult. You grew up into the reality of death and sorrow. Reilly sat on the bed and took Philip's hand in hers. She took her other hand and gently stroked Philip's curly blonde hair. "I'm here Philip." Reilly repeated those words over and over again.

Suddenly Philip moved his head and his eyes focused on Reilly. He was lucid and focused. "Reilly, I love you."

"I love you too my darling," Reilly whispered and kissed his lips. "I'm here by your side. We're going to take you home with us."

"Reilly my love," Philip wheezed out painfully. "I held on until I could tell you that knowing you and loving you has been the best part of my

life. In our short time together here on earth I have known a lifetime of happiness."

"We will still have a lifetime together," Reilly wept denying the reality.

"You and I know better my love," Philip coughed dreadfully. "I don't want you to mourn my passing. Live your wonderful life to the fullest. Our love brought us happiness for a lifetime."

"I'm taking you home," Reilly cried burying her face into her husband's neck. "I'm taking you home!"

"I love you, Reilly," Philip wheezed while his hand gathered enough strength to stroke his wife's thick black shiny hair. His hand fell and he was silent.

Reilly sat up and cried out, "Philip! Philip!" Her hands clawed at his silken pleated shirt. "Philip!" She felt strong arms grab onto her. Her body was folded into the massive strength of her father. Reilly buried her face in her father's coat. Tears flowed and sobs could not be stopped.

Garvey and John lifted the sheet to cover Philip's body while the doctor who had walked in to check on his patient only minutes before, closed Philip's eyes and placed pennies on them.

"I can't believe the boy lasted this long," Doctor Miles whispered shaking his head. "It was a miracle he lasted this long considering his wounds."

"He had to say goodbye to his Reilly," John choked out. "Their love is stronger even than the grip of death."

Trevor led his daughter into the hall.

"I'm taking Philip home," Reilly uttered in a daze. "I won't leave without my Philip."

"Garvey and I will help," Trevor reassured his daughter. He held her tightly in his arms. He was afraid his daughter would fall she was shaking so much.

Doctor Miles walked out with Garvey and John. He addressed Trevor, "will some laudanum help?"

Reilly spit fire with her response, "I don't want your drugs! I want my husband! Why didn't you operate? Why didn't you try to save him? What kind of doctor are you?"

Trevor held his daughter tighter and placed his hand upon the back of her head as she returned to his tear soaked suit coat. "Doctor Miles, she's upset. Forgive her."

Doctor Miles nodded his head in understanding. He handed Garvey a vial of laudanum. "She'll need this later to sleep," he whispered to Garvey. Doctor Miles returned his look to Trevor and closed his eyes in a private pain. He had seen so many young men in his care die today. "The boy should have died on the battlefield. His wounds were so grievous and fatal. I can't believe he survived this long. We gave him morphine for the pain."

"We know you did everything you could," Trevor appreciated while stroking his grieving daughter's back. "Thank you, doctor."

"Trevor," Garvey said quietly. "Take Reilly to the hotel nearby and give her this." Garvey handed the vial of laudanum to his friend. "John and I will see to hiring a hearse and prepare Philip's body to be brought home."

"We'll send word to his family," John volunteered. "I thought it was important that Reilly get here immediately. She was my only concern for my friend."

"Thank you for your kindness and understanding," Garvey said somberly.

Garvey and John watched Trevor take his sobbing daughter from the hall and down the stairs.

Trevor acquired several rooms in the hotel although it was booked to capacity. Money always bought the impossible. He put his daughter to bed after he had spiked a glass of warm milk with laudanum and gotten her to drink it.

It was early in the morning hours that John and Garvey returned to the hotel. Garvey assisted John Dresden in taking a bath and redressed his arm wound. The two men then collapsed in beds from exhaustion.

Trevor was awake early. He had slept in the chair next to Reilly's bed. He recovered her with the quilt she had kicked off and rose to bathe and shave. He went downstairs and ate breakfast although he wasn't hungry and left most of the food on the plate. He ordered a late breakfast for Garvey and John. He knew in his heart it would be useless to try to make Reilly eat. Instead he brought a serving tray into the room that would offer her a cup of hot tea when she woke.

Reilly sat up suddenly nearly stopping her father's heart in his surprise. "Philip?" Reilly put her fingers to her temple and tried to regain her senses. She looked around the room in a daze. Her eyes clamped onto the image of her father. Slowly she refocused her mind. "Philip is gone!"

"Reilly, baby," Trevor said sadly. "Philip has passed on."

Tears of reality once again streamed down Reilly's cheeks. "I want to take him home."

"Everything is ready, baby," Trevor said reassuringly. "We're taking Philip home this morning." Trevor rose and poured Reilly a cup of tea.

Gathering her wits Reilly took the offered cup. "I must tell Philip's family."

"Garvey and John took care of that," Trevor consoled.

"I want to..."

"Everything is ready, baby," Trevor repeated quietly. "Drink your tea." Trevor didn't tell Reilly he had put a small drop of laudanum in the tea to help relax her."

A black hearse waited in front of the hotel. In the glass sided hearse was a mahogany coffin holding the remains of Philip Madison.

Reilly nearly fell when she walked outside and saw the hearse. Fortunately her father's arms were securely around her. Garvey stepped into his carriage ahead of Reilly and helped Trevor lift her into the carriage. The two men sat on either side of her for the trip home. She was eerily quiet on the ride back to Fairland.

Rachel saw the carriage and hearse approaching. She knew that meant Massah Madison was passed on. Quickly she took Rory down the stairs and into the Woulfe gardens. The riding master was waiting and Rory and he went on a pony ride.

The coffin was taken into the parlor of the Stewart home. Jacob and Zachary were two of the pallbearers. John Dresden and Garvey also insisted upon helping. Trevor holding Reilly walked behind the coffin as they carried it up the stairs and into the house. After the coffin was lovingly placed in the parlor, Trevor walked his daughter up to her room. Abigail followed them. Abigail helped Reilly undress and put on a cotton nightgown. Again, Reilly was given spiked warm milk. She drifted off to sleep immediately.

"My poor baby," Abigail cried as she tucked the quilt around Reilly.

"Where is Rory?" Garvey whispered to Abigail as she silently shut the door. He had been waiting in the hallway.

"Rachel saw you coming and took Rory to the riding master," Abigail whispered in return. "He's out riding."

"I'll tell him when he gets back," Garvey said softly. He walked to his town house and waited for his grandson.

That evening Rory walked into the Stewart parlor holding his grandfather's hand. He was wearing his special uniform that Philip Madison had given him at Christmas. Rory's eyes were puffed, red, and swollen with tears. Silently he and his grandfather walked to Reilly's side. She was kneeling next to the coffin weeping quietly. Rory took her hand.

Reilly looked up and opened her arms to Rory. Together they mourned the loss of their dear love.

Chapter Nine

Everyday since Philip's funeral Abigail would wake Reilly in the morning, help bathe her, and help her to dress. After Abigail left, Reilly would sit on her chair and stare out the window. Her father would arrive later with a breakfast tray and eat with her. His gentle persuasions forced her to eat. They would talk about household things and Trevor would disappear until supper. Abigail would bring lunch on a tray and stay for company. It was another ploy to make sure Reilly would eat. Trevor would come at dinner and physically walk her downstairs to eat in the dining room.

This was the standard routine for these three days after the funeral. Feeling alone and especially grieved this morning, Reilly walked to the Armoire that held Philip's suit and uniforms. Opening the doors she fingered the uniform and bent her head to inhale Philip's scent. Treating the clothes like a holy relic, Reilly brushed an unseen particle of dust from the shoulder. Closing the Armoire Reilly walked to the bed, she fluffed the pillow that Philip used for sleeping. "My God," Reilly cried loudly to the heavens. "Why did you take him from me?"

Reilly walked back to the open window wiping her eyes with a lace kerchief and sat on her chair near the table to once again stare outside. Her mind returned to the funeral three days ago. She wore a heavy black veil over a black coalscuttle bonnet. It was a hot July day and she chose a simple black cotton dress. She wore black cotton gloves. Rory had stayed by her side and held her hand bravely like a strong little soldier Philip would have been proud of. At least that is what Garvey told his grandson. Trevor supported her and nearly held her throughout the entire burial ceremony.

Peter was devastated by his brother's death. Melissa was his rock and salvation. Penelope was left at home with her other grandparents.

Franklin too was devastated, but remained strong for Lillian who was destroyed by the death of her handsome and adored youngest son. Lillian fell apart in hysteria many times during the service and the burial.

Reilly returned in her mind to the wake after the burial. Lillian was actually nice and sympathetic. "My son adored you! You were his life. It is all my horrible pride that made this tragedy happen. I'm being punished. Lord, I promise I'll change. I swear!" Lillian repeated over and over.

Reilly wanted to be strong and loving for Lillian's sake, but she was too encased in her own grief. She remembered Melissa comforting her and her husband, Peter. Melissa told the two of them she was again with child. If their baby were a boy she would name him Philip Madison. Reilly choked on her sobs. Melissa meant to be kind but it cut Reilly deeply that she was not carrying Philip's child. She could not even carry on her husband's name.

Just then Trevor walked in with the breakfast tray. He quickly put the tray on the table and enclosed Reilly in his arms. Trevor stroked her hair in reassurance. "There, there baby. You must stop this mourning," Trevor whispered. "Philip wouldn't want this."

Reilly's tear filled eyes and streaked cheeks looked at her father lovingly. She wept, "This pain will never stop!"

"Yes, I know. The pain never stops, but it dulls and you live with it," Trevor replied thinking of his own Rose.

Reilly cocked her head and realized her father had suffered such pain all these years. "You still miss mother?"

Trevor sat on the chair and took Reilly's small hands in his large rough ones. "I miss her painfully. I miss her every moment. I miss her every time I see you, my baby, Reilly. You are the image of your mother."

"Oh father, I'm so sorry!" Reilly exclaimed. "I never stopped to think how you have suffered so all these years."

"Of course not. The pain of lost love and loneliness cannot be shared. It is our own burden. It is our own cross to bear," Trevor said sadly. "But I have you and that is the joy of my life."

They heard shouting coming from the front lawn. Reilly saw Rory trying to pull away from his grandfather's grip. "Let me go! Let me go!" Reilly heard Rory shouting.

"You can't see Aunt Reilly," Garvey reprimanded. "Your Aunt Reilly is still sick."

"I can see her! I must see her!" Rory shouted. "Let me go! I have to see my Aunt Reilly!"

Reilly stood and called out to Garvey, "Let Rory come to see me. I'll meet him downstairs."

A surprised Garvey released Rory, but followed the streak running into the house.

Trevor's mouth silently uttered a prayer of thanks. He had been worried about Reilly and her mental state.

Reilly was nearly knocked over when Rory ran into her arms at the base of the staircase.

"Aunt Reilly, Grandfather is taking me away from you," Rory cried anxiously. "He's making me leave my home."

Stroking Rory's sandy brown hair Reilly asked Garvey quietly as he entered, "What is going on here?" Rory buried his head into the fullness of Reilly's skirt near her waist.

"I just told Rory that I had purchased train tickets," Garvey revealed. "We're leaving for St. Louis next week to meet Owen there."

Something happened inside Reilly's mind. It opened wide and dumped the self-pitying grief. A protective and fiercely defending side of Reilly emerged in full power. These past days her life had been gray and unclear. At that moment Reilly saw everything as if it were crystal clear. She made solid decisions instantly. Taking Rory's hand she led him into the parlor. She sat him next to her on the rose divan that had been her and Philip's special chair.

"Rory, your grandfather must take you to your father," Reilly stated firmly but raised her hand to stop Rory's anticipated argument. "You will not be separated from me."

Garvey dropped his jaw, "Reilly, how do you plan on staying with Rory when I have to go to St. Louis?"

With words that bordered on solid steel Reilly replied, "I'm going with you. I will not allow anyone to take my Rory from me. Not even his father. I will meet Owen Woulfe personally and dissuade him from his endeavor to keep Rory."

"Reilly," Trevor choked out. "Do you understand what you're planning to do?"

"Meredith was taken from me, Philip was taken from me, and Rory and I have shared that grief," Reilly said with resolve. "We are a pair, Rory and I. No one will separate us. Not as long as I live!" Reilly hugged Rory with a strength that surprised even her.

Garvey smiled. "I'll obtain another parlor car for us."

Reilly rose holding Rory's hand. "Father, I will also find mother. I need her more than I have ever needed her before, and I will see to it that she is returned to your arms. You have my vow!"

Trevor was overcome with emotion. "Today you are a woman, Reilly Stewart Madison."

"It was a long time coming, but I'm here now," Reilly said bravely. She turned to Rory. "Don't you worry one little bit. You go pack. I'll start my packing. We'll meet your father together!"

Rory pulled Reilly's arm until she bent down. He kissed her on the cheek, "I'm not afraid anymore," he said happily.

"Go run along and have Mrs. Wilson help you pack," Garvey ordered his grandson. "I want to visit with Trevor awhile."

"If you gentlemen will excuse me," Reilly smiled to them. "I have packing to do."

Trevor and Garvey watched Reilly climb the stairs and disappear into the hall to her room.

Reilly felt wonderful. She was firm in her decision and determined. She had a goal in life. She did have a son. Reilly had a son that Philip and she had shared. Reilly would fight to the death to protect her child, her Rory. Heaven help you Owen Woulfe!

"Thank God," Trevor breathed. "My Reilly has snapped out of it. She's really going to be all right. Even better I think."

"I feel sorry for my son, Owen," Garvey chuckled. "I just wonder if either of them will realize just how strong willed and stubborn they both are?"

"Oh they'll realize it," Trevor laughed. "They will just see it in the other, not in themselves."

"This trip is going to be interesting," Garvey mused stroking his clean-shaven chin.

"Maybe I should come with you," Trevor volunteered half-heartedly.

"We'd love to have you, but who could take care of our business?" Garvey asked.

"Next visit is mine," Trevor growled teasingly. "Be sure you send me posts and wires. I don't want to miss a round between the two of them."

"Care to make a wager on who will be the crowned champion?" Garvey offered laughing.

"I bet on Owen," Trevor chuckled. "In one month."

"I bet on Reilly," Garvey declared. "That little girl of yours is some woman. She'll have Owen eating out of her hand in a week or two."

"Do you think our wish of united families will happen?" Trevor asked.

Garvey nodded. "Those two need each other and both love Rory. They should be very happy together. Eventually. That is if they don't shoot each other first."

"Those two together at last would make me very happy," Trevor sighed. "The only thing that would make me happier is if my Reilly found my Rose."

"I hope she does," Garvey wished for his friend.

"The wager is on," Trevor laughed slapping his friend on the back. "Let's have a brandy and cheroot."

"Isn't it a little early for that?" Garvey laughed embracing Trevor.

"You're absolutely right," Trevor agreed. "How about a nice glass of buttermilk?"

Reilly went to her Armoire and looked at her clothes. What exactly would she need for the trip? She was a widow and only black would do for her. She didn't have many black outfits. There were deep browns and grays. The clothes were made of all simple cotton. She looked at her evening gowns. She certainly wouldn't need them. Then she came across the outfits she had worn when her and her father went on an African Safari five years ago. These would be practical clothes for the west. They were made of sturdy cotton and linen fabric. The clothes were deep brown and three of the skirts were split for pants. She found her three pair of leather boots that were made specifically for the African trip. Reilly sat down on the chair and tried them on. The boots still fit perfectly. She pulled out the blouse and tried it on. It was a little snug around the breasts.

"A little alteration and it will be fine," Reilly said aloud. "After all, I was only fifteen when these were made."

Reilly walked to the door and was about to reach for the doorknob when it opened and Rachel stood in front of her. "Massah Woulfe said you might be needing my help."

"Rachel, I was just about to call for you," Reilly smiled. "I'm going to need you to help alter some clothes for me. I will also need these clothes washed and pressed before we pack them."

"Lawsy, are you going on a trip Missus Madison?" Rachel asked in surprise. For the past three days no one had even seen Reilly. The staff had been told she was still sick with grief. Now she was packing for a trip?

"Not only a trip, Rachel. I'm going with you, Jacob, Rory, and Mr. Woulfe out west," Reilly replied heading for the heap of clothes she had thrown on her bed.

"You're coming with us?" Rachel gasped. "Praise be, that makes me happy!"

"I'm glad for that," Reilly smiled graciously. "But Owen Woulfe will regret the day he ever laid eyes on me."

"You mean Rory's Pa?" Rachel queried straightening a blouse on the bed.

"One and the same," Reilly replied. "I'll alter these two skirts if you would be so kind as to alter these blouses with my current measurements. I would be grateful to you, and of course I'll pay you one dollar in federal notes for each one you have done and ready to pack by next week Friday when we leave."

"Yas ma'am," Rachel beamed. "Lawsy, you are shore good to me."

"You are a talented seamstress and need to be paid properly for your talents," Reilly replied checking her toilette. "You and Jacob will also need the extra money when you arrive at Bear Lake."

"Is that the name of the place weez going?" Rachel asked. "Bear Lake. I like that name."

After Rachel left the room, Reilly opened Philip's Armoire. Reverently she touched his military uniform. "I'll keep our son, I promise you. We had our happiness and I will remember you always, my husband." Reilly closed the door on the uniform and her grief.

After several days of frantic packing, Reilly took a rest at the table in the breakfast nook of their large Victorian house. Quietly sipping her tea, she was musing over the possible conversations she would be having with the elusive and stand offish, Owen Woulfe. "How can someone be such a stubborn pig head as you, when you have the most wonderful father in the world," Reilly said expounding her thoughts verbally.

"What was that?" Trevor asked as he walked into the room. "Talking to yourself are you? I really don't believe you are that stubborn and pig headed."

"Father!" Reilly recognized after she jumped from the surprise of her Father's voice.

"Nervous as a wet cat," Trevor chuckled. "Want to share your deep thoughts with me?"

Reilly leaned over and kissed her father's cheek after he sat down next to her. "I was just thinking. I don't understand the coldness of Owen Woulfe when he has such a wonderful, warm-hearted, and loving father."

"Baby, you don't know what kind of man he is," Trevor reprimanded. "Didn't I teach you not to make rash judgments? Besides I have met Owen. He is a wonderful loving and kind man like his father. It broke his heart to give up his son and wife. It hurt him even more when Meredith wouldn't go back with him."

"How do you know that?" Reilly asked curiously.

"I talked with him several times with his father whenever he visited. The last time was four years ago," Trevor related. "He was real broken up that Meredith refused to go back with him."

"He loved her?" Reilly questioned.

"I think it's time you heard the entire story," Trevor advised placing his hand on Reilly's delicate fingers. "You ought to know both sides before you tear into Owen like your planning."

"I don't plan to tear into him," Reilly defended. "I just want him to see reason. Rory belongs here with me and his grandfather."

"Well baby, that's what Meredith called it, seeing reason," Trevor said quietly accepting a cup of tea from Abigail. "Owen did everything to make Meredith happy. It got to the point he absolutely hated that phrase. No matter what he did, it was never good enough."

"Meredith was a wonderful person," Reilly defended. "You can't try to blame her."

"Baby, you have to look at both sides. Both people are right and both people are wrong," Trevor explained. "The truth of the matter always lies in the middle. Just try to remember that when you meet Owen."

"I promise I'll try," Reilly conceded.

"I speak from experience baby," Trevor said sadly. "If I had it to do over again I would have changed a whole bunch of my wrongs. I would have changed your mother's wrongs. We would have worked on the rights. You would have your mother and I wouldn't be lonely."

"It hurts me to see you sad. I know you really love mother and miss her," Reilly gulped. "I promise you I will find her. I'll find her for you and then you must come and get her."

"I can guarantee you I will," Trevor said allowing a small smile.

"Father?" Reilly asked taking his hand.

"Yes baby?"

"You haven't tried even once to stop me from going," Reilly noted. "I appreciate that but it will leave you all alone."

"I have you in my heart and mind right there with your mother," Trevor said pointing to his heart and then head. "I will miss your smile and presence but you need to do this."

"You agree that I must get custody of Rory?" Reilly asked hoping her father finally agreed with her.

"No, you need to confront Owen, talk to him, and find the right path," Trevor expounded. "You also need to find your mother. You need her now more than ever."

"I have always felt I needed her," Reilly corrected. "But I never have lacked for love or guidance. You are the most wonderful father in the world."

"Thank you baby," Trevor grinned. "I learned a lot of things about myself raising you. You are a blessing."

"Oh father," Reilly choked. She fell into her father's arms and sat on his lap just as she did when she was a child. They held each other in silence for a long time. It was a special embrace that said they would love each other as long as they could take breaths. Time and distance would never lessen their love for each other.

Chapter 10

Trevor was a solid rock for Reilly as she bade him farewell. She would never know that he cried openly after the train had left his sight. In his heart he knew Reilly must make this trip, but he loved his daughter dearly and would miss her desperately.

Reilly had never left her father other than school terms. She was surprised herself that she did not completely fall apart. Tears had trickled down her cheek as she waved adieu to the figure at the train station, but she was resolved in her mission. Rory was hers and she would not leave him to anyone, even his father.

The long train ride was exciting for the young Rory. He asked Reilly questions about everything. In overwhelming curiosity Rory investigated everything when there was a train stop. "Are we going to get robbed? Will we see Indians?" There was no end to his questions. "When are we going to see buffalo?"

"For someone that doesn't want to see his father," Garvey chuckled to his grandson. "You sure are excited about this trip."

"Aunt Reilly is going to stay with me. Aren't you?" Rory questioned Reilly confidently.

She sat on a large stuffed chair in the parlor car reading.

"I will not leave you," Reilly reassured grinning.

"See grandfather?" Rory chirped. "I'm not afraid any more. I won't be taken away from my Aunt Reilly."

Reilly would faithfully instruct Rory in reading, writing, and mathematics everyday during the long train ride. She was certain the proper education of Rory would be a persuading factor in obtaining custody of Rory from Owen Woulfe.

Rory was reading from the first primer in the parlor car when he heard a deep sigh. "What is it Aunt Reilly?"

"I was just thinking of how proud I am of you," Reilly replied. "You are such an intelligent young man."

"You really think so?" Rory beamed proudly.

"Yes, I really think so," Reilly answered. "I do declare that your Mother and Uncle Philip are watching you from above and are radiating lights of love."

"Notwithstanding that you my dear Reilly are illuminating beams of pride and love yourself," Garvey snorted. "You could light up a city."

Reilly rose putting aside the primer she was reading with Rory. "That's enough for today, Rory. You can go and play."

"Can I look at the picture book?" Rory asked. He loved looking at the anatomy book Reilly had bought for him before they left. As his mother, Meredith, had told Reilly, Rory loved medicine and was certain he grow up to be a doctor.

"Of course dear. It's on my bed in the next car," Reilly responded. "I want to talk to your grandfather." She waited until Rory left the parlor car.

"What is it you want Reilly?" Garvey questioned thoughtfully. He was a striking figure in his quilted red satin smoking jacket. This train ride was a relaxing vacation for the harried businessman. He found he enjoyed not keeping up appearances. Yes, Garvey was looking forward to the vacation he planned with his son in the mountains he so loved.

"How much longer do you estimate it will be until we are in Saint Louis?" Reilly queried hesitantly.

"We should be there day after tomorrow," Garvey put down his cheroot. "Why do you ask?"

"I've been thinking a lot," Reilly nearly whispered.

"About what?" Garvey returned.

"Your son. My father warned me not to make any judgments about him," Reilly offered shyly. "Tell me about him."

"Owen is a fine and honorable man. His mother was killed when he was just a baby. I took him to live with my sister, Sierra in Fairland. She raised Owen and saw to his education. When she died he came back to me. We worked together, shared together, suffered together, and grew together," Garvey told her.

"You've already told me that story," Reilly said softly. "I want to know about the man he is. Why did he leave his wife and son alone? What kind of man could do that?"

"An honorable and loving man," Garvey replied quickly. "Owen is gentle and kind. When he loves he gives his heart and soul. It broke Owen's heart to give up his son, Reilly. He won't give him up again. Owen loves Rory."

"I don't understand why and how he could leave them. Why couldn't he live with you and his family?" Reilly questioned.

"Home is where the heart is," Garvey repeated the words she had heard many times recently. "Owen's home is where his heart is, Bear Lake."

"He chose land over his wife and son?"

"No Reilly, Meredith chose her comforts over her own marriage. A young boy needs his mother. Owen consented to allow Rory to stay with her. Owen knows a young boy needs his mother more than his father, but Rory is old enough now to be with his father," Garvey stated knowingly.

"Owen will not give up his son, Reilly. You should know that ahead of time."

"Are you trying to dissuade me from my purpose?" Reilly asked calmly hiding her nervousness.

"Heavens no! I just want you to be prepared for any necessary steps that would keep you by Rory's side," Garvey chuckled softly. "You did promise the boy. Are you prepared to make any sacrifice to do so?"

"What do you mean by that?" Reilly queried warily.

"Meredith, rest her soul, chose comfort and civilization over her own marriage vows. Owen sacrificed his son to the selfishness of his wife," Garvey replied sadly.

"I thought you loved Meredith?" Reilly gasped.

"I still do, but all of us are good and bad," Garvey answered putting down his cheroot. "Remember that."

"You sound just like my father. I've never heard you once say a sour word about Meredith," Reilly pushed trying to understand Garvey's reply. Of course Owen was his son and Meredith was his daughter in law. Of course he would defend his son's behavior. She had to come up with a different approach. "If that is true, what is Owen's bad?"

"Can't say he has anything that is bad," Garvey snorted.

Reilly glared at Garvey. "Oh is that a fact?"

"Lawdy, you do have a temper," Garvey laughed. "So does Owen when he's pushed too far."

"Is that why he never came back to Fairland? Did he lose his temper with Meredith?"

"Aye, that is exactly what happened," Garvey replied seriously.

"Owen tried to take Meredith back with him to Bear Lake. He promised he would do everything in his power to please her. He begged her. She refused him. Meredith even locked him from her room."

"What did he do?"

"He lost his temper. Words were loud and bitter. The words they used against other hurt so badly neither recovered. One of the cruel words that came from Meredith's anger was that Owen was a failure. He couldn't even provide a comfortable home for a family. Owen vowed he would prove her wrong. Meredith laughed at him and told him that if he ever did build a proper house and ranch she would return with Rory."

"And?"

"Owen did just that. He has been working for three years and the house is completed. He was devastated when he learned of Meredith's death," Garvey said quietly.

Reilly noticed tears swelling up in Garvey's eyes.

"I'm telling you Reilly, Owen will not surrender his son again. You must prepare for the ultimate sacrifice to stay with Rory," Garvey said sternly. "Owen has sacrificed enough. He is as stubborn as you and won't give in any more."

The firmness of Garvey's voice penetrated Reilly. "You think I'm stubborn?"

Garvey laughed loudly, "I don't think it. I know it!"

Reilly had plenty of time to dress for the arrival in Saint Louis. She chose a black taffeta mourning dress. Her bonnet was simple with a black veil folded over the back. She fussed with her dress and hair for more than an hour. Rachel found her talking to the mirror several times when she entered the private bedroom finishing the last minute packing.

Reilly was practicing her conversation with Owen Woulfe.

Rachel tried hard not to giggle at the scene.

The train pulled into the station. Rory was dressed in the military uniform Philip Madison had given him. He wasn't nervous at all. Reilly had promised to stay with him.

Owen had been waiting on the platform at the station. "Never fails," he complained opening his pocket watch. The train was over four hours late. Nothing could irritate him more than wasting time at a train station when he was in a hurry to get back to his home in Bear Lake. "Only you, Rory would keep me here." Owen thought about his son. Rory had grown since he last saw him. Rory was a handsome boy and looked just like him. "I can't wait to hold you again, son," Owen whispered to himself. Suddenly the train was in view and he began to shake. "What if he hates me?" Owen said choking. "Meredith could have made him hate me." In an instant his irritation of waiting for the train turned into panic. Owen was not confident of what to say or do. "At least Pa is coming with Rory."

"You always talk to yourself boy?" the rough looking trapper said to Owen.

"Nah, only when I'm nervous."

"You're mighty skittery," the trapper snorted. "You expecting your bride?"

"My son," Owen responded. "I haven't seen him since he was a toddler."

The old trapper grinned. "Seems to me you need some type of company. Seeing as how you talk to yourself."

At last the train pulled into the station. Owen's legs couldn't move. Did someone nail his shoes to the platform? Owen watched as people disembarked and greeted family and friends waiting for them. He saw a woman disembark with the aid of the conductor. He held his breath. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her eyes were the prettiest gray he had ever seen. It was like the color of the sky after a winter snow. Those eyes haunted him. It was like he had seen them before somewhere? Her hair was shiny black and coiffed like a real lady. The black she was wearing accented her peaches and cream complexion. "You would look prettier in emerald green," Owen mumbled.

A tall handsome blond man stepped out of the train behind the lovely woman and spoke to her. From out of nowhere Owen felt a thread of

jealousy run through his mind. He watched as the woman pointed toward the end of the train where the luggage was being unloaded and the handsome man walked away.

"I'd never leave my pretty wife alone in this place," Owen snidely remarked.

"Have to find yourself one first," the old trapper snorted. "I think you need a woman more than a son, boy!" With that caustic remark the laughing trapper met up with his friend who had been on the train. Owen watched as the trapper pointed to him and both men let out loud guffaws.

Owen forced himself to move and watched as a large black man who looked like a mountain, dwarf the pretty lady and talk to her. They were in animated conversation and the big man left her walking to the car where the luggage was being unloaded.

I hope that is Jacob, the slave Pa told me about. He will make a great smithy for the ranch, Owen was thinking. He sure didn't want to be heard talking to himself anymore. Truth is, he did need a woman. It's a shame the pretty thing is with someone else. There it was again, that green-eyed devil. As he moved closer to the train, Owen saw his father and Garvey was holding his son. Owen's heart stopped. His son! How he had waited for Rory to come home to him. "Rory!" Owen shouted and bolted toward the boy.

Garvey put Rory down on the platform. When Rory saw the strange man running toward him and shouting his name he panicked and ran into Reilly's arms.

Reilly recognized Owen Woulfe immediately. He was the full-grown version of Rory. Instinctively Reilly placed her arms protectively around Rory.

Owen reached for his son when he came to a stop in front of Reilly. "Son!"

Rory cringed and hid his head in Reilly's skirt. "I don't know you!"

Reilly pulled Rory in closer and gently stroked the shaking boy to calm him.

"Excuse me ma'am. I'd like to talk to my son," Owen said politely. He thought to himself that he and his son had the same taste in good-looking women. Yep, he's a chip off the old block.

"Mr. Woulfe, your son has no idea who you are and you come charging at him like a raging bull," Reilly scolded. "I do believe we should have more quiet and calmer introductions."

"She's right Owen," Garvey agreed. "Give the boy a little time to get to know you."

"He'll never get to know me if he's wrapped up in some woman's skirts," Owen snapped. He had waited to long to hold his son to be told he shouldn't.

"Owen!" Garvey growled. "Be a little more patient!"

"Patient?" Owen snarled. "Meredith took him away and kept him away from me since he was born. How much more patient should a man be?"

"You're scaring him!" Reilly barked.

"You're coddling him!" Owen retaliated. "And just who the Sam Hill are you to keep my son away from his father!"

Rory turned around showing his tear-stained face to his father. He stood tall and said defensively, "This is my Aunt Reilly. I want to stay and live with her and grandfather. I don't want to live with you."

Owen's knees wobbled a little. It was as if someone had taken a Bowie knife and stabbed his heart. He had wanted his son for so long and now he heard his son didn't want him. "Rory, I'm your Pa. I love you. Your Ma is gone and we're blood. You're my son!"

"I love my Aunt Reilly," Rory replied stamping his foot.

"Well, that's all good and well, but you belong to me," Owen said softly.

"Can't you see reason, Mr. Woulfe?" Reilly questioned bravely. "Rory wants to stay with me."

Owen's face contorted. His anger came flowing forth like a volcano erupting. He hated those words; see reason, more than anything in the world. Meredith used those words constantly to keep his son and her away from him. That anger exploded, "I know who you are Duchess! You and your husband can get right back on that train. Go back where you came from. You and your Philip Madison cannot have my son. Go make your own children!"

Reilly shook. Those words cut her like a knife. Her Philip was dead and she couldn't have his child. "You horrible, despicable, cruel, lout!" Tears flowed from her eyes. Garvey offered her his kerchief and placed his arm around her shoulders in comfort.

"Owen, what in the blazes has gotten into you?" Garvey reprimanded as he cradled Reilly in his embrace. "Can't you see she's wearing a widow's dress? Reilly's husband was killed in the first battle of the war."

Rory stood straight and walked up to his father. He kicked Owen in the shins, and walked back quickly to Reilly hugging her.

The color in Owen's face drained. "What was that for?" he asked his son.

"You're a mean man and I don't want to live with you!" Rory shouted.

"You were raised with better manners than that," Garvey chided his son gruffly. This meeting was a complete disaster. "Maybe living out here too long has affected you."

"Look Duchess, I'm sorry. I apologize," Owen attempted at an apology. "It's just that you she women use that see reason more often than changing your broderie."

Reilly's eyes grew large and her gasp was loud. "A gentleman would never use such language in front of a lady. How dare you use an unmentionable term in front of a lady and a young boy?" Reilly was over being upset and went into straight mad! "Perhaps you are so unreasonable a she woman needs to help you see reason!"

"Duchess, it is no never mind of yours to make me see anything," Owen retorted. "Now just get back on that train and go back where you came from. This is no place for a breakable piece of china like your ladyship."

"You will address me as Mrs. Madison!" Reilly ordered angrily. "I have no intention of returning to Fairland without Rory. Kindly sign the adoption papers I have brought with me. It is then Rory and I will return to Fairland!"

"You have a hearing problem?" Owen shouted heatedly. "Duchess, get back on the train and go home. Rory is staying with me. Rory is my son!"

"I am certainly not going to leave this impressionable and intelligent boy with you to ruin!" Reilly sniped. "You sir, are one step above a crude cur!"

"The two of you are making a scene," Garvey scowled and reprimanded the two adults. "Everyone is staring. I suggest we let Rachel and Jacob gather our luggage and we leave immediately to the hotel for a quiet conversation." Garvey took Rory's hand and keeping his arm around Reilly, urged the two forward toward the main street in town. "I sent a wire ahead to keep several rooms for us at Nellie's Star Hotel."

"It's just down the street a ways," Owen offered stubbornly. "I'm put up there myself."

Owen followed his father to the hotel. His head was aching. His son didn't want him and he wanted a woman that absolutely infuriated him. Perhaps he was beginning to lose his mind. He had been without a woman too long. The trapper was right. He caught himself just before he started talking to himself.

Chapter Eleven

Reilly glared at Owen while tapping her foot at the front desk of the hotel. She almost dared him to come near her and Rory.

Owen silently watched his father register at the desk standing next to Reilly. He leaned against a wall several feet away from the woman who was holding his son in her arms.

Garvey finished at the desk and turned to speak to Reilly. "Go upstairs, take a long hot bath, change and we'll discuss all of this calmly at dinner."

Reilly nodded her head in agreement and keeping Rory's hand in hers spoke gently to the boy, "Come Rory, we'll get you settled in first."

"I'll take care of my boy," Owen growled stepping away from the wall.

"No..." Rory shrieked looking at Reilly for protection.

"Go on with Aunt Reilly," Garvey interceded. "Owen you and I need to have a talk." It was obvious in Garvey's tone that Owen was about to get a fatherly lecture.

"Fine," Owen grumped. "Let me go upstairs and get the clothes I bought for Rory. I want him out of those soldier boy clothes."

"My husband Philip gave Rory those!" Reilly snapped furiously.

"All fine and good Duchess, but here in St. Louis this war has two sides about it and both want to fight with each other," Owen replied haughtily. "I don't want my son in the middle of an argument. Meredith died because of such stupidity."

Reilly's chin stuck out in defiance. "I know how my friend died! You needn't remind me. You weren't even there for her funeral!"

"I didn't even know until Christmas!" Owen shouted. God this woman was infuriating.

"Enough!" Garvey said firmly. "Reilly, Owen knows what he's talking about. Saint Louis is split right down the middle on the issue of this war. For Rory's safety he should change."

"Of course," Reilly agreed with all the gentleness of a newborn kitten. "I have more appropriate clothes cleaned and ready for Rory that he can change into. Come along, Rory."

Owen watched his son and that woman climb the stairs to their rooms and disappeared into one of the doors. It was the room next to his.

Good, I'll be close to my son. He turned to look his father in the eye and said, "Where did you pick up that she cat?"

"Reilly is a lady, and the daughter of my best friend, Trevor Stewart," Garvey replied irritably.

"That's old Trev's daughter?"

"One and the same," Garvey answered.

"That witch quim couldn't possibly be related to him," Owen said sarcastically.

Owen didn't see the fist coming. His father had him decked and on the floor rubbing his chin where a bruise would show up before he knew what happened. "What the Sam Hill was that for?"

"I brought you into this world and I am still capable of taking you out, Owen Woulfe," Garvey scolded. "I never want to hear that filth from your mouth again when you are referring to a fine lady!"

"I'm sorry Pa," Owen said fully ashamed of himself. Even he didn't understand why Reilly Madison got under his skin so quickly. He never acted like such an ill-mannered idiot in his life.

"Sierra and I raised you to have better manners than you've shown lately," Garvey reprimanded. "What has gotten into you?"

"I don't know," Owen replied from his sprawled position on the floor. The hotel guests were gawking. "Help me up will you?"

Garvey bent over and offered his hand to Owen.

"I guess I'm upset that Rory thinks I'm some type of plague or something," Owen excused. "What am I going to do about my boy, Pa?"

"Rory was raised proper just like you. Your behavior certainly hasn't help endear you to the genteel nature of the boy," Garvey admonished.

"Mrs. Madison sure isn't helping the matter any," Owen commented. "I sent her back a note telling her I wouldn't give Rory up. I won't Pa and you know it!"

"Unfortunately I do know it. I've tried to tell that to Reilly, but she won't give Rory up either and she is just a stubborn and pig-headed as you are."

"I am not stubborn and pig-headed," Owen countered.

Garvey's reply was a cocked eyebrow.

"Well okay, just a little, but nothing like her!" Owen exclaimed.

"Exactly. Tell me how you are going to dissuade her?" Garvey asked.

"She has no legal claim," Owen offered lamely.

"Of course not," Garvey agreed quickly with a smile running across his face. "Just how are you going to keep her away from Rory when the boy won't leave her side? Those two have a very special bond."

"What is it between them?" Owen asked his father with deep interest.

"When Meredith died, Reilly was Rory's rock and strength. She helped Meredith take care of Rory when they first came to live with me and

she recovered. Reilly has taken care of Rory since he was a toddler," Garvey elucidated. "When Reilly met the Lieutenant, Rory took him as his missing father figure. When Philip was killed, Rory was Reilly's rock. It was Rory that snapped Reilly out of her melancholy. Trevor and I were really worried about her after Philip's burial."

"I've really made an ass out of myself," Owen recognized.

"You have indeed!" Garvey agreed.

"What am I to do?" Owen asked himself as well as his father. "I won't give up my son, but I don't want him to hate me."

"First of all, I want you to take this money and buy yourself a new suit from the dry goods store across the street," Garvey suggested pushing a wad of folded bills into Owen's hands. "Then I want you to bathe and shave. You look every bit the ruffian with that get up. It's comfortable and useful in the saddle but frightening to a young boy from the East. It certainly won't win you any credits with the lady."

Owen brushed his clean blue side buttoned shirt and ran his hands along the tough blue jeans he wore covering his black leather boots. "I thought I dressed up right fine!"

"You did for a Shoshone squaw! It won't do anything for a refined Eastern woman," Garvey lectured. "You gave one real bad impression, and son, don't use anymore vulgar terms or I'll have to give you a come up a pence again!"

"All right, Pa," Owen conceded. "But take your money back. I brought plenty of my own. I'll behave tonight and try to dissuade the lovely Duchess, Mrs. Madison, from trying to keep my son."

"Calmer heads always prevail," Garvey ventured. "Tonight we will discuss this over dinner. We'll meet here in the restaurant about seven o'clock."

"Fine," Owen agreed. "Pa will you take the clothes I bought for Rory and give them to him. They are on my bed. Here is the key."

"I will, son."

"Thanks, Pa," Owen acknowledged rising from the table and heading toward the door.

The waiter came to the table and Garvey ordered a cup of coffee. He needed time to think and time to plan.

Rachel had returned and set about unpacking needed clothes and toiletries. While Rachel put things in order and told Jacob where to put things, Reilly helped Rory with his bath.

Reilly was a trifle unnerved with the fact Rory seemed sullen and extremely quiet. "Is something troubling you, Rory?"

"Yes ma'am," Rory answered as he turned to look at her. He was an adorable sight with soapsuds on his curly sandy brown hair. "I've been thinking about father."

"Oh, and what have you been thinking?" Reilly asked soothingly.

"He said he loved me," Rory shared. "I remember I always wanted to hear my father say that to me. You see, I thought he hated me and Momma."

"Oh darling, my Papa and your grandfather told me he loves you very much," Reilly reassured as her own heart sank into the depths of despair. Perhaps Rory was better off without her and should be with his father.

"He was mean to you. I got angry at him for that," Rory pouted stubbornly. He imitated Reilly when she was upset and stuck out his chin. "No one can be mean to you. I'll make sure of that."

"Your father was angry. We all say things we don't mean to when we're angry," Reilly comforted. In her heart she knew it would be wrong to make Rory side with her against his own father.

"I never heard you say mean things," Rory stated cocking his head trying to remember if at anytime he had.

"I have many times," Reilly confessed. "I just said mean things back to your father, and I was wrong for doing so."

"What you said was the truth," Rory defended.

"What I said was mean and hurtful to your father. It may have been my truth, but we don't know or understand what truths your father has," Reilly explained.

"I want you to stay with me," Rory pleaded. "You promised you would stay with me."

"You still want me?" Reilly asked taking a deep breath of hope.

"I do," Rory said firmly. "Is it wrong to want my father to love me too?"

"Absolutely not!" Reilly laughed dumping water on his head to rinse of the soap. "It is very easy to love many people and you are so easy to love."

Reilly helped dry Rory and then put a fresh suit on him. The double-breasted jacket covered a fine white silken shirt. The knickers matched the jacket. He wore new stockings and brand new shiny hi-top button boots.

"You look grand young man," Garvey offered when he entered the room finding Reilly on her knees buttoning Rory's shoes.

"Thank you grandfather," Rory smiled happily.

"Rory is ready and tells me he isn't a bit tired," Reilly beamed. "As for me, now that you are here I will ask Rachel to help me with a bath. Then I shall change for dinner."

"Run along," Garvey motioned. "Rory and I need to have some man to man conversations."

Reilly smiled and walked into the room adjoining the suite. Rachel was already preparing her bath.

"Want to talk about anything, boy?" Garvey questioned. He noticed Rory watching Reilly leave the room. It was as if he was waiting to say something after she left.

"Grandfather, I'm confused," Rory squirmed. He was very confused at the moment for a seven-year-old boy. He wanted his father's love, but he needed the loving security of his Aunt Reilly. Rory and his grandfather had shared many secrets in the past and he trusted his grandfather.

"Tell me all about it," Garvey said waving his hand for Rory to sit on his lap. "This won't be the first or the last time we share our secrets." Garvey sensed his grandson's confusion and already understood it. You didn't get to be a grandfather and not learn a few things along the way.

"Father said he loves me. I've always wanted to hear that. I kind of want my father," Rory shared.

"Every boy does," Garvey agreed knowingly.

"But I love my Aunt Reilly. I don't want to lose her either," Rory sighed. "I don't know what to do."

"Well boy, I've been thinking the same thing," Garvey grinned mischievously. "I think I've come up with a plan that will keep both your father and Aunt Reilly by your side."

"What?" Rory asked excitedly.

Garvey whispered his plan to Rory. It wasn't necessary to whisper but it made it just a little bit more a special shared secret.

"But they don't like each other. They both said mean things to each other," Rory doubted vocally about his grandfather's plan.

"Boy, when you get older you will understand that the deepest love and attraction between two people is shown in the effort they deny to themselves," Garvey explained.

"Huh?" Rory quizzed looking completely confused.

"You will only understand when you're older," Garvey chuckled. "Do you want to try this plan or not?"

"Yes!" Rory said positively and without doubt.

"Good, let's go shopping," Garvey said smiling. He rose from the chair and walked to the closed door. Gently knocking he heard Rachel respond. "Rachel, tell Mrs. Madison to take her time and rest a little. Rory and I are going shopping."

"Yassuh, Massah Woulfe. I'll tell her. I shorely will," Rachel replied.

Garvey and Rory left the hotel to do their very important and secret shopping. They did not return until almost seven o'clock.

Reilly was impatient and went down to the restaurant early. She informed the waiter that two gentlemen and a young boy would be joining her for dinner. Reilly ordered some tea to calm her taut nerves. She also had some thinking to do.

Rachel and Jacob were invited to join them for dinner but declined quickly when they noted the attitude and the remarks of some of the town

people. It was an undeniable fact that there were many southern sympathizers in Saint Louis. The two of them wished to cause no notice and wouldn't be happy until they were safely working in Owen Woulfe's estate. Garvey had given Jacob money to build his own smithy shop and house near the estate. Rachel would be free to earn her own living sewing and working a garden. They weren't going to risk taking any chances.

Reilly couldn't help but agree with Rachel and Jacob when she perused her surrounding environment. There were dozens of Southern gentlemen at the bar getting very loud and very drunk. They were spouting off about the Federal defeat at Manassas. The Federals referred to it as Bull Run. It was the battle that killed Philip. Reilly's stomach started to churn. It was only with great determination that she didn't begin to cry. Philip wouldn't want that. He wouldn't want me to be defeated by my emotions.

A tall dark pox faced Southern gentleman dressed in white and about thirty years old swayed up to Reilly's table. "Howdy, ma'am. What's a beautiful thing like you doing unescorted? I would like to correct that."

Reilly placed a napkin over her nose and mouth. He reeked of tobacco, liquor, and body odor. "I'm expecting company. No thank you sir," she stated politely.

"You're a Northerner!" he shouted angrily. "You're dressed in black. You mourning over a Federal pig?"

"My husband, Lieutenant Philip Madison was a hero at Bull Run, sir," Reilly snapped. "Federal or no. He was a hero who died for his country. Which is more than I can say for you, sir. What battle have you fought in other than a battle not to take a bath?" Reilly's mouth ran off before her brain engaged. It was not like her to be so rude or so foolish. Even she couldn't believe those words jumped from her mouth.

"Why you blamed quim!" The man exclaimed raising his hand and slapping Reilly across the cheek so hard she fell from the chair. He raised his hand to strike her once more when a fist met his face and plummeted him across the room. The Southern gentleman learned to fly in one blow as he found himself sailing over several tables and chairs. Fortunately no one was sitting at the tables.

Owen stood boldly in front of Reilly. His hands were balled in fists and ready to battle.

The man growled at Owen, "Since you're a Federal too, I won't do you the honor of demanding a duel. My quarrel is with this little snipe of a quim."

"Call her that one more time and I'll demand a duel," Owen barked fiercely. "I am no Federal. I am a resident of Washington territory."

"Call her that one more time and you're a dead man," a voice was heard in the back of the room. The crowd heard a pistol cock.

Reilly turned her head and saw Garvey Woulfe stepping into the fray with his gun pointed directly at the rowdy.

The man backed up, "Is she your woman?"

"She is," Owen said without flinching. "And you sir are drunk. Get out now with your life." Knowing his father was backing him up with a pistol he knelt down and picked Reilly up gently. "Didn't I warn you this was no place for a lady, Duchess."

"Stop calling me that," Reilly protested but allowed Owen to help her back onto her chair.

"Waiter, I need some ice here, pronto!" Owen ordered.

"Ice in August?" Reilly chuckled.

A few minutes later the waiter brought a small chunk of ice in a napkin. Owen folded it and placed it gently on Reilly's cheek. "Keep this there. It will help bring down the swelling."

"You're a doctor?" Reilly questioned sarcastically.

"Out here you learn medicines and cures real quick," Owen explained pleasantly. "You have to be your own doctor."

"You know about medicines?" Rory asked his father. Owen didn't know, but Garvey and Reilly knew the great interest Rory had in medicines and doctors. Hospitals and doctors had fascinated him since he was a young toddler. At first Meredith thought it was just the white coats. Later she learned Rory was really interested and bought special picture books for him.

"I sure do, son," Owen told his boy. He knelt down on one knee and held his son's shoulders. "You have to learn out here."

Reilly noticed the gleam in Rory's eye. Reilly had to admit Rory needed his father, but she didn't want to give him up either. She needed him as well.

There was simple small talk around the subject at hand during the time dinner was served and they ate. After the meal with wine for Reilly, milk for Rory, and brandy for the men the real conversation began.

Rory started it to everyone's surprise.

"I have something to say," Rory said after he placed his napkin on the table properly.

Owen was shocked. Reilly was stunned. The seven-year-old boy had the demeanor of an adult.

"I have decided to stay with father," Rory hesitated even though he had practiced the speech with his grandfather for over an hour. "But I won't give you up Aunt Reilly. Will you marry me? You promised you would never leave me. I want you to keep that promise."

Owen's jaw dropped.

Reilly's eyes widened. "Rory, I can't marry you darling. I simply can't"

"Why?" Rory asked pulling a piece of paper and two gold rings out of his pocket. "Grandfather helped me get the stuff I need. See?"

Reilly gulped. "Rory, you have to be at least sixteen years old to marry. I'm afraid you have to wait ten more years and I'll be quite old then."

"Oh," Rory accepted sitting back on the chair. "Well then I have another idea. Marry my father."

"What?" Reilly choked.

"I think that's a splendid idea," Garvey chimed in. "Don't you, Owen?"

"What?" Owen gasped trying to catch his breath.

"The two of you adore Rory. Rory needs a mother and father," Garvey snorted. "Viola! Instant loving family! Lord knows Owen you do need a wife. Reilly you need a husband. I think Rory has a great idea."

"And you just happened to let Rory buy a marriage license and wedding rings?" Owen groaned warily.

"The boy has been through some very upsetting times. The two people that love him the most were confusing him even more. I saw absolutely nothing wrong with indulging the boy," Garvey defended lamely. "Well, go ahead and ask her, Owen."

Owen looked at Reilly. If he were to be honest with himself, he did want her. "Mrs. Madison, would you do me the honor of becoming my wife and Rory's mother."

Before Reilly could reply, Garvey butted in, "Listen to me Reilly. Owen is a good man and you need one. You saw how he defended you. It is your one chance to keep Rory all legal like and your chance to find your mother."

"Find your mother?" Owen asked.

"There is something you should know about me," Reilly replied.

"Before I answer you."

Chapter Twelve

"If you are about to tell me that your mother is a breed Shoshone," Owen remarked smugly. "I already know and for your information..."

"You are a breed Shoshone," Reilly finished jutting out her chin in defiance. "I already know."

"Smug aren't we?" Owen murmured. Why it seemed right to have this woman as his wife seemed to be just short of lunacy. Was it a full moon?

"Must run in the Shoshone blood. Of course your veins have more potency," Reilly pointed out. How could she admit this man excited her just being near him?

Garvey closed his eyes and groaned pathetically, "Are you two so self involved you are forgetting Rory is here."

Owen and Reilly turned beet red. Embarrassment was the cause. It was true, they were too self involved and both were on the verge of intense passion that they both were feeling.

"Does that mean I'm part Indian father?" Rory asked.

"Yes it does. I'm proud of my mother and her people. I can only hope you learn to be proud as well," Owen answered honestly and ruffled his son's hair. "It's about time you knew all about our heritage."

"Wow!" Rory exclaimed squaring his shoulders. "Can I grow up to be a chief?"

"There always is that possibility if you are brave, strong, and wise," Owen beamed. His son was finally warming up to him. It is worth this odd marriage to keep him. Perhaps in time they could make the marriage work. After all Reilly was Irish and Shoshone like he was. He wanted to put every effort into making his marriage work with Reilly to get and keep his son. I WILL put every effort into this marriage to keep my son. His thoughts were happy ones as he turned to Reilly. "What's this about finding your mother. I know these people and have asked them since I returned from Fairland where Rose was. I never got any answers. What makes you think you will?"

"Because I'm her daughter," Reilly ejected triumphantly jutting out her chin defiantly. "That's why!"

Owen realized he had seen that stance before but couldn't place where. "Whoa, I'm impressed with that. Do you really think the Shoshone would be?" Owen questioned. In reality he knew and understood the power

of the woman and her importance in the Shoshone tribes. It could very well make the difference, but did Reilly know that?

"Father and Garvey both raised me to believe in the strength and power of the woman. The two of them lived with the Shoshone. I was raised in the understanding a woman, especially a mother and daughter had powerful medicine," Reilly replied angrily. "The answer to your question is yes, I would impress the people more than you."

Garvey cocked an eyebrow at his son.

Owen sat back against the chair. There was something about the intelligence and tenacity of this woman he admired. It was crazy, but he did want this woman. He would try very hard to make this marriage work.

Garvey took Reilly's hand, "Remember honey, I told you about sacrifice. Sometimes we are called to make great sacrifices." By the look of fired passion in his son's eyes, Garvey knew Owen was sold on the marriage. Garvey still wasn't quite sure about Reilly.

Placing her other hand over Garvey's, Reilly replied with strength, "I made a promise to Rory I intend to keep. I will make any sacrifice including my life to keep that promise, but there is one more thing."

"Which is?" Garvey queried.

"Mr. Woulfe, I am recently a widow. It has only been one month since my husband was killed in battle," Reilly explained to Owen.

"And your problem is?" Owen returned too quickly. God, he was an imbecile with Reilly Stewart Madison.

"Why Mr. Woulfe, people would gossip horribly that I did not wait the proper mourning period before I entered into matrimony once more," Reilly stated with unease. "Our reputations could be attacked."

"By whom? Is there a Daughters of the Republic delegation in the wilderness I was unaware of?" Owen chuckled at Reilly's worrying about reputations in the wilderness of Bear Lake. "Do you think the Shoshone social soiree's wouldn't send you an invitation?"

"You needn't be so crass, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly growled.

"And you needn't be so hoity toity, Duchess!" Owen rebuked not sharing his sudden fear that Reilly wouldn't want him. He vowed he wouldn't show weakness. Not this time. Not this wife. "This will be a marriage of convenience. It happens all the time out here. Haven't you heard of mail order brides? There have been a number of widows that came out west to find new husbands."

"I think you need to give Owen your answer one way or another, Reilly," Garvey pursued. "Remember your promise, your mission, and understanding of sacrifice."

"I agree to marry you, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly said stoically.

"Why thank you Duchess!" Owen exclaimed exaggerating his answer. "How happy and idiotically romantic you have made this humble proposal of marriage."

"Stop calling me Duchess!" Reilly implored heatedly.

Rory grabbed his grandfather's hand and pulled it until Garvey leaned his ear down to Rory's cupped hand.

"What did they just say?" Rory whispered.

Garvey couldn't help himself. A rumble of a chuckle exploded into a belly gusher of laughter. With tears rolling down Garvey's cheeks, he replied, "They just said they love each other and will get married tomorrow."

Rory looked at his father and then at Reilly. "Does this mean I can call you Momma tomorrow?"

"Yes son," Owen answered. "You may call her Momma tomorrow, but Duchess suits her much better."

Reilly rose from the table on that last remark. "Please excuse me. I find I am quite fatigued and I shall retire."

"Good idea," Owen grinned wickedly. This woman in his bed just might be happily interesting. "I'll meet you downstairs at 8:00 sharp in the morning. We'll go to the justice of the peace and say our vows. I have a lot of work tomorrow and I can't waste time dawdling around waiting for a wedding."

"We all have a great deal of work to do, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly snapped. "I certainly agree with you. I can't afford to waste time on a wedding." Actually Reilly was hurting inside that her future husband seemed to have no interest in her at all. In a sharp turn Reilly walked out of the restaurant, up the stairs and into her room slamming the door so hard the sound was heard downstairs.

"I think Aunt Reilly is upset with you, Father," Rory observed.

"Nah, she's just suffering from nervousness. All brides get nervous," Owen chuckled mischievously. "She'll be fine in the morning. I want to show you the clothes I bought you. You are going to need some real riding and work clothes for the ranch. Grandpa forgot to give them to you today."

"Do they look like cowboys' clothes?" Rory asked eagerly. "Like you did at the train station, today?"

"Yep, I even bought you chaps," Owen smiled broadly. It felt good to have his son with him. All these years he only had a piece of paper called a photograph. Today he had his son. He was even getting a wife out of the deal. He was a happy man. "Let's go upstairs and try them on. Are you coming Pa?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Garvey replied rising from the table. It was a wonderful day. He was with his son. Owen had his son back and they were bonding quickly. He and Trevor hoped their children would marry and tomorrow they would. It was a great day.

Reilly was not too happy. She paced in her room chewing her nails and biting her lower lip. She hadn't done this since she was a child and waited for her father to return after a lion hunt in Africa. "What am I getting into?" Reilly repeated over and over again. "The man is a boor! A

cur! A ruffian!" She asked of herself over and over again if this marriage would be worth the sacrifice to keep Rory and find her mother.

The pros and cons of this nuptial went back and forth in Reilly's mind all night. She did admit that Owen Woulfe was a fine specimen of a male. He was handsome, strong, protective and well built. She told herself although brief, her marriage was a loving and happy one. Many women don't even get that much out of life. Finally she resolved to try to make the marriage work for Rory's sake. Reilly admitted to herself she didn't want to be a widow for the rest of her life. She wanted a child, hopefully a baby of her own with Rory. Owen would be a good father. He loved and cherished Rory even though he wasn't there when Rory grew up. Besides, it would be her child as much as his. Reilly told herself that Owen was right about mail order brides. You didn't need love to make a marriage work. At last her mind was settled and she lay upon her bed closing her eyes.

Reilly jumped with a start when she felt someone moving her gently and calling her name. "Rachel?" Reilly questioned as she slowly focused her eyes.

"Yes'm, you're gonna be late for your own wedding," Rachel chided. "It's a good thing I came up here early to check on you."

"What time is it?" Reilly yawned and stretched her arms up over her head.

"You is supposed to meet Mr. Woulfe downstairs at 8:00 sharp. It's already 6:30. I have jest the time to get you in a bath and prettied up," Rachel scolded.

"Rachel, you aren't my slave," Reilly reminded her. "You don't have to do these things for me. I certainly don't need to get prettied up for this nuptial."

"What you talking bout? This is your wedding day. You and Mr. Woulfe is going to jump the broom," Rachel replied indignantly. "Course you wants to git prettied up."

"This is a marriage of convenience, Rachel," Reilly replied exasperatingly. "It's not like my marriage to Philip or your marriage to Jacob."

"You're wrong, a wedding day is a wedding day," Rachel argued. "I'll get your bath and you pick out a right pretty dress."

"Fine," Reilly allowed. It was useless to argue with Rachel and this wedding was going to be difficult enough. Reilly rose and walked to her trunks. She hadn't brought anything fancy. The majority of her clothes were frugal and practical. Reilly gasped when she discovered the lavender striped taffeta day dress that had been one of her favorite dresses. "Rachel, you sly little devil." Reilly pulled out the dress and found the bonnet to match. Rachel had also packed a precious silk broderie. Underneath the undergarments was a satin peignoir she had bought as trousseau but had never worn. Reilly's mind filled with a vision of Owen seeing her in that gown and falling passionately at her feet. She blushed at the thought. "You silly goose. He can't stand you!"

"You said something?" Rachel asked as she opened the door for Jacob. He was bringing in the large buckets of hot water for the tub.

"No, not a word," Reilly replied. She turned and faced Rachel holding up the lavender dress. "Will this be pretty enough?"

"Not pretty enough for you, Miss Madison, but it will do," Rachel replied seriously. "It will be good to see you out of that horrid black."

Reilly said nothing. Rachel assisted her to bathe, dress, and apply toilette. At precisely 8:00 Reilly and Rachel left the room to walk down the stairs. At the bottom Owen, Garvey, Jacob, and Rory waited for them. Owen looked up at Reilly and felt his heartbeat quicken and thunder in his chest. She was even lovelier out of her mourning clothes. Owen dressed in the same suit he wore yesterday, offered his arm.

Reilly reached for Garvey instead. "I do believe it is the duty of the father to give away the bride. Since my father is not here, would you do me the honor?"

"It would be my pleasure, Reilly," Garvey acknowledged and extended his arm. Inside he knew Reilly was indeed the perfect match for Owen Woulfe.

The group left the hotel and walked down the street to the Justice of the Peace office. Rachel served as Matron of Honor and Jacob served as the Best Man. Garvey acted as Father of the Bride and young Rory held the rings. It seemed it was only a moment later when the justice declared Owen Woulfe and Reilly Stewart Madison, husband and wife.

Reilly heard the justice say, "the vows will now be sealed with a kiss."

Owen bent his head and brushed his tongue over Reilly's lower lip. The surprise caused Reilly to jump and open her mouth.

Owen pulled her closer taking her mouth with his. Lips covered hers and he slowly and erotically danced his tongue inside her sweet mouth. Lord, she tastes so sweet. He inhaled her rose scent. It felt wonderful to have a soft woman in his arms once more. This woman fired him like no other he had ever had before.

Reilly succumbed to Owen's strength and felt relaxation in his strong arms. His deep kisses excited her. Never had she been kissed like that. Her body responded with unusual sensations. Giddy didn't even begin to express her feelings. Reilly automatically wrapped her arms around Owen's neck. His strength and his manly scent were intoxicating.

Owen pulled away and looked into her eyes. "You taste wonderful and look so beautiful out of that black, Mrs. Woulfe."

"I'm a widow, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly said unthinkingly. Her head was still spinning from the kiss. After she said those words she realized the mistake she had made. She felt Owen stiffen and become cold and rigid.

"You're a bride! Mrs. Woulfe," Owen bit out.

"Er, yes," Reilly fumbled. "I am." Reilly regretted her slip of the tongue immediately. She had enjoyed Owen's kiss and suddenly he was cold and aloof.

Garvey came to her side and kissed her cheek. "Welcome to the Woulfe family, daughter. I can hardly wait to share this joyous news with your father. I shall send a wire today."

"Momma?" Rory questioned.

"Oh yes my darling," Reilly wept taking Rory in her arms. "I am your Momma, now!"

"You may take our son and prepare for our trip to Bear Lake," Owen said coldly. "We leave tomorrow morning at first light. It is a long trip. If we're lucky it will take three weeks. We'll be taking the Missouri River south to the Platte River across the country until the Shoshone lands. From there we will cross land until Bear Lake," Owen announced.

"Are we going through Fort Bridger?" Garvey asked.

"Yes, that will give us a chance to trade for many things the people need," Owen replied.

"We used to take two weeks to get back to Bear Lake," Garvey remarked.

"Not with wagons and women," Owen snickered.

Garvey didn't laugh. "You still go that river boat?"

"Yeah, and the best river pilot west of the Mississippi," Owen bragged.

"So Matthew tells everyone," Garvey muttered. "Is the old goat still as mean as a rattlesnake woken up in spring?"

"No, he's mellowed a little since he married a Shoshone woman," Owen informed his father. "Actually has two young uns already."

"Poor woman," Garvey said thoughtfully. "I'll buy something nice for her when I send out the wire to Trevor."

"I got to go," Owen excused. "Jacob! Let's get those wagons and supplies loaded up. I want them on the dock and loaded on the riverboat this afternoon."

"I still got to buy some iron for the horse shoes," Jacob replied.

"Go on and get it. I'll start the packing and loading. I brought two extra Conestoga Wagons. I brought one for luggage and one for Rory to sleep in at night when we're on the trail. I guess Rory and Duchess can share it now."

"Will you please stop calling me that!" Reilly hissed.

"Uh yeah, sorry, Mrs. Woulfe and Rory can share that wagon," Owen quipped and left the justice's office. He headed toward the livery. The parting verbal shot was to remind Reilly she was now his wife.

Garvey and Rachel walked back to the hotel with Reilly and Rory. Reilly ran up to her room as soon as they entered the hotel lobby. She shut the door and cried. She didn't know what she had hoped for but this wedding day was a disaster in her eyes. That kiss had stirred a fire in her and suddenly the cold Owen snuffed her out of his life. Sobbing she removed the lavender dress and pulled out her simple brown fitted dress. Reilly dressed slowly allowing her hurt to subside. She convinced herself

this marriage was for Rory and he did call her 'Momma'. Rory was hers at last.

Reilly missed lunch as she threw herself into packing and repacking her treasures and clothes she had brought with her. Rachel finished her labors and was helping Rory and Garvey.

Jacob showed up early in the afternoon with the extra Conestoga wagon. He and Garvey packed it with the entire luggage. Reilly watched from the window as Jacob and Garvey packed the second Conestoga wagon with blankets, quilts, and pillows they had bought this morning under Owen's orders.

"I'll find you mother," Reilly sighed in a quiet promise. "I'll make this marriage work for you and Rory."

Garvey forced Reilly to eat supper with him. After dinner the mentally and physically exhausted Reilly changed for bed. She looked at the silk peignoir Rachel had kept out for her and laughed. "Like the incomparable Owen Woulfe would even notice. I think not!" Reilly folded the soft gown and placed it back into the valise. Instead she removed her clothes down to her chemise and crawled into bed wearing only that. It was a hot September day and the chemise was comfortable enough with the sheet. In moments she was sound asleep.

Owen and Jacob arrived for supper shortly after Reilly had gone to prepare for bed. They ate a large supper and shared several glasses of beer before they each headed to their wives rooms. Owen had been told Reilly had gone to her room, not his. I'll go to you then. Slightly inebriated Owen told himself it was his right to enter her room. They were married this morning and she was his wife. He was just using his conjugal rights as her husband. He would tell her that fact if she said anything to him. Missing a step or two, he managed to get to her room.

Owen opened the door to reveal a vision of beauty lying on the white sheets. A moonbeam was lighting her face. Her black silky hair was loose and framed her face. "I like your hair down best," Owen whispered as if he was having a conversation with Reilly. "You keep it long and loose like that." He removed his clothes never taking his eyes off Reilly. "God you're beautiful!"

Reilly stirred and her fluid movement on the bed was erotic to Owen. He stripped his clothes off faster than he ever had in his life. Silently he slipped under the sheets. His hand eagerly sought and found her breast. He gently palmed the treasure as if it were Chinese porcelain. Carefully he pulled Reilly into his arms inhaling her scent. Slowly he raised her chemise and roved the shapes, rolls, and curves of her beautiful body. To his surprise Reilly snuggled into his chest and began to make soft little purring sounds.

Reilly was dreaming. She was in Philips arms and for the first time since they were married she was heated and wanting. This foreplay he was using was making her feel all sorts of wonderful feelings. In her dreams he was discovering her body and making her want him. Fluid

warmth engulfed her body and in her dreams she was responding to her Philip.

Owen became more aggressive with Reilly's response. He softly kissed her forehead, nose, lips, and stroked his tongue down her throat. His hand kneaded her breast and felt the nub come alive in hardness to his touch. God how he missed having a woman and he certainly wanted this one. He inhaled her womanly scent and his hand released her breast slowly moving down her supple abdomen to the thatch of thick black quim. His finger daringly probed into her womanhood. She was warm, inviting and wet. Using his thumb he massaged the nub of sensitivity while inserting and removing his finger.

Reilly began moving to his probing rhythms. She moaned in her sleep and suddenly cried out, "Philip! Oh God Philip!"

Chapter Thirteen

Reilly's cry hit Owen like a bucket of ice water. He nearly jumped from the bed and put his shirt and pants back on. Picking up his boots he walked to the door and mumbled. "No room in that bed for a man, his woman, and a ghost." Angrily he walked to his room and crawled into bed. Owen was frustrated, hurting, and angry. "Damn!" Owen said slamming his fist into the pillow. "One of these days you are going to want me and me alone, Mrs. Woulfe!"

The sound of a door closing suddenly ended Reilly's dream and she felt disappointed. Slowly her eyes opened to find an empty room, but something was strange. She noticed Owen's essence, the scent that was Owen's alone, on her pillow. Shaking her head in disbelief, Reilly fell back into a deep sleep.

As the sun peeked over the horizon in the East, the new Woulfe family headed toward the docks of Saint Louis. At one of the docks they approached was a small paddle wheel riverboat. On the side panel Reilly read the name of the boat, 'Meredith's Way'. It suddenly struck her that she was indeed a widow of only a month, but Owen was a widower of less than a year. She hadn't really thought about the fact that Owen had recently lost his spouse.

"Watch that!" Owen ordered as the stevedores loaded the rest of their luggage on the riverboat. It was the first words Reilly had heard Owen speak since he greeted Rory at breakfast. Owen ran to catch the small-carved wooden box that was falling from the larger one a man was carrying onto the riverboat. Reilly watched as Owen carefully tucked the box under his coat like it was a cherished treasure. You are a paradox Owen Woulfe. You are gruff, impatient, nasty man, yet caring, kind, loving, and thoughtful. Just who are you really?

Captain Matthew Brodie met Reilly at the end of the gangplank. "Welcome aboard Mrs. Woulfe," Matthew said as he graciously offered his hand to help her on board.

"Thank you, Captain Brodie I presume?" Reilly asked graciously placing her hand in his. "Mr. Woulfe has informed you already that I am his wife?"

"Aye mum!" the Captain answered. "He told me you were the prettiest woman in St. Louis. That's how I would recognize you."

"Captain Brodie, I do declare you must have visited Erin and kissed the Blarney Stone," Reilly teased.

"Tis the truth I'd be telling you," Captain Brodie insisted. "Owen told me you were the prettiest woman in St. Louis, and here you are."

Reilly blushed. Not only was she unused to such compliments, the fact Owen described her in that fashion pleased her greatly.

"I'll be showing you to your cabin," Captain Brodie indicated bowing and extending his arm forward.

Reilly was led to a beautifully furnished cabin. The wood was ornately carved cherry and rosewood. The bed was large with deep green satin sheets and cover quilt. The windows were lace curtained and crocheted doilies covered the ornate tables. Reilly saw her luggage and Owen's trunks being brought into the room. Owen followed the stevedores. Reilly looked at him and then looked at his trunks being placed next to hers.

Owen didn't miss her eyes and look of apprehension. "Captain, would you excuse us for a moment. I'd like to have a word with Mrs. Woulfe."

"Of course lad," Matthew Brodie winked and left the room closing the door securely.

"You needn't worry about sharing the room with me Duchess," Owen assured her. He ran his fingers through his hair nervously. "These waters can be dangerous and I take the night watch. I'll be sleeping during the day and you will have the room all night."

Reilly wasn't sure what to say. She felt a little disappointed. Owen was her husband. She was adjusting to that, and she was hoping she could have a baby. Reilly said nothing.

"If you're still worried," Owen added. "You can lock the door against me like this!" Owen walked to the door and showed her the bolt. "I couldn't get in if I tried. This door is solid oak."

"I don't think that effort will be necessary," Reilly replied softly. "I am sure you are a man of your word."

"Thank you for that, Duchess," Owen bowed. "I am truly tired of being locked out of my wife's rooms."

"Meredith locked you out?" Reilly asked in surprise.

"Like I was the bubonic plague," Owen remarked bitterly. The memory tore at his heart and he left the room quickly.

Reilly sat down in the large Victorian stuffed chair. She had no idea that Meredith went as far as denying Owen his conjugal rights. No wonder he stopped coming back to Fairland. Perhaps that is why he gave up trying to see his son and his wife. Reilly could not imagine a wife denying her husband his rights and duty to create children. This is something she would discuss with Owen Woulfe, but at a quieter time. Reilly realized they still needed to adjust to this hurried marriage. I will make this work. I will.

Several days down the Missouri River were relaxing and enjoying to Reilly. She took up her scheduled classes with Rory once again. Garvey kept her company during meals and Rachel kept her company several hours during the day. They worked on dress alterations for Rachel who was now showing her pregnancy. Reilly and Rachel also cheerfully sewed baby clothes. Reilly was as happy for Rachel as she would have been if she were expecting her own child.

As for Owen, he kept his word. He never came near their room at night and slept in Captain Brodie's cabin during the day. He only came into the room in the morning to wash and change his clothes after Reilly had left for breakfast.

Reilly found Owen's avoidance of her quite nerve wracking. She was beginning to feel like the bubonic plague.

Several more days passed and they were well on their way in the Platte River.

Reilly woke from her night's sleep and feeling uncomfortable in the cabin confinements, she put her slippers on and tied her blue satin robe over her chemise. Peeking out the porthole she looked at the lovely scenery of the moonlit river. Reilly decided she would get a breath of the sweet cool night air on the deck. Looking at the clock Reilly realized it was near dawn.

Opening the door a silhouette of a man caught her eye. It was Owen on the deck. His arms were straight with his hands grasping the rail. His face focused on the river. Reilly watched Owen. He didn't move and it was as if he were completely lost in his thoughts. She determined this was as good as time as any to speak to her husband. Walking toward Owen a board squeaked loudly under her slipper.

Owen jumped around and in his hand he had drawn his Bowie knife. The blade flashed in the moonlight. "Blame it all, Duchess!" he exclaimed recognizing her. "Sneaking around like that at night could get you hurt. Didn't I tell you it's dangerous on the river, especially at night."

"Yes you did, but you didn't tell me the greatest danger would be from you," Reilly laughed.

Owen looked at the knife and chuckled, "sorry, it is instinct. A mountain man never lets anything come from behind without preparing to do battle." He sheathed it quickly. "What are you doing up and walking about for anyway?"

"I couldn't sleep and the air smelled so sweet and coolly inviting," Reilly replied walking toward Owen. "You looked deep in thought. Perhaps that's why I startled you."

"Yeah, I guess I was thinking about things," Owen admitted and turned back to watch the river.

"Want to tell me what?" Reilly asked stepping next to his side by the rail. "I am your wife you know."

"Duchess, that is something I can hardly forget. Especially when you're close to me like this," Owen said using self-restraint not to look at her.

Reilly moved closer. "Will you tell me what you were thinking about?"

"Well Duchess, I was just thinking that maybe if I had grown up with a mother I might have turned out to be a better husband," Owen responded still staring out into the river. "You seem to be a really good mother type to Rory. I hope he learns from you how to behave with a lady. It's obvious I don't know how."

"We could learn," Reilly said quietly.

"We?" Owen asked turning to finally look at his wife. That statement of hers had completely dumbfounded him.

"I haven't much experience as a wife and I wish I could have had a mother to guide me in what to do and expect," Reilly shared daring to look into Owen's eyes.

Owen took Reilly in his arms. He stared at her for several minutes and placed his lips lovingly on hers. Owen gently flayed his tongue on her lips and she opened them like a budding rose. Pulling Reilly even closer his mouth slanted over hers and indulged in the tongue duel of passion.

Reilly relaxed in Owen's arms. He once more was sending shock waves through her entire body. She enjoyed his kissing, his passion. Automatically she put her arms around his neck. The new feelings shooting through her body caused a vibrating shiver.

Breaking from his kiss Owen asked, "Are you cold Duchess?"

"No," Reilly replied placing her head comfortably on his strong muscled chest. Her body shivered once more uncontrollably.

"You are cold," Owen stated and released her. He moved to the deck chair and took the blanket lying on the chair. Opening the blanket, he wrapped it gently around Reilly's shoulders. "Perhaps you should go back to your cabin. You could catch a chill and get sick."

"Couldn't I stay here with you awhile?" Reilly questioned hopefully.

"I don't think that's a good idea," Owen answered. This was his watch. He had to protect his family and the riverboat. At this moment he was hard and hurting. It would only take one more kiss or one more look to drive him over the edge and take his wife right then and there on the deck.

"Are you locking me out of your rooms?" Reilly quipped.

"That's the last thing I'd want to do Duchess," Owen chuckled. "The river is dangerous and I have to keep watch. I can't keep watching you and you're hard not to watch."

"Oh," Reilly blushed. He made her feel so special at times and furious the other times. "What is so dangerous?"

"River pirates," Owen replied once more scanning the river and its banks. Concentrating on his duty was the only thing that was keeping his restraint.

"Pirates?" Reilly asked. "I thought Pirates only raided on the oceans."

"Pirates also raid the rivers, the worst of mankind's lot. Most sea pirates were honorable men. River pirates are scum," Owen explained. "Twice as deadly, too!"

"I see," Reilly replied in almost a whisper. She wanted to return to Owen's arms. It was such a good feeling there. He offered warmth, strength, and comfort. Even more than Philip had, admitting that fact seemed to easy to do.

"This part of the river is known to harbor many river pirates," Owen said in explanation. "I need to keep a sharp eye. They prefer to attack around those type of river bends and early morning hours." Owen pointed to the twists and turns of the river up ahead. "The sun will be peeking up over the horizon in a few minutes."

"I'd like to stay here with you," Reilly requested quietly. "I won't bother you."

"That is impossible," Owen snorted but took her in his arm. "Help me keep an eye on the banks and bars in the bends."

They stood together silently enjoying the nearness of each other. It was nearly an hour later and the sun began to rise. The pink dawn with blue sky and white clouds reflected on the dancing waves of the river. It was a picture worthy of a master painter.

Reilly saw a movement in the darkness along the bank of a nearby bend. It was a shadow and something round. "What is that?" Reilly asked Owen pointing to the now moving shadow.

"Pirates! They're using bull boats!" Owen exclaimed. He removed his arm from around Reilly's shoulder and reached for the bell rope.

The clanging woke every one of the crew. They dressed quickly and pulled out their guns and rifles.

"Get back in the cabin. You'll be safe there!" Owen ordered pushing her toward the door.

"What about Rory? He'll be scared to pieces," Reilly cried out as Owen pushed her further. He pulled out the rifle he had ready on the deck near the deck chair.

"Pa knows exactly what the riverboat bell signifies. He's with Rory. I'm not worried at all. Pa will take care of him," Owen answered in a rush. "Get below where it's safe."

"I'm a good shot," Reilly protested. "I can help!"

"Duchess! Get below now! That is an order," Owen bellowed.

Reluctantly Reilly opened the door to return to her cabin. "I hate it when he calls me Duchess in that tone!" she mumbled. When she entered the cabin she heard the crew running across the decks. Suddenly there was rifle shot and gunfire. "Hell if I'll stay down here when I can help, Mr. Woulfe!" Reilly quickly changed into her split skirt and cotton shirt. She slipped on her boots and pulled out her colts from her trunk. When

Reilly opened her cabin door she heard scuffling and heavy footsteps. Some of the pirates had managed to board. Running to the deck she opened the door. Her nose was immediately assaulted with the stench of powder, burnt flesh, and smoke. A buzzing sound with heat passed close to her head and singed her hair that was still loose. A thunk caused her to look to her right side where she saw a pellet implanted in the doorframe. Shouting and curses were so loud no one could understand any of it. Stepping into the melee she raised her colt. The smoky haze of the pistol and rifle shots made it difficult to see as she stepped carefully on to the deck.

A smoke shadowed figure was above her. The body fell off the side into the water. Reilly could see the Captain standing above her taking aim at another pirate attempting to board his boat. The gunfire was constant. A stray bullet could strike any one. Slowly she walked on deck attempting to find Owen. Reilly peered through the smoke haze to see a pirate with a club in hand right behind Owen. Owen was shooting at several pirates in bullboats and didn't hear the pirate until it was too late.

Reilly watched in horror as Owen spun around and the heavy club slammed into his head. Owen spun and his legs buckled under him. The pirate pulled out a pistol and aimed at Owen lying on his back on the deck. Owen thought this was his last breath and closed his eyes. He heard a shot and suddenly the pirate fell on him. The pirate was dead with a shot to the heart. Pushing the pirate aside he saw Reilly with a smoking colt taking aim at another pirate that had just jumped over the deck rail.

Owen choked when he saw that pirate fall in one shot. His wife's aim was deadly. Quickly he scrambled to his feet and grabbed his rifle. Aiming his rifle he caught a shadowed figure just above Reilly taking a deadly aim at her. One shot and the pirate's body fell behind her, causing Reilly to jump and run by Owen's side. They stood together in the ensuing battle. Between Owen's rifle and Reilly's colt they managed to deliver eight more pirates to their watery graves.

A half hour later the crew were cleaning the decks of the scum who had dared violate the sanctity of their boat.

"You are some shot, Mrs. Woulfe," Owen commented wiping his head of perspiration.

"I told you I could help, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly retorted. "Perhaps next time you will have a little more faith in me."

"A lot more faith, and a fear never to get you angry with me," Owen snorted. More and more he was discovering he really admired this woman. Her hair was down and rippling in the wind. Full of smoke powder and perspiration, Reilly never looked more beautiful to Owen. Here was a woman of iron nerve. His woman. He couldn't have found a more perfect mate. If only he knew how to get rid of the ghost of Philip Madison.

"That's a good point," Reilly chuckled and blew into the barrel of her colt.

"Where did you learn to shoot like that?" Owen asked curiously.

"I'm my father's daughter," Reilly boasted. "Father made certain his little girl could compete with the best of them. He schooled me in riding, roping and tracking from the time my nappies were dry."

"You grew up close to your Father," Owen observed.

"Very close. He was my mother and father," Reilly shared. "I adore him."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," Owen confessed. "I feel the same about Pa. I hope one day Rory will feel the same toward me."

"He's beginning to already," Reilly comforted. "You know, we have a lot in common. You and I."

"Many things, loving Rory for one. Worshiping our fathers for another. The others as I recall are, Irish, Shoshone, stubborn, crack shots," Owen laughed.

Reilly noticed Owen's eyes twinkle when he laughed. He looked much more handsome smiling. He was strong and brave. His protectiveness was inviting. She could be happy as his wife, if only she could get past that hardness of character.

Reilly's smile was enticing. Owen moved forward and took Reilly in his arms. His mouth covered hers and together they indulged in a pastime they both seemed to enjoy.

Several minutes later a loud clearing of the throat interrupted their play.

Owen opened his eyes to see Garvey standing on the deck. Rory was at his side.

Reilly blushed crimson to be caught in such a passionate position. "Rory," she acknowledged. "Are you all right?"

"Grandfather told me we were attacked by river pirates," Rory replied excitedly. "Did you shoot any?"

Owen looked at Rory strangely. "Why would you ask your Momma if she shot any pirates?"

"Cuz she's a crack shot!" Rory boasted. "Didn't you know?"

"Not until recently," Owen groused.

"She's the best," Rory beamed. "Momma's been teaching me how to shoot."

"Really?" Owen questioned Reilly cocking an eyebrow. It was identical to his father's affectation. "Is that true? You've been teaching our son to shoot?"

Reilly lowered her head humbly. "Well, yes I have. I didn't know if you'd have time."

"I'll make time, but by all means continue with your lessons," Owen guffawed. "All of them!"

"Your head is bleeding," Garvey noticed. "You'd better get inside and have Sour Water take care of it for you. Then get some sleep. You've had enough excitement for one day."

Owen wiped his head. His hand felt the warm blood dripping down his face. "Yeah, I'd better get it tended too. There's a large knot growing there."

"I'll come and help," Reilly volunteered.

"Don't worry, Duchess. Sour Water may need to stitch it up. I don't want you to fret none," Owen offered. "Take care of Rory for me. I need to get some sleep. The river has more of these pirates and we aren't home yet."

"You look tired yourself, Reilly," Garvey noted. "Why don't you run along and take a nap. I'll tend to Rory."

"I'd better check on Rachel first," Reilly suggested. "A fright like this isn't good for an expecting woman."

"Go on and then get some rest," Garvey agreed.

Reilly returned to the cabins and did check on Rachel. They had a tea together and then Reilly collapsed on her bed. She slept soundly for several hours missing lunch.

Rory shared more secrets with Garvey while his parents slept. Rory was a happy little boy. "They were kissing, grandfather."

"They were," Garvey agreed.

"I'm going to have real parents who really love each other," Rory stated gaily.

"No doubt about it," Garvey concurred. "Just a little while longer and they will realize they were meant for each other."

Chapter Fourteen

The river waters and weather cooperated with the Woulfe family and they were at their destination in a week and a half. After passing through a place called Casper, the riverboat slowly continued on to a small town. Everyone seemed to know the riverboat, its Captain, crew, and of course Owen Woulfe. Children ran to meet Owen when he walked off the boat. He had filled his pockets with penny candies that he generously gave out to the children. The children were white, Indian, Negro, and several types of mixes.

To Reilly's observances, the children all seemed to adore Owen Woulfe. The wagons were unloaded from the cargo area of the riverboat and Reilly again observed sacks, cartons, and barrels of goods being taken by the local people. After leaving the riverboat Reilly turned to hear her name being called.

"Betsy?" Reilly queried. "My God, it is really you Betsy?"

"Lawzy, Miss Reilly," Betsy cried. "I never thought I would see you again."

"You look well," Reilly commented taking Betsy's hands and holding them out. "How is your son, Richard?"

"He's a fine strapping and healthy young man," Betsy replied. "Thanks to you and Massah Stewart."

"So this is where you and Richard came," Reilly remarked. "Are you happy here?"

"Lawzy, Miss Reilly, I couldn't be happier," Betsy related cheerfully. "I done jumped the broom with Jonathan Driggers and we have a baby girl. She's right over there." Betsy pointed to a little Negro girl sucking her thumb watching longingly at Owen Woulfe passing out candy to the children. She was away from the rest and appeared reluctant to go near them. "Would you look at that? My baby Melody is so shy she won't even get any candy."

"Oh she's so cute," Reilly observed. She was thinking about going to Owen and ask him for some candy that she could give to Melody when she heard Owen.

"Come here puddin'," Owen yelled out as he walked to Melody. He picked her up and swung her around to her delight. "You want some candy from Uncle Owen, puddin'?"

Melody nodded her head. Owen pecked her cheek with a kiss and put her down. He gave her a big handful of candy.

"Lawsy, Massah Woulfe is the most righteous man," Betsy commented.

Owen turned and walked to Betsy. "I see you've met Mrs. Woulfe, Betsy."

Betsy gasped, "Why Miss Reilly, you done jumped the broom with Massah Woulfe?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes," Reilly replied.

"Well if you ain't the luckiest woman this side of the Mississippi!" Betsy exclaimed but then looked at Owen. "You always done told me you was a married man."

"I was Betsy. I mean I am," Owen fumbled. Just how would someone explain this? "Just know that I am married and this is Mrs. Woulfe all righteous and legal like."

Betsy wrinkled her brow. "Is that true Miss Reilly?"

"Yes, Betsy. It is true. We are legally married," Reilly responded. It was difficult for her not to laugh at the absurdity of it, but it really wasn't a laughing matter. She and Owen may be married, but they had some challenges to overcome. "We were just married a few weeks ago. My first husband, Philip Madison was killed in the war. Owen's first wife, Meredith was killed in an accident. We came together because of mutual love for Rory. He is Owen's son," Reilly said. "Does that explain everything?"

"That must be the boy there?" Betsy questioned pointing to Rory. He was in the middle of a fistfight with a young boy about the same age and size.

"Oh dear," Reilly inhaled. "Owen, do something!"

"What?" Owen grinned.

"Stop them of course!" Reilly growled angrily. "Rory could get hurt."

"Looks to me like he's winning," Owen beamed proudly.

"Fighting is not a good thing to encourage," Reilly rebuked.

"Scuffles are good for boys, Momma," Owen teased. "It's not the same as fighting. Besides, we don't even know what they're scrapping about."

"I'll just go and find out," Reilly decreed. She began walking toward Rory when Owen grabbed her arm and pulled her back.

"It's right embarrassing for a boy's Momma to stop a scrap," Owen said firmly. "You stay here and I'll handle it."

"See that you do," Reilly ordered.

"Aye, Aye, Duchess," Owen snorted and walked toward Rory.

"And stop calling me that!" Reilly screamed to Owen's back stamping her foot. "He can be so aggravating!"

Betsy who walked up behind Reilly grinned. "Most men are, but some can be the best husbands." After she spoke she craned her neck. "Rachel? Is that you Rachel?"

"Betsy!" Rachel called running toward her. "Lawsy, I thought I'd never see your face again!"

"You two know each other?" Reilly queried.

"Yas'm. We came from the same plantation. A lot of us women ran away from that place," Betsy replied hugging Rachel. "The Massah and his overseer used all the women as breedin stock. Then when the young'uns were old enough they were put to work or sold off for profit. Those two enjoyed breedin and hurtin."

Reilly felt suddenly sick in her stomach. She knew what Betsy meant. She had heard stories of such things and remembered Betsy's backside when she helped Betsy with a bath after she arrived at the Stewart house.

"Miss Madison, would you mind if Rachel and I went off?" Betsy asked. "We have a lot of catchin up to do."

"No, not at all," Reilly replied. "I need to find out what still needs to be done."

Betsy giggled, "I'm sure you don't need to lift a finger. Massah Woulfe and his foreman, Jonah, always seem to have everything organized jest fine."

"Jonah?"

"That's him over there talking to my Jacob," Rachel offered before taking Betsy's hand and walking toward town.

Uncertain of what to do or what was expected of her, Reilly stood like a statue watching. Owen walked over to Jacob and Jonah with Rory. They talked a few minutes and then turned to look at her. Rory pointed at her. This is ridiculous. I cannot abide idle hands. I have to do something. Reilly walked toward them.

"Momma," Rory gushed running to her and pulling her to the men. "This is my Momma," Rory introduced to Jonah.

Jonah tipped his hat and bowed. "Pleased to make your acquaintance Mrs. Woulfe."

"Why thank you, Mr. Jonah," Reilly replied extending her hand. It was then Reilly noticed Jonah was staring at her. "Is something wrong with me? You're looking at me like I have dirt all over my face."

"Sorry ma'am. I don't mean to stare, but you look so familiar," Jonah remarked. "Have we met somewhere before?"

"I don't think so," Reilly said thoughtfully. "I remember every slave's name I have ever come in contact with and I don't recall the name Jonah."

"I've never been a slave. I was born a freeman," Jonah said proudly. "I didn't come through the underground railroad at all."

"Then perhaps I just look like someone you know," Reilly replied.

"I think that must be it," Jonah responded.

"Mr. Woulfe, is there something you need to give attention to that I can assist with," Reilly requested. "I cannot abide standing here and doing nothing."

"Things are already in order thanks to Jonah," Owen offered. "You best go to the Mayfield's house and rest up for the trip to Bear Lake. We leave tomorrow at sunrise. Jacob will take you there. I have to finish inventory with Jonah."

"Perhaps I could help with your inventory," Reilly suggested.

"I'll handle it with Jonah. You just take care of Rory. See to it he gets a good meal and plenty of rest. Mrs. Mayfield is expecting the two of you," Owen ordered.

"Aren't you coming?" Reilly asked. It seemed her husband was avoiding her and the marriage bed.

"Nope, Jonah and I are going to stay with the wagons. I trust everyone in town, but there are raiding Snakes. Pocatello is acting up again," Owen explained.

"Will you be safe?" Reilly asked with concern.

"Are you worried?" Owen countered.

"Of course I am. You are Rory's father," Reilly said too quickly.

"And your husband, Duchess!" Owen reminded bitterly. "I've got to get going. Jacob, take Mrs. Woulfe to Mrs. Mayfield's boarding house."

"Yassuh," Jacob replied. He led Reilly and Rory to the comfortable and clean boarding house of Mrs. Mayfield.

Rory and Reilly had a huge meal where all she heard was the accolades of Owen Woulfe. She and Rory shared a bed and slept soundly through the night.

In the morning Reilly was wakened to soft kisses on her cheeks and a male voice whispering, "Duchess! Duchess, it's time to wake up."

"Mr. Woulfe?" Reilly questioned sleepily while she slowly opened her eyes.

"It isn't your ghost, Duchess," Owen replied sarcastically and then whacked her on her bottom. "Time to get up and eat breakfast. Good God, you are a sound sleeper."

Reilly focused her eyes. It was still dark outside. Rory was already dressing. "I sleep well because I have a clear conscience, Mr. Woulfe."

"Glad to hear it," Owen snickered. "Get dressed and come downstairs to eat. We can't lollygag waiting for you."

"You won't have to, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly spat out. This man was so nasty to her, but sweet to everyone else. "I'll be ready in a little bit."

"Make that half of a little bit, Duchess," Owen commanded. He turned and walked out of the room.

Reilly stuck out her tongue at Owen's back. "Impossible man!" she exclaimed under her breath. She walked to her trunk and pulled out her clean white cotton blouse, and blue cotton split pants. Quickly she washed her face, neck, and arms with a cool cloth after dipping it into the bowl of fresh water on the bureau. Adjusting her broderie and stockings she slipped on the clothes and her boots. Reilly took no time to do her hair. Instead she

brushed it and tied it in back with a dark blue ribbon. She took her colt and put it in her belted holster buckling it around her waist. Reilly then pulled out a bolero type leather hat she had brought along. Placing the hat on her head, she pulled the cord snugly until it fit under her chin. "Ten minutes Mr. Woulfe, fast enough for you?" she mumbled under her breath as she opened the door and walked down the stairs to the dining room.

Owen looked up with surprise showing on his face when Reilly walked into the dining room.

Reilly thought he was surprised because she dressed so quickly. "Fast enough?"

"Where do you think you're going dressed like that?" Owen queried.

"With you," Reilly snapped. "This is a suitable outfit for riding."

"Who said you were riding?" Owen grouched. "Duchess, this is a rough trip. You will be more comfortable in the wagon."

"I prefer to ride!" Reilly argued. "Are you telling me you refuse to provide a horse?"

"I'll get Desiree saddled," Jonah laughed. "I ain't gonna argue with no lady."

"Coward," Owen shouted at Jonah's backside when he quickly left the breakfast table.

"I shall be certain to thank Mr. Jonah," Reilly bit out.

"I'm riding too! Aren't I father?" Rory asked while stuffing a large piece of buttered bread in his mouth.

"Can you ride a horse?" Owen asked not knowing all too much about his son.

"He's an excellent equestrian. He's been riding since he was three years old," Reilly informed heatedly. "Garvey saw to that personally."

"Why thank you for the information, Duchess," Owen growled. He didn't need to be reminded how much of his son's life he had missed. Lord she is always nasty with me!

"I'll relax in the wagon," Garvey chuckled. "I have a feeling I'll be a lot safer in there than on the trail with the two of you."

Owen glared at his father. There were times he did not understand his father's sense of humor. "I'll go saddle Misty for you." With that statement, Owen rose and left the breakfast table.

Garvey, Reilly, and Rory were taken to the wagons. Jonah and Owen were already mounted and waiting to leave. Garvey climbed into the wagon and sat next to Becker, an old trapper he knew well, who was now working as a hand for Owen. Rachel and Jacob were in their own Conestoga wagon with six mules. There were six wagons total and all but one was solidly filled with equipment, dry goods, foodstuffs, furniture, and tools.

Reilly mounted Desiree and Nathan, another hand of Owens, helped Rory up to mount Misty.

The days were long and boring as they traversed the plains heading toward Fort Bridger. It was a bit out of the way, but it was the safest and best traveled route. The more traveled the route, the more likely for military patrols and less likely to run into wild animals.

At the end of each day, they would wash up and would eat supper prepared by a crusty old trapper named Doughnut. Reilly had to admit he cooked a fine meal considering the environment.

The evenings were beginning to cool and Reilly would relax after riding the full day by walking a short distance from camp and sitting underneath the stars enjoying the beauty and solitude. Owen still had not made any attempt to join her in a marriage bed and she was beginning to wonder if something was wrong with her. Philip enjoyed her, but she got nothing from it. Perhaps Owen perceived she wasn't very alluring. Perhaps she wasn't attractive to him at all. Meredith's words kept going around her head at night. He was magnificent and very pleasurable in the marriage bed. "What is wrong with me?"

"I don't know," a deep voice came from behind her. "Are you feeling sick?"

"Oh it's you," Reilly stated after composing herself from the mild state of fear in the suddenness of the voice.

"Just me," Owen replied soberly. Why was this woman driving him crazy with lust but acting like a chunk of frozen river to him? "Is something wrong with you?"

"No," Reilly said gathering her wits about her. "I was just thinking out loud. What are you doing out here? Aren't you guarding something or another?"

"I saw you leave camp," Owen answered. "I just wanted to make sure you were safe."

"Ah, I see. You were guarding me. How come you haven't noticed me leave camp before?" Reilly asked. "I come out here to enjoy the quiet and beauty every night before I retire."

"Who says I haven't noticed?" Owen chuckled. "I do keep an eye on you, Duchess. This is the wilderness you know."

"Will you please stop..." Reilly began to say and ended up in a scream as a large, make that, very large half dressed Indian suddenly appeared from behind a rock.

"Painted Foot," Owen recognized laughing. "Why'd you have to scare Mrs. Woulfe like that?"

"She your woman?" Painted Foot asked pointing to Reilly.

"Yes, she is. What brings you to our camp?" Owen queried.

"Washakie heard you are bringing wagons across Shoshone land. He wants to know if you bring firearms and firewater?" Painted Foot asked.

"Chief Washakie knows I never carry firearms and firewater. I bring only blankets, cloth, dry goods, tools, and foodstuffs. Some I will send to him after I arrive back at Bear Lake." Owen replied. "Is that what you are checking on?"

"No, Washakie always wants you to know that you are his friend. He sent me to warn you that Pocatello is causing trouble again. If you paint your Conestoga wagons with this sign," Painted Foot said showing a mark on the ground with a stick. "Pocatello will know it is you, and you are protected by Washakie."

"I have some paint in the wagons. I'll get the brushes. We'll take care of it tonight," Owen answered. "Thank Washakie for me."

"I must tell you to look out for the great devil bear that has lost its senses," Painted Foot also warned. "The devil bear had been wounded and now seeks the blood of man."

"Who wounded him?" Owen asked.

"A white trader hoping for a trophy," Painted Foot informed. "Bad medicine."

"Thank you Painted Foot, is there something you would like to take now?" Owen offered.

Painted Foot nodded and pointed toward the heavy woolen blankets.

Owen retrieved two from a wagon and handed them to Painted Foot. "Will you ride with us to Fort Bridger?"

Painted Foot shook his head. "No, I must return with news of your gifts to Washakie." Painted Foot disappeared as quickly as he appeared.

"You heard about the bear," Owen warned. "Come back into camp. Bears don't like fires."

"That Indian spoke perfect English," Reilly muttered in amazement.

"Painted Foot's parents were killed by white settlers and he was taken in by a trapper when he was about four years old. He learned English from the trapper, named Salty Dog. He was a sea captain before he went into the fur trapping business. Salty Dog died of consumption when Painted Foot was a young man. Painted Foot then returned to the Shoshone people."

"I have so much to learn," Reilly admitted. "So many different things to learn."

"Not all in one night," Owen chuckled. "Get back to camp now. I have some painting to do."

"I can help with that," Reilly volunteered. "I'm handy with a paint brush. Father used to make me help whitewash the fence when I was little. He always said good honest labor is healthy for the soul."

"If you're as good with a paint brush as you are with that colt," Owen laughed. "I'd appreciate your help. Are you sure you don't mind getting all messy?"

"One doesn't get messy if one paints correctly," Reilly bragged. "Show me those brushes and paint."

Chapter Fifteen

Owen painted one wagon and then noticing how well Reilly was doing, sat back and watched her paint the other five. He sat on the ground near the campfire with his back resting against a boulder and his feet crossed.

Reilly was so engrossed in her painting she didn't even notice that Owen and Garvey were sitting watching her. Rachel had already put Rory to bed. Reilly felt wonderful after some good hard labor. She was right, the painting was done well and she didn't have a drop of paint on her. When she walked toward Owen and Garvey with the paint bucket and brush in hand they cheered.

"Great job, Reilly," Garvey acknowledged clapping his hands in applause.

"Just perfect, Mrs. Woulfe," Owen added smiling. "We just may have to keep you."

"Not to rub it in, Mr. Woulfe, but do you notice I am quite clean?" Reilly boasted.

Owen rose to his feet. Standing nearly a foot over her he carefully perused her from head to toe. "Yep it looks that way." Owen bent down to take the paintbrush and bucket from Reilly's hand. "Now that you mention it, I see only one spot."

"Where?" Reilly questioned looking about her clothes.

"Right there," Owen said taking the brush he had dipped in the bucket and touched her nose.

Reilly didn't know if she should break out laughing or screaming like a furious Irish banshee. Instead she said quite calmly, "Oh dear, now how did that happen?"

"Got me," Owen chuckled.

Reilly grabbed the bucket of paint and quite promptly dumped it all over Owen's jeans. "Oops, I'm so sorry. It was an accident." Reilly turned and ran quickly lest she suffer dire consequences and ruined clothes. She didn't hear Garvey and Owen hooting with laughter until after she sought the shelter of the Conestoga wagon she shared with Rory. A smile crossed her lips as she lay down next to Rory and fell fast asleep.

In the morning the paint on her nose dried and was quickly peeled off. She mounted Desiree and trailed behind the Conestoga wagons to

avoid Owen. He laughed last night, but his temperament could quickly change.

After several hours Owen reined his palomino horse, Moccasin, to the back of the wagons and Reilly.

"Mrs. Woulfe, are you avoiding me?" Owen chuckled.

"What ever would give you that idea, Mr. Woulfe?" Reilly replied.

"Oh I don't know. Perhaps a fear of retribution for a waste of fine paint over some fine range clothes," Owen suggested.

"Retribution? For an accident?" Reilly teased. She was enjoying this little banter immensely.

"Accident? My aunt Matilda, that was an accident," Owen laughed. "I came up to tell you that Fort Bridger is just ahead. We'll camp there for the night."

"Can I obtain a real hot bath there?" Reilly asked hopefully. She hadn't a bath since Mrs. Mayfield's rooming house.

"Yep, and I'll make sure you get one if I have to give it to you myself," Owen offered huskily.

"Mr. Woulfe, mind yourself," Reilly said feigning shock.

"I intend to do just that," Owen said mischievously. "Sooner or later, I intend to do just that."

For the first time since his kiss on the riverboat, Reilly felt there was hope for this marriage. Her hopes faded when they arrived at Fort Bridger. Owen had Rachel and her taken by a young lieutenant's wife into the private section of the officer's quarters. She didn't see Owen until they left two days later. Owen, Garvey, Jonah, Jacob, and the other men including Rory stayed by the wagons. Owen had spent most of the daylight hours in conversations with the militia of the fort. A telegraph wire had been set up and there was constant news of the war. None of the news was good. Most of the federal troops had been called back to the east to fight against the Confederacy as they were now named.

Several of Washakie's braves were sent to escort the wagons through the Shoshone lands to Bear Lake. Chief Bear Hunter and Chief Sagwitch met the wagon train just five miles away from Owen Woulfe's estate.

Reilly watched silently as her husband opened two of the Conestoga wagons and gave the Chiefs and their band of six warriors bags of dry beans, flour, sugar, bolts of cloth, blankets, and the most valuable commodity of all, salt.

When the Shoshone had left, Reilly galloped next to Owen on Moccasin. "Do you always just give away your foodstuffs and dry goods?"

"Nope, never give anything away. It's bad business," Owen replied.

"But you just did with those Indians," Reilly corrected.

"No Duchess, we traded. Shoshone's are honorable. They don't take, they trade," Owen corrected.

"What did they trade with?" Reilly asked curiously.

"Free passage. That's the most important. Then they gave me medicine bags. Powerful medicines. They also traded tobacco and seed beads," Owen answered. "Tomorrow they will send Winter Sun pine nuts, buffalo jerky, venison, and Shoshone potatoes."

"You never mentioned Winter Sun before," Reilly noted.

"She's my cook and housekeeper," Owen replied casually. "I guess I didn't think to mention her. She's second nature to me. Winter Sun has been with me for about six years. Ever since Meredith left."

"Is she pretty?" Reilly found herself asking. Where the jealousy had come from she wasn't quite sure, but that would explain Owen's not having any interest in their marriage bed.

"I think Winter Sun is beautiful," Owen replied. "Couldn't be you're a little jealous?"

"Of course not," Reilly lied and reigned her horse in trot back to the wagons.

It was dusk when the wagons pulled into the estate. Reilly's mouth dropped. "This is unbelievable. You built this?"

"Yeah, I did," Owen said humbly.

"It looks like George Washington's estate, Mount Vernon!" Reilly exclaimed.

"Yeah, I visited Mount Vernon when I was a kid. I fell in love with the estate, so I built my own. It took five years, but she's a beauty isn't she?" Owen asked with pride.

"She certainly is," Reilly marveled.

"You'll be real comfortable now," Owen beamed. "I've had every modern convenience installed. Even water closets and marble tubs with hot water heaters."

Reilly stared at Owen. This entire estate and house was incredible.

A black woman ran out the door and greeted Owen. "Welcome home Massah Woulfe. We shore missed you."

"Harriet, this is Mrs. Woulfe. Would you mind showing her to the master suite and help her with her things?" Owen requested. He then helped Rory down from Misty. "And this is Rory. He came with Pa. Will you take them to their rooms also?"

"I'd be pleased to," Harriet acknowledged and showed the way past the gates, into the house and up the stairs to the bedrooms.

Reilly took in everything. This house was beautiful, elegantly wallpapered and furnished.

Harriet opened the bedroom door and Reilly inhaled deeply. The room had pink satin curtains that covered the windows, a huge brass bed with pink satin coverlet, sheets, and pillow shams covering the pillows. The mattress was hard and filled with cotton. The walls were papered in a lovely white background with pink nosegays. Four armoires of cherry wood were placed neatly against the walls. A large chest and a bureau were made of the same elegantly carved cherry wood of the armoires. "It's lovely!"

"Massah Woulfe built this especially for his woman," Harriet offered. "It would make him right proud if you liked it."

"I love it!" Reilly remarked.

Harriet opened a door to reveal the toilette room.

Reilly saw the tub, heater and water closet. "Impressive to say the least."

"I'll help you with the bath," Harriet volunteered. After the water was pumped and heated, Harriet filled the tub with rose scented salts that Owen had bought in Soda Springs. "Massah Woulfe bought these for his woman." After helping Reilly disrobe, Harriet disappeared into the bedroom and returned several minutes later with a soft drying towel and a lovely white satin nightgown.

"Where did that nightgown come from?" Reilly asked Harriet angrily.

"Massah Woulfe bought this on one of his trips to Provost. He said his woman would have the best someday," Harriet clucked. "Since you're his woman I guess you is gonna be spoilt."

Reilly blushed in embarrassment. Then she remembered the other woman he thought was beautiful. "Where is Winter Sun?"

"She's outback getting cow chips dried. We always stock up for the winter months," Harriet answered absentmindedly as she smoothed the nightgown out for Reilly.

"Cow chips?" Reilly asked. "What are cow chips?"

"They is the droppings from cows. When they is dried they is good cooking fuel," Harriet answered. "Lawsy, don't you know anything girl?"

"I have a lot to learn. Will you help teach me?" Reilly requested.

"Shorely I will, Mrs. Woulfe," Harriet beamed. "It'd be my pleasure."

After helping Reilly dress in the nightgown, Harriet excused herself. She needed to help Winter Sun with supper and feeding the hands. Harriet promised she would bring up a tray.

Reilly didn't argue. The satin nightgown felt soft and wonderful against her skin. Looking out the window Reilly watched all the men unload the wagons in the night. They had torches lit to see what they were doing. She watched as Owen removed his shirt and helped unload. In the torchlight Reilly could see the golden reflections of powerful muscles on his shoulders and forearms. His chest revealed soft brown hair that narrowed at the waistline. He was a beautiful male specimen. A wanting snuck up on her and she sighed heavily.

A few minutes later Harriet brought up her dinner tray. "You just relax and be spoilt."

"I could get used to this, Harriet," Reilly giggled opening the tray. The bread was fresh and warm. The aromas of the stew, vegetables, and potatoes were incredibly inviting. A huge piece of chocolate cake was on the side plate for desert. "Have Rory and Garvey Woulfe eaten?"

"They was powerful hungry so I brought them trays first," Harriet volunteered. "Your boy Rory is a good boy. He was plumb tuckered out after dinner and fell asleep."

"Rory is a wonderful boy," Reilly agreed sampling the food. "This is delicious."

"I'll tell Winter Sun. You enjoy the supper and I'll be back later to fetch the tray."

"Thank you, Harriet," Reilly appreciated. She set about arranging her clothes in the armoires and chests. Reilly was tired but couldn't sleep. How could she ever be a wife or a mother if her husband kept her in a separate room? Was he with Winter Sun?

Owen ate his meal and went directly to his study. He worked on the inventory and his books for some time. Garvey came down to visit with him for a little while after dinner but excused himself shortly after. He was tired from the trip.

"Not as young as I used to be," Garvey stated sadly. "I'm afraid I'm plumb tired."

"Get some rest, Pa," Owen replied. "I have to finish these books anyway. I'll show you the estate tomorrow."

"You did a fine job, son. A fine job," Garvey praised. "Reilly will be happy and comfortable here. You'll see."

"I hope so," Owen replied. "I hope so."

"Son, she isn't Meredith at all," Garvey advised.

"That's for sure," Owen agreed. "Meredith was terrified of guns. This wife is a crack shot."

"That's only one of her talents," Garvey chuckled.

"So I'm learning," Owen agreed. "Go to bed, Pa. I'll see you in the morning."

Several hours later, near midnight, Winter Sun entered the study holding a kerosene lamp. Her hair braided in one long braid down her back. She was wearing a simple cotton nightgown and a woolen robe tied at the waist. "Why aren't you in bed?"

"I had to finish this," Owen answered pointing to the books.

"You could have done that tomorrow. I've never known you to come back from a trip and work on those writings all night," Winter Sun observed. "What's really troubling you, Owen?"

"It's my wife," Owen replied. "She isn't really my wife."

"Tell me," Winter Sun ordered. All these years she was the closest to a mother Owen had ever known other than his Aunt Sierra.

Owen told her the entire story starting from the train station in Saint Louis. "And to top things off, when I went to our bed and was enjoying my wife, she called out her dead husband's name."

"Make her forget. You can do that!" Winter Sun said wisely. "Your problem is you have always given into women. Stop being a

cowering sheep. Be a man. Don't approach her in her dreams. Take her when she's awake. Be a man!"

"She could get angry," Owen feared.

"Your problem has always been that you keep giving into the woman," Winter Sun scolded. "It's time you have what you need. She might even enjoy it."

"You're right!" Owen agreed slamming his fist on the closed books. Standing tall and straight he headed for the stairs. Mounting the stairs two at a time he stood outside the door and without hesitating opened it.

Reilly was sitting on the bench in front of the bureau brushing her hair. She jumped when she heard Owen enter the room, but relaxed when she saw him and faced the mirror once more. "Have you come to check on my well being, Mr. Woulfe? You will be happy to know I am fine and very comfortable."

"Glad to hear it, but I came to go to bed," Owen replied. "With my wife."

Reilly's heart skipped a beat. "This is your room?"

"This is our room," Owen corrected. He sat on the bed and removed his boots and socks.

"What are you doing, Mr. Woulfe?" Reilly asked blushing as she watched his reflections in the mirror as he unbuttoned his jeans and shirt.

"Getting ready for bed," Owen answered removing his shirt and jeans. "I see you are ready."

Reilly flushed crimson. Suddenly she was very nervous. She felt as if she were a virgin on the wedding night all over again. Glancing up she saw the virile reflection of a naked man approaching. "Mr. Woulfe, a gentleman would excuse himself and disrobe in another room."

"What in God's name for?" Owen answered behind her.

She felt his warmth and inhaled his manly essence. His hands unbuttoned the top of her nightgown and his warm hands slowly caressed her breasts. Her nipples hardened immediately under his attention.

"A gentleman would do so...." Reilly found her breathing begin to become erratic. "...for propriety's sake."

"A gentleman might, but a husband?" Owen breathed huskily in her hair. "This husband wants his wife. This husband wants to make love to his wife."

Owen's hands cupped her breasts. His thumb gently massaged the hardened nipple.

Reilly's head was beginning to swim.

"Mrs. Woulfe?"

"Yes?"

"Are you ready to be my lawfully wedded wife?"

"Yes."

In a swift movement Owen lifted Reilly from the chair and tucked his arm under her legs. He began kissing her lips gently at first as he

carried her to their bed. Lying her down upon the satin quilt his lips delved deeper for the sweetness of her mouth. His hands lifted her nightgown while they discovered every inch of her curves.

Reilly felt his hot bare flesh. Her hands roamed the muscles of his shoulders and arms. She returned his deep kisses with a passion she had no idea she possessed.

Owen's hands began to explore her quim buried beneath the dark patch above her thighs. He probed and found her inviting. Massaging the womanly nub Owen was near the breaking point, but controlled his need. He wanted to bring Reilly to orgasm first. He found he wanted to pleasure her, and she was responding to him.

Reilly issued a soft scream and her body went rigid as she arched her back to the penetration of Owen's fingers. Never had she enjoyed such pleasure. Her body shook in delight. Yes, it was true. Owen Woulfe did make a woman shiver and shake!

Owen's hand was flooded with the sweetness that was Reilly. He kissed her deeply after her orgasm. He took his tongue teasingly down her throat until he stopped to suckle on one breast while his hand played with the teat of the other.

Reilly was burning all over again. Her nails scratched into Owen's back as she arched into the pleasure he was giving her.

Owen moved down further. This time he was laving his tongue over her navel. He moved lower and took her legs to place them over his shoulders.

"What?" Reilly asked breathlessly. In a euphoria few women enter Reilly was taken into higher heights of ecstasy.

Owen dipped his tongue into the quim of his wife. He bit gently, laved, and suckled the sweetness of her womanhood.

Reilly arched fully into Owen's onslaught and this time screamed breathlessly, "Owen!"

Without a word, Owen mounted and penetrated his wife with his hardened male shaft. Purging in and out, deeper and deeper until he moaned and shook in release. Reilly joined him in the spiral of pleasure at the same moment.

It was several minutes before their hearts stopped racing. Both were in a special world few people enter.

Owen rolled to the side and pulled Reilly next to him. "You are a very special woman, Reilly Woulfe."

"It wasn't a dream," Reilly said softly. "It wasn't a dream. It was you, wasn't it?"

"I hope so. Who did you think was making love to you just now?" Owen asked heatedly. Would he always have to compete with a ghost?

"Not now. It was our wedding night. I dreamed of being made love to," Reilly answered not recognizing the hostility in Owen's question. "I woke up and thought you were there, but I was alone. You were there, weren't you?"

"You felt me making love to you?" Owen asked.

"Yes, but you weren't there when I woke up," Reilly said snuggling into his arms.

"You called out Philip's name," Owen responded. "I thought it best that I leave. I wanted you to want me. I couldn't share you with a shadow."

"You shouldn't have left me wanting," Reilly chided. "Don't ever leave me wanting, this...again."

"I take it you enjoyed the marriage bed?" Owen gloated.

"Even if it means giving you a fatter head than you have already, the answer is yes, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly giggled. "I enjoyed you very much."

Several encounters of pleasure later, Owen finally fell asleep with a smug face. Reilly was already asleep tucked neatly in his arms.

Chapter Sixteen

In the morning Owen woke to find Reilly still in his arms. Dare he try making love once more? Surely after their lovemaking last night she would be sore. The thought alone brought his organ to stiff attention. Reilly stirred in his arm and brought her leg over his. Owen closed his eyes in agony. It had been so long since he had a woman and his Reilly was a passionate woman. Without foreplay he rolled Reilly onto her back. Owen mounted his Reilly and entered cautiously. As he entered he found her to be hot and moist. He began his rhythmic penetrations as he held her rounded bottom with his hands.

Reilly opened her eyes and smiled. She responded to his lovemaking by arching her hips in match to his rhythm. Together they shared their orgasm.

When Owen sank down into the bed he took Reilly's chin in his hand, "I can't seem to get enough of you."

"Nor I you," Reilly whispered back picking up his hand and kissing his fingers. Reilly was truly content. At least there was nothing wrong with her. This marriage was working in the bed. Of that Reilly was happily certain.

Owen was in a heaven also. This marriage was wonderful. At least in the marriage bed they found happiness. It was a start. Silently Owen thanked the great spirits to give him a passionate woman. "Let's lie about a little longer," Owen suggested. "I just want to hold you for awhile."

"I'd like that," Reilly concurred.

They did just that. Enjoying the warmth and feel of each other's body they lay in bed until Reilly's stomach growled.

Owen chuckled, "its time to eat would be my guess."

Reilly blushed in embarrassment. "I guess I am a bit hungry."

"After our exercises, I would think you need nourishment my dear Duchess," Owen teased.

"Stop calling me that," Reilly protested. She slapped Owen on the chest playfully. "Why do you call me that?"

"When I first saw you at the station, you were my idea of British Royalty. You were so elegant and beautiful. I saw pictures of Queen Victoria and you reminded me of her. So regal and stately," Owen explained. "I mean it in respect and love. It's a pet nickname."

Reilly lifted her head and touched Owen's cheek. "You think I'm beautiful?"

"I think you're beautiful, elegant, regal, and MINE!" Owen snorted and pushed her down into the mattress. He kissed her passionately.

Reilly enjoyed the frolic and kissed back with the same passion. Owen Woulfe had awakened all that was woman in her and she enjoyed it. When she was able to take a breath she asked, "I thought you said Winter Sun is beautiful."

Owen rolled on his back and pulled Reilly on top of him. He tweaked her nose. "Listen to me Duchess. Winter Sun is beautiful. Just as beautiful as any mother is to a son."

"You didn't tell me she was your mother," Reilly declared in slight confusion. "Garvey always told me your mother was killed when you were a baby."

"Winter Sun isn't my blood mother, she's sort of a surrogate mother, like Aunt Sierra was," Owen explained softly. "And she is beautiful in body and soul."

"I can't wait to meet this wonder woman," Reilly said jealously. "Harriet thinks Winter Sun can walk on water."

"Actually she can," Owen teased.

"What?"

"When the river is frozen you will too," Owen laughed.

"I can hardly wait to try out that belief. You were really mean to me when we met at the train station, you know," Reilly reminded. "How would I know you thought I was beautiful and elegant?"

"I see my son clinging to a woman who planned to take him away from me," Owen growled. "Would you have been nice? What if I came to Fairland to take Rory?"

"If you put it that way, I see your point," Reilly allowed. He was right and she knew it. She didn't want to upset things right now. Reilly found herself happy and content, she didn't want to start any type of argument. They still needed time to learn to love each other. Reilly's attention was drawn to noise at the door. "What is scratching at the door?"

They heard a sharp bark and the nails began to scratch on the door once more.

"Quiet Misery," Owen yelled toward the door. "I'm coming."

"Just who or what is Misery?" Reilly asked grabbing the sheets to cover her body.

Owen rose from the bed and walked to the door.

Reilly couldn't stop staring at the beautiful body Owen possessed. He was muscular, broad shouldered with narrow hips and that derrière was taut and magnificent. Reilly made a mental note to pinch Owen's bottom sometime.

A streak of gray and black raced across the room as Owen opened the door.

"Misery, is my dog," Owen said chuckling. He watched as Misery jumped on the bed pushing Reilly down with his paws. Misery began licking Reilly's face, all of it.

"Help me!" Reilly implored trying to push the large dog away. "He's trying to eat me."

"Nah, just kissing you," Owen laughed. "He likes you."

"Well in that case," Reilly chirped still protecting her face with her hands. "Pleased to meet you Misery."

Misery immediately sat down and barked.

"Thank you for the bath Misery, but I prefer mine in a tub," Reilly laughed taking the sheet and wiping her face with it. "Will you remember that from now on?"

Misery cocked his head to the side and then barked playfully.

Owen walked up to Misery and scratched his head between his ears. "Good boy. I want you to meet Mrs. Woulfe, the Duchess."

Misery barked and raised his paw.

Reilly took Misery's paw and shook it. She looked at Owen as she jutted out her chin. "Owen, this is not a dog. Misery is a wolf."

"He's a breed. He looks like his father, a wolf, but his mother was a mutt some trapper brought from the East. I fell in love with him when the trapper sold the pups. Old Misery was the ugliest and runt of the litter," Owen remarked. "Weren't you old boy?"

Misery barked three times.

"You turned into a beautiful specimen, good watchdog, and fine friend," Owen praised scratching Misery's chin. "Didn't you boy?"

Misery barked and jumped from the bed.

"I'll get dressed and see to it you get your grub," Owen replied understanding Misery's message. "I don't understand why Winter Sun hasn't fed you yet." Owen went to the basin and cleaned himself briskly. He put on his clothes and told Reilly, "You take your time. I'll send Harriet up to help you and bring you a breakfast tray."

"Good, I'm as hungry as old Misery," Reilly teased. "What will you be doing today?"

"I thought I'd take Rory out to the barns and show him around the estate," Owen replied leaving the room. "I'd like to spend some more time with my son."

Reilly took that as a hint to leave him and Rory alone for the day. They were bonding and that made Reilly happy. She knew she had nothing to fear about losing Rory because he came to her every night for reading, writing, math, and prayers.

Reilly rose from the bed with the sheet wrapped around her. Dancing on her feet and in her heart she went into the toilette room and remembering everything Harriet had done the night before, drew her bath. She was full of suds when Harriet brought in a breakfast tray. Harriet helped Reilly to dry and then helped dress her. Reilly ate all of the breakfast quickly to Harriet's astonishment. Reilly said, "I was really hungry, Harriet."

Harriet clucked as she picked up the tray and left the room.

Owen went downstairs and straight to the kitchen with Misery. He pulled out some pemmican and pine nut mush to mix in a bowl for his dog. "There you are boy."

Winter Sun walked in the kitchen carrying a basket of fresh berries. "I kept your breakfast warm."

"Thank you Winter Sun. Sorry I slept in this morning," Owen apologized.

"By the glow surrounding you, it would be my guess you were a man last night," Winter Sun commented.

"It shows that much?" Owen queried rubbing the stubbles on his chin.

Winter Sun nodded.

"Well, I am a happy man. I have my son and I have a wife," Owen stated happily. "Who would have believed I would end up being happily married to Trevor Stewart's daughter?"

Winter Sun dropped her basket. Fortunately it was over the table. Her breathing became heavy and she turned to look at Owen. "Trevor Stewart?"

"Yeah, I married his daughter Reilly Stewart Madison," Owen replied not paying attention to Winter Sun. He was still busy paying attention to Misery.

Winter Sun sat down and took deep breaths. She knew her daughter would return, but she didn't know she would return as Owen Woulfe's wife. Then she remembered she had told Owen to take her own daughter. Winter Sun jutted her chin and glared at Owen.

Owen noticed Winter Sun a few minutes later. "What's wrong? You look sick!" It was then he noticed the resemblance. Owen realized just where he had seen that defiant chin of Reilly's before. It was Winter Sun. He realized then she was Reilly's mother. He was furious Winter Sun never told him just who she really was. All those years he shared Garvey's letters with her. He had shared so many times Trevor's request to find his Rose. Owen then started to feel duped and just stopped short of laughing at himself. Boy, was he an idiot. "Winter Sun, do you want to tell me something?"

"What would I want to tell you?" Winter Sun questioned attempting to regain control of her spinning world.

"Something like all these years I've been looking for Rose Stewart I find her in my own house. She's been living in my house with her secret all these years?" Owen prodded walking over to Winter Sun and sitting next to her. "Come on, fess up!"

"She's here. She's really come back," Winter Sun whimpered in disbelief.

"Why didn't you ever tell me you were Rose Stewart?" Owen demanded.

"I always knew you would find out," Winter Sun replied simply. "Everything is coming together as it should."

"Reilly will be thrilled to have found her mother," Owen said sadly suddenly realizing Rose was a primary reason Reilly had decided to stay with him. "I hope she doesn't decide to take off on me. I actually believed I would have some happiness in my lifetime."

"Do you think it would be wise to tell her, or wise not to tell her?" Winter Sun asked Owen placing her small hand on his large tanned one.

"What do you mean?" Owen asked. "She has a right to know you're alive."

"She has a right to her mother and I have a right to my daughter," Winter Sun agreed. "But this is too soon for the both of us. We need to get to know each other first. Don't you think?"

"Just what are you saying? Do you realize the other's will see the resemblance?" Owen questioned.

"We'll tell everyone and explain it must be kept secret," Winter Sun suggested hopefully. She was certain Owen would remain loyal to her and help her this time of her needs. "I want time with her before she finds out I am her mother. I want her to have time to get to know me, learn to love me, and understand exactly why I sent her away with her father."

"Pa came with me. He knows who you are," Owen warned.

"I'll find him and talk to him," Winter Sun volunteered. "You will help me?"

"Reilly wanted to find you and take you home. I just found her. I don't want to lose her. Yes, I'll help," Owen agreed selfishly. "But I don't ever want to lose my wife. Not again, Winter Sun."

"You take care of my daughter!" Winter Sun exclaimed. "Or I will take her away."

"Do you have any doubts?" Owen countered.

"None," Winter Sun said smiling.

Harriet came in with Reilly's tray and commented, "I jest can't get over how much Mrs. Woulfe looks like you, Winter Sun."

Owen chuckled. "Yeah, amazing resemblance."

Harriet was the first to be let in on the secret. Soon everyone in the estate and compound knew and was sworn to secrecy. Garvey returned from his morning ride Owen whisked him into the study to speak with Winter Sun privately.

"Rose!" Garvey exclaimed as he entered. Garvey was spellbound in momentary shock, but quickly recovered with happiness for his best friend. "You are still as beautiful as ever!" Garvey was next to Winter Sun in a wink. He held her arms and kissed her gently on the forehead.

"And you are still as handsome," Winter Sun returned. Hesitating a moment. "How is my Trevor?"

"He is still as handsome, strong, young at heart, and deeply in love with you," Garvey answered.

"Trevor still loves me?" Winter Sun questioned hopefully.

"There isn't a moment he does not think about you and miss you desperately," Garvey informed. "He saw you in Reilly everyday and kept his loving memory of you alive."

"I love him more than anyone can imagine," Winter Sun sighed.

Garvey smiled with understanding. "I believe your love has grown by the separation. There is no point in discussing if this separation was the right thing to do or the wrong thing to do. I feel the only important thing right now is to reunite you two. I'll leave immediately to send Trevor a wire from Soda Springs."

"Garvey, Reilly doesn't know I'm her mother," Winter Sun whispered quickly in warning. "She doesn't know anything about me yet. I don't want her to know yet. Owen doesn't want her to know. He's afraid she'll leave him to take me back to her father. That would hurt him beyond repair." Garvey was about to reply when Winter Sun held up her hand. "It isn't just Owen's fear involved. I don't want to suddenly tell my daughter I'm her mother. I want her to get to know me and I her. It has been so long since I've held her and loved her. I need time with her."

"Perhaps I should wire Trevor and ask him to come here post haste. The two of you together should tell Reilly," Garvey suggested.

"Do you think Trevor would come for me?" Winter Sun choked with hope and happiness.

"My dear Rose, if Trevor could fly here when he finds out you're alive, well, beautiful, and at Bear Lake with us, he would! I have a feeling he'll hitch himself to the steam locomotive and pull the train to St. Louis," Garvey laughed. "Now tell me, how did you know to come here? Did the people tell you Trevor's daughter was with us?"

"Garvey, when Meredith left Big Beaver (Owen's Shoshone name), the people heard of the news. Owen is a fine man and loved by the people. We knew he was your son, and you lived near Trevor and Pink Dawn (Reilly's Shoshone name). It was my chance to be near without anyone knowing. I came to Owen and stayed as his help."

"When Owen wrote to me that a Shoshone woman had come to stay with him as his housekeeper, I would never have guessed it could be you," Garvey marveled. "Not once did he mention your name. How could he have kept this from us?"

"Big Beaver never knew I was the Rose you were looking for," Winter Sun defended. "I never told him anything about me. As the good man he is, he never asked. He didn't really know until this morning."

"Why didn't you ever tell him? Surely he must have asked you about finding Rose Stewart?" Garvey queried.

"He never directly asked. Big Beaver thought that if I knew anything I would have told him. He always shared your letters with me," Winter Sun explained. "I simply did not volunteer anything."

"Why have you waited so long? I don't think I will ever understand that. Not if you've known how to reach us for six years," Garvey reprimanded.

"Somehow I have always hoped that if Trevor still loved me, he would come back. I knew it would be when Pink Dawn was old enough and on her own," Winter Sun explained. "I also believed they would come together to find me. I was surprised to find out my daughter came on her own and married Big Beaver."

"A lot of surprises lately," Garvey pondered. "I'm going to Soda Springs right now. I'll be back tomorrow afternoon. I think it's best if I don't talk to Reilly for a little while. I'm busting with happiness. I'm afraid I'd give everything away."

"You promise not to tell?" Winter Sun asked. "At least not yet?"

"I promise I won't tell Reilly anything until you are back in Trevor's arms," Garvey agreed. "I also understand my son's worries. The last thing he needs right now is to be hurt in a marriage again."

"Thank you, Garvey," Winter Sun appreciated. "I hope Trevor still does feel for me as you say. I have been very lonely these many seasons."

"I won't tell him everything. I'll tell him you miss him and love him," Garvey promised. "I can guarantee he'll be here in less than three weeks. And most of that time will be putting our businesses in order. The rest of the time he'll be euphoric." Garvey kissed Winter Sun on the forehead once more. "Got to go. It'll be dark by the time I get there." Sending that telegram to Trevor was all he was thinking about as he left the estate in a hurry.

"Where did Pa go?" Owen asked Winter Sun when he walked in the study.

"Your father is going to Soda Springs to send a wire to Trevor," Winter Sun explained.

"Is he going to tell Reilly?" Owen asked fearfully.

"He promised he would only wire Trevor. He will not tell Reilly," Winter Sun soothed. "He understands your fear and my needs. He is a good man, like his son."

"Winter Sun, your daughter has made me a very happy man," Owen shared. "I couldn't stand the thought of losing her. I couldn't bear to lose this happiness."

"We have work to do," Winter Sun replied. "Emotions were high and it would do no good to let her daughter feel the intensity. We should stay busy."

"I agree!" Reilly said entering the room in her own euphoria. "Father always said, 'Idle hands are the devil's play toys'."

"Duchess," Owen smiled broadly. "I thought you were going to rest today."

"Rest?" Reilly said disdainfully. "Why would a woman rest when there is work to be done? Isn't that right Winter Sun? You are Winter Sun aren't you? Owen told me you were beautiful!"

Winter Sun looked at Owen and crooked a brow. "You said I was beautiful?"

"My Pa told me never to tell a lie," Owen said staunchly. "You are beautiful, Winter Sun."

"Indeed you are," Reilly agreed. "I am proud to say I see some resemblance. Does that mean you think I could be beautiful, Mr. Woulfe? Dare I hope?"

"Duchess, you aren't just beautiful. You are breath taking," Owen decreed.

"I did take your breath away this morning, didn't I," Reilly teased and then stared at Winter Sun. "We do resemble each other, don't we?"

"You are of the people," Winter Sun said a bit shaken. There was a tremendous emotional surge of seeing her daughter grown that had to be controlled. Here was her fully-grown daughter in front of her. It took all Winter Sun had to not weep in joy and run to hold her daughter. "We will look like each other in some ways."

"How did you know I had Shoshone blood?" Reilly gasped.

Chapter Seventeen

"I told her Duchess," Owen quickly replied. "I am proud of your heritage. I wanted to share that with Winter Sun."

"We are of the same mettle, aren't we Mr. Woulfe?" Reilly asked allowing a tinge of innuendo. She was still soaring from their love making last night and this morning.

"Oh yes, Duchess," Owen replied grinning from ear to ear. He folded his arms around her and bent down to kiss her tenderly on the neck.

"You two must let me go," Winter Sun excused blushing with embarrassment. "I have a lot of work to do. Harriet promised your people fresh made beef dodger for the midday meal."

"Yum, Rory and I will be sure to be back in time," Owen said quickly. "I love those beef dodgers."

"What is a beef dodger?" Reilly asked quizzically.

"It is bits of beef in a baked cornmeal loaf," Owen answered licking his lips. "Nobody makes them better than Harriet and Winter Sun."

"Would you like to learn to make them?" Winter Sun offered Reilly.

"I'd love to!" Reilly exclaimed. "I hope you will teach many things. If I am to find my mother, I don't want her to think I am ignorant."

Owen cast a glance to Winter Sun. "I'm sure your mother will be extremely happy to see you and that thought would never enter her mind."

"Your man is right, your mother will be happy and proud of you as a daughter," Winter Sun agreed taking Reilly's hand. "I will give you a Sosoni' name. For the people your name will be Pink Dawn."

"Thank you Winter Sun," Reilly smiled thoughtfully. "That is a beautiful name."

"I thought so," Winter Sun chuckled taking Reilly's hand and walking toward the cooking room.

Owen gave Reilly an affectionate peck on the cheek before Winter Sun took her away. "I'll see you at noon. I'm taking Rory out to the lake. I thought we'd do a little trout fishing."

"Good, go away. Bring me home some supper," Winter Sun ordered.

"Yes ma'am!" Owen saluted turning on his heels leaving to find Rory.

Zachary opened the door to the young boy from the Fairland Wire office.

"A wire for Mr. Trevor Stewart," the boy smiled hoping for a large tip. The house was big and promised a wealthy owner.

Zachary dipped his long gloved fingers into his pocket and pulled out a shiny gold coin. "Here you go," Zachary said handing the coin to the young boy and retrieving the wire.

Zachary dutifully walked to the library where Trevor was reviewing accounts with his young clerk, James Davidson.

Abigail came from the kitchen wiping flour from her hands on a linen towel. "Who be that at the door?"

"Massah Stewart jest got one of them wire notes," Zachary answered his wife.

"Lawsy that can be no good. Them wire notes bring people sorrow and pain these days," Abigail chortled. "I hope nothing done happened to Miss Reilly. She be too far away for me to take care of her."

"Massah Stewart told us she done married that son of Massah Woulfe to keep little Rory," Zachary reminded. "He be a fine man. He'll take good care of Miss Reilly."

"Tain't right his marrying my little baby so soon after Massah Madison got kilt," Abigail criticized.

"Massah Stewart were shore happy bout it," Zachary disagreed. "He was smiling widely for a week."

"Hmpfh! Still tain't right!" Abigail pouted. "You gonna give that sad thing to Massah Stewart or jest jaw with me?"

Zachary rolled his eyes and knocked quietly on the library door.

"Enter," Trevor called from inside the library.

"I got a wire note for you, Massah Stewart," Zachary informed his employer handing him the telegram.

"Them things bade sorrowful news," Abigail wailed behind Zachary.

"Hush woman," Zachary ordered.

Trevor rose from behind the desk and took the wire from Zachary. "It's from Garvey!" he exclaimed. He quickly opened the wire. Trevor felt a lump in his throat. He was afraid something had happened to Reilly. He quickly read the wire and his face went ashen. He put his hand to his throat as if he couldn't breath.

Abigail moaned fearfully as she watched her employer sag into the nearest stuffed chair, "I told you! Didn't I say? Bad and evil news in them notes of late."

Choking for breath Trevor uttered, "No, Abigail. This news is too wonderful for words. This news is the greatest joy for me I can barely survive it."

Abigail rushed to Trevor's side. "What do it say?"

"Rose! My Rose!" Trevor murmured. "My Rose is with my baby. She's there in Bear Lake with Garvey."

"Praise the Lord!" Abigail shouted. "Read me the writing, Massah Stewart."

Trevor held up the telegram and read slowly as if even he didn't believe the wire, "Trevor, come immediately to Bear Lake. Stop. Rose is here with Reilly. Stop. Reilly doesn't know it is her mother. Stop. Rose wants you here when she is told. Stop. Plan to spend the winter. Stop." When he finished reading, Trevor pressed the wire to his heart. "Rose!"

"Will you be leaving?" James Davidson asked wondering if his employer remembered he was in the room with him. "We're about to finish the year's numbers."

"There is no doubt I will leave immediately. I'll be gone until spring," Trevor answered quickly. "Zachary, pack my old range clothes. I'll contact Winston Dunhill. James, you and Winston will take charge of both my and Garvey's business. I'll expect complete reports on my return in spring. Abigail, I'll see to it that you have all the income you'll need while I'm in Bear Lake. Please prepare the house for my Rose. I'm bringing my wife home."

"I thought your wife had died?" James questioned.

"I let everyone think that," Trevor answered stoically. "I let prejudice and ignorance make me a lonely man. I intend to correct that error after these long lonely eighteen years."

"Will you be bringing Reilly back?" James asked eagerly. He had always held a fondness for Trevor's daughter and to marry into the business would be a good merger. "I was hoping after the mourning period, I would be able to court her."

Trevor placed his hand on James' shoulder. "Sorry son, she has already remarried."

The shock on James face was evident to all present in the room. "It has only been two months since her husband was killed."

"You aren't telling us anything new," Trevor chuckled. "Reilly married Rory's father to keep Rory. Philip would have approved."

"I knew I couldn't compete with Lieutenant Madison. I had hoped I would have at least had a chance," James sighed.

"You'll find a good woman for you soon enough," Trevor comforted. "Now if you excuse me, I have to go get my woman. I have to go get my Rose!"

Trevor barely stayed in one place longer than ten minutes. After leaving explicit instruction on the function of his company, Garvey's company, and his household with Winston Dunhill, his attorney, and James Davidson, his accountant, Trevor saddled his thoroughbred, Duncan, and left for the train station. His small saddle bag and ticket in hand.

Abigail watched Trevor Stewart gallop out of sight. "That man is in a powerful hurry."

"No doubt. He even done take Duncan. That horseflesh is the fastest in this here county," Zachary agreed. "He shores do look younger though, don't he?"

"His heart jest became younger," Abigail responded. "He gonna bring back his Missus Rose."

"Miss Reilly kept this house happy," Zachary said thoughtfully. "Now Missus Rose will keep the joy in this house. Do you think Miss Reilly will come back?"

"No. I have a feeling that Miss Reilly and her new man are gonna be real happy," Abigail predicted. "I jest have a feeling we are gonna be visited now and then with some new young' uns."

In the three weeks that followed Trevor's receipt of the letter, Reilly had developed a close relationship with Winter Sun. They spent nearly every day together and Reilly was an apt student. Winter Sun showed Reilly all the woman's ways of the Shoshone.

Reilly learned how to dry peas, beans, berries, and preserve meat. She learned to make the unleavened bread of the people. Reilly learned how to cure the hide of antelope, deer, elk, and bison. She learned how to sew and make belts and pouches with elaborate beading and quilling.

In return, Winter Sun was given reading and writing lessons. Reilly shared her expert sewing skills and embroidery talents. Reilly also showed both Harriet and Winter Sun how to make rice pudding, chocolate cake, and dressings for the wild birds that were brought home for supper when Rory and Owen would have good hunting days.

Rory was happier than Reilly had ever seen the young man. Every day was an adventure with his father. Owen showed him how to hunt, fish, track, and shoot accurately. They spent every day together. In the evenings Rory spent with Reilly and his studies. Rory had his mother and his father. Rory had a grandmother at his side every evening; he just didn't know it yet.

Winter Sun showed Rory many of the things young warriors would learn. Winter Sun even started baking cookies on a regular basis to make sure Rory would have a treat late afternoons before he started his lessons with Reilly.

Winter Sun had her daughter. Everyday they bonded more. Soon they were sharing little secrets and surprises for each other, Owen, and Rory.

If anyone asked Owen how he was doing, he would have to answer that he had never been happier in his life. He had his son and they were bonding so well even he was surprised. At night Owen had his passionate wife to share his bed. Reilly responded to his ardent needs with the same urgency. He doubted if he could be any happier.

"I'm going to bed," Reilly said to Owen while he labored over some books late one evening in his study.

"Are you tired, Duchess?" Owen asked with concern. He had noted that this past week Reilly had taken up the habit of naps in the early afternoon.

"I said I was going to bed," Reilly giggled. "I didn't come in here to tell you I was going to sleep."

"Oh," Owen replied unthinking. Then it struck him what she meant. "Oh!" Owen put down the books, leapt from the chair, racing to Reilly who was mounting the stairs, and carried her up to their room.

Later as Owen tucked Reilly securely in his arms he brushed her hair from her face. Bringing his fingertip to her nose he asked softly, "You haven't had your flow. Do you think you might have my child growing within you?"

"That is a possibility, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly answered happily. "I should like to think that is the reason."

"Does that possibility make you happy?" Owen questioned hopefully. He remembered Meredith was completely distraught when she missed her flow and found she was with child. Although Meredith had wanted Owen and loved Rory when he was born, Rory's birth had not been part of her plan.

"That possibility makes me very happy, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly answered cheerfully snuggling into her husband's loving arms. "I do want a child. I want a child very much."

Owen kissed her nose.

"Do you want another child, Mr. Woulfe?" Reilly asked hesitantly. She knew she wanted her own child. She wasn't sure about Owen's feelings for the matter of fatherhood.

"Duchess, I want lots more children," Owen replied happily. "I want as many as you'll give me."

"Really?" Reilly queried teasingly. "Can it be for the reason you enjoy the making?"

"As much as you do, Duchess," Owen laughed. "As much as you do."

"Then I think we shall have many children," Reilly mumbled softly into the hardness of Owen's muscular chest. Reilly couldn't believe the happiness and contentment she had found in the strong arms of Owen Woulfe. Reilly realized at that moment she loved Owen, and everything about him. He had been kind, gentle, thoughtful, and loving. He was almost as good a father to Rory as Trevor had been with her. Reilly realized these past few weeks how much she loved Bear Lake. She really understood Garvey's words, 'Home is where the heart is.' Her heart was truly in Owen's arms and Bear Lake.

Owen smiled happily. "That we shall, my Duchess. That we shall." Owen thought about their baby. He wondered what she would look like. Yes, he wanted a baby girl. A girl he could cuddle and spoil just like her mother. Would she look like her mother? His little girl! He loved that idea. How much happier could he be? That he couldn't answer. Basking in

that happiness he felt he heard Reilly breathing softly and slowly. She had fallen asleep in his arm. "I love you Reilly Woulfe," he whispered holding her even closer.

"Owen! Owen," Reilly whispered into his ear nudging him to wake up. "Wake up. I hear arguing."

Reilly heard an exaggerated snore and then arms pulled her down to a warm and loving mouth. After a lengthy kiss Owen's arms embraced her lovingly. "Not now Duchess, I'm too sleepy."

"Mr. Woulfe!" Reilly said loudly punching him lightly in the chest. "You need to wake up right now. Someone is arguing in the courtyard!"

"Ow! What was that for?" Owen asked waking up.

"Mr. Woulfe, someone is arguing in the courtyard and it isn't even dawn yet," Reilly insisted nudging him toward the edge of the bed.

Then Owen heard the voices. "What the Sam Hill?" Owen jumped from bed and quickly donned his jeans. Grabbing a shirt from the armoire he didn't bother to button it. Instead he found his boots and sat on the vanity chair to put them on. "You stay here, Duchess."

"I'm not exactly dressed for dinner out, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly snapped grabbing the sheets around her naked bosom. As a grown adult she didn't need to be ordered about in such a way. "I just want to find out what is going on out there."

Owen bolted for the door grabbing his gun belt.

"Be careful!" Reilly shouted after Owen. Suddenly she was frightened for her husband. She was furious at herself for her cross words. As she learned very well, one has a life one day and the next day it is gone from you.

"Stay put!" Owen shouted back not caring how Reilly reacted to the first order. His only concern was for his wife's safety and his baby girl's safety. A smile crossed his face as he thought about his future baby girl. In moments Owen had gone down the stairs and walked out the door to the dark morning. He saw the silhouettes of several Shoshone warriors. Then he heard Winter Sun's voice angrily speaking Sosoni' to the tall warrior. Owen recognized him immediately. It was Chief Washakie. "What the devil is going on here?" Owen asked in Sosoni'.

"My young sister will not allow me to see Pink Dawn," Washakie answered angrily. "Pink Dawn is your woman. Tell her I will see the child of my young sister."

"Trevor isn't here yet. I do not want Pink Dawn to know I am her mother," Winter Sun told Owen quietly in American. "Not yet. Not until my Trevor is here."

Reilly looked at the dark shadowed figures in the courtyard through the window. She had wrapped a sheet around body as she looked out. The voices had quieted. "Curiosity has always been my weakness," Reilly mused. She left the window and grabbed her cotton nightgown from the armoire. There was no need to wear it last night. Reilly then pulled her

robe from the armoire and quickly slipped into it tying the sash as she walked down the stairs.

"I think I can come up with a compromise here," Owen said quietly in Sосoni'. "I know that Rory and Reilly both want to meet you, Washakie. So I will introduce you to them, but I ask you to say it is because you have come to visit my wife."

Washakie nodded and motioned to his son, George. The young warrior brought a bundle over to Washakie. The Chief then pointed to the woman walking toward them. A satirical grin crossed Washakie's face. He told Owen in American. "A gift for your woman." Washakie then winked at Winter Sun and laughed.

Reilly approached Owen with her arms firmly wrapped around her body. Although she had remembered to wear her slippers she had not realized how cold it was outside.

"You'll catch the death!" Owen shouted walking briskly to Reilly. "Didn't I tell you to stay put?"

"It became obvious we have company," Reilly snapped attempting to stop her teeth from chattering. "I am your wife, Mr. Woulfe. It is my duty to entertain your guests."

"Currently your only duty is to take care of yourself and my baby girl," Owen growled angrily. He swooped her up in his arms and began walking back into the house.

Winter Sun stood motionless. She hadn't even guessed that Reilly could be with child. She was so involved in enjoying her daughter at last that possibility had skipped her notice. Winter Sun began to chuckle.

Washakie walked to Winter Sun and smiled at her. "Another life comes into this family after so long. It is good my young sister. Big Beaver and Pink Dawn are good medicine."

Winter Sun nodded happily. She would begin making a ko-na for her granddaughter.

"Please come in," Reilly invited over her shoulder. If the Shoshone people didn't understand her it didn't matter. She knew Winter Sun understood her and would invite the people in.

Once in the house Reilly bit out, "You can put me down now, Mr. Woulfe."

Owen carefully set her on a divan in the parlor. "I don't want you to get sick. Please don't ever expose yourself to the morning chill again. You have my baby girl to take care of."

Reilly looked into Owen's soft gray eyes. He looked handsome and worried. She remembered her cross words and had regretted them. She wouldn't make that mistake again. "I promise I won't do that again. I didn't realize how chilly it was."

Owen rewarded her with a gentle kiss on the lips.

Winter Sun, Chief Washakie, and the warriors entered the parlor.

Washakie took the bundle from his eldest son's hands and offered the bundle to Reilly.

"It's a gift," Winter Sun volunteered.

Graciously Reilly took the gift and removed the sinew bindings surrounding the hand woven blanket carefully.

Chapter Eighteen

"It's beautiful!" Reilly exclaimed finding a soft white doeskin Shoshone dress intricately decorated with colorful seed beads and quilling with artistic designs. Under the dress were leggings and moccasins that were made of the same soft white doeskin and exquisite patterning. "I don't think Thank you is sufficient, Le-gwan-i Washakie."

"You honor my house," Owen responded politely. "Please come and share a meal in my house. Rest from your journey, hansh."

"Nim-ah," Washakie said taking Reilly's face in his powerful hand. "You give Hav-ne healthy children and much se-nea-shoon-gan."

"Pink Dawn brings this Big Beaver much happiness and a child," Winter Sun announced.

"Be quiet, hiv-ve-zot-sie," Washakie ordered. "I speak with Hav-ne. You guash-up your Po-ho-gin-no, pe-hw-rah, and han-ne-vit-na-o-sup."

"Yn-hah-nidzik?" Winter Sun growled.

Washakie looked at Winter Sun in confusion. Why would she ask him if he was sick? He shook his head.

"You will be!" Winter Sun snapped as she left the room. "Look carefully in your Sage Grouse for worms."

Owen roared in laughter. He put his hand the shoulder of Chief Washakie. "Never make the woman about to cook your food angry."

Washakie laughed with Owen.

"I'll go help Winter Sun," Reilly volunteered.

"Do you feel up to it, Duchess?" Owen asked with concern. "I don't want you to over do."

"Really, Mr. Woulfe. I feel wonderful," Reilly chided. "I want to help make Chief Washakie welcome." Reilly took her present and left to help Winter Sun in the cooking room.

Owen and Washakie walked to the study. In the study they would share tobacco and pipe. Before they entered the study Rory raced around the corner from the stairs and ran right into Washakie. Rory was wearing only his nightshirt.

"Wow!" Rory gasped looking up at the tall muscular Shoshone Chief.

Owen reached for his son and enfolding his arms around Rory, introduced him, "Washakie, this is my son, Rory."

"Wow!" Rory repeated in awe. "You're Washakie?"

Washakie nodded and held out his hand to the young boy.

Rory noticed a nasty cut near Washakie's wrist. It was healing but looked fresh and unattended. "You're hurt!" Rory stated. "Don't worry, Winter Sun and Mother taught me medicines. I'll be right back."

Washakie smiled and he and Owen continued on to the study.

No sooner had Washakie and Owen lit a pipe, than Rory came into the room with aloe leaves crushed with marigold leaves, a wet cloth, and a clean linen strip. Gently Rory took Washakie's arm and washed the cut with the wet cloth. He put the herb paste on the cut and wrapped Washakie's arm with the clean linen strip. Rory split the end and tied it neatly.

Owen watched in wonder and pride.

"We have to learn medicines when we live out here," Rory announced like a grown up. "No doctors to call on."

Washakie waited patiently as Rory did his doctoring. Then Washakie took the boy's head in his hand and looked him directly in the eye. "Today you take a name from Nim-ah. Today I give you the name, 'Pen-che-co Nat-a-so.'"

"What does that mean father?" Rory asked Owen excitedly.

"Chief Washakie named you Morning Medicine," Owen proclaimed. "It is an honor to be named from the Nim-ah or Shoshone, but even more of an honor to be named by a great chief. I am proud of you, son."

"I want to be a doctor when I grow up," Rory radiated. "Ever since Uncle Philip was killed, I promised myself I would learn medicines and help people. I want to be Morning Medicine. Thank you Chief Washakie."

Washakie inhaled smoke from the pipe and said, "It is good for you to be a doctor, Pen-che-co Nat-a-so. You will help Nim-ah, you will help your people."

"You have my vow," Rory beamed. "Just wait until I tell Mother and Winter Sun." Rory ran out of the room and into Garvey's.

"What's the hurry, boy?" Garvey asked.

"I was named. I am Pen-che-co Nat-a-so!" Rory repeated carefully. "I'm going to tell Winter Sun and Mother. Chief Washakie named me himself!"

"Washakie?" Garvey questioned in surprise. "Is he here?"

"He's in the study with father," Rory answered beginning his run to the cooking room.

Garvey walked briskly to the study. "Washakie!"

Washakie turned his head to see Garvey and greeted him, "Git-tant T-djap-u. You are still Tall Wolf."

"That I am, Washakie. It's good to see you!" Garvey addressed happily. "I'll have some of that bam." Garvey reached for the tobacco and pulled a pipe from his woolen robe.

"You dress like a wipe," Washakie teased looking at the nightshirt under the multi colored woolen robe.

"Washakie, I haven't seen you in what? Twenty years? And you insult me?" Garvey chuckled. "I guess that's what friends are for."

"Our friend, Enga-wd-ne, is near. I have sent my son George to greet him. Sagwitch met him near the summer camp. Sagwitch rides with our friend and sent a messenger," Washakie informed.

"Red Fox?" Garvey choked. "How close is Trevor?"

"He will be here after the sun reaches the mid sky," Washakie said raising his hand to indicate the sun's position.

"Does Winter Sun know?" Owen asked. "Is that what the arguing was all about?"

"I did not tell my young sister. She worried too much that I would greet her daughter as her uncle," Washakie laughed. "My young sister will be happy to have her Enga-wd-ne again. This is one reason I journeyed here. First to meet the new wife of Hav-ne. I too wanted to see my younger sister's se-nea-shoon-gan at the sight of her husband."

"I can't wait to see her happiness, either," Owen agreed. "It has been difficult keeping Reilly from suspecting Winter Sun is her mother. Jonah has been especially a problem. The poor man is heart broken knowing he will never have a chance now that Trevor will be taking her back."

"It's almost over," Garvey replied enjoying another smoke from the pipe. "This family will be completely united."

"Even happier news, Pa," Owen grinned broadly. "Reilly is carrying my child."

"Glory be!" Garvey roared joyously. "Son, that is great news!"

"Such good news," Washakie agreed. "Hold on to the happiness, I have learned in my many years happiness is brief and sorrow arrives to often. I hear your people are torn by war with each other. I hear of sadness and death."

"It is true, Washakie," Garvey explained. "The country is in a sad state."

"Many bluecoats are leaving and heading toward the great white father's home," Washakie indicated. "There are those among the Nim-wah that are asking to make war on the settlers and bluecoats."

"Pocatello?" Owen asked knowingly. "Is he still stirring up trouble for you?"

"He steals horses, cattle, and other settler's goods. He has not learned to stay away from the white men," Washakie sighed. "He will cause much trouble for my people."

"When I was in Soda Springs I heard a lot of the Mormons complaining about raids," Garvey added. "Pocatello's raiding is making them settlers demand military actions."

"This I feared," Washakie said solemnly. "The white settlers do not know a Crow, from a Ute, or a Nim-wah. They just say it is Nim-wah. Much trouble for us. Much trouble."

"Will you be returning to Wind River for the winter?" Owen queried. "You're safer up there. There are calmer heads in charge of Fort Bridger."

"My camp is safer away from all whites, your settlers, and travelers seeking wealth where the sun sets and the big fish are found," Washakie agreed. "Many of the people only steal because they are hungry. What the great white father promised has not been given. This war between your peoples has made them forget their promises."

"I'll help with whatever I can," Owen offered.

"You are Nim-wah and Hansh," Washakie acknowledged. "We will need your trades this winter."

"You will have all I can spare," Owen promised. "Your people will not be hungry or cold this year. Where will Bear Hunter and Sagwitch have their winter camp? Will they join you in Wind River?"

"Bear Hunter and Sagwitch will camp near Wurrah Pah-kah-re," Washakie answered. "It has been their winter camp for many years."

"I know, my friend," Owen agreed. "With all the talk of the settlers. I worry for the people. It is safer to be farther away from the trails and cities that are growing up."

"Bear Hunter is chief of his camp," Washakie replied. "He and Sagwitch are good leaders. They will be wise."

"It isn't their wisdom we worry about," Garvey offered. "It's the prejudice and jealousy for land of the settlers and the Mormons I worry about."

"I'll send food to them all winter. They'll have whatever I can spare," Owen said firmly.

"Many times I think that we could live in peace together if men like you worked for the great white father," Washakie mused. "Your Washington men sent here do not understand the land, the people, and the balance."

"No, they don't understand. You are right Washakie. They understand fancy suits, good wine, plush offices, and all that large cities offer the wealthy man," Garvey agreed.

"The truth of it is wealth. Everything comes to money. With the money is conceived power," Owen added. "Once the wrong people have both, it is disaster."

"Still, isn't there someway you can control those young hotheads of your people?" Garvey questioned. "Stop them from raiding?"

"When your stomach is knotted in hunger and you see food that is not shared, wouldn't you steal? Or would you starve and let your children starve?" Washakie returned in logic. "I can not control those hungry young warriors feeding their families anymore than the great white father can stop his children from breaking away and starting this war between brothers."

"Blame it Washakie, do you have to be so logical and so right all the time?" Garvey groaned in agreement.

"That's why he's Chief and we're just folk, Pa," Owen laughed.

Washakie, Garvey, Owen, Jonah, and Rory ate a filling and impressive noon meal. Winter Sun explained to Reilly that the women of the people rarely ate with the men. They served them and ate elsewhere after the men were finished.

Reilly didn't understand the protocol until Winter Sun laughingly told her that men eat like pigs, make horrible belches, and destroy a woman's appetite. It was better to eat with women and enjoy more intelligent conversation.

"In some cases, I couldn't agree with you more," Reilly laughed heartily. She and Winter Sun ate together in the cooking room with Rachel and Harriet. They enjoyed each other immensely and discussed babies. Reilly told Rachel and Harriet she thought she was carrying Owen's child. Rachel bubbled over in joy and shared her baby's increasing movements in her womb. Their conversation was happy and pleasant.

The laughter drew Owen into the cooking room after Garvey, Washakie, and Jonah returned to the study for another smoke of bam. "Everyone enjoying herself in here?"

"Mr. Woulfe, we are having a positively delightful conversation," Reilly smiled up to her husband from the table she shared with the other women.

"I'm glad to hear it," Owen replied. "Duchess, I'm sorry about your not eating at the table with Washakie. It's kind of customary that the men eat alone."

"Please don't worry a minute more, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly chuckled. "Winter Sun explained everything to me. As a matter of fact I think we should separate and eat like this more often." Reilly's retort was followed by a large and lengthy yawn.

"Are you tired, Duchess?" Owen asked.

"As a matter of fact I am," Reilly admitted. "If you ladies will excuse me, I think I will take a short nap."

"I'll walk you to the bedroom," Owen volunteered.

"That isn't necessary, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly laughed. She was still in a gay mood from lunch. "I do know the way. I shan't get lost."

"I just want to take care of my girls, okay?" Owen offered. "I am really happy about our baby."

Reilly took his offered hand. "Do you really want a little girl?"

Owen assisted Reilly in rising from the table. His eyes sparkled happily as he answered, "I really want a little girl just as pretty as her Ma."

Owen kept his arm firmly around Reilly's waist as he walked her up the stairs to their room. He released her at the door and went to the bed to pull down the quilt. Reilly sat on the edge of the bed and Owen bent on his knees to remove her shoes.

"You really are spoiling me, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly whispered lovingly.

"Please let me," Owen answered looking up into her beautiful face. "Please let me spoil you. I want to do everything I can to keep you content with me." Owen then gently pushed Reilly down onto the soft feather mattress. Slowly he covered her with the quilt and tucked in the sides. "My girls should rest now." Owen brushed his lips gently across Reilly's. "Sweet and happy dreams."

Reilly snuggled into the covers. Her eyelids were heavy and drooping. "You can spoil me all you want, Mr. Woulfe. I find I am enjoying it."

Within moments, Reilly was sleeping.

"I love you, Reilly Woulfe," Owen whispered as he shut the door quietly when he left the room. He wished that someday he would have the courage to say those words so loudly people would hear him in Soda Springs. As for now, he was afraid Reilly wouldn't share those strong feelings for him that he had now grown for her.

Owen thought he would go outside for a breath of revitalizing fresh air before he returned to his smoke filled study. In the courtyard he noticed a dust trail and a rider on a horse moving fast. Behind the rider were several more dust trails. He knew immediately that had to be Trevor Stewart. The rider was pushing a thoroughbred to its limits. Running back into the house he called Winter Sun and Washakie.

Winter Sun was the first one out. She was still drying her hands from washing the dishes. She peered at the speeding rider and tears streaked down her cheeks. Her voice was filled with elation, "Trevor!"

The beautiful thoroughbred was reined to an abrupt stop. The rider leaped off and ran to Winter Sun.

"Rose! My Rose!" Trevor exclaimed taking his wife in his arms and kissing her ardently.

Winter Sun returned the passion.

They looked at each other, kissed. They touched each other, kissed. Their eyes bored into each other's souls, and they kissed.

Washakie, his warriors, and his sons looked at the couple with understanding. A signal from Washakie and the horses were brought to the courtyard. "Peace to you all," Washakie blessed the family. The chief mounted and they left.

Chapter Nineteen

A few minutes later by the barn, Owen walked up to Jonah's side. "Are you going to be all right with this?" It wasn't necessary to explain Owen meant Winter Sun's husband reappearing.

Jonah shook his head and replied, "If she's happy, I'm happy. I care that much for her. Besides, you can't really miss something you've never really had."

"That's very true, Jonah," Owen agreed. "Maybe you can give some thought to that pretty little Mattie near Paris. She's had her heart laid out to you for several years now."

"She has, hasn't she?" Jonah replied thoughtfully. "I could learn to love her and she's a fair cook too!"

Rory disappeared after the noon meal. He told Harriet he would be going to the bunkhouse to visit with old Doc Jamison.

Finally Trevor and his Rose separated long enough for Garvey to embrace his dearest friend. With Winter Sun between them, the two men walked to the house chattering happily. Every twenty seconds or so, Trevor would squeeze his Rose and give her a kiss on the nose.

Owen led them into the parlor since his study stilled smelled of tobacco smoke.

Trevor sat down on the large divan with Rose, his arm firmly embracing her around the shoulders and his other hand holding her hand tightly. "Where is baby girl?" Trevor asked his wife.

"She's upstairs napping," Winter Sun replied with a bright gleam in her eye. "Baby girl, our Pink Dawn, is going to have her own baby."

"I'll be," Trevor declared turning to Owen. "Congratulations, Owen. I couldn't be happier. This is something that Garvey and I had always hoped for. Does Rory know?"

"Yeah, and he is happier than all of us put together," Garvey informed. "He said he hopes he can be a doctor soon and help his baby sister to be born."

"Everyone wants a baby girl it seems," Winter Sun laughed burrowing into the loving comfort of Trevor's embrace. "We shall see what Tam Apo will provide."

"I can't begin to tell you how happy I am, Trevor," Owen gurgled joyfully. "Reilly is turning out to be the wife every man has ever dreamed of. She must take after her mother in that."

"Rose is everything I ever and always dreamed of," Trevor agreed kissing Winter Sun on the forehead.

"When are you going to tell Reilly the truth about you," Owen addressed to Winter Sun.

"As soon as she wakes up," Winter Sun replied. "My Trevor, my Red Fox is with me now, and I have had time for Pink Dawn to know me as a person. Perhaps she will learn to love me as her mother."

"I'm going to go find Rory and Doc," Owen announced. "I think you and Trevor should have some time alone with each other and I really don't want to be around when you tell Duchess. I'm afraid she'll be angry with me if I'm present. Are you coming with me, Pa?"

"Coming," Garvey responded. "I'll talk to you tomorrow in depth, Trevor. You can let me know about the business then. Right now I agree with Owen. You and Rose need some time together." Garvey arose from the chair, he and Owen left the room to find Rory, leaving Trevor and Rose alone.

"Duchess?" Trevor queried Rose.

"It is his special name for Pink Dawn," Winter Sun replied. "It is his love name for her."

"Like mine is Rose for you," Trevor beamed stroking Winter Sun's hair with his fingers. "My Rose, I love you."

They kissed again and again. Trevor and Rose would talk about Reilly, their separate and lonely lives and kiss in between.

Reilly woke up from her nap and came downstairs. Entering the parlor she found her parents in one of those embraces. "Father?"

"Baby!" Trevor recognized turning to see Reilly standing in the doorway.

Reilly was stunned and couldn't move. Her father, here! Her father was kissing Winter Sun. Winter Sun was her mother! She should have known. How many times had she remarked on their similarities both physically and habits. Trembling Reilly asked, "Why didn't you tell me?"

Winter Sun stood and walked to Reilly, "I wanted some time for you to know me. Garvey told me he would send word to your father and I wanted him by my side when you found out."

"But why?" Reilly repeated in shock.

"You did not know me. You did not understand who I was and what I am," Winter Sun replied embracing her daughter. "I wanted us to have time together, to understand each other. I wanted you to love me as a person. Can you?"

"How much time will we have?" Reilly asked choking back emotions and the tears. "I need a mother now more than ever. Father will take you back to Fairland."

"No baby," Trevor answered quickly. "I've made arrangements to spend the entire winter with you and your mother. Finally we'll be the complete family you and I dreamed so many times of being."

Reilly looked at her mother. Tears were streaming down both their cheeks. It was joy, and it was sorrow for all the time they had missed. "Why did you send me away? I want you to tell me why you sent father and me away."

"Come sit with me," Winter Sun encouraged taking Reilly's hand and leading her to sit down between her and Trevor on the large divan. "I want to tell you everything. I want you to know my feelings."

When they were seated Trevor took one of Reilly's hands. Winter Sun took the other.

"Red Fox and I were thrilled when you were born. You were such a beautiful good baby. You did not show your Sosoni' blood. You looked so pink, so like a white baby. You had my black hair and resembled me, but you could pass for a white child. Your father and I treasured you like the white people treasured their yellow rocks. When the settler's came, sad times came upon the people. Their wagons and cattle trampled the berries and seeds the people needed to survive the winter. The settlers took the women of the people and treated them poorly, like slaves. It was then I learned of the hatred the white people had for the people. Even my people began to hate the whites as much as they hated the people. Your father was tormented for marrying me. I was tormented for being a squaw."

"That prejudice is still among us," Trevor declared. "That I am afraid will never change. As long as someone has a need to put others down to build themselves up, this will never change."

"The two years of your life we had together I watched as babies and children of the people died of hunger and exposure," Winter Sun continued. "We never suffered. Your father kept us fed and sheltered comfortably. That is when the anger against us rose even more. We helped all we could, but we could not help enough. The settlers and the Mormons caused us great problems."

"Oh how awful," Reilly said weeping. She took her hand from her father and removed his kerchief to wipe her eyes.

"It was then that Garvey came with a letter from your grandfather. My husband had to leave to take care of the family business. Your grandfather was sick and not expected to live much longer. Garvey had to return to the east to educate his son, Owen. It was then I was determined to send you with your father. The people of your father would not know you were of the people. You would have plenty to eat and get a good education and life with your father. I divorced him and left you with him. I returned to the people."

"When I woke the day we were to leave I found your mother's river boat ticket next to me in bed. You were snuggled in a blanket next to me," Trevor revealed. "Rose had told me many times how difficult it would be for you if she came with us as your mother. She did not want anyone to

know you were part Shoshone. Rose argued with me many nights before the planned trip back East. She told me she would divorce me first. Your mother wanted what was best for you, for me, even if it meant sacrificing her happiness. I knew that is exactly what your mother had done that morning I woke up with you in my arms.”

“Didn’t you try to go after her?” Reilly sobbed.

“Baby, I know your mother. She would never have let me find her. She also would have the Shoshone to hide her,” Trevor replied. “I had to return with Garvey. Your grandfather was dying. I had to take over the business. I loved your mother so much; I did exactly what she wanted me to do. I took you back East and no one guessed you were part Shoshone. I raised you exactly as your mother had asked me to.”

“You did well, my husband,” Winter Sun said proudly. “My Pink Dawn is everything I hoped she would be and even more.”

“That doesn’t mean I didn’t stop looking for you,” Trevor told his Rose brushing his hand gently down her cheek. “I would have brought you back to Fairland if I ever found you.”

“I know, which is why I remained hidden from you,” Winter Sun smiled to her Trevor, her Red Fox. “Your Garvey came back with Owen and asked all the people. He never stopped being a pest.”

“Where were you all this time?” Reilly sniffled. “Owen told me you first came to him after Meredith left.”

“I spent most of the time with my brother, Washakie,” Winter Sun replied. “My brother is wise and stayed away from all settlers and Mormons. He still stays away in the mountains and valleys of the Wind River. When my sister’s daughter married Bear Hunter I chose to live with their camp. It is there I heard of Owen’s troubles with his wife. When she left I came to take care of him as his father had helped care for my daughter with my Red Fox. Washakie and Bear Hunter approved. They thought it humorous that I would be with the very people who were looking for me. Since I did not know how to read or write, it was wonderful to hear about you from Garvey. Owen or as I know him, Big Beaver never suspected.”

“Why do you call him Big Beaver?” Trevor asked. “I know I am Red Fox because of my red hair and my dealings with business.”

“Since Garvey returned here with his son, we saw how Owen was always building things. Even when Garvey and Owen came and went, when Owen was here he was building things. The time he started building this house we knew that would be his name. The people gave him that name five seasons ago.”

“Owen had no idea you were my mother?” Reilly asked in disbelief. “He had no idea at all?”

“No he did not, but that is not important right now,” Winter Sun stated firmly. “All I care about is that you understand it was my great love for you that sent you with your father. I could not and would not cause you suffering or pain because of my blood. It was hard enough to see the pain on your father’s face when we were tormented. I saw all those babies and

children dying around me and realized it could also be you if I kept you with me. I had to send you away. Please tell me you understand?"

"I do. I do, mother," Reilly sobbed sagging into Winter Sun's arms. "It was a great loving sacrifice. I understand why my father never wanted another woman. I understand why he kept his strong love for you and taught me nothing but love for you. I understand. I really do."

Winter Sun hugged Reilly with all her might. Winter Sun stroked Reilly's hair and wiped the tears from her eyes. "I love you so much, Pink Dawn. I love you with all that I am. I will stay with you until your child is born. Do you understand Red Fox?"

"My darling Rose, I am not about to let you out of my sight again. I think I may even chain you to the bed at night," Trevor chuckled. "We'll stay as long as needed. Besides, don't you think I want to see my granddaughter born?"

"Of course you do," Reilly agreed. "I want to talk to Owen. You two need some time alone."

"We certainly do," Trevor answered moving his brows up and down wickedly as he looked upon Winter Sun. "I think I need to retire to bed. My wife should come with me and take care of me."

"Indeed?" Winter Sun teased.

"Indeed!" Trevor laughed taking Rose's hand leading her out of the parlor. "By the way, where is our bed?"

"In the house wing over here," Winter Sun giggled leading her husband to the house extension where she lived.

Reilly did understand her mother's sacrifice. The fact she was going to be a mother herself meant even more to her. This arrangement with Owen Woulfe to keep Rory had changed somehow. She found herself wanting and needing Owen in many ways. She asked herself if it was love and her answer was yes. She wanted Owen's comforting arms right now. She needed him. She loved him. The cold November winds were blowing and Reilly was glad she had put on her manteau before she went outside to find Owen. The icy fingers of the winds bit her cheeks that were still tear stained.

Owen was in the barn watching as Rory and Doc were applying a salve to a bad cut on the shank of one of their prize mustangs. There was truth to Rory's Shoshone name, Morning Medicine. The young lad was interested in healing. Reilly saw the pride radiating from Owen's face as he watched his son apply the salve as Doc directed.

"Mr. Woulfe?" Reilly addressed. How she wanted to call him Owen, my love, my husband, but fear prevented her. She wanted him to tell her he loved her first.

"Duchess," Owen said in surprise turning to see her standing at the barn door. "Did you see your father?"

Rory looked up, "Grandfather Trevor is here?"

"Yes son," Owen turned back to Rory in reply. "He arrived shortly after you went to help Doc."

"As soon as I finish I'll go see him," Rory said excitedly.

"Take your time," Reilly said softly walking toward her two men.

"Grandfather Trevor will be busy with Grandmother Rose for some time."

Rory looked confused. "I thought Grandmother Rose was dead?"

"We all did," Reilly answered taking Owen's arm in her hand. "It seems she was here waiting for us. Rory, your Grandmother Rose is Winter Sun."

"Really? Wow!" Rory bubbled.

"Watch it boy," Doc growled. "We have to put a pack against the salve now boy. Run along and get that mud pack I made."

"Yes sir," Rory replied obediently and ran to the bunkhouse.

"It looks like the two of you need to talk," Doc remarked wisely.

"Run along. I'll keep the boy busy awhile."

Owen took Reilly under his arm. "How did it go? Are you okay with everything?"

"How long have you known?" Reilly asked as they walked slowly to the house. "Winter Sun told me you didn't know she was my mother."

"I didn't until I brought you back," Owen answered honestly.

"Then I remembered something. I remembered why I thought you were so beautiful. When you stuck out your chin in anger I remembered that is exactly what Winter Sun does. There were so many things that you two do alike. You have the same mannerisms and stubbornness."

"When Garvey had to make that sudden trip to Soda Springs. It was to wire father, wasn't it?" Reilly queried.

"Yes, Duchess," Owen answered. "Winter Sun knew when Garvey arrived he would recognize her."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Reilly asked putting her arm around Owen's waist.

"Winter Sun made me promise. She made everyone promise not to tell you until your Pa got here."

"I've been so blind," Reilly sobbed into Owen's jacket.

"Don't cry Duchess," Owen said comfortingly. "I can't stand it when you cry."

"What does it matter to you?" Reilly asked looking into Owen's eyes. "I'm your wife in name only. We have an agreement, remember? We want to keep Rory and make him happy."

"Is that what you think our marriage is?" Owen asked sadly. "Is that all I mean to you? Even now when you're carrying my baby? Lord, I hoped you would learn to love me at least just a little. Especially now."

"You want me to love you?" Reilly questioned hopefully. Her heart was jumping at the hope.

"I'd hoped you could. I fell in love with you the day I saw you. I've loved you more and more every day, Mrs. Woulfe," Owen confessed. "You're carrying my baby, our baby. Yes I hope you could learn to love me just a little."

"I didn't really believe Winter Sun when she told me you didn't know who she was all these years. I do now. You really are dense, Mr. Woulfe," Reilly chided. "Can't you see how much I love you? Can't you feel the love I have for you? Mr. Woulfe, Owen my love, every night I thrill to your passions. I don't want to be away from you longer than a day. I long for your arms. I need you Owen. I love you."

Owen stood dumbfounded for several minutes. Then he let out a yell that could be heard echoing in the mountains. He shouted for the entire world, or at least the neighboring Shoshone camps to hear, "She loves me! My Reilly loves me! I love my Reilly! Do you hear everyone? I love my Reilly and she loves me!"

"What was that?" Rory looked up from putting the mudpack on the mustang's shank.

"That boy is your Pa," Doc grinned in answer. "He and your Ma have just found out how much they really love each other."

"You mean they didn't know?" Rory asked in surprise.

"Oh they knew, they just had to admit it," Doc laughed.

"Huh?" Rory questioned.

"You've got time enough to understand those complexities of life, boy," Doc answered. "Let's just concentrate on the easy things in life like fixin' hurts and cuts like this."

Garvey shook his head with mirth as he heard his son shout. "It's about time. Only you two blind people couldn't see how much you loved each other."

Trevor craned his neck when he heard Owen shout. He returned to kissing his wife's shoulders. "I think they found out they're in love."

"Hmm," Winter Sun murmured. "I hope they can love as much as we."

"So do I," Trevor whispered seductively. "So do I."

Chapter Twenty

Several days later Garvey, Trevor, and Owen were talking at breakfast about going to Soda Springs before the winter snows came. Owen wanted to double up on needed flour, sugar, salt, beans, and other staples.

"Hope you don't mind, but I want to stay with my Rose," Trevor excused.

"Understandable old friend," Garvey agreed. "I'd stay here with my pretty little wife too. Which brings up the fact I think Jonah, Jacob, and I should go. Owen, you need to stay home with your pretty little wife."

"As much as I agree with you, Pa," Owen volunteered. "I have to go with you. Jonah has noticed a lot of them Confederates up there and they don't know you or Jacob. It has been a long time since you were wheeling and dealing, Pa."

Reilly was carrying her famous pancakes into the dining room when she overheard the discussion. "We can still spend time together, Owen," Reilly suggested. "I'll come with you. I told you I don't like being separated from you and that would keep you away from me for what? Two or three days?"

"No Duchess," Owen countered immediately. "You stay here where it is safe."

"Owen Woulfe!" Reilly growled placing the pancake dish on the table. "I am safer no where else than in your arms."

"Listen to me Duchess," Owen barked. He worried a great deal over his pretty little wife. "On the trail there are hostiles. We don't know if they would be Paiute, Ute, Umatilla, Crow, or even Shoshone. They could attack us. There are reports of raids and attacks everywhere. I want you safe here."

"But you're their friends," Reilly argued sitting on Owen's lap and placing her arms around his shoulders.

"I'm Sagwitch's friend. I'm Bear Hunter's friend. I'm Washakie's friend. The others don't know me from Adam. I just look like any other settler trampling their lands," Owen explained. "Besides, just like the settlers and Mormons hate the Indians, there are a lot of Indians that hate the whites."

"I'd still feel safer in your arms," Reilly cooed.

"Cut that out, Duchess," Owen complained.

"Cut what out?" Reilly said innocently tracing Owen's jaw line with the tip of her finger.

"That," Owen said taking her finger and kissing it.

"You'll let me come with you?" Reilly purred.

"Give up son," Garvey laughed. "You ain't got a chance."

"You have to promise me that if something happens you'll do exactly what I tell you to do," Owen stated firmly.

"Yes sir!" Reilly saluted and kissed Owen's nose.

Owen buried his face into Reilly's hair that she now let hang long and loose. He had told her how much he liked it down that way. "You're right, Pa. I never had a chance."

"I'll send Slow Snail to Bear Hunter's camp," Winter Sun said adding to the conversation bringing in the bacon, eggs, and toast. "We'll send an escort with you."

"See how safe we'll be," Reilly uttered rising from Owen's lap to help Winter Sun place the food on the table.

"Can I come?" Rory asked.

"Sure," Reilly answered quickly.

"Duchess!" Owen growled.

"Yes, Owen?" Reilly quipped. "Surely you want our son to come along and see how you conduct business."

"Fine, but the two of you dress real warm," Owen rumbled. "The last thing I want to worry about is the two of you catching the winter lung fever."

"Chief Washakie sent me a buffalo skin wrap," Rory bragged. "I have all new warm woolen clothes. Besides, Doc Jamison told me what to take if I get sick."

"Good, you take real good care of me and your Ma, then," Owen chuckled reaching across the table to tousle his son's hair.

"I think we should take the Conestoga," Garvey suggested. "They give more protection against the cold winds."

"I agree," Owen said. "I'll make sure they're outfitted."

"Do we use the mules?" Garvey asked.

"Yeah, horses are for the buckboards and better weather," Owen said smiling. "You never forget do you, Pa?"

"No, it stays in your skin," Garvey chuckled. "Like ringworm."

Everyone laughed.

The next morning at daybreak Owen helped Reilly up on the Conestoga he would be driving. Rory rode with his Grandfather. Jonah and Jacob each had their own wagon. They also had a string of horses that Doc Jamison was in charge of.

“Why are we taking so many horses?” Reilly asked her husband as she snuggled against his warm coat when he jumped on the Conestoga and took the reins.

“We may need some for trade if we run into hostiles like Pocatello,” Owen answered. “Or we may need them to help pull out a wagon if it gets stuck in mud.”

“I see,” Reilly uttered softly. “I will learn things, eventually.”

“Are you sure you’re warm enough?” Owen asked worriedly. “The last thing I want is for you to get sick. You know, with the baby and all.”

“I could be a little warmer,” Reilly teased taking her hand from the fur muff and rubbing Owen’s area of manhood.

“Duchess, if you keep that up you may be warmer, but I’d be about to burn alive,” Owen chuckled.

“I’m glad to see I haven’t lost my touch,” Reilly laughed.

“You haven’t Duchess,” Owen hooted. “You haven’t.”

That night they camped outside of Montpelier. Jonah had stayed the night in Paris. He had business to take care of with Mattie. He promised he would catch up with them the next day in the afternoon.

Owen and Reilly spent a wonderful and warming night together in the Conestoga. Neither was cold at all.

Later the next day Jonah had caught up with them on horseback and in his wagon Mattie was driving. She had agreed immediately to become his wife and they would be married in Soda Springs.

“Do you see them?” Jonah asked riding bringing his mustang next to Owen’s Conestoga. He let Mattie handle the mules. She was one of the best mule drivers in the county. Jonah was certainly was one of her biggest stubborn mules and she had brought him into tow.

“Sure do,” Owen acknowledged glancing up to one of the bluffs on the side of the trail.

“See who?” Reilly asked squinting her eyes in the sun trying to see what her husband was talking about.

“Bear Hunter’s warriors,” Owen answered. “They’re following us. I saw them yesterday too.”

“Why aren’t they riding with us?” Reilly queried.

“They are just watching over us,” Owen laughed. “It’s our trade. The people give me safe passage and I give them food. It’s a bargain I really think I’m getting the better deal on.”

“If they are escort and our giving you safe passage, I don’t understand why they stay so far away,” Reilly commented. “I still can’t see them.”

“It wouldn’t be safe passage any other way,” Owen explained. “If people saw them it would remove the element of surprise from any attacker. It’s like a general keeping some of his troops back for reserves.”

"Philip explained that to me once," Reilly thought aloud. "I think I understand. But I heard back East that only the Indians attacked people. Here they are protecting us?"

"Duchess, there are more than one type of Indian. You as a Shoshone should know that. It is no different than your Northerners fighting Southerners. The Crow attack the Shoshone, the Ute attack the Paiute, or the Lakota attack the Cheyenne. Unfortunately worse yet, some low account whites attack settlers and other whites making it look like an Indian attack."

"They wouldn't! Would they?" Reilly gasped. "How could anyone believe such a thing? I mean white people attacking travelers and blaming Indians!"

"Happens all the time, Duchess," Owen sighed. "It's a fact and no one chooses to believe it."

"That's preposterous!" Reilly shrugged.

"Nope, it's a fact. People want to believe what they want to believe," Owen shared with Reilly taking his eyes off the road to look at her. "It doesn't matter if it's the truth or not. It's their truth."

They rode in silence for an hour when Owen suddenly said, "I don't like this one bit!"

"What don't you like?" Reilly queried responding to Owen's sudden change in conversation. She didn't like it much better when Owen became too silent.

"Our escort disappeared about fifteen minutes ago," Owen replied. "We are still two hours away from Soda Springs."

"Maybe they thought we were safe now," Reilly offered.

"No, that means something is wrong!" Owen exclaimed. "Reilly get back in the wagon and cover yourself up with the buffalo hides."

"But Owen," Reilly protested.

"Blame it! Do it now woman! Don't you dare argue with me!" Owen shouted. He stood up turning toward the wagon directly behind him and shouted to Garvey, "Hide Rory! Something's up!"

Reilly trembled at Owen's order. She literally jumped into the wagon and covered herself with the buffalo hides as ordered.

Garvey immediately spoke to Rory.

Owen watched his son disappear into the Conestoga.

Garvey stood up and waved to Owen, "I smell it son! It's a snare for sure."

Jonah rode quickly up to Owen after telling Mattie what to do. "Ahead boss, do you see them?"

"Yeah, it's that no good Richard Preston. I recognize that white stallion he rides," Owen replied. "Are we set?"

"I'll get the wagons in a circle," Jonah replied. "We'll pretend we thought they was injuns. That will protect Bear Hunter's warriors from observation. I'll put us in a circle in that thicket over there."

“Good,” Owen answered reining in the mules to begin the circle. Garvey followed suit and so did Mattie. Jacob followed Jonah’s orders and Doc Jamison got his horses into the center of the circle.

When the wagons stopped Reilly peeked out, “Owen?”

“Hush up!” Owen growled. “Stay put and stay under those buffalo robes. Don’t say a word! I don’t want you to sneeze or move. Do you understand me?”

Reilly understood all right. She didn’t answer and slid deeper into the buffalo robes.

“Good girl,” Owen whispered.

It was then Reilly heard the rumble of horses’ hooves. She heard a gruff voice address her husband.

“Hello Owen, you off buying some more rifles, ammunition, and firewater for them Snake friends of yours?” Richard Preston queried sarcastically. “You know, most people don’t really care for Indian lovers like you.”

“You know I only buy food and blankets for my Shoshone friends,” Owen replied too politely for Reilly’s taste. “If you needed food and blankets I’d buy them for you, Richard.”

“I see you got your blacks with you again. Who is that man?” Richard asked ignoring Owen’s sarcastic response and pointed to Garvey Woulfe.

“I’m Owen’s Pa,” Garvey replied jumping from the wagon and walking toward the men. “Who might you be?”

“So you are the great Garvey Woulfe. I heard a lot of stories about you. I heard you were a great Indian lover too. Heard you married one of them Snake squaws.”

“I know all about me,” Garvey replied rudely. “I asked about you?”

“I sir am Richard Andres Burns Mason Preston the fourth,” he answered proudly. “My family had been established in North Carolina since the late sixteen hundreds.”

“My family in Erin was established for at least several centuries,” Garvey replied sarcastically.

“Well sir, your family line is about to end,” Richard sneered. “I find it right convenient that you set up your wagons to expect an Indian attack. It will make this a whole lot easier for me and my men.”

“Just what will be a whole lot easier?” Garvey snarled in question.

“Why our robbery,” Richard laughed. “You wouldn’t come into Soda Springs without a lot of money, Owen. Where is it?”

“I didn’t bring any money,” Owen replied casually. “I only brought furs for trade.”

“Liar!” Richard roared and struck Owen across the face with his riding crop. “You’re going to die anyway. Make it easier on yourself. I’ll kill you quickly instead of slowly and painfully if you tell me where it is. In the wagon?”

Owen put his hand up to his mouth to brush away the blood flowing from the cut the crop made on his lip. "The wagon is the last place I'd put any gold coin."

"I thought so," Richard scoffed. "Rufus, check out the wagon Owen was driving."

"Nothing is in that wagon," Owen shouted lurching to jump Rufus Slade as he moved to the wagon.

"Grab him," Richard ordered Lucas Mathers.

Owen's arms were suddenly pinned behind him and held fast by the giant Lucas.

Lucas Mather was nearly six feet eight inches tall and solid muscle. Lucas was brawn but no brain. He was slightly addled in the head.

Owen still struggled trying to break free from the giant. His Reilly would be in danger. Owen continued to struggle as he watched Rufus start throwing furs out of the Conestoga.

"Well, what do we have here?" Rufus leered pulling at the boot he found under one of the buffalo hides.

Reilly threw the buffalo hide on top Rufus and jumped from the wagon. She stopped to see Owen being held by a giant of a man. "Owen," she screamed and bolted toward her husband.

"Run! Run, Reilly, run!" Owen shouted with panic. "Run to the woods."

Reilly knew she had to obey Owen and stopped in her tracks. Quickly she turned and began to run toward the woods, but it was too late. As she ran past the Conestoga, Rufus jumped out on top of her. For a moment she couldn't breathe for the heavy weight on top of her. Pain gripped her as the man named Rufus yanked off her fur hat and pulled her hair roughly.

"We got us a real purty white woman, boss!" Rufus exclaimed holding Reilly's hair in his hand and looking at her face as he yanked back her hair harder.

"Leave her alone!" Owen shouted his face crimson with rage. "You hurt her and I'll kill you. You hear? I'll kill you, you son of a bitch!"

"Bring the pretty little lady here," Richard laughed maniacally. "Don't worry about anything Owen. It's you that is going to be dead. I actually think I'll enjoy killing you. I never did like you. I don't like Indian and Negro lovers like you."

"Oh this is a pretty one, boss," Rufus cackled bringing Reilly to Richard Preston. "Can I keep her?"

"Let me take a look," Richard said taking Reilly's face in his gloved hand. He wiped a smudge of dirt from her face. "Oh yes, you are a pretty one. What are you doing with this sad lot?"

"Let her alone you bastard!" Owen screamed.

"Shut him up, Rufus," Richard ordered tilting Reilly's head from to side to side.

Rufus balled his fist and slammed it right into Owen's mid section.

The hit was hard and knocked the wind from Owen's lungs. He fell to his knees. Lucas kept his hold on him.

"What do you want from us?" Reilly asked boldly.

"We don't want anything," Richard replied rubbing his gloved knuckles up and down Reilly's cheek. "We are going to take the horses, the furs, the gold Owen has hidden, and a wagon or two after we kill all of you. Then we are going to plant arrows, pouches, and feathers to make it look like Indians attacked you poor folks. Tsk, tsk, such a shame to happen to such nice folks."

"You bastard!" Garvey screamed. He balled his fists and started walking up to Richard when Santos Diaz clubbed him from behind. Santos was the Mexican Richard had hired the week before as one of his so called ranch hands. Six more men dismounted and pulled out their guns ready for any other moves. One of them pulled Mattie from her Conestoga. The others brought Jacob, Jonah, and Doc up to the center of the circle by gunpoint.

"Tell me little lady," Richard asked again. "What are you doing with these riff raff?"

"It appears to me sir, you are the riff raff," Reilly scorned unwisely.

Richard raised his hand and slapped Reilly so hard across her face she fell to the ground.

"I'll kill you!" Owen roared once more. "Lay another hand on my wife and I'll dissect your heart after I rip off your balls!"

"Wife?" Richard asked as he cocked a brow. "This pretty lady is your wife?" Richard bent over and picked Reilly up from the ground. He held her tightly in his arms. Slowly he began unbuttoning her jacket.

Reilly struggled with all her might but found Richard Preston had more strength than she thought he did. "Let me go! Let me go you animal!"

Richard planted his mouth across Reilly's lips. Savagely he bit her lips forcing her to cry in pain. He forced his tongue into her mouth.

Owen was going insane and shouting curses at Richard.

Richard released Reilly's mouth and looked directly at Owen. "Let's just get a taste of what you savor, Owen Woulfe," Richard said cruelly. He began to unbutton Reilly's shirtwaist. Pushing his hand under the clothing he grabbed the nub on her breast and pinched.

Reilly screamed in pain, "Oh God, stop!" Tears flowed from her eyes.

"Do you want to watch me take your wife?" Richard sneered. "I won't make you watch if you tell me where the gold is."

"Let her go first," Owen said all too calmly. "When she's next to me I won't give you any problem. I'll tell you where the gold is."

"No Owen," Reilly shouted. "Don't give in!" Reilly stomped her boot heel into Richard's boot.

"You bitch!" Richard howled but not releasing his hold on Reilly. He tore open her shirtwaist and began raising her skirt with his hand. "I'll teach you!"

"Do you want the gold easy or not?" Owen shouted.

Richard stopped and released Reilly.

Reilly ran to Owen as Lucas released his hold on Owen.

"You have your bitch now," Richard growled. "Where have you hidden the gold?"

Owen took Reilly in his arms and turning his back yelled to his friend and ranch boss, "Jonah take care of it for me. Show Richard where it is hidden."

Jonah slid into grammar Reilly never heard him speak before.

"Yassuh, I do jest like ya done tolt me, right now suh," Jonah answered lumbering lazily toward the horses and reaching for the saddlebag on his horse. He whispered to the horse. She reared and whinnied. "Calm down girl," Jonah soothed. Then in a normal tone he said in Shoshone, "Nim-ah ne-re-ma-zom-mo!"

Owen shouted at that moment pulling Reilly on the ground with him, "Down everyone!"

Chapter Twenty One

Reilly had been taught enough Sosoni' to understand that Jonah had said, "People help!" She was not too surprised when Owen pulled her on the ground and shielded her with his body. The people were near. They would rescue them.

Richard barked when he saw Owen pull Reilly down, "What the hell?"

Everyone in the Woulfe party obeyed Owen's orders. Garvey pulled Mattie down and shielded her with his body. Jacob and Doc Jamison hit the dirt on command. Jonah leaped to the Conestoga that Mattie had been driving and dove into the back of it.

Richard Preston's men looked at him quizzically. They wanted to know what to do next when suddenly an arrow shot through the encircled wagons and Richard Preston went down on his knees after that arrow found its target in the back of his calf. Sosoni' warriors came out of nowhere. Arrows whistled in the air and all of Preston's men were wounded or brought down by warriors using wrestling moves and corded lassos before Preston's men even cocked their pistols to fire.

The Preston's men were succumbed in five minutes. A Sosoni' warrior party of twelve outnumbered his nine men.

Jonah reappeared from the Conestoga carrying guns, rifles, and strong ropes. "I think we are going to need these, boss."

Owen stood up and carefully raised Reilly from the ground. "Are you hurt?"

"I don't think so," Reilly said shakily.

"You've got a fat lip," Owen commented contradicting her.

"So do you," Reilly observed and stated mocking her husband with jest.

"Oh Duchess," Owen murmured lovingly while he embraced her in his strong protective arms.

Sagwitch appeared at that moment. "These are bad white men. Do you want us to kill them? We'll make sure they are never found," Sagwitch said in Sosoni' addressing Owen humorously.

"You would never do that," Owen replied in Sosoni'. "How about I turn them over to Pocatello?" Sharing the banter with Chief Sagwitch.

"What are they saying," Richard barked to Rufus while hugging his wounded calf.

"They're talking about giving us to Pocatello to kill us," Rufus answered holding his broken arm.

"Owen, you can't do that!" Richard Preston pleaded. "You can't give us over to these savages to be tortured."

"It seems to me that's what you were planning to do to us," Garvey snarled angrily.

"Can I come out now?" Rory asked peeking out from the back of the Conestoga.

Sagwitch pointed to Rory, "That is why we brought so many warriors to protect you. Chief Washakie told us to protect the boy. He will be a great medicine man for the Nim-ah."

"Come out son," Garvey answered.

"Doc, all these men are hurt," Rory said as he jumped from the wagon. "We've got to help them, Doc."

"I'd rather help a rattlesnake or an ornery grizzly," Doc answered stoically.

"They're hurt, Doc," Rory insisted. Good or bad a hurt person needed help in Rory's empathetic way of thinking.

"Boy, these people wanted to rob and kill us," Doc replied firmly.

"If we don't help them, we will be just like them," Rory said sadly. "Momma taught me that, didn't you?"

"Yes Rory," Reilly responded lovingly. "I did teach you that."

"Chief Sagwitch, will you help me secure these polecats so my son and Doc can see to their wounds," Owen requested. "Duchess taught my boy right, but I still don't want to treat a rattlesnake until I have his fangs bound up tight."

Sagwitch motioned to his warriors and spoke to them. Six warriors took the ropes Jonah had brought out previously. The other half began securing large limbs and constructed travois carriers for the wounded villains.

Although they were less than two hours from Soda Springs they had to camp for the night while Richard Preston and his men were tended to with medicines Doc Jamison had brought and Chief Sagwitch's warriors supplied from their parfleches.

Jacob and Jonah cooked some beans, tripe, and jerky for their prisoners. Mattie cooked up a sage grouse and rabbit Jonah had caught a day earlier for the rest of the party. Chief Sagwitch and his warriors ate with them even though Reilly and Mattie sat and ate with the men. It was explained to Reilly that there were many times a family ate together in the Sосoni'. It was only special functions, visits, and festivals that the women ate separately.

Owen tended to Reilly himself. He soaked a rag in the cold creek water to place tenderly on Reilly's swollen bruised lips. All through the meal he kept Reilly in his arms on his lap feeding her with his own hand. Before the meal he had let his son and Doc put salve on the cut Preston had put on his face.

Chief Sagwitch was given blankets for his warriors and a large fire was kept going through the night so the warriors would sleep comfortably and warm. Three warriors took turns keeping watch on the prisoners.

In the Conestoga Reilly curled into Owen's arms under the warm buffalo hides. She stretched her neck to kiss him lightly on the cut near his jaw. "I love you so much, Owen Woulfe."

"I love you, Reilly Woulfe," Owen responded in kind. "I have never been so happy in my life. Please tell me you and baby girl are really going to be fine. I am still worried that all this really hurt you and baby girl."

"We're fine. Who wouldn't be fine with a husband and father like you," Reilly answered and snuggled next to Owen's warm body. She didn't tell Owen that she had felt some cramping like her flow was arriving. The cramping went away so she wouldn't think about it anymore.

Owen embracing his wife was soon fast asleep and didn't wake until the dawn broke on the horizon.

They proceeded to Soda Springs and just outside the town, Chief Sagwitch and his warriors left the wagons.

"We'll wait for you on your return over there," Sagwitch said pointing to a rise of land they had just passed.

"Won't you come into town with us and tell the authorities what these men did?" Reilly queried.

"Chief Washakie says to protect you and Morning Medicine. We traded for safe travels for Big Beaver. This is what we do," Sagwitch answered. "Chief Washakie also warned us to stay away from white camps. Chief Washakie is wise. We will do as he tells us. Your white camps are full of evil and hate these recent seasons."

"He's right Reilly," Owen agreed. "There is only trouble for good men like Sagwitch in towns like Soda Springs. We'll leave tomorrow morning, Chief Sagwitch."

The wagons entered Soda Springs and Reilly noted the wooden framed buildings. There were only a few places she saw were made of brick. One of them was a small building with bars on the windows. She correctly assumed it would be the jail where Preston and his men would be put. Owen stopped the wagon in front of the bricked building.

"Arthur? Are you about Arthur?" Owen called when he approached the building.

A large portly man with a gray beard appeared in the doorway. He was wearing a red checked woolen shirt and deep blue jeans. "Yeah Owen, what's up?" Arthur replied and then noticed the travois behind the horses carrying the wounded men. "What you catch this time, Owen? Looks like a bunch of maggots to me."

"Richard Preston and his men decided to jump me and my crew at Little Fork just outside Soda Springs. Seems he wanted to kill us all, take our belongings and blame it on the Snakes," Owen related. "Is Marshall Timms in town?"

"No, I'm afraid not. He won't be back for several weeks," Arthur informed spitting a wad of tobacco in the direction of Richard Preston. "But you're in luck. Lieutenant Parker is in town with a troop. It seems he is escorting some surveyors for the railroad."

"Damn," Owen muttered under his breath.

"Yeah, I agree with you. That means more land taken by the railroad, more settlers, more civilization if you call that civilized," Arthur complained. "I don't like it one bit, but they're planning on extending a line through here up further into Washington territory. It's all talk now with the war going on and all."

"Is it going to cut through Bear Lake?" Owen asked. "I wasn't told about any people on my lands."

"Yeah, but on the Eastern side of the lake. The Snake camp and your lands are safe from them," Arthur informed him and then returned to his thoughts on Richard Preston. "It's a good thing you got Lieutenant Parker here. He'll take that scum to Fort Hall for trial. Justice may not be served if they were taken into Fort Bridger or the militia running Camp Douglas. I heard that after the war broke out they sent for Colonel Connor of the California Militia. I ain't heard nothing good about him. Folks from California say he is mean and a glory hunter."

"That won't do the Snakes much good in Ruby Valley," Owen said sadly. "It's going to be a hard enough winter for all of us. If only they could keep a good Indian Agent out here. If the Shoshone weren't starving there would be even less trouble. Pocatello couldn't push the other chiefs into trouble with him."

"Can't your friend Washakie stop them? He is the head chief isn't he?" Arthur queried.

"Like Washakie told me, 'even your own great white father couldn't stop his children from fighting each other.'" Owen chuckled.

"That Washakie sure is a smart one," Arthur chortled in agreement. "A lot of us old timers have great respect for the chief."

"Even a lot of us young timers do too!" Owen exclaimed. "You want to help Jonah and Jacob lock up these polecats?"

"Ain't you gonna help?" Arthur questioned. "Seems to me you'd like to throw them around a bit."

"I'd love to, but I have a wife in the family way. These dirt eaters viciously attacked her and I want to take her to Doc Miles." Owen shared with the jailer. "I want to make sure she's okay."

"Your wife? I heard she died?" Arthur questioned in complete confusion.

"Meredith died last November," Owen replied. "I re-married the prettiest woman this side of the Mississippi. Trevor Stewart's daughter."

"Old Red Fox?" Arthur asked. "How is the old buzzard?"

"Happy and healthy," Owen grinned happily. "He's back at Bear Lake Estate."

“Well you tell that old buzzard I expect him to come visit here in spring,” Arthur snorted. “I’d like to share another beer with the old buzzard before I pass on to the Great Spirit.”

“I’ll be sure to tell him,” Owen answered before walking back to the Conestoga.

“Introduce me to your pretty new wife before you leave,” Arthur bellowed walking toward Jacob and Jonah. They were untying the men on the travois litters. “I’ll send my boy Louis to fetch Lieutenant Parker.”

“Thanks Arthur,” Owen said jumping back on the wagon and using clucking sounds to make the mules move.

“Aren’t we staying to help put those men behind bars?” Reilly asked turning her head to watch the three men take the bound prisoners into the jailhouse.

“Nope, we’re taking you to Doctor Miles for a look over,” Owen answered.

“I’m fine Owen, really,” Reilly protested. She had a few cramps again this morning but they too had finally gone away.

“Just do it to make me feel better, Duchess,” Owen pleaded.

“I’d do just about anything for you,” Reilly said lovingly and cuddled next to the body warmth of her strong husband. “You promise me to get the cut on your lip checked.”

Owen laughed, “I’d do just about anything for you too, Duchess.”

The doctor examined Reilly and decreed he found nothing significant other than a few bruises. As for the pregnancy he didn’t find any abnormalities like spotting. He did suggest that she take it easy for a few days.

Owen rented a room in the Soda Springs Hotel where he made Reilly stay in bed for three days. Owen sent Jonah to tell Chief Sagwitch they would be delayed for four days and asked if the warriors needed any food or supplies sent to them.

Owen successfully procured the extra needed foodstuffs and dry goods for the coming winter. He knew he couldn’t help everyone, but he could help some. At least he would be able to help Sagwitch, Bear Hunter, and Washakie who were his friends.

The Mormons were once again proving their hypocrisy. They continually repeated their words of feed not fight. In reality they found the opportunity to take over the territory by militia control. The War Between the States was advantageous to the religious organization concentrating on control over the territory, including the power struggle between the religions charismatic leader and the federally appointed governor.

Arthur related everything to Owen as they sat and talked at lunch one day. “I tell you they hold the bible in one hand and a rifle in the other,” Arthur complained. “I can guarantee you that if Lieutenant Parker wasn’t here to take your prisoners to Fort Hall for trial they’d have been freed.”

"Those men were going to kill us, my wife and baby, my son, innocents all," Owen queried. "How can you say they would be free?"

"The Mormons want trouble with the Indians so they can obtain even more power with their selected militia," Arthur informed. "I've already heard your story twisted saying that Richard Preston was viciously attacked by your Indian friends and you, being an Indian lover, lied to protect them."

"What?" Owen shouted slamming his fist on the table.

"Don't get upset. Parker knows the polecat Preston really is and was suspicious about many so called Indian raids," Arthur reassured. "Parker comments to me so many times that on all his patrols he never ran into any trouble with Indians. His problem has always been with some of the more radical Mormons and greedy polecats like Richard Preston."

"Even when Bear Hunter's people are starving because of the land laid to waste by settler's cattle he asks for help," Owen told Arthur knowingly. "Bear Hunter doesn't allow his people to steal. They beg. It's tragic that such a noble people of the land are reduced to begging."

"Sure am glad there are people like you around," Arthur complimented. "With you they trade with honor and dignity. It's the way all men should live but don't."

"I can't tell you how much I thank you for telling me what's going on around here," Owen appreciated. "I am isolated from all of these politics up at the estate."

"Take my advice, stay isolated up there. Keep your pretty little wife and son safe up there," Arthur advised wisely. "There is going to be trouble and a lot of dead Indians. I promise you that. It's the Indians that are going to be sacrificed in this political war of the territory."

"I know you're right, Arthur," Owen agreed sadly.

"I'm keeping my Silver Shell out of sight as much as I can," Arthur shared with Owen. "She's been a good wife and mother to my children. We've sent our children to schools in them French territorial schools. I do all the buying and trading and keep Silver Shell away from everyone."

"I will take your advice and keep all my family safe up at the estate," Owen volunteered. "I smell the stench of politics getting stronger every time I come to this town."

"Yeah, I was going to warn you about Jonah and that new Jacob of yours," Arthur added. "You must already be aware of the new transplanted south loving people up here. It's a plague I tell you. These pompous self righteous penniless aristocrats have the most unchristian actions I've ever run across."

"I've sensed it. I'm going to have to keep Jonah and Jacob with their women at the estate and start bringing only Doc Jamison, Thomas, and Reaver," Owen admitted.

"You did a fine thing giving all them runaway slaves their freedom here. They have become some of the finest trappers, masons, and wranglers

this here country has ever seen,” Arthur praised. “But, things are a changing.”

“What runaway slaves?” Owen asked innocently. “I just give a fair wage for a hard worker. It don’t matter to me what their past or skin color is.”

“Yeah, we all know,” Arthur chuckled. “I’m just warning you to be real careful from now on.”

“Thanks Arthur,” Owen appreciated. “You are a good friend.”

Rory stayed with his mother and saw to all her needs including bringing her food tray for lunch. Owen was there to feed her breakfast and supper.

“You two spoil me,” Reilly sighed happily curling up next to Owen who had just joined her in bed for the night. The rest had been good for her. She hadn’t had any cramping for two days.

“You deserve to be spoiled,” Owen whispered into her hair. “I’m so proud of you Duchess. You’ve seen the worst of this land. You’ve endured trials that Meredith hadn’t even contemplated, but you’ve been strong and undefeated. You still love me and have stuck by me. I love you, Reilly. I love you with my very soul.”

“I can’t seem to get unstuck,” Reilly giggled playfully. She moved her hand across Owen’s hard muscular chest. “It must be that honeyed Woulfe charm. I can see where Rory inherited it. I love you, Owen.”

Owen kissed Reilly on the forehead and pulled her closer.

“Did you get all the supplies?” Reilly queried.

“Yes my love, I got everything and more,” Owen yawned. “Now go to sleep. We have a long trip back tomorrow.”

The return trip was uneventful and took only two days even with the loaded wagons. One of the reasons was both Garvey and Owen wanted to get the family safely back to Bear Lake. Then keep the family secured there. Owen would set up a twenty-four hour watch over his land. Part of his plan would be trading more food with warriors of Bear Hunter’s camp this winter to watch for intruders of any kind on his lands.

Winter Sun ran outside in the courtyard with just her shawl over her dress and moccasins on her feet. “We were so worried. You’ve been gone for over a week. The journey is usually only three days. Trevor was about to ride out with a scouting party. I heard nothing from Bear Hunter.”

Trevor followed Winter Sun outside and helped Reilly from the wagon.

“We had a run in with horrible people,” Reilly told her father.

“You tell us all about it once we get back into the warmth of the house,” Trevor suggested while guiding his daughter to the house.

Rory jumped down and ran to his other Grandfather, “They were going to kill all of us. They beat up Father and hurt Momma.”

Winter Sun looked at Reilly and asked, “They hurt you? Are you all right?”

Reilly nodded. “Owen and Rory have been spoiling me. They haven’t allowed me to lift a finger. Owen even had me checked by a doctor in Soda Springs.”

“The doc suggested that Reilly do a lot of resting,” Owen added jumping from the Conestoga. After walking briskly toward Reilly he lifted her in his arms carrying her into the house. “I’ll put her right to bed, Winter Sun.”

Chapter Twenty Two

"I do wish you would let me do something, anything!" Reilly said in frustration to Winter Sun.

"Owen has given his orders," Winter Sun replied. "You are not to do anything except eat and sleep. He is worried about you, daughter."

"I know, but I don't understand why. I feel fine," Reilly sighed heavily.

"You were hurt badly in that attack. Owen fears for you and your child," Winter Sun replied while continuing to roll the biscuit dough. Outside it was already becoming dark. The ranch hands would want supper soon.

"Mother, that was almost a month ago," Reilly protested. "I feel fine. I really do."

"Owen tells me that sometimes at night you whimper," Winter Sun recounted. "It frightens him that you hurt in your sleep."

"What? That's nonsense. It must be only a dream," Reilly replied. "I'll talk to him about that."

"There is nothing wrong with letting a man spoil you," Winter Sun chuckled. "I let your father take care of me while we waited for your coming."

"Did he smother you like Owen is doing to me?" Reilly asked taking a bite of a sliced carrot for the stew.

"No my daughter, your father was even more smothering," Winter Sun remembered happily. "I loved every moment."

"He must have been so happy to know he was becoming a father," Reilly smiled. "Owen is very happy and tells me all the time."

"You were even more special, my daughter. More special than you would ever know," Winter Sun shared. "You see, your father and I lost a baby before you were born."

"You what?" Reilly choked. "I would have had an older brother or sister?"

"If it had been Tam Apo's will, yes," Winter Sun replied. "Since it was not, you are even more special." Winter Sun reached across the table and gently swathed her hand across Reilly's cheek. "Daughter, it is good that your man loves and cares for you this much."

Their attention was drawn to noise outside. It was the sound of pounding horse hooves, a lot of them.

As Reilly moved toward the parlor Winter Sun reached for their two shawls. It was a cold December day.

Owen was already outside talking to a uniformed officer of some type. Reilly didn't recognize the uniform and his jacket was fringed buckskin. Winter Sun placed the warm woolen shawl around Reilly's shoulders as they walked outside.

The officer looked at Reilly and addressed Owen, "Would you mind introducing me to this lovely creature you have kept hidden in your house?"

Owen turned to see Reilly walking toward him. He waited until she was under his protective arm and introduced her, "Captain Clark, this is my wife, Reilly."

"Wife?" Daniel Clark sighed. "The beautiful ones are always taken."

Owen then put Winter Sun in his other arm. "This is my mother in law Rose Stewart. She's taken also."

"Would you and your men like to come in and warm yourselves?" Winter Sun offered. "We have plenty of hot cider we can share."

"I'd appreciate that ma'am. I really would," Captain Clark replied dipping his hat. He turned and gave Lieutenant Fedderman the order to dismount. "Are you sure you have enough room for twenty five men?"

"We have plenty of room in the bunkhouse for your soldiers and if you don't mind we can bunk you and the Lieutenant in a spare room in the main house," Owen offered. "We have plenty of food."

"My men would appreciate a nice hot meal," Captain Clark said as he dismounted.

"Stoner, will you show the troops to the bunk house?" Owen requested his ranch hand.

"Sure will boss, the bunk house and the bath tubs," Stoner complained. "These men smell worse than a bison carcass."

"I'm certain they would also appreciate a hot bath and shave," Captain Clark chortled. "I know I would."

"Glad to oblige," Owen volunteered. "You can use our tub in the main house."

"Owen, I had a feeling I could count on you when I ordered the men to head for your estate," Captain Clark grinned broadly walking into the house with Owen, Reilly, and Winter Sun. Lieutenant Fedderman walked behind them.

Garvey stood up as they entered the parlor. "I'll be! Daniel Clark!"

"Sir," Captain Clark acknowledged.

Garvey turned to face Trevor Stewart, "You remember Benjamin's boy, don't you, Trevor."

"This is a surprise. It's like old home week," Captain Clark laughed. "It's good to see you."

"How's your Pa?" Garvey asked Daniel.

"He's great. He moved to California about five years ago," Daniel Clark answered removing his buckskin coat and leather gloves. Daniel walked to the fireplace and opened his palms to the warmth of the flames. "I get to see him now and then. He remarried after Ma died seven years ago."

"You got a wife yet?" Trevor questioned.

"Nope," Daniel replied turning to warm his backside. "It seems all the pretty ones are taken before I even meet them. Maybe when I get called up to serve back East I'll find me a pretty filly."

"I heard some of the settlers have pretty daughters," Owen disputed. "Even the Mormons have a crop of girls growing."

"As I recall they never suited you," Daniel scoffed. "I'm waiting for a pretty little filly like you roped. Where'd you find her?"

"I found him," Reilly answered carrying a tray of cups filled with hot cider. "I had to come all the way from the East to do it."

"Thank you ma'am," Daniel said politely taking a cup. "Lucky man. Owen always was a lucky man."

"I think so," Owen agreed taking the tray from Reilly and putting it down on the table near his father and Trevor. Owen didn't want Reilly to lift anything heavier than a comb for her hair, but wouldn't pursue this request of his in front of guests. "What brings you out this way?"

"A couple of things," Daniel answered sipping the hot cider. "Mmm, this is good. First of all, we heard there might be some attacks on the mail stations."

"Attacks from who?" Owen queried sipping his hot cider.

"The Mormons and settlers say it's the Indians, meaning all of them, but I've just had some problems with Pocatello and White Knives," Daniel said seriously. "Those bucks have raided some settlers farms, stolen some Mormon cattle, and helped themselves to food stuffs. Bear Hunter, Sagwitch, and Washakie are in negotiations with federal troops for food and blankets, so I know it isn't them stirring up trouble. The mail stations I have checked haven't seen an Indian, but there have been attacks on the mail stagecoaches. Nine out of ten times it's bad white men looking for gold. The one time it is Indians is the only time the attacks are remembered. It irks me that people won't believe what is before them. Their truth is what they believe to be true."

"Have you run across any raiding parties?" Reilly asked knowing how safe she was in Owen's care and on his estate. Reilly also remembered that their attack was going to be blamed on the people, but greedy white men had perpetrated it. "We were attacked by white men who wanted to blame the Sosoni'."

"I know about your attack, ma'am. Mighty sorry you had to go through it," Daniel replied quickly. Daniel knew better than to share the

rumors that had already been started about the attack. The settlers wanted to believe it was the Indians who attacked the white men. "I haven't run across any raiding parties. I am careful on any judgment I must make. There is a lot of tension building with the rumors of gold further north of here. All three sides of the triangle are angered and retaliating."

"I heard about the gold strikes. Some men found a few grains here and there," Trevor rejoined. "Gold fever takes away a man's common sense."

"The Indians are suffering horribly for it," Daniel shared. "There is more and more destruction of their hunting grounds and fields by the increased movements toward the north."

"This continues to be a delicate balancing act," Owen observed. "I know some of the younger warriors are developing more courage to do things they shouldn't knowing the soldiers are leaving for the East and the war."

"It's also politics. Buchanan ousted Brigham Young and the Mormon empire the President feared was broken up. Although Brigham is power hungry he honestly believes his own preaching. He really believes in feeding not fighting," Daniel offered. "Some of his followers do the lip service but in reality are greedy, vicious, and blood thirsty. I know that one of his leaders is out for blood, but Brigham can't see it."

"Brigham sees this War between the States as his chance to get back the territory and political power he lost," Owen agreed. "I'm sure the new governors of the territories aren't going to want to give up their power."

"Scary thing is, President Lincoln shows more preference to Brigham Young than the Buchanan appointed governorships," Daniel related.

"That will only last until Lincoln appoints his own hand picked governors," Owen stated. "In the meantime no one has been here long enough to understand the situation."

"And the territories are getting new boundaries to make matters worse," Daniel agreed. "The Indian agent for our Snakes is making decisions on the other side of the mountains with Indians that have completely different lives."

"Politics, always politics," Reilly complained. "Politics killed Meredith, killed Phillip and just continues to keep killing everyone. The ones that don't die are the men that hold on to their political power!"

"Your pretty little wife is philosophical," Daniel chuckled. "Also correct. It's always the soldiers that die, never the politicians."

"She's smart and a crack shot," Owen bragged.

"Why thank you," Reilly smiled feeling rather proud of herself.

"Stay smart and do what little you can," Daniel suggested to his old friend Owen. "Just remember you can't solve the country's problems with good works and philosophy."

“But we can change our little corner of the world,” Reilly countered. “What I don’t understand is why the settlers and Mormons choose not to believe that many of these attacks were committed by their own people.”

“I know for a fact that when a warrior is guilty of being part of a raid or confrontation with whites, both Chief Bear Hunter and Chief Washakie turn the culprit into the authorities, expel the trouble makers, and make restitution to the best of their ability,” Owen explained. “I also know that there are raids on the Shoshones and the white settlers by Crow, Cheyenne, and sometimes even Lakota. Some of these atrocities are the guilt of some tribes, but not all. It is frustrating.” Owen angrily combed his hair with his fingers.

“What is going to happen when people like you, the ones that know and understand the people, leave us?” Reilly asked in trepidation. “What you’re trying to tell us is that the Mormon settlers will send in their people.”

“That is exactly what is going to happen,” Daniel responded with conviction. “Colonel Patrick Connor is short fused, biased, and out to make a name for himself. He was part of a lot of carnage in Florida during the Seminole Wars. You remember that and watch yourself with him.”

Harriet came in and announced that dinner was served.

Captain Daniel Clark ate like a starved man.

After dinner Reilly took Rory into the study to practice his reading and math. Winter Sun, Harriet, and Rachel cleaned up the supper table.

In the privacy of the parlor with just the men Daniel gave a warning.

“I want to warn you to be careful. Keep the women indoors and don’t let anyone wander about alone,” Daniel advised enjoying the cheroot and brandy.

“Do you really think someone would attack Owen?” Garvey queried.

“I doubt that, but on our patrol we ran into a few chewed up carcasses including human ones,” Daniel said quietly. “There is a crazed grizzly running around and he’s killing everything. Some of the people told me their camps had been attacked. A few camps managed to ward him off but he’s wounded now and even meaner.”

“We’ll heed your warning,” Trevor vowed. “Lieutenant Fedderman, you’ve barely said a word all evening. Something wrong?”

“No sir, I haven’t felt it was my place to say anything,” the Lieutenant answered quietly. “I’m waiting to fight in the war. I want to teach them southerners a thing or two about humanity.”

“Altruism for the cause,” Garvey grumbled. “Don’t take offense son, but this war is about politics. It’s about the federal government having control over state government. It isn’t about slavery at all. Politicians care nothing about humanity. They are self serving power hungry vipers.”

"That may be true sir, but I will never forget when as a boy my father and I went Virginia to check on horse stock. I saw a grown man chained to a post and whipped mercilessly until he collapsed. The overseer was covered with the man's blood and he seemed to enjoy beating the man," Fedderman related. "I found out later the reason the slave was whipped was because he had taken a loaf of bread out of the kitchen and gave it to his family to eat."

"Fedderman vowed to himself that he would join the military, obtain enough rank that if he ever saw inhumanity again he would be able to stop it with authority behind him," Daniel explained. "He's my best man, Owen. It don't matter to him what skin color you have. Fedderman listens to both sides and generally finds the truth. He makes his decision based on facts, not prejudice."

"Speaking of observation, I noticed your men Jacob and Jonah didn't share the dinner meal," Lieutenant Freedman said questioningly.

"A true observation, Lieutenant," Owen praised. "The facts are, Jacob is a hard worker and is busy finishing a project in the livery. Jonah is newly married and prefers his wife Mattie's company and food."

"First time in a long time I ever got a direct answer with straight facts," Lieutenant Freedman chuckled. "Thank you sir!"

"We need more men like you in charge," Trevor appreciated. "Look us up in Fairland when this war is over. I'd like to put some monetary support behind a man like you Fedderman and get you in the government."

"Thank you sir, I will do just that," Fedderman smiled using his fingers on his forehead for a small salute. "If you gentlemen don't mind. I would like to retire. I would really love to sleep on a soft feather mattress if only for one night."

"Certainly," Garvey granted. "It's about time for Rory's bedtime and prayers. I'll show you the way. Did you want to come, Daniel?"

"Yes," Daniel nodded then turning to Owen. "Before I retire I was wondering if my men and I could spend a day or two to rest. A warm bed, hot food, and rest would do them a world of good. I'm sure they will gladly help around your ranch for a day or two."

"We'd be honored to have you rest here a few days," Owen replied. "If you would excuse me, I would like to find my wife."

Chapter Twenty Three

Owen discovered Reilly lying in bed. She had already changed into her white cotton nightgown and had brushed her hair. “You didn’t tell me you were going to bed, Duchess,” Owen said unbuttoning his shirt. “Are you feeling ill?”

“You really worry about me too much,” Reilly answered admiring the magnificent specimen of a man her husband was as he undressed.

“That’s my job, Duchess,” Owen retorted walking toward the fireplace to put a fresh log on the fire and stoke the flames. “You didn’t answer me. Are you feeling ill?”

“No my darling,” Reilly sighed and leaned back into the pillows. “For some reason I am just very tired.”

“Baby girl seems to demand a lot of you,” Owen chuckled lifting the quilt and climbing in bed next to his beloved wife. He patted her slightly rounded belly. “I think I could get a little jealous.”

“Husband, you have nothing to worry about,” Reilly breathed sensually. She palmed his strong muscular chest down to his suddenly erect manhood. “I can never have enough of you.”

“Mmm, Duchess,” Owen said huskily. He folded his Reilly in his arms.

Owen was wakened by the sound of quiet movements in the room. Reaching for Reilly he found she was not in bed. Opening his eyes he focused on Reilly standing by the window. The soft light of the kerosene lamp on the table silhouetted her. “What is it?” Owen asked groggily. “Something wrong?”

Reilly was staring out the window and was startled when Owen woke and asked her the question. “I just can’t sleep. Go back to sleep my darling.”

“Are you cramping again?” Owen asked worriedly.

“No,” Reilly denied. “I simply can’t sleep. I feel strange.”

“Come back to bed, Duchess,” Owen ordered. He was really concerned. Reilly usually slept soundly. It had only been since the wagon attack she hadn’t slept well. There were times in the middle of the night when he felt her moving into a fetal position and whimpering as if in pain.

Reilly was about to answer Owen when her attention was drawn to a shadow near the entrance to the estate. Reilly had been watching Jacob opening the doors to the livery. Jacob was an early riser and was usually up before dawn. He liked to start a fire in the Franklin fireplace to warm the livery and then get right to work. She was watching him collect logs from the woodpile. “My God!” Reilly exclaimed when she saw the shadow stand to full height. The sun was beginning to peek through the horizon clouds. It was a grizzly bear and it had seen Jacob. Tightening the sash on her warm woolen robe she turned and forgetting she was only wearing slippers ran from the room.

“What the blazes?” Owen cursed under his breath. He jumped up from bed and looked out the window. He saw the bear. “Reilly!” Owen screamed. “Don’t you dare go outside!” Quickly he grabbed his pants and nearly jumped into them. He pulled on his boots and found his shirt. Owen kept screaming, “Reilly! Don’t go outside!”

Owen’s voice resonated in the house and had everyone rising in a start.

Reilly was so focused on the danger Jacob was in she didn’t hear Owen. Instead she grabbed Owen’s rifle from the study and ran out the door with it.

The bear was almost on top of Jacob when she aimed and fired a shot. It hit the grizzly in the shoulder. Now the bear was mad. It stood straight up focusing on Reilly and started a charge toward her.

Reilly calmly took aim and waited for the bear to almost reach her. She had no fear of wild animals and had hunted lions and tigers in Africa with her father. A grizzly bear should be no different. Or so she thought.

The bear stood straight and growled fiercely in front of her.

Reilly released the trigger and hit the bear directly in the heart.

It was a fatal shot, but the bear charged angrily. The grizzly took a swipe at her with its large clawed paw. The rifle took the brunt of the blow but the bear successfully knocked Reilly down slicing her shoulder and arm with its massive and sharp claws.

Owen was panicked when he ran out the door. He had grabbed his shotgun and took aim about the same time Reilly fired her fatal shot. He unloaded both barrels into the bear’s head as it swiped Reilly.

Misery suddenly appeared and was barking ferociously while charging at the bear. Jacob was running toward them.

The bear fell directly on top of Reilly. Her head hit the ground with a thud.

Owen was cursing when he threw down the shotgun and ran to Reilly. Her eyes were closed and there was blood everywhere. He didn’t know if it was hers or the bears.

Jacob came up behind him.

"Jacob, help me. Get this bear off my Duchess," Owen shrieked in panic.

Misery bit into the bear carcass and pulled as Owen and Jacob lifted the huge grizzly bear off Reilly.

In these few minutes the entire militia and household was awake and outside half dressed but armed to the teeth.

Owen felt tears run down his cheek as he knelt next to Reilly. In the chill of the morning he saw the warm breath of steam coming steadily from her nose. "Thank God she's alive," Owen cried. Gently he picked up the limp form of his wife and carried her back into the house, up the stairs, and back into their room.

Winter Sun, Trevor, Garvey, Rory, Jacob, and Daniel Clark were behind him.

Gently he placed Reilly on the bed. There was blood everywhere.

Winter Sun took command, "Everyone out! I need to tend to my daughter."

Obediently everyone left. Everyone left with the exception of Owen.

Winter Sun took the linen towel and rinsed it in cool water. When she turned and found Owen still in the room carefully undressing Reilly she ordered, "Owen, leave the room. This is women's work."

"I'm not leaving," Owen replied softly but firmly. "She's my wife."

Winter Sun shook her head. There would be no arguing the point this time. Gently she washed the blood off Reilly's face and when Owen had removed the nightgown they discovered she was badly bruised. She had several gashes on her shoulder and arm. "Wash the cuts carefully, Owen. I'll be right back. I need to get my salves and herbs for the cuts."

Winter Sun ran to her rooms to get the herbs and was stopped by Rory just before she re-entered the bedroom.

"Is Momma going to live?" Rory asked sadly. "Can I help?"

Garvey took hold of his grandson, "your Momma is going to be just fine. Let's just leave Grandma Rose take care of her for now."

"Pink Dawn is going to be fine," Winter Sun promised. "She was just cut by the bear." Winter Sun was not prepared for the look on Owen's face when she returned to the room. His face had paled and was taut with fear.

"Winter Sun, she's bleeding," Owen whispered in terror. "The baby?"

Winter Sun rushed to the bed. On the sheets was a pool of blood slowly trickling from her daughter's womb.

Reilly had been thrashing in pain. In her stupor she cried in agony.

Winter Sun took linen towels and packed them under Reilly. Tenderly she covered her daughter with the quilt.

Owen's legs turned to jelly. He was never weak or squeamish before, but this was different. It was obvious Reilly was in pain. Tears flooded his eyes. His hand drawn to his mouth, he bit down hard on his knuckles. "What is it?"

Winter Sun walked to Owen's side and patted his arm. "Owen, Reilly is losing the baby. There is nothing we can do. We have to accept this. Fortunately she will not remember this pain."

"No!" Owen shouted. "No, we can't lose our baby! Reilly wants her baby!"

"Owen, we cannot stop what has begun," Winter Sun reassured. "Our only concern right now is to make sure our Pink Dawn does not lose too much blood and we lose her. Come, help me tend her wounds."

Together they washed the cuts. Winter Sun put herbs salves and bandages on the smaller wounds. There were two deep gashes on her shoulder. Winter Sun stitched those wounds before she put the salve and bandages on.

The next six hours were torture as Owen watched Reilly writhe in pain upon the bed. For those hours Owen held her hand. He felt every pain she did. He would not leave her side. No one even suggested it. "Damn it! Can't we give her something?" Owen yelled raking his fingers through his hair.

"Pink Dawn isn't even awake, Big Beaver," Winter Sun said soothingly. "If we tried to give her pain syrups she might choke. Besides, she must push out the dead baby."

"Who says my baby is dead?" Owen stormed angrily. "We don't know that!" He had to deny the reality. He just couldn't face losing his and Reilly's child.

"Big Beaver, she bleeds. You know she would not bleed if your child was alive and growing," Winter Sun said gently. "I know this to be true. I lost my first baby. I remember it well."

"I didn't know, you lost a baby before Reilly," Owen replied choking back his tears. "I'm sorry, Winter Sun. It's just I don't want to lose my baby girl and I'm so scared for Reilly."

"We are all scared," Winter Sun responded quietly. "I don't think I have ever been so scared." Winter Sun patted Owen's shoulder and returned to her chair. She removed her sacred beads and began her prayers to Tam Apo once more. She was begging Tam Apo not to ask for her daughter's spirit.

"I tried to take care of her," Owen sobbed into Reilly's hand that he held. "I really tried so hard to take care of her."

Winter Sun looked up from her sacred beads. "You did all you could. This is not your fault. Mother Earth gives and Mother Earth takes. We cannot control or stop these happenings."

The torture of pain racked Reilly's semiconscious body for another hour. Owen thought he would go mad if this lasted much longer.

Suddenly Reilly's body went straight. Her body arched and Owen saw her bear down. Reilly screamed and sagged into the bed.

Winter Sun jumped from the chair she had been sitting in and removed the quilt covering Reilly. Without a word, Winter Sun wrapped the expelled fetus in one of the white linen towels she had used to absorb Reilly's bleeding. After the fetus was wrapped she spoke to Owen. "Everything was pushed out. Once we stop the bleeding Reilly should recover. We just must make certain she rests."

"Where are you going with my baby?" Owen asked looking at the bloodied towel in Winter Sun's hands.

"I was taking it to the fire," Winter Sun answered. "Its spirit will be cleansed by the fire to return to the ghost trail."

"No!" Owen said firmly. "Give me my baby. I want to say good bye."

Winter Sun understood Owen's grief and handed the bloodied towel to him.

Owen carefully unwrapped the towel. With tears streaming down his cheeks his finger first moved the placenta out of the way. He then touched the lifeless hands and legs. Owen looked at Winter Sun and cried out, "It was a little girl. She's so tiny, so small!"

"I'm sorry," Winter Sun choked on her own motherly emotions. "Let me have her, Big Beaver."

"No!" Owen snapped. "I'm going to give my baby girl a proper burial." He walked to Reilly's armoire and pulled out a crocheted blanket Reilly had made for their baby. Gently the large man wrapped the baby in the blanket dropping the bloody towels on the floor. "I'm sorry baby girl. I'm sorry I couldn't keep you. Papa is going to put you to sleep now."

Winter Sun watched Owen begin to leave the room and couldn't stop her tears as she said sadly, "Please send Harriet up to help me clean Reilly."

"I will," Owen sobbed. He took the bundle in his hand and as he walked out of the room he turned and said, "After I give baby girl a proper burial I'll be back to stay with my Reilly. Take care of her for me."

Owen walked down the stairs still holding the little bundle close to his heart.

Trevor jumped from the desk in the study when he saw Owen. "Is it over?"

Owen nodded, "I'm going to give baby girl a proper burial." Owen saw Harriet emerge from the parlor. "Winter Sun asked if you would go upstairs and help her with Reilly," Owen requested of Harriet.

She nodded her head and wringing her hands in her apron mounted the steps to be at Winter Sun's side.

Suddenly Captain Daniel Clark, Lieutenant Fedderman, Jacob, Jonah, Garvey and Trevor surrounded Owen. Mattie had taken Rory with her into the kitchen to help bake cookies for the soldiers.

"I'll help," Daniel Clark volunteered reaching for his coat in the hall.

"We all will," Garvey announced putting on his woolen jacket.

"Let me hold baby girl while you get your jacket," Trevor requested.

Reluctantly Owen gave the little bundle to Trevor. Putting on his jacket Owen turned to Jacob. "Would you mind getting the cherry wood cradle I made for baby girl?"

Without a reply Jacob ran to the livery.

"Cradle?" Trevor asked returning the precious bundle to Owen.

"I made a cradle for baby girl," Owen revealed. "It was going to be a Christmas surprise for Reilly."

"I'll get the shovels," Lieutenant Fedderman said soberly. Emotions were heavy in the room and contagious.

"Jonah, would you make a headstone for baby girl?" Owen requested choking back his tears.

"Of course, what do you want me to put on it?" Jonah asked solemnly.

"Just, Baby Girl Woulfe. December 17, 1861," Owen answered sobbing. "I want to show Reilly baby girl's grave in the spring. I'll need to find it."

"I'll make it with some red granite I have," Jonah answered. "I'll have it done tonight."

"Thank you," Owen replied carrying the little bundle outside. Jacob met him half way toward the open land Owen determined would be the family's graveyard. It was a clearing outside the estate and under a grove of Aspens. Owen took the cradle and carefully tucked the little bundle inside of it. "Good bye sweet little baby girl."

Lieutenant Fedderman, Captain Clark, Jacob, and Garvey helped dig the grave. Fortunately the ground had not yet completely frozen. Trevor rubbed Owen's shoulders as he lovingly held the cradle in his arms.

It was sunset when they finished digging the grave. Snow was beginning to fall gently blanketing the ground. Using a rope Lieutenant Fedderman had brought with him they lowered the cradle into the ground after Owen had reluctantly given it up.

Captain Clark said proper words over the site as they replaced the dirt in the grave. When they had finished the snow was coming down heavily.

Owen knelt on the cold ground that surrounded his tiny little child and sobbed, "Good night baby girl. Papa will always love you. The snow is going to cover you now. As pure as the white snow, that is you little baby girl."

Trevor and Garvey lifted Owen to his feet.

"Come along son," Garvey encouraged. "We need to take care of Reilly."

Jonah appeared at that moment carrying a small headstone. Engraved were the words Owen requested. ‘Baby Girl Woulfe – December 17th, 1861’. He placed it over the grave.

“Thank you,” Owen acknowledged. He stiffened his back and stopped his tears. “Thank all of you for sharing our sorrow.” They walked back to the house together. Owen removed his jacket and was met by Rory.

“Mattie told me baby sister went to heaven,” Rory announced. “Is that true?”

“Yes son, it is true,” Owen sighed heavily.

“Why?” Rory demanded. “What did baby sister do for God to want her? Why did my mother die? Is baby sister with Mother?”

Owen’s knees buckled and Trevor and Garvey assisted him to the divan in the parlor.

Captain Daniel Clark took Rory to the side, “No one can answer that question, Rory. Death and life are the greatest mysteries.”

Rory’s eyes flooded with tears. “Everyone I love dies. Why? If I were older, if I were a doctor!”

“Son, it won’t matter if you’re young, old, doctor, or soldier. People die. If you’re going to be a doctor you’d better understand that,” Daniel Clark soothed. “There are no reasons. There simply are no reasons.” Rory buried his face into the Captain’s broad chest. Daniel let the boy cry and rubbed Rory’s back reassuringly. It was all right to cry.

Grudgingly Owen conceded to eat some food. He was kept downstairs by Mattie to eat and allow Harriet and Winter Sun enough time to clean Reilly.

When Harriet walked downstairs carrying all the dirty linens she motioned to Owen. “Ms. Reilly is sleeping comfortably. She’s going to need a lot of rest. Let me know when she wakes. I’m going to keep stew warm. She’s going to have to eat for strength.”

“Can I go back to her?” Owen almost pleaded. In all his life he had never felt so alone or so helpless.

“Yes, Winter Sun said you could go upstairs. All of you can go if you’re quiet,” Harriet replied. “Winter Sun needs to come down and eat. Remind her.”

“I will,” Rory volunteered racing toward the steps and beating everyone upstairs. He tiptoed into the room and whispered to Winter Sun. “Harriet says you have to go downstairs and eat. Is Momma going to get better?”

“Your Momma is going to get better. I promise you,” Winter Sun smiled painfully. The entire fetus and placenta had been expelled. The bleeding had stopped. It was a good sign, but Winter Sun was weary from the anxiety and fear.

Owen entered the room with Garvey and Trevor. Trevor walked to Winter Sun’s side. He looked at her and said only, “Rose!”

Winter Sun threw her arms around her husband’s waist and wept quietly.

Trevor kept his arms around her and walked her out of the room whispering, “You did all you could. Come, let me take care of you.”

Captain Clark and Lieutenant Fedderman didn’t go upstairs. They felt this was a private family matter. Instead they went to the bunkhouse to be with their comrades and let them know what had happened.

Walking to the bunkhouse a chill went through their bodies. They turned to see Misery lying over the grave of baby girl and howling mournfully.

The ranch hands had taken the bear and the meat was cut up for food. They would keep the meat for Bear Hunter’s tribe. The hide would be cured and become a rug in the bunkhouse.

Owen kept a vigil at Reilly’s side all night. He could not be persuaded to leave her side.

Chapter Twenty Four

Reilly opened her eyes early the next morning. Looking out the window she noticed snowflakes falling outside the glass. She felt pain in her arm and shoulder. Groggily she felt the bandages on her left arm with her right hand. She sank back into the pillow remembering the bear and the attack. Reilly heard Owen's soft breathing. She was used to that soft reassuring sound but her husband was not next to her in bed. She sat up and found his head cradled in his arms on the bed quilt. He was sitting on a chair next to the bed. Reilly reached to pet his head. She couldn't understand why he was sleeping on the chair and not next to her in their bed.

Reilly's touch woke Owen with a start. "Morning Duchess," he said smiling wearily. Owen took her right hand and kissed her soft knuckles tenderly.

"The bear? Jacob?" Reilly asked. Her head was still fuzzy and she felt odd. She felt weak.

"The bear is dead. He'll be a good feast for Bear Hunter's camp. Jacob is fine. He and Rachel thank you for their life once more," Owen answered quietly. "How are you feeling?"

"Sore, strange, and hungry," Reilly giggled tugging on her husband's shirt.

"I'll get you breakfast," Owen smiled lovingly at his pretty young wife. "I promised Harriet I'd let her know as soon as you woke." He started walking toward the door.

"Owen?"

"Yes Duchess?" Owen replied turning quickly to face Reilly.

"Have I slept an entire day?"

"Yes Duchess," Owen answered. "You needed to mend. You were hurt bad."

"Owen?"

"Yes Duchess?"

"Why do I feel strange and weak?"

"You need some food," Owen hesitated and then quickly left the room.

A half hour later Owen returned carrying a tray holding coffee, cream, sugar, and toasted bread. There was a bowl of fresh whipped butter and a bowl of strawberry jam. Behind him Harriet carried a tray holding a

plate of fried eggs, bacon, sausage, flapjacks, and a tea pitcher of warmed maple syrup.

Reilly's eyes opened wide at all the food placed before her. "Why thank you, but I don't even eat this much when I feel well."

"You eat all you can," Harriet ordered. "I'm going to stay here with you and see to it."

Owen felt cowardly and wanted to avoid telling Reilly everything, at least for now. "I'll take a bath and shave."

"Good idea," Reilly teased sipping her hot coffee that tasted delicious. "You look worse than I do."

Owen brushed his hand over the stubble that had grown on his face. "I'm sure I do." He walked to the toilette room and closed the door. Leaning against the doorframe he took a deep breath. "Coward!" he said to himself.

Reilly found she was hungry enough to eat most of the breakfast. "Harriet, where is Winter Sun? Is she still sleeping? I don't know why, but I want my mother near me. Maybe, because my shoulder hurts."

"She's still sleeping. She was worn out with worry for you Miz. Reilly. We all is worried for you," Harriet shared. "Lawsy, if you don't do the bravest things. Problem is you is the one that gets hurt."

Owen came out freshly bathed, shaven, and wearing clean clothes.

"Well you look better," Reilly commented snuggling into the warm blankets after Harriet removed the trays.

Owen watched Harriet leave the room and stood by the window watching the snowfall. He glanced toward baby girl's grave and watched as the snow was slowly covering up the red granite stone. A tear trickled down his cheek.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Reilly uttered noticing her husband's silent stare.

"Yeah it is," Owen answered absentmindedly.

"Owen, what is wrong?" Reilly asked. "Don't tell me nothing! I know something is wrong. You can't hide your melancholy from me."

Owen walked to her bedside and sat on the edge. "Duchess, I have something to tell you."

"What's wrong?" Reilly gulped hard she sensed by Owen's voice something was terribly wrong. It couldn't be Jacob. Owen said he was fine. Did someone else get hurt? "What happened after the bear hit me? Did someone die?"

"Duchess, my love," Owen choked. "Baby girl didn't make it."

Reilly's eyes widened in disbelief, "what?"

"We lost baby girl," Owen whispered.

"No. Nooo!" Reilly wailed pulling away from Owen trying to bury her face into the bed pillows.

"Reilly! Reilly don't do this to me," Owen said gruffly pulling Reilly back into his arms. "We lost baby girl. We have to mourn together. She was our baby! Not yours, not mine, ours!"

Reilly collapsed into Owen's embrace. Her sobs were strong and loud. Owen held her shaking body. Their tears mingled on his shirt. Lovingly he stroked her hair. Reilly cried herself into exhaustion and Owen felt her breathing change. Carefully he laid her sleeping body back onto the pillows.

It was then Owen became aware he was not alone in the room. Trevor and Rose were standing near him. By the foot of the bed he saw Misery looking sad and resting his head on the covers.

"She's sleeping," Owen whispered.

"You're a good husband," Winter Sun said quietly. "I know of only one other man that is a husband as fine as you." Winter Sun looked up at her Trevor lovingly. "I'm happy my daughter has married you."

"I'm happy she married me," Owen confessed. "I love her to my very soul. If only we could have had our baby girl."

"There will be other babies," Winter Sun comforted. "Pink Dawn is strong and she survived this. She will heal and give you many more children. I promise you this."

"Owen, in my lifetime and living through many tragedies I can tell you it is my experience that there is a reason for everything," Trevor advised philosophically. "We may not understand it, but a reason will become known."

"What reason is there for losing our baby girl?" Owen argued.

"I don't know yet," Trevor answered. "Reilly was devastated when Philip was killed. It seems there was no reason for his death. It seemed there was no reason, but she found you and I've never seen my baby happier. Philip was a good man and a good husband, but Reilly's fate was to be with you."

"You planned on bringing Meredith back to the ranch, but she was killed in an accident," Winter Sun reminded Owen. "You were saddened by her death, but you brought Pink Dawn back as your wife. I've never seen you happier."

Wearily Owen nodded his head. He raked his fingers through his thick sandy brown hair. "I know you're right, but it still hurts so bad."

"It will hurt," Trevor agreed. "There is no denying the hurt. The hurt will stay, but there is always happiness and sadness to share when you love someone this much."

Misery jumped on the bed and curled up by Reilly's feet. He whimpered softly.

"Reilly will sleep for awhile," Winter Sun expressed. "I'll stay with her. You have your work to do and Rory to comfort."

"Work will be good for me and Rory," Owen agreed.

For the next few months that is exactly what Owen did. He and Rory worked into forgetting.

Captain Clark and his men returned to Fort Hall. They dropped off the bear meat at Bear Hunter's camp on their return to the fort. In spring they were called up to fight in the war.

The winter had been extremely harsh and the Shoshone were near starvation. Owen sent whatever supplies he could to Bear Hunter, but the weather prevented the shipment of the vast amount of food the camp needed. It was a very large encampment.

Reilly was up and returned to her routine in a short time. The only difference was Owen didn't share the bed with her. For a long time she thought he slept in the spare room, until she woke up in the middle of the night several weeks later and wanted some cold milk. Taking the kerosene lamp and opening the door she found Owen sleeping on a bedroll outside her door. Silently she closed the door, put out the lamp and returned to bed.

Reilly missed Owen's warmth and security in bed. It was understood that she needed to heal after the miscarriage, but that was two months ago. She had her monthly flow twice since then. She felt fine and wanted her husband back in bed with her.

It was one of those really cold nights in February that Reilly made her decision. Sitting at the vanity brushing her hair she saw Owen enter the room carrying logs for the fire.

"It's a Nor' wester," Owen declared. "It's going to be a cold night. I want to make sure you're nice and warm."

"And what about you, husband?" Reilly questioned still brushing her hair. "Don't you get cold sleeping on that bedroll outside my room?"

"How did you know?" Owen asked.

"I almost fell on top of you when I woke up in the middle of the night and wanted some cold milk," Reilly answered turning to face her husband. "Owen, I want you to warm me in bed."

"Misery, keeps your feet warm," Owen chuckled looking at his dog curled up on the foot of the bed. He's made that his station lately."

"I want my husband back!" Reilly stated firmly. "Owen, I need you."

Owen didn't answer. Reilly heard him drop the logs on the fire and walk toward the door. The door creaked as he opened it. She closed her eyes and sighed. Perhaps he didn't consider her his wife anymore. Perhaps he felt she was less than a woman because she couldn't keep their baby. A tear trickled down her cheek. Then she heard, "Out!"

Owen had opened the door and ordered Misery out of the room. He walked briskly to Reilly's side and asked, "Are you certain?"

Reilly pulled herself up and stared directly into Owen's eyes, "I'm certain!"

Owen picked her up and carried her to bed. Gently he laid her on the mattress kissing her lips, forehead, ears, and slowly down her neck. He whispered, "I love you, Duchess. I love you." He tore off his clothes popping buttons off his shirt. Slipping into bed his hands moved quickly renewing their paths along the soft curves that belonged to his wife. In a

moment Reilly's cotton nightgown was thrown onto the floor. Owen kissed Reilly deeply and hungrily. His hands massaged the soft globes of her breasts allowing his fingers to play with the hardened nubs.

Reilly responded with a fire of passion. Her lips devoured Owen's kisses. Her hands stroked the muscles of his back and her legs rubbed the calves of Owen's muscled legs. Her groans were intoxicating.

Owen suckled her breasts and hardened beyond restraint when Reilly moaned in pleasure. He mounted his wife and taking his leg to open the apex of her womanhood he gently inserted his manhood. Breathing heavily he begged, "I need you Reilly. I need you bad. Will I hurt you? You have to tell me if I hurt you."

Reilly breathed raggedly, "Owen, I am on fire. You are hurting me by not loving me. Love me! Love me!"

Owen plunged deep into the warmth. Together they peaked in ecstasy that only two can share as one. The heights they shared brought a communion of worship for each other. It was love shared physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Owen expelled his seeds with a roar of triumph.

Reilly peaking at the same time emitted a quieter roar of pleasure.

Falling in exhaustion upon the warm and inviting body of his wife, Owen kissed her eyes, her cheeks, and her lips. "I love you, Reilly Woulfe."

"I love you, Owen Woulfe," Reilly whispered into her husband's hair.

They held each other afraid to let go. Finally sleep took them.

From that night on, Owen and Reilly returned to their normal routines including the art of loving each other and hopefully creating another baby. In spring Reilly happily announced she had missed her flow twice and she was certain she was once again carrying Owen's child.

Trevor and Rose had planned to return to Fairland in the spring, but when they heard Reilly was with child they decided to stay until the following spring. They were determined to be together as a family to share the birth of their first grandchild. Garvey returned to Fairland and promised to take care of the businesses until Trevor and Rose would return, but he made them promise to send a wire as soon as the baby was born.

This pregnancy was different. Reilly felt full of energy. She actually emitted a radiant beauty. Owen still remained overly protective and didn't allow her to ride, go to Soda Springs, do house chores, or even cook. Instead she spent her time going over the ranch's books, teaching Rory, sewing, and helping Rachel take care of her baby daughter, Freedom.

The spring brought hope and renewal. Owen was busy with the sheep providing new lambs, the horses providing foals, and the cows new calves. Flowers were blooming everywhere. Owen brought rose bushes after a visit to Soda Springs for Reilly to have growing in a garden. Rachel, Harriet, and Winter Sun began planting their gardens. The vegetable garden

was huge and would provide enough through summer and for the entire Bear Lake Estate as well as the Bear River camp of Shoshone in winter.

Berries were picked and preserved. Owen did allow Reilly supervise the making of preserves. She instructed Harriet in the proper making of whipped cream and butter.

The spring offered plenty to those that worked the land. A special garden was planted around the red granite headstone of baby girl Woulfe. Starting when the snow had first melted, early in the morning on every 17th of the month Owen and Reilly would place a flower on the tiny grave.

Every day Owen and Rory would return with mountain plants and flowers to add to Reilly's flower garden.

Rory had just turned eight years old and was well advanced for his age in stature and intelligence. Owen was proud as he could be of his son.

Happiness radiated from the estate that spring and its glow brought many Shoshone visitors. All were well fed and cared for. Owen was blessed with a fine new breed of foals and gave some of the older mares to the people for transport of the women and children.

Bear Hunter's people had survived the winter with Owen's help and were grateful. He took his camp and moved further to the east for the plains and their hunting grounds.

Sagwitch followed Bear Hunter and after staying a few days with Owen and Reilly on Bear Lake grounds.

With his stay he brought news. Pocatello and White Knives had moved north. They were harassing settlers, Mormons, and gold hunters from Ruby Valley to north of Fort Hall.

Chapter Twenty Five

Dadabaychee shared with Winter Sun that she was carrying Chief Sagwitch's child and would deliver about the same time as Reilly. Reilly had been learning Shoshone but was still not learned enough to carry on a detailed conversation.

Reilly spent the two days of the Shoshone sojourn with families from Chief Sagwitch's camp. Going about the temporary camp with Winter Sun had been a wonderful experience for her. She met and played with the children and was amazed that there never seemed to be any arguments. She found the parents to be patient, understanding of youthful ways, and great teachers. It was true it wasn't formal classes of reading, writing, and math. It was teaching the ways of nature, Apo, and animals. Reilly had learned there would be sorrow at the passing of a family member but joy in the attainment of the spirit world. She learned the interaction the Shoshone shared with nature and admired the trait. Reilly wasn't certain she could live in their lifestyle, but admired it and admired the people.

"You're enjoying this visit, aren't you?" Owen asked Reilly coming up behind her in the cooking room. He quickly snaked her waist with his arms and kissed her neck gently.

"I am," Reilly agreed sensually responding immediately to her husband's touch. "I realize that although the blood that runs through my veins is part Shoshone, it is the culture I was raised in that dominates my life."

Owen frowned. "You mean you prefer the city and its social culture?" Owen held his breath. He had hoped that the woman he adored was falling in love with his world.

"No silly," Reilly reassured brushing her husband's hair away from his eyes. "I prefer this world. This is the world I was born for. It is the world between two worlds. My world is a bridge between the worlds so to speak. And you need a haircut, husband!"

"I rather like my hair long," Owen laughed throwing his head back. "But for you Duchess, I'll get it cut."

"Allow me the honors," Reilly giggled. "I want to try my hand at scalping."

Owen roared with laughter, "I've never volunteered for that!"

"You have now," Reilly teased and pulled out a mean looking scissors from a shelf.

Reilly sent Rory to her room to fetch a comb and when he returned she gave her two men a haircut. She held up one long shock of Owen's curly hair and tied it with a string. "This will do as my first coup!"

"Lord, I love you Duchess!" Owen guffawed. "My Shoshone Princess, my Duchess."

"That's Duchess Pink Dawn!" Reilly answered beaming and holding the lock of hair. "Greater coup, my victim is alive!"

Owen picked up Reilly and spun her around. Delicately he put her down and laved his lips on her neck returning them to their proper place, her lips. He delved, he probed, he groaned, he was hard.

"Yeeeechhhh!" Rory complained as he left the cooking room and ran into his Grandfather Trevor. "They're kissing again!"

Trevor cleared his throat, "Excuse me but we have more visitors."

Reilly and Owen broke apart like two school kids caught in the middle of mischief.

Reilly was the first to clear her throat and asked, "More people?"

"You can call them that, but I wouldn't," Trevor chuckled. "I'd be more inclined to put them in the ranking of pompous, arrogant, and self righteous zealots."

"Mormons?" Owen asked.

Trevor nodded.

"Now father, all Mormons aren't bad," Reilly scolded. "And this home welcomes everyone."

"I like that," Owen beamed. "I like that word a lot!"

"Welcome?" Reilly asked cocking an eyebrow.

"No, home!" Owen responded happily. "You've made this place a real home Duchess!"

Owen was the type of man that could thrill his wife and keep her happy! Reilly reminded herself of that fact everyday. She treasured this marriage and now she would have his baby. There was no doubt this baby would be theirs together and grow in love and happiness.

"Let's go greet our guests," Owen smiled warily. "Trevor, how many Mormons have come to visit?"

"What I want to know is why you automatically assumed they were Mormons?" Reilly asked taking her husband's offered arm. "They could have been settlers in Franklin or Paris."

"I know your Pa," Owen said seriously. "His look of contempt means Mormons. Your Pa never did cotton to them even a little bit!"

"Neither did your Pa, or you," Trevor snarled. "These visitors are new arrivals of the Mormon pack to Franklin. It is three women who have come to call on the poor Ms. Woulfe."

They passed the dining room into the parlor where the three women were sitting on the divans. They stood as Reilly entered.

“My dear Ms. Woulfe,” The older heavier one announced. “We have come to invite you to our church services.”

“I wasn’t aware there was a tabernacle nearby,” Reilly replied politely taking a chair next to the divans.

Owen felt protective and he wasn’t certain why, but he wanted to remain. He sat on the arm of the chair.

Reilly looked up at Owen questioningly and then spoke quietly, “We don’t want to keep you from your work.”

Owen bent down and whispered in her ears. “The bear was bad enough. These women look like real dangerous rattlers. I’ll be near by if you need me. Just yell for help.”

“Of course darling,” Reilly chuckled. “I’ll do my best to make our guests welcome.”

Owen kissed his wife on the forehead and left reluctantly.

Harriet came in the room and asked, “Ms. Woulfe, would your guests care for some tea and cakes?”

“Why yes Harriet, we’d appreciate that very much,” Reilly acknowledged.

The thin woman with the large nose spoke, “We never expected to see such luxury and culture out here in this wilderness. It even has servants!”

“Harriet isn’t a servant,” Reilly corrected. “She’s a part of this household.”

“You pay her no wages?” The heavysset woman named Ruth questioned haughtily. “That’s slavery!”

“Harriet receives wages for work performed,” Reilly answered. “However, Harriet is a member of the Woulfe household. She lives here. Harriet has been with the household for almost ten years.”

“I see,” the hawk nosed woman name Bertha reacted angrily.

It was obvious to Reilly that two of the women liked to be superior and in control. The third woman was quiet and looked quite young, perhaps only seventeen or eighteen years old. Reilly thought it was time for introductions. “You have me at a disadvantage,” Reilly purred. “It seems you know who I am, but I have not been introduced. I do not know who you are.”

The heavysset woman spoke, “I am Ruth Madigan, first wife of Stephen Madigan. This is Bertha Madigan, Stephen’s second wife, and Rebecca Madigan, Stephen’s third wife.”

“Mrs. Madigans,” Reilly choked back a giggle and bit her lip so she wouldn’t give away a chuckle. “You are all married to the same man?”

Ruth sipped at her tea that Harriet had brought in and then replied arrogantly, “Righteously married.”

Reilly found it difficult to not break out laughing. She had heard the Mormons believed in polygamy and knew that the Shoshone practiced the same, so it wasn’t the many wives that mad her want to laugh. It was

the pompous attitude and introduction as such by Ruth Madigan. "Have you children?"

"Of course!" Bertha erupted angrily as if offended.

"I'm sorry," Reilly countered quickly. "It's just that I didn't see any children with you."

"We have two sons each," Ruth Madigan announced. "That is Bertha and I have two sons. It seems the young Rebecca has been unable to produce a child for Stephen as yet."

"He's only taken me as his wife a few months ago," Rebecca answered defensively.

"You can thank the dear Maker for that travesty," Bertha scolded. "If Stephen hadn't found you in that camp and decided to save your soul, you would have starved to death and followed the path to damnation."

"Bertha dear," Ruth chided. "We didn't come to wash our dirty laundry in front of Ms. Woulfe."

"Of course not," Bertha agreed scowling at Rebecca.

"Our sons are ten, eight, seven, and five years old," Ruth informed. "So naturally our boys are with their father learning the ways of the Lord."

"We've heard of your attack and loss of your child," Bertha continued. "We came to offer our prayers and an invitation to our services."

"Our tabernacle has not been built as of yet, but we still conduct services on the Sabbath day," Ruth decreed. "We invite you to share prayers."

"That's kind of you," Reilly answered politely. "However, the Mormon religion is not my faith."

"We invite you to join our tabernacle," Bertha said. "If you join our faith perhaps you will no longer suffer as you have."

"Suffer?" Reilly questioned.

Winter Sun walked into the room at that point carrying small sweet cakes and honey on a delicate silver tray. "Would you care for some?"

Trevor was directly behind her. Reilly noticed her father's deep scowl. He truly did not like Mormons for some reason.

Ruth raised a brow while she looked from Reilly to Winter Sun, back to Reilly.

"You know Ms. Woulfe, there is quite a resemblance between you and this Indian squaw," Ruth Madigan blurted out.

"Why thank you for noticing," Reilly cooed. "Ladies, may I introduce my mother, Rose Stewart. Behind her is my father, Trevor Stewart."

Ruth blushed in embarrassment. "I apologize. It's just that your mother wears her hair braided and dresses like an"

"Indian?" Trevor questioned rudely. "My Rose is known as Winter Sun and is a Shoshone Princess. She is the breed daughter of a great chief. This is a fact I am quite proud of."

Ruth choked on the pride of this man announcing he was married to a breed. She fumbled trying to regain control of the situation, "Where did you meet your squaw, I mean wife?"

"I was one of the spiteful crude mountain men your people snubbed their noses at," Trevor replied sarcastically. "I met my wife in the Cache Valley while trapping furs to keep women like you warm. She's the best thing that ever happened to me."

Reilly covered her mouth so her giggling could be somewhat concealed. She enjoyed her father's pride in Rose and his life. She also enjoyed her father putting the arrogant Ruth Madigan in her place.

Ruth again once more tried to gain control of the conversation. "Were the two of you righteously married? Or is your daughter a bastard child? Perhaps that has been her folly. We could baptize her."

Reilly turned crimson in anger. She couldn't believe the audacity of this woman.

Trevor smiled wickedly and responded, "we are more righteously married by an honorable preacher than you folks who live in sin with your polygamist husbands."

Reilly's attention turned to Rebecca who suddenly began coughing. It was obvious to Reilly by the look she received from Rebecca that Rebecca was enjoying this banter with Trevor.

"That is a matter of opinion," Ruth huffed.

"Exactly," Trevor agreed. "This household would be very appreciative if you kept your opinions to yourself."

"We heard of your daughter's travail in the terrible attack of the Indians. We heard of her losing her child," Ruth Madigan continued ignoring Trevor to the best of her ability although her face was bright red. "We offer our Lord's Tabernacle to her. Perhaps the Maker would be more kind to her if she followed his ways."

"What Indian attack?" Reilly asked.

"Why the one on your way to Soda Springs," Ruth Madigan replied in surprise. "We heard of how the Indians attacked your wagons and you barely escaped with your lives."

"We were attacked by black hearted robbers of the white persuasion," Reilly declared. "It was the Shoshone who saved our lives."

"That's certainly not what we heard," Bertha butted in.

"I was there," Reilly growled. "I can tell you who perpetrated the attack."

"Dear, we know of your husbands jealous love for the Indians and all wayward souls. You needn't protect them," Ruth said magnanimously.

"Don't even try daughter," Trevor reprimanded. "You'd find it easier to convince a mule it's a horse!"

Winter Sun choked back a laugh.

"Come Rose," Trevor grinned taking his wife's arm. "I'd sooner welcome a polecat into the bedroom than stay in the room with these ladies."

"Perhaps we can find more interesting things in our bedroom, husband," Winter Sun suggested sensually. She then grabbed Trevor's crotch and gave Ruth a wicked smile. "We can righteously renew our marriage vows."

"Wooo Hooo!" Trevor yelled. "Come on woman!"

Reilly blushed at her parents' behavior but considering the company, felt the act was well worth the audience. Reilly had never had such a difficult time being a hostess until now, but she concentrated on Rebecca and reminded herself that there are good and bad people of all affiliations. "It is true Owen and I lost our first child, but happily we are with child once more. I can assure you that Owen and I are righteously and most happily married. We also have an eight year old son whose name is Rory Woulfe."

"You must have been quite young when you were married," Bertha cocked a brow suspiciously.

"Quite young," Reilly sneered back.

"Since it has become obvious our invitation to you is rejected," Ruth said taking in a deep breath. "Perhaps you will allow us to minister to the current collection of savages that are currently camped outside of your walls."

"Your ministrations are to be accepted or rejected by the people," Reilly answered gracefully. "It is not up to me to accept or reject your offer. Please feel free to approach our guests as you will."

"These cakes are delicious," Rebecca suddenly spoke out. "May I have the recipe?"

"Of course," Reilly replied quickly. "If you come into the cooking room I'll gladly write it down for you."

"Can you even read dear?" Ruth asked cruelly.

"Why yes I can," Rebecca answered quietly. "I was schooled proper before I was orphaned by the fever."

"Of course, dear," Ruth cackled looking at Bertha who shared the same contempt for the younger wife.

Once in the security of the kitchen, Rebecca bubbled over. "You are certainly a kind a Christian woman. I declare those two women would try the patience of Christ himself."

Reilly burst out laughing, "I take it you don't really care too much for the first two Mrs. Madigans."

"Honey child," Rebecca giggled. "I don't even like Mr. Madigan."

"How did you get married to them?" Reilly quizzed teasingly. "Would you like some coffee?"

"I was crazed with the fever myself. My Ma and Pa died, or so I was told," Rebecca shared on a more serious note. "Next thing I know this fat old man is sharing my bed and is taking my virginity and announcing he was my husband by decree of the Mormon Tabernacle."

"You poor thing," Reilly sympathized. It was terrible for such a thing to happen to obviously a very nice person. "Is there anything that can be done?"

"Sure, if you can find another husband for me that has lots of money," Rebecca laughed. "It seems these righteous marriages can be bought and sold quite easily. Fact is Mr. Madigan isn't too fond of me either. I'm not a very good convert."

"Couldn't I just buy you?" Reilly queried. "I have a substantial amount of my own money."

"Thanks anyway, but these people are strange," Rebecca sighed. "They believe a woman has to be under the protection of a man. They would only sell me to another man as his wife."

"We have many ranch hands that would jump at the chance to wed a pretty little creature like you," Reilly offered, "But could you be happy without love?"

"You and your husband really love each other, don't you?" Rebecca asked sadly.

"Owen and I are one in many ways, most importantly the way of love," Reilly shared. "But the truth is, we started out disliking each other immensely. I wish I could help."

"Oh, it's all right. They don't beat me. I just have to sleep with the man once and awhile," Rebecca said shaking her head in disgust. "They have this thing about wanting baby boys. I hope I have a girl so I can keep her."

"Owen wanted a little girl," Reilly sighed sadly. "We lost her."

"Is that her grave out front under the Aspens?" Rebecca asked.

Reilly nodded reaching for a paper and quill pen.

"We all have our sorrows, and our joys," Rebecca reassured holding Reilly's arm firmly. "If you let us stay, perhaps one of those ranch hands might find me attractive and I might even like him. I would like to stay here."

"I'll write this recipe later," Reilly answered perking up. "Let's you and I disappear. I'll show you around. I want you to meet Red Magruder first."

"Matchmaking?" Rebecca laughed happily.

"Absolutely," Reilly giggled. "He's a Scots pure and fine. A gentleman and hopefully a good match."

"Does he have enough money to buy me?" Rebecca teased.

"I do," Reilly chuckled. "I shall have to give him a loan."

"You leaving me with them she devils?" Harriet complained when she saw Reilly walking toward the outside door.

"Of course not," Reilly assuaged. "Have Stoner take them out to the people. The Shoshone have faced down cougars and grizzlies. I'm sure they can handle the Mrs. Madigans."

Chapter Twenty Six

Reilly walked with Rebecca to the west side barn. She had quickly scanned the marriageable ranch hands in her mind and came up with Rebecca's perfect match, Red Magruder. His real name was Ewan Magruder and had emigrated to the West from Scotland over a time period of ten years. Red Magruder had been with Owen for the last three years of those ten. Red was content to stay with Bear Lake and had told Owen and Reilly many times that he loved the ranch, the mountains, and the open land.

Reilly chatted gaily with Rebecca as she brought her closer to Red Magruder who was exercising a recently broken mustang. Red was the best horse trainer Bear Lake had ever seen. The other ranch hands said his way was gentle and it was as if he and the horses actually communicated.

Red fell into the trap. He looked up and was immediately captivated with Rebecca. He tossed her a broad grin that included sparkling blue eyes. His broad shoulders straightened and he pushed back his leather hat to expose locks of red curly hair.

"Is that Red?" Rebecca asked dreamily.

Reilly took Rebecca's hand and pulled her over to the fence. "Red, this is Rebecca, a guest. I was just telling her what a wonderful horse trainer you are."

"You like horses, lass?" Red queried with a thick Scottish brogue.

"Aye," Rebecca replied. As it turned out Rebecca's family had been Scottish although she and her younger brother had been born in Kansas.

Reilly disappeared and let nature take its course between Red and Rebecca. She took great pains to avoid the other Mrs. Madigans and set about directing Winter Sun and Harriet for the preparation of a very special dinner. Reilly requested that every one of Owen's favorite foods would be made for supper including the apple brown betty he loved so much for dessert.

Rory came in the cooking room looking for Reilly, "Momma, can I be excused from my studies tonight? Father said I had to ask you."

"That depends on what your reason is," Reilly answered wiping her hands with a towel to remove the flour. She was making sourdough

biscuits, another favorite of Owen's. He loved those biscuits hot with melted butter and honey on them.

"Father and I are going to pick out a right fine tree," Rory beamed.

"You want me to excuse you from lessons so you can pick out a tree?" Reilly responded questioningly.

"We're going to pick out a tree and then Father is going to teach me how to build a tree house. We're going to start with drawing the tree house," Rory bubbled happily. "Father calls it sche-matics."

"Well in that case, a budding engineer will get plenty of lessons using math and writing," Reilly smiled. "You're learning a lot from your father."

"He's wonderful!" Rory exclaimed. "He knows everything! He can do everything! He builded this house!"

"Built this house," Reilly corrected. "Yes, your father can do just about everything."

"I'm so proud I'm his son," Rory smiled impishly. "I think there isn't a boy anywhere that could be as lucky as me to have such a great father."

"I think you're right," Reilly agreed. "You can tell your father you are excused from my lessons this evening. Go run along! I'm sure your father is waiting for you."

"I wonder who wants the tree house more," Harriet chuckled. "The big boy or the little boy?"

"Both!" Winter Sun laughed.

"Rory has truly bonded with his father," Reilly observed happily and returned to her dough.

"Owen is a wonderful father," Winter Sun agreed readily. "Your child will bloom like a flower in the sun under his guidance and love."

"Seeing Rory blossom, I have no doubt our child will enjoy the same enchanted life," Reilly admitted. She was absolutely convinced nothing would happen to this baby.

Supper was strained as the three Mrs. Madigans, Owen, Rory, Reilly, Winter Sun and Trevor sat down to eat.

Trevor hated all Mormons. It was a personal prejudice he had developed when he was a trapper more than twenty years ago. The Mormons started arriving and taking over the land, clearing it and destroying what he considered the balance of nature. He also disliked their sanctimonious attitudes as if they were better than other men. Trevor remembered well how the trappers treasured their Shoshone brides. The Mormon men berated the squaws and treated them contemptuously. Well, at least most of them did. Even though Trevor taught Reilly to judge each man individually and never by race or creed, he had to admit he couldn't shake his dislike for all Mormons.

Ruth Madigan opened conversation with a verbal attack toward Rebecca. "We noticed that you failed to minister with us, Rebecca."

Reilly quickly interceded, "I'm afraid I took her off with me. We simply forgot the time."

"None the less," Bertha tsked. "We will have to inform Stephen of your shirking your duty."

Rebecca didn't reply. She was contemplating finishing her meal and going for a late walk with Red. They had indeed shared an instant attraction and had so much in common.

Trevor questioned the Mrs. Madigans, "Won't your righteous husband be concerned about your not returning this evening?"

Ruth and Trevor had declared war earlier and she rallied immediately, "It was our assigned mission to come here and minister. Stephen knows full well we will be staying here for several days."

Trevor gagged, "Several days? I don't recall hearing about any invitations sent out." Trevor glared at Reilly as if she were responsible. "Did you invite them baby?"

Owen turned to scowl at Reilly as if she had.

Reilly calmly wiped her lips with her napkin and addressed the two Mrs. Madigans. "It is quite a surprise to me that you presumed to stay with us. However, you are welcome to share our home."

"How'd you know we had a nice big home to share?" Trevor growled. "Our other guests brought their own lodgings."

Rebecca couldn't resist answering, "Mr. Madigan did not rely on presumption, Mr. Stewart. Your son in law's reputation, estate, and wealth is common conversation with the settlers. Mr. Madigan sent us here to pave the way of conversion and funding of his tabernacle he intends to build in Franklin."

Trevor took a liking to Rebecca with her honest information.

"Rebecca!" Ruth yelled. "How dare you share those conversations?"

"Mrs. Woulfe and her family seem to deal much better with facts than subterfuge," Rebecca snapped uncharacteristically. "It is wiser to be open with this family and ask directly for funding."

If the truth were known, Rebecca had shared that fact right away with Reilly during their walk to the barn. Reilly suggested she bring it out in the open during supper. Reilly explained to her that Owen was a man of directness and honesty. It would behoove the Mormons to approach him directly. This would put a feather in Rebecca's cap as far as Stephen Madigan's view on his success. A plan had already begun to form in Reilly's mind.

"Your assumptions are correct, madam," Owen supported. "When can we expect Mr. Madigan to visit?"

"You can expect him on the morrow," Bertha blurted out. Even she tried to get the better of the first Mrs. Madigan whenever she could.

"I wish to make it clear in the forefront that I never donate funds," Owen said with resolve. He ate a forkful of food. He was certainly enjoying supper. All of his favorite foods had been prepared.

“You seem to give freely to the Indians,” Ruth Madigan observed sarcastically.

“My husband does not give anything to the people,” Reilly Woulfe defended. No one would attack her husband’s reputation when she was near. “Owen trades for furs, seeds, beads, bison robes and meat, knowledge, and safe passage.”

Finishing his bite of buttered honey biscuit he addressed Rebecca, “So what could Mr. Madigan possibly offer in trade?”

“I’m not sure,” Rebecca answered honestly.

“It doesn’t matter,” Reilly butted in. “I have something in mind.”

All eyes turned on Reilly.

Owen cackled, “Really?”

Reilly took her soft hand and rubbed Owen’s chin tenderly offering him a look of deep love and promise, “really!”

Owen’s eyes opened wide in suspicion when Harriet brought in his favorite dessert, apple brown betty. He was certain he would be finding out what Reilly’s trade would be very soon.

Bertha and Ruth excused themselves after dinner saying they were going to offer prayers. Rebecca joined them but quickly left feigning exhaustion. She joined Red for a quiet moonlit walk. Rebecca shared her entire life and predicament. Red shared his austere and lonely life as the child who ran away from home. He was the sixth brother of a family of thirteen.

Rory, Trevor, and Owen returned to the study to work on the planning of Rory’s tree house.

“Lazy good fer nothing women,” Harriet mumbled while washing the dishes. Reilly grabbed a towel and was wiping the dishes dry. Winter Sun took the dried dishes and carefully put them away.

“I am interested to find out what you are up to daughter,” Winter Sun mentioned.

“I’d like to know what you and father were all about this morning?” Reilly countered. “Just what was that embarrassing scene all about?”

“I did a good job, didn’t I?” Winter Sun laughed.

“A very good job, mother,” Reilly agreed. “I thought Ruth Madigan was about to swoon. What I don’t understand is why you did it?”

“When you were born I feared white women like the Mrs. Madigans. It was that fear that sent you off with your father alone,” Winter Sun shared. “I have since lived a full life and been blessed by Tam Apo with a greater knowledge and understanding of this wonderful Mother Earth. I am no longer afraid. I am ready to return to your father’s land unafraid. My only regret is that it took me so long to learn. You are like your father, you have no fear.”

“Mother, father and I have many fears. We have a tendency to override our fears with illogical actions,” Reilly chortled in warning.

"I understand those facts about your father and you, but tell me daughter," Winter Sun demanded trying to be serious with the smile sweeping across her lips. She was indeed proud of her daughter. "What are you up to?"

"I intend to free Rebecca Madigan from Ruth, Bertha, and Stephen," Reilly exchanged. "She is miserable with them. The marriage was not her choice. She was still weak and groggy from the fever. Apparently the Madigans came upon her family's homestead and finding her parents and brother dead from the fever, took her in and Stephen made her one of his wives. The poor girl is only seventeen."

"She is protected with the Mormons," Harriet interrupted. "At least the girl has a roof over her head and food in her mouth."

"So do the slaves of the South," Reilly argued. "I know you were born free Harriet, but slavery is slavery. There is no color aligned with it. Slavery is the control of another soul by any means whether it is emotional, religious, or legal document."

"Yas'm, I know you be right," Harriet sighed.

"Do you plan on having Rebecca work here?" Winter Sun questioned.

"Actually Red Magruder and Rebecca have a blossoming attraction to each other," Reilly grinned mischievously looking out the window watching the silhouettes of the two people in conversation. "I do believe we may have a wedding here soon."

When the dishes were done, Winter Sun and Reilly went to collect their men in the study.

Trevor looked up. Upon seeing his Rose he put down his quill pen and said, "I think it is bedtime for this old man. Would you excuse me?"

Reilly walked up to Rory and instructed, "It's past your bedtime young man, and you haven't even bathed yet."

"Awww," Rory protested. "Cowboys don't bathe every night!"

"They do if they smell like horse," Owen chuckled. "And you son, smell like horse! Listen to your Momma."

"I don't smell like a horse," Rory denied and picked up his arm to smell his sleeve.

"Neighhhhh!" Owen mimicked teasing his son. "Don't argue with your Momma, go upstairs and take your bath. I'll finish the drawing and tomorrow we'll inventory what we need to build your tree house." Owen reached across the desk and tousled his son's curly brown hair. "Good night, son. I love you."

Rory hugged his father. "I love you, too!" Then slightly embarrassed, he ran up the stairs to take his bath.

Reilly placed a gentle kiss on Owen's cheek. "I love you, too!"

"Do you now, Duchess?" Owen smiled broadly. "You love me so much you made every single one of my favorite foods for supper?"

“Of course,” Reilly answered innocently. “I’ll take care of Rory’s bath, listen to his prayers, and tuck him in bed. Don’t stay up to late. I’ll be waiting for you.”

“You will?” Owen questioned sensually.

“I will,” Reilly replied seductively leaning over his desk and drawings with luring eyes.

Two hours later Reilly was finishing her toilette when she heard Owen enter their room. She checked her hair in the mirror and made certain her silken chemise’s ribbon was left open just enough to peek into see the feminine globes of temptation. Reilly added one more touch of rose attar to behind her ears.

Owen had already removed his shirt and was sitting on the bed removing his boots.

Reilly walked swiftly toward Owen and crawled on the bed to kneel behind him. Her hands immediately began to massage Owen’s shoulders.

“Mmmm, that feels great,” Owen murmured in pleasure. He relaxed into the massage.

“My poor husband works so hard,” Reilly whispered in Owen’s ear and then nibbled his ear lobe. “You’re so handsome and ever too wonderful.”

Owen shivered in pleasure when Reilly nibbled his ear and told him he was wonderful, but he lost control when she put her hands on his chest and kneaded his taut nipples while her tongue laved its way from one shoulder to another and said seductively, “You are so wonderful, so tasty, so manly.”

His manhood swelled to unbearable constraint in his jeans. His hands trembled as he unbuttoned his belt and jeans nearly ripping them off. All the time Reilly whispered seductive words of adoration in his ear as her hands and tongue massaged the contours of the hard masculine body that was Owen Woulfe.

Reilly found herself on her back with her expensive silken chemise raised to her neck in a flash of light. Owen’s mouth was covering her breasts, first one and then the other. Owen’s hands moved up and down Reilly’s curves until they rested between the apex of her womanhood. He massaged her nub of intimacy and spread her legs apart entering her with a force of uncontrolled need.

Together the passions united in sycophant movements of pleasure between them. Soaring to the wind castles of ecstasy the both of them flew. Reaching their orgasm in unity they dreamily floated back to the loving arms of each other.

Still gasping Owen pulled Reilly’s head to his chest, “What is this all about, Duchess?”

"I don't know what you mean," Reilly said innocently hearing Owen's heart thundering. Even she admitted to herself a blind man would have suspected something was up.

"What I mean is," Owen chuckled and held up his fingers while still keeping Reilly secured to his chest. "One, a meal comprised of all my favorites. Two, you suggest a plan of yours for a trade with a Mr. Stephen Madigan. Three, Red Magruder suddenly asks me right after dinner if he can take a loan out from me to be drawn from his future pay. Four, Red Magruder talks to me about marrying a married woman. Five, you take Rory and put him to bed. Six, you are wearing your most sexiest chemise. Seven, you seduce me like the greatest temptress in history. Which I must admit you were highly successful in achieving. God, I can't get enough of you Duchess."

"When I'm fat and waddling with child, you won't even want to look at me," Reilly avoided trying to change the subject.

"I wouldn't count on that Duchess," Owen rebutted kissing Reilly's nose. "I want to know what this is all about!"

"I want to buy, Rebecca," Reilly confessed.

"What?" Owen roared sitting up straight.

"You needn't be so loud," Reilly shushed pushing up to sit next to Owen.

"Duchess, you of all people should know you can't buy anyone," Owen said impatiently.

"It's the trade I was referring to," Reilly admitted. "Stephen Madigan would trade Rebecca for funds to build his tabernacle."

"What makes you think I would agree to such a trade?" Owen queried suspiciously.

"Because you are a kind and loving man," Reilly cooed. "And I have my own funds you know. I wouldn't ask you to spend your money. Rebecca is miserable as a Mormon and Stephen's wife. She doesn't remember agreeing to the marriage or the marriage itself."

"Were you meddling?" Owen asked holding back his mirth and trying to present an angered façade. "Is Rebecca this married woman Red Magruder suddenly wants to marry? And was it you that introduced them?"

"I don't call seeking happiness for lonely people meddling," Reilly complained testily. "Are you going to help me or aren't you?"

Owen turned his back to Reilly.

Reilly saw Owen begin to shake. She was suddenly frightened. Perhaps she would see Owen angry for the first time in their marriage. Could he get angry with her for this? Reilly crawled to face Owen and pulled his hands away from his face. She was angry when she saw the smile on his face. "You were laughing! You're laughing at me!"

"No Duchess," Owen guffawed loudly and pinned her down on the bed. "I wasn't laughing at you. I was laughing with happiness because I think I happen to be the luckiest man in the world to have you as a wife. Of course I'll help you buy Becky. You just tell me your plan and what you

want me to do. I'll do it. Don't you even consider spending your money. I'll take care of the trading, okay?"

"You'll really help me?" Reilly smiled in relief.

"Of course," Owen chuckled. "But anytime you want to get me to do something special for you, please use these seductive ways. I really enjoy them."

"Oh you big oaf," Reilly giggled smacking Owen on the chest with her hand. She explained her idea.

They sealed their pact with a deep and long kiss.

Chapter Twenty Seven

A large buckboard arrived at the Bear Lake Estate mid morning. A portly man driving the buckboard with four boys sitting behind him entered the gates. Stoner was the first to greet the men.

“Good day,” Stephen Madigan greeted cheerily as he and his boys descended from the buckboard. The oldest of the boys tied their team of horses to a hitching post. “I am here to see to my wives and visit with Owen Woulfe.”

“The boss is out back by the mill,” Stoner answered. “You’re expected so you can go right on back.” Stoner pointed the way. He wasn’t about to lead the man when he had fence mending to take care of.

“Mr. Woulfe is expecting me?” Stephen Madigan asked in surprise.

“Yep,” Stoner replied walking toward his horse. “The boss told all of us hands this morning to send you to him when you arrived.”

Stephen Madigan and his sons walked toward the back of the estate. There he observed many cabins with small gardens. Children were running in play. There was a assortment of Indian, White, and Negro children, and some were even mixed bloods. In the distance he saw the tops of tepee lodges and smoke. It looked like a small settlement of Indians. Stephen Madigan grinned, his information had been correct. The Indians were on Woulfe’s land and from all appearances, the house, the cabins, the barns, the corrals; all of it proved Owen Woulfe was a wealthy man. There were men all over in the back. They were all working enthusiastically. Stephen wondered which one of the men was Owen Woulfe. He heard him described as tall as pine tree and broad as mountain. Stephen had been told he was a white man. Like Stephen seemed no one other than the Shoshone were aware that the true heritage of Owen Woulfe was Irish and Shoshone. Stephen looked around at the white men. They all seemed large. Stephen Madigan stood only five feet six inches and was almost as wide as he was tall.

A voice from behind startled Stephen, “You looking for the boss?”

Stephen turned to look at the broad chest of a huge black man. “I’m looking for Owen Woulfe, the owner of this land.”

“Follow me,” Jonah said gruffly. “The boss is over at the mill.”

“What kind of mill do you have operating here?” Stephen asked curiously.

“Well, operating we have a grain mill,” Jonah answered pensively. “Boss man is building a lumber mill. Only part of that is working so far. The other machinery will be arriving in a day or two.”

It was like a small city Stephen Madigan thought to himself as they continued walking in the back of the estate. “Does everyone here work for Owen Woulfe?”

“No, a lot of the people here are the wives and family of the boss’s ranch hands. They take care of themselves with schooling and gardening. Boss let’s anybody do what they please as long as they don’t cause trouble.” Jonah replied. “A person’s talent and craft is respected around here and everyone does a lot of trading. It works out well for all of us. No one goes hungry and everyone feels safe.”

“I must say I am impressed,” Stephen Madigan admitted. He noted that even his boys were looking at the other children playing with hoops, balls, toy soldiers, and dolls. There was no quarreling, just contentment.

“There’s the boss,” Jonah said pointing to a large muscled man with rolled up sleeves who was sanding a piece of cut lumber helped by a boy about the age of eight or older. “I’ll leave you with the boss. I have some stone cutting to do.”

“You’re a mason too?” Stephen queried.

“The finest this side of the Mississippi,” Jonah bragged and walked away.

Stephen walked over to the tall sandy haired man, “Mr. Owen Woulfe?”

Owen looked up and replied, “I am. You are Stephen Madigan I presume?”

“A correct presumption,” Stephen remarked cheerfully. “It is a pleasure to meet you. I have heard a lot about you in Franklin.”

“Did you have a rough crossing over the mountains?” Owen questioned knowing if he left Franklin this morning he could have only made it this early by going over the mountains instead of around the valleys.

“The path is well worn and quite clear this time of year,” Stephen answered quickly. “The boys and I had no problem.”

Owen wiped his hands on his jeans. “Pleased to meet you. This is my son, Rory,” he said proudly.

Stephen Madigan shook Owen’s hand with a powerful grip of friendship. “These are my boys, Joshua, Jeremiah, Zachary, and Matthew.”

Owen was impressed with Madigan’s friendly handshake. It was Owen’s belief you could tell a lot about a person by their first handshake. Owen also had been paying attention to Madigan’s sons and noticed they were watching the other children playing with a wistful look on their faces. “Rory, why don’t you take a break and take the Madigan boys along. Show them around and play for awhile if you like.”

"I'd rather work some more on the tree house," Rory hemmed.

"I'd really like to meet the others," Jeremiah Madigan wished out loud.

"Sure," Rory agreed realizing he would have new friends to share his tree house with. "Father and I can finish working on the tree house later. My father can build anything," Rory bragged leading the Madigan sons away. "Hey Sven! We want to play ball with you!"

"You have a well mannered son," Stephen complimented. "You've reared a fine boy."

"His Momma can take most of the credit," Owen offered humbly. "She's taught him well, along with his grandfathers."

"I'm sure his mother did well, but it still shows good seed, fine crop," Stephen praised.

"Thank you," Owen accepted. "It looks like you have a fine crop of boys yourself."

"I appreciate your sentiments," Stephen crowed proudly.

"Since we've completed the niceties, how about getting down to business?" Owen questioned.

"I was told you were expecting me when I arrived," Stephen confessed. "I have to admit that took me by surprise."

"I was informed of your mission by one of your wives," Owen said nonchalantly. "I have to admit I prefer being upfront and open, so I hope you will appreciate the directness of your wife."

"I shall thank her," Stephen grinned. "Which one do I thank?"

"Let's go to the house and have some lemon ice," Owen offered. "You can thank Becky."

"Becky?"

"I'm sorry, Rebecca," Owen replied. "My wife and Rebecca took an instant liking to each other."

"Where are my wives?" Stephen asked walking toward the house with Owen.

"Your first two are in the Shoshone encampment. Learning a trade I hope," Owen chuckled. "Rebecca is with my wife, Reilly, in the bedroom working on a dress. Reilly is in the family way. I don't want her doing anything strenuous."

"In Franklin we heard of your sorrow," Stephen sympathized. "We are sorry."

"Thank you, Stephen," Owen accepted. "It broke both of us up. We really wanted our little girl."

"You wanted a girl?" Stephen asked incredulously.

"A female is the giver of life. A male is the taker of life. This is taught in the Shoshone religion. A woman has more value because of it," Owen shared. "Besides it would be great to have a little girl as pretty as her Momma to spoil."

"I shall remember your words should our Savior decide to send a girl child to me," Stephen answered thoughtfully as they entered the house.

Harriet was in the cooking room working on the noon meal.

"Can we have some lemon ice in the study?" Owen addressed as they walked in.

"Shur can Massah Owen," Harriet replied. "I'll bring some in as soon as get these beef dodgers in the bake oven."

"Thank you, Harriet," Owen acknowledged. "This way Stephen."

Owen walked into the study in front of Stephen and pulled out a stuffed leather chair. "Have a seat and make yourself comfortable." He then crossed the room and sat behind his desk and pulled out a leather bound book. "Let's get right down to business. I don't donate money to anyone or anything. Converting me is useless since I am quite happy with my own belief. I will however consider a trade."

Owen had once more taken Stephen Madigan by surprise. "I'm speechless. What is your trade?"

"I want to trade Rebecca for funds to build your tabernacle," Owen said bluntly.

"She's my wife," Stephen choked. "I can't just trade her without knowing her future is secure as a wife. Do you plan on taking Rebecca as your own?"

Owen sat back in his chair and chuckled, "No sir! The one wife I have is all I need. She has made me the happiest most content man in this territory. I couldn't begin to compare anyone after having Reilly as a wife."

"I hope you understand I simply cannot release Rebecca without promise of security as a wife," Stephen said regretfully. "Perhaps there is something else?"

"Well you see, Stephen," Owen sat forward. "Fact is I have a man that is head over heels in love with Rebecca. A love at first sight thing you might say. He would righteously marry Becky today. Red is one of my best men and would provide happiness and security for Becky without a doubt."

"I see," Stephen replied folding his hands into a steeple form and pressing them against his lips. "You would give your money to help a ranch hand marry?"

"It's a trade, remember?" Owen snorted. "I think all my hands are tools, and to make the tools last and work for you, one must take care of them. If Red is happy, I have a happy ranch hand that does more work than an unhappy one. I never trade unless I am sure I am getting equal or better in the bargain."

Stephen guffawed and slapped his hands on his legs, "I like you Owen Woulfe. I've heard of your reputation as a fair and honest Christian man. I can see that all I have heard is true."

"I thank you again for the compliments, but let us get back to business," Owen smiled. "How much were you expecting me to donate? Then I'll let you know how much I'll trade."

"The tabernacle will cost about five thousand dollars to build," Stephen answered.

"That's a lot for a building!" Owen exclaimed. "Were you expecting me to fund it completely?"

"I had heard you were a wealthy man, but no I did not expect such a large donation," Stephen admitted. "The cost is high because we want it built of stone and we need to bring in a mason from Deseret'. However, I just learned your top ranch hand is a stonemason. Do you think he would lend his hand to the building?"

"You would have to ask Jonah," Owen replied. "But whatever you are planning to pay him, double it! He's the finest stonemason in these parts. He won't work cheap. I can guarantee you that. He has a wife and baby coming to think about."

"If he agrees to our offer, would you give him leave?" Stephen asked.

"Jonah is his own man," Owen answered. "I don't run his life and he doesn't run mine. He's a fine man and one of my best, but he makes his own decisions."

"You truly are a Christian man, Owen," Stephen admired.

"Are we agreed on trading Becky?" Owen asked.

"Agreed!" Stephen declared. "We just need to settle on the donation. Say, \$3,000 perhaps?"

"I'll trade for the original \$5,000," Owen replied taking the quill pen and writing on the bank draft in his leather folder. "However, you must agree to pay Jonah a fine wage and take good care of his family."

Stephen was stunned and replied stuttering, "You have my word, sir!"

"We'll draw up the agreement in writing right now," Owen said. "Here is your bank draft. It is yours as soon as you sign the trade agreement."

Harriet brought in the lemon ice while the men wrote down the entire agreement.

"I see you don't serve spirits in your house," Stephen noticed sipping his lemon ice.

"I have liquor, but we only drink it on special occasions," Owen replied. "It isn't brought out regularly."

Stephen signed the paper of trade under Owen's name. "I should speak to Rebecca."

"I'll send for Red," Owen agreed nodding his head. "Then you as a minister of the Latter Day Saints can marry the two of them this afternoon. Right after the noon meal, since I'm smelling those beef dodgers and I'm mighty hungry."

"Personally I never let anything come between food and business," Stephen guffawed. "I couldn't agree with you more. I'm hungry smelling that cooking myself."

Owen walked to the staircase and called up the stairs, "Duchess, would you bring Becky downstairs. It's time for the noon meal." Then Owen went to the front door and sent Old Joe to fetch Red for the meal.

Reilly brought Becky downstairs and walked whispering feminine secrets until they walked into the dining room. Stephen Madigan was already seated and waiting for the meal still sipping on his lemon ice.

"Ah, there you are Rebecca," Stephen smiled. "I have news for you. Come sit next to me."

For the next few moments Rebecca's heart was in her throat. Reilly had not shared her and Owen's plan. Rebecca was expecting the worst. She was thinking Stephen would reprimand her severely for telling Owen Woulfe of his plans. Rebecca was happily surprised when Stephen related the trade agreement.

"I expect you should be happy in this surrounding haven of Christian love," Stephen said after he told her she had been traded for the tabernacle's building funds and she would become the righteous wife of one of Owen's ranch hands.

Tears of joy streaked down Rebecca's cheeks as she said softly, "Until this moment I never believed that the Lord moved in mysterious ways."

Red walked in with Owen and was grinning from ear to ear. "Becky Lass, I'm proud tae ask, will ye be my wife?"

"Aye!" Becky bubbled jumping from the chair next to Stephen and running into the strong arms of Red Magruder.

It was at that happy moment Ruth and Bertha Madigan entered the dining room with Trevor and Rose Stewart.

"Shocking!" Ruth gasped disdainfully. "Rebecca, what has gotten into you? May God forgive your evil soul!"

Bertha refrained from saying anything. Instead she had been watching Stephen. He wasn't the least surprised at Rebecca's behavior. Bertha instead quietly sat next to her husband.

"I have divorced Rebecca, m'dear," Stephen announced. "Rebecca will righteously marry this man, Red Magruder, this afternoon by my own blessing!"

"What?" Ruth shrieked incredulously. "I don't understand!"

"Come sit quietly beside me, wife," Stephen beckoned to Ruth. "Praise to our Savior. Rebecca has become the sacrifice to build His temple."

Ruth looked at even more quizzically at Stephen.

"Our Rebecca has sacrificed herself to become the trade allowing us to build the tabernacle," Stephen explained. "I have made a trade of my third wife with Owen Woulfe in exchange for all the funds to build Franklin's tabernacle."

"Praise God," Bertha whispered. She was even happier to know Rebecca was no longer a wife. There had been a twinge of jealousy knowing Rebecca was so young and pretty. Bertha had been afraid that

being the middle wife she would soon be forgotten by Stephen Madigan. He would spend most of the time attempting to impregnate his young pretty wife and of course his first wife, Ruth controlled the house and family. It was a true blessing for Bertha in her own mind.

Ruth immediately became quiet and demure. It would not be Ruth to upset her husband in any way. Ruth too had been jealous of the young pretty wife and was relieved that Rebecca would no longer be a threat.

The boys came in and were stopped at the door by Reilly. "Let me see those hands?"

The boys obediently held them out.

"Rory Woulfe," Reilly chided. "You know better than to come to the table with dirty hands. You and your friends get into the kitchen this moment and wash them before you come back to the table. Have Harriet help you."

"Yes ma'am," Rory replied shyly. He did know not to come to the table with dirty hands. He had simply forgotten about it when he was called to the meal. He had developed an immediate friendship with the boys and they had been having so much fun together.

"That your wife?" Stephen asked Owen.

Owen nodded, "That's my Duchess."

"She is as beautiful as you described," Stephen admired.

Reilly walked to Owen's side and he pulled out the chair for her to be seated. "My Duchess is the most wonderful wife a man can dream of," Owen bragged and bent to place a kiss on Reilly's neck.

Reilly looked up at Owen and said softly, "and you are the most wonderful husband a woman could dream of." Her hand stroked his strong jaw. "I take it from all appearances the trade was successful?"

"Did you expect any less, Duchess?" Owen snickered.

"I had complete confidence," Reilly grinned.

The boys came back a few moments later and showed their hands to Reilly. She nodded her approval and the boys sat down to eat.

Rory plowed into the beef dodgers but stopped when he noticed he was the only one moving.

Trevor chuckled, "we haven't said grace. I'm sure you will understand with our most distinguished guests it is a necessity."

"Oh," Rory said bashfully. He put the beef dodger on his plate and folded his hands like his friends. After the blessing had been made he ate his beef dodger quickly. He piled his plate with carrots, potatoes, fresh bread, soft creamed butter, and fresh strawberry preserves.

Jeremiah was wide-eyed at the amount of food on Rory's plate. He asked his father, "Can I eat like that?"

Reilly blurted out, "Of course you can. Take as much as you want."

Stephen felt the necessity to explain, "Our meals have been quite lean. Frankly we haven't seen this much food before. Your table is truly bountifully blessed. I hope you understand my son's hesitancy."

“We are truly blessed,” Owen agreed. “We are blessed in many ways. Go ahead boys. There is plenty of food. Eat your fill.”

Joshua, Jeremiah, and Zachary piled their plates high with food. Bertha filled a plate for Matthew, who was the youngest at age five, and her son. The fresh cold milk was a treat for the boys, but nothing compared to the fine strawberry shortcake covered with fresh cream that Harriet brought in for dessert.

Chapter Twenty Eight

Owen Woulfe and Stephen Madigan became friends through the following months. They visited each other often cutting through the mountains. Rory was allowed to spend some nights in Franklin with the Madigan boys and they were allowed to spend nights at Bear Lake. They Madigan children even helped build Rory's tree house.

Stephen Madigan kept Owen informed of everything happening at the building site and Franklin news. Stephen Madigan tried to be factual with his information. Even Trevor Stewart admitted he started to respect Madigan even if the man was a Mormon.

It was on during one of those visits to Bear Lake in early September when Stephen told Owen about Colonel Patrick Connor who had built a fort in the Ruby Valley area of Nevada Territory. "I was sent to Ruby Valley on a mission by Brigham Young and I met the Colonel," Stephen told Owen and Trevor. "I don't like the man. He has an unnatural hatred of all Indians. He doesn't differentiate between camps, tribes, or nations. He's also mighty hateful that he wasn't asked to fight the Confederates in this war."

"There's nothing in his favor so far," Trevor responded. "You say he built a fort in Ruby Valley?"

"That is ominous," Owen said thoughtfully. "Soon the Shoshone will arrive for the pine nuts, seeds and berries after fishing for the salmon near Wind River."

"They won't find much there. The settlers and their cattle have trampled the valley all summer. Only thing left there is tore up rye grass," Stephen said sadly. "I heard hunting this spring was lean."

"It was," Owen confirmed. "Fortunately our gardens and crops were abundant and we've all worked hard to warehouse, preserve, dry, and store everything. We'll have plenty to share with Washakie, Bear Hunter, and Sagwitch this winter."

"I hope they can keep their Bucks in tow. This Connor is itching to kill. I've seen his kind before," Stephen warned. "The man is like a crazed cougar. Utah territory just gave him the power to blood let."

"What do you mean?" Trevor asked.

"Connor just received complete military command of Utah Territory," Stephen replied. "He plans on taking over Salt Lake City. Connor respects Brigham, but he doesn't trust him or other Mormons. He

truly believes Brigham would side with the Confederates to maintain Mormon power. Connor is almost insanely distrustful.”

“Brigham is anti slavery,” Trevor stated. “One of the few things in his favor. I can’t see him siding with the Confederacy even to maintain his power as Governor.”

“Brigham doesn’t need the title of Governor,” Stephen defended. “He is a leader with or without a title. Even President Lincoln knows that.”

“Brigham is a leader,” Trevor agreed. “I’ll give him that. He honestly believes and tries to practice what he preaches. There are some around him I can’t say I care for.”

“I agree with that,” Stephen grinned knowingly.

“Just like you’ve always said, Trevor,” Owen reminded. “There are good and there are bad on both sides of a line.”

“I hate it when I’m right,” Trevor snickered.

“What’s happening in Franklin now that they say they’ve found gold in Grasshopper Creek?” Owen asked offering Stephen a refill of coffee.

“Settler’s, gold hunters, and no account riff raff are trampling the area,” Stephen complained. “I’m hoping you’ll let my boys stay here more often until the snows come. I don’t like to expose them to the men who are coming through. Lustful, sinful, drinking, and thieving the lot.”

“I hope you keep your wives inside as well,” Trevor laughed. “That Ruthie of yours teeters on the side of suicide with that mouth of hers.”

“She is kept quite busy inside the tabernacle staining and polishing the wood,” Stephen assured smiling in good humor. “Bertha is fixing up the cabin and preserving our bounty properly. We’ll have plenty of food this year.”

“Glad to hear that,” Owen grinned. “I always thought those boys of yours were too thin.”

“Not any more,” Stephen guffawed. “Your Harriet has sure fattened them up quite a bit.”

“Some hard work building that tree house helped build some muscle,” Trevor snorted. “I hear you’ve added some sheep and pigs to your farm. That will build some more muscle having the boys tend those pens.”

Reilly waddled in during the conversation. She was literally blooming with this pregnancy and Owen was amazed at her high energy levels.

Owen stood and walked over to her immediately. Placing his arms around her bulging middle he commented, “our little one seems a bit active today.”

“Your child, Owen Woulfe,” Reilly inhaled breathlessly after a sudden kick, “is going to leave me bruised from my ribs to my hips.”

“It’s only fair,” Trevor cackled. “You did the same thing to your mother when she carried you.”

"Come sit down," Owen suggested. "Want some coffee, Duchess?"

"Yes, I'd love some," Reilly replied trying to get comfortable on the chair. "I don't know how I'm going to make it until the first of December with this active one."

"How is Rebecca?" Stephen asked. "I heard tell from Joshua that she is in the family way."

"Becky and Red will be expecting their first child come springtime," Reilly informed Stephen. "They are very happy and have taken over Jonah and Mattie's cabin now that they are permanent residents of Franklin."

"Mighty fine people," Stephen commented. "Jonah is the finest stonemason I have ever known. The tabernacle is beautiful. He and Mattie are right proud of their little boy, Simon. Had him baptized in the tabernacle."

"That's wonderful," Reilly said cheerfully. She tossed her father a look that told him not to comment negatively. "Tell me more about this Colonel Connor I heard you discussing."

"Well, like I told your husband," Stephen restated. "The man is evil. I think he's wanting to stir things up so he can claim legality in his slaughtering."

"He doesn't sound like a very sane man," Reilly noted uneasily.

"I don't think he is sane," Stephen agreed. "Worse, he's a disappointed insane man."

"Thank God he's in Utah territory," Trevor sighed.

"Pa, we're mighty close to Utah territory," Owen reminded his father. "We're too close and this area is in dispute."

"You mean he would come here?" Reilly gasped.

"I wouldn't put it past the glory hunter," Stephen announced honestly. "There has been some mail interruptions."

"Doesn't anyone realize that just as the militia and army have Indian scouts, the robbers and thieves hire Indian scouts?" Reilly snarled angrily. "It infuriates me every time I hear about those Indian attacks that are really robbers using Indians and the Indians catching the entire blame."

Stephen, Trevor, and Owen stared at her.

"What?" Reilly growled. "Did I suddenly grow two heads?"

"I guess we never thought of it that way!" Stephen declared.

"Sad part is I don't think anyone has thought of it that way," Trevor stated.

"Maybe we should start thinking that way," Owen offered. He was always proud of his wife and she gave him more reasons every day.

Unfortunately other people refused to see the simplicity of facts. Selfishness and greed slowly crept over the valleys and mountains as winter approached.

Stephen had given correct information to Owen. The Shoshone found their lands trampled, the seeds destroyed, the grasses gone, and the

pine nut harvest small. Without help the Shoshone camps would starve. A few warriors broke off from Sagwitch and Bear Hunter and joined Pocatello and White Knives. Other warriors took offers from white men, good and bad. Reilly had been right about robbers hiring the Shoshone, Paiute, Utes, and even some Navajo. These men knew full well all Indians would take the blame for their thefts.

The warriors themselves really didn't think about how they were being used. They just knew they would eat well and would feed and clothe their own families this winter. They believed that if the white men stole horses and cattle it would be acceptable for them to steal horses and cattle with the white men.

Stephen Madigan continued to maintain information lines with Owen. He related that Connor had brought a force of 750 men and was permanently camping at Camp Douglas outside of Salt Lake City. Stephen told Owen that the rattlesnake was ordered only to guard the Western Mail Routes and telegraph lines but for his own prestige had written to President Lincoln that he was indeed policing the savage Indians and by purpose of the country's benefit was keeping an eye on the loyalty of the Mormons.

Trevor received a shocking letter from Garvey, who was keeping track of all events in Washington City. Apparently, this Connor had written Washington that Mormons were a community of traitors, murderers, fanatics, and whores." Connor had held this opinion for most of his life and waged a cold war with Brigham Young once he was established at Camp Douglas.

Trevor wrote back before the heavy snows would come that he heard Connor had aligned himself with private miners and prospectors in Corinne outside of Brigham City. Garvey was told Connor had overstepped military bounds and was profiting from these non-military excursions and destroying Shoshone food areas. Trevor mentioned to Garvey that Corrine was nicknamed Connor City.

Bad news also had Owen Woulfe upset in November 1862. A Shoshone warrior had escaped capture by Major McGarry. The warrior, Small Toes told the story of McGarry going on a killing spree. Hiding, Small Toes, had watched Major McGarry carefully and related the deaths of several unsuspecting and helpless Shoshone.

"The bluecoat invited my brothers into his camp," Small Toes related. "When they got up to leave, he killed them. My dead brothers were left to wolves and crows. Their spirits are to wander without peace."

"My God," Owen choked. "This lot is blood thirsty."

"The bluecoats continued killing more of the people where ever they found them," Small Toes informed.

"I have a feeling of foreboding," Trevor said unhappily.

"I will return to Washakie," Small Toes declared. "It is best to stay far away from these evil men. I am taking my family with me."

"Rest with us a few days," Owen offered. "I'll send you with my food wagons of trade and my men to Washakie. You'll be safe traveling with them. I agree your family will be safer with Washakie."

It was only a few days later Owen and Trevor harbored more fugitive Shoshone people on their way to Wind River. They were told of McGarry holding Chief Bear Hunter hostage until they delivered a supposed white captive named Reuben Van Orman, a blond blue-eyed fair skinned boy. Owen knew it was not Reuben. The boy was the son of one of Chief Washakie's daughters who had married a fur trapper, but returned to the people. Owen was furious when he heard the boy was taken away from his real mother to save the life of Chief Bear Hunter.

"These California Militia are nothing like the regimented United States Army," Trevor said angrily while helping load a wagon for the Shoshone family's trip to Wind River. "They shoot first and ask question later. They are uncontrolled, unkempt, and undisciplined."

"I can't believe that bastard hung four innocent men from ferry ropes and butchered them with fifty one bullets," Owen voiced nearly retching. "Butchering men like that for a few head of cattle the Shoshone never even took."

"I can't wait to get my Rose back East," Trevor growled. "Even the stupidity of this Civil War isn't as bad as those butchers, McGarry and Connor. Perhaps you should reconsider coming back East with Reilly and your children."

"I am thinking about it," Owen replied honestly strapping in the last of the dried beans and flour he was sending with the Shoshone families for their trip to Wind River. "This land was beautiful and free. The Shoshone dwelled in balance with the land. We lived in peace until the Mormons started spreading out and taking more and more land. Then the settler's started coming and taking without giving back. Now we have the gold miners trampling the land and all of them destroying the food supply of the Shoshone without care as to their survival. It makes me sick! I am thinking about it."

"You won't come back, will you?" Trevor asked knowingly.

"No. If I did, there would be even fewer people out here trying to help keep peace and balance with the beauty that still exists," Owen confessed. "I can't change the world, but I can maintain a small portion of it. I know I'm doing right here."

Reilly snuggled into Owen's arms as soon as he crawled into bed on a cold mid December night. She was well over due in her calculated delivery date and found it difficult to sleep, eat, or even walk. Reilly had also become quite irritable of late.

Owen was ever patient and understanding. "How are we feeling?" Owen asked beginning to massage her extremely large abdomen.

Reilly relaxed back into the mattress. Owen's massages always felt wonderful, but today it seemed even more so. She didn't tell anyone

but she had felt strange bandings all day. "I'm feeling fat and miserable. Even though our baby has stopped kicking my ribs, I feel strange."

Owen moved his hands to her chin, "You are the most beautiful Momma in the world, Duchess."

"I'm glad you feel this way," Reilly pouted. "I can't believe how huge I've become carrying your child."

Owen didn't say a word. Instead he kissed her gently and tucked her under his arm. "Get some rest Duchess, you'll be kept awake all night feeding our hungry baby soon enough."

"I'm beginning to think this baby of yours likes staying right where it is," Reilly grumped.

"Can you blame the child?" Owen teased. "I'd crawl into you to stay if I could."

"You wicked man," Reilly laughed. Owen always made her feel better and he always made her feel loved.

Soon Owen was sound asleep, but sleep evaded Reilly. She felt stronger tightening around her abdomen. It was enough to keep her awake, but there was no great pain. She had been told childbirth would be painful. Restless, Reilly left her bed and sleeping husband. She sat on the chair and looked out the window. A winter storm was blowing snow across the windowpane. A tear trickled down her cheek. It was after midnight and December 17th. This was one year to the day she and Owen lost baby girl.

"Oooh!" Reilly gasped as she stood up suddenly. She was soaking wet.

Owen sat up straight upon hearing Reilly's cry. He knew immediately she was not in bed with him. Straining to see in the dark he found her silhouette standing by the window. "What is it, Duchess?"

"I'm wet!" Reilly cried. "I'm leaking water and I feel odd."

Owen jumped from the bed and took Reilly in his strong arms. Gently he placed her on the bed. He brought her towels and helped her dry herself. At Reilly's insistence, Owen helped her to change her gown. Nervously he begged, "Don't go any where! I'm going to get Winter Sun."

Reilly crossed her arms and replied irritably, "now just where do you think I would be going, Owen Woulfe?"

Owen just scowled. He pulled on his pants, slipped into his boots, and grabbed a shirt to put on as he raced out the room and down the stairs. Running in the halls between the houses he pounded on the door of Trevor and Rose Stewart.

Trevor opened the door half awake and half asleep, "What is it, Owen?"

Winter Sun was tying her robe and walked toward her husband and the door, "Is it Pink Dawn? Is it time?"

"I think so! I don't know! She's all wet!" Owen exclaimed in broken statements.

"It's time," Winter Sun said calmly. "Trevor you stay with Owen. I'll wake Harriet and send for Becky."

"I'm going back to Reilly," Owen said stubbornly.

"You are staying here!" Trevor ordered sternly. "This is women's work. You would be in the way. Besides I was there when Reilly was born. You really don't want to hear what your woman calls you while she's giving birth. Why Rose turned my face pink, red, crimson, and downright purple with the names she called me. She even called me the worst names in Shoshone and American."

Winter Sun didn't listen to her husband's story. She was walking quickly to get Harriet and start the water boiling.

"You don't understand," Owen whimpered. "This is the same day we lost baby girl. I need to be with Reilly. I'm afraid."

Chapter Twenty Nine

Trevor walked with Owen back to the main house. “Son, it doesn’t matter if we’re in the same room with the women or not,” Trevor consoled. “What is going to happen is going to happen! It’s best if we let the women do their work and we stay out of the way.”

As they entered the main house Owen saw Winter Sun flash by him as she mounted the stairs. Several minutes later Harriet followed Winter Sun’s path. It was about a half hour later Becky entered the foyer area with Red behind her.

“Ye scared aboot this?” Red asked Owen in his highland brogue. It always seemed thicker when he was upset.

“Terrified!” Owen replied quickly without thinking.

“But ye had a son born tae ye afore?” Red remarked showing even more nervousness.

Again without thinking Owen replied, “I was out hunting with Bear Hunter and some of his warriors. I had left Meredith in the people’s care. When I came home they presented me with my son. Remember, it was one year ago today we lost baby girl.”

“Och, I fergot,” Red mumbled. “I did nae ken birthin a bairn was sae terrifyin. Me mother seemed to have sae many without a problem.”

Owen stopped thinking of his worst fears and remembered that Becky was carrying Red’s child. Soon Red would be do the pacing and worrying while Owen would be trying to console him. “Everything is going to be fine. It has to be! I will it to be! Duchess has Winter Sun, Harriet, and Becky.” The words were false bravado. Owen paced from one end of the house to the other end of the house for hours.

Trevor sat on the divan in the foyer. He tried to appear calm but he smoked one cheroot every hour.

Red went into the cooking room to make coffee. He brought back the pot and cups. Everyone had to admit Red brewed good coffee.

Rory walked down the stairs wiping the sleep from his eyes shortly after dawn had broken. He looked at the strained faces of his father, grandfather, and Red Magruder. “Is it time?”

Owen nodded.

“I’ll go to Momma,” Rory said turning to remount the stairs.

"The women won't let you in, boy," Trevor reprimanded. "Come downstairs with the men and keep us company."

"But I'm going to be a doctor when I grow up," Rory said stubbornly. "I can help."

"I doubt you would be let in even when you're grown up and a doctor," Trevor chided. "Get down here and keep us company."

"I'm hungry," Rory conceded and started walking to the kitchen. "Where's breakfast?"

"Och, we fergot tae eat," Red chuckled. "I kin be making us food tae eat." It gave Red a chance to place his own fears aside. He and Rory went into the cooking room.

Jacob and Rachel came in and heard that Reilly was birthing. Rachel went upstairs immediately to assist the women. Jacob went outside to tell the others Reilly was birthing.

Everyone remembered it was one year ago to the day Reilly and Owen had lost their little girl by saving Jacob's life. The entire estate was quiet throughout the morning and it had nothing to do with the winter storm howling outside.

Upstairs Reilly was laughing and enjoying the company of Winter Sun, Becky, Harriet, and Rachel.

"If this is all there is to having babies," Reilly quipped. "I think I shall give Owen many more."

"Those are brave words my daughter," Winter Sun chuckled. "Not every birthing is the same. It would be best you remember this." Winter Sun stretched her hand across Reilly's belly as it tightened. She counted the time the hard band lasted. "Did you feel this?" Winter Sun asked when it was over.

"Yes, I felt your hand," Reilly replied jokingly. "What did you do that for?"

Winter Sun just shook her head, "You my daughter are blessed. You feel no labor pains. Your child has decided it will do all the work."

Rachel chuckled, "I don't believe it. I was a wailing when Freedom was born. I cursed Jacob with every evil name I could think of."

"I remember," Reilly laughed and then suddenly turned serious. "Do you think something is wrong, mother?"

"Everything is as it should be," Winter Sun comforted timing another tightening on Reilly's abdomen. "I believe your child is doing all the work. Be thankful."

"As often as your hand is resting upon Missus Reilly's belly," Harriet observed. "That little young 'un should be making an appearance pretty quick."

"I agree," Winter Sun said. "Rachel, the water is boiling downstairs in the cooking room. It is time to put the knife into the pot. Harriet, heat the water in the toilette room. We'll need it to clean Reilly and the baby soon. Becky, fetch the linens and the cord from that chest over

there.” Winter Sun then rose from the side of the bed and walked to another chest. There she pulled out a small woven basket, sage mats, and an elaborately decorated sash. Winter Sun placed the mats by the footboard of the bed and tied the sash to the bedpost. “Daughter, do you remember the birth of Freedom.”

Reilly nodded, “I do mother.”

“Good, because I know you are near your time,” Winter Sun smiled to Reilly. “Soon I shall cradle my first grandchild in my arms.” Winter Sun returned to Reilly’s side.

A few moments later during a banding Reilly’s face contorted into a grimace. “I felt that one.”

Winter Sun removed the quilt and spreading Reilly’s legs saw a thatch of black hair protruding from the womb. “It is time,” Winter Sun said calmly. She helped Reilly up and position her in a squatting position.

Reilly took the sash in her hands and waited. Suddenly the urge to push overwhelmed her.

Downstairs Owen was raking his hands violently through his hair.

“How long does this take?” Rory asked following his father’s pacing strides.

“I don’t know,” Owen replied worriedly. “I don’t know, but if someone doesn’t come down and tell me something soon, I’m going up there and the devil himself couldn’t stop me.”

The door opened and Rachel raced downstairs, straight into the cooking room. She came back a few minutes later carrying a clean cloth with the boiled knife. Rachel was attempting to run upstairs when Owen grabbed her arm. “Rachel, what the blue blazes is happening up there.”

“Ms. Reilly is gonna have her baby,” Rachel snapped irritably. “What you think is happening up there?”

“Is she alright?” Owen asked worriedly.

“Ms. Reilly is doing better than most birthings I’ve seen,” Rachel stated trying to pull away. “Let me go, Winter Sun is gonna need this here knife right quick.”

Just then Owen paled and felt his knees give in when he heard Reilly scream.

Rachel took the moment to break free and run up the stairs.

It seemed just seconds later Owen heard another scream. He bolted toward the steps but Red held him back. Red Magruder was the only man on the estate equal to Owen’s size and strength other than Jacob.

Trevor jumped up and took Owen’s arm. “Rose will let us know when the time is right for us to go upstairs.”

All the men looked to the top of the stairs when they heard the distinct and strong wails of a newborn.

Reilly pushed and let out a scream when a head emerged. Holding tightly to the sash she looked at Winter Sun, “Damn this part hurt!”

Winter Sun laughed, "We were certain of that once we heard your scream. Keep pushing when you feel you must. You have only pushed out the head."

Another urge to push overwhelmed Reilly. Grabbing the sash firmly in her squatting position she pushed with all her strength and screamed once more as the shoulders pushed through. Soon the baby had completely emerged and was lying on the sage mat.

"It's a boy!" Winter Sun declared. "A big boy!"

Becky, Rachel, and Harriet agreed, "A really big boy!"

Becky chuckled, "Reilly, he looks like you but he is as big as his father. I don't know how you ever gave birth to such a half grown baby."

Winter Sun tied a tight leather cord on the baby's umbilical. She then took the boiled knife and cut it.

Harriet picked up the baby, showed it to Reilly and the boy let out a healthy cry. "He ain't too happy about leaving his Mama's nice warm tummy and being popped out in this cold room. I'll wash him up real nice and get him nice and warm. Lawsy what a big healthy baby boy."

"He's beautiful and wonderful," Reilly breathed out. She still felt like pushing and felt Winter Sun place the basket under her as the after birth was ejected.

Winter Sun took the basket filled with afterbirth, covered it and told Reilly, "By tradition we return the afterbirth to mother earth. I will secretly bury this later."

Reilly had been told all of the Shoshone traditions of childbearing and rearing. In the corner of her bedroom was the cradleboard Winter Sun had made for her grandchild as well as the hand carved cherry wood cradle Owen had made for his child.

Winter Sun took the warm dampened rags Becky had brought from the toilette room and washed her daughter lovingly. In the background they heard the new son of Reilly and Owen Woulfe objecting to his cleaning.

Owen couldn't stop staring at the top of the stairs. He heard the crying of a newborn baby and knew it was his child, but no one had come from the room. He still knew nothing and was becoming more agitated. He wanted to know if Reilly was all right. He was a nervous and worried new father.

Everyone in the house jumped when Owen bellowed, "Duchess!"

"Lawsy, I almost dropped the chile!" Harriet exclaimed walking back into the bedroom carrying the still squalling newborn. "Winter Sun, you'd best take this boy down to his Pa afore the man shakes this house apart with his bellowing."

Harriet handed the baby to Winter Sun. He had been washed and covered with a sweet scented oil to protect his newborn skin.

"Let me see him once more," Reilly said in awe of her screaming son.

Winter Sun opened the small quilt and Reilly touched her son. She checked his hands and feet. "He's perfect. Just perfect! He's so big like his father."

"Duchess!" Owen bellowed once more. Red Magruder could barely keep him back.

Winter Sun recovered the baby and smiled to Reilly, "Harriet is right. I'd better show the man his new son or he'll shake this house down upon us."

"Yes, show Owen his beautiful son, but give me a chance to clean up a bit before he sees me," Reilly requested.

Owen was about to hit Red Magruder and tear up the stairs when he craned his neck at the sound of a door opening. The cries of a newborn baby became louder. Owen looked at the top of the stairs and saw his mother in law descending the staircase carrying a bundle in her arms. He whispered to himself, "My child."

"You needn't shake the house down anymore," Winter Sun smiled broadly. "Would you like to hold your son?"

"Son? Boy?" Owen muttered as Winter Sun opened the cover of the squalling baby and handed him over to Owen. "He looks just like Duchess!"

Winter Sun laughed, "he has Pink Dawn's hair, mouth, eyes, ears, but he has your hands, feet, and body."

"He's a big boy for sure," Owen beamed. "I don't remember Rory being this big even after a few days when I first saw him." Owen proudly showed his new son to Trevor, Jacob, and Red.

Red guffawed, "Boss, ye bairn were born a colt!" For Red Magruder everything was measured in horse terms.

"That's his name!" Owen exclaimed. "We'll call him Colt!"

"Aye, Colter is a fine Irish name," Trevor agreed.

As if he knew he was being discussed and named, Colter suddenly stopped crying. He looked up at the blur that was holding him and stretched in the new unconstrained freedom. He let out a yawn and his little arms swung aimlessly.

Owen's heart melted when his new son looked at him and yawned. "I'll be, Colter likes his name."

"Do ye think Mrs. Woulfe would be approving of ye naming the bairn?" Red Magruder asked taking the little hand in his large rough one.

Owen's worried eyes glanced to Winter Sun who responded immediately, "Pink Dawn is well. The birth, despite the size of your son, was relatively easy. She wants to see you, but wants to get cleaned up first."

Becky came to the top of the stairs and seeing the men gathered around Owen announced, "If you wish to see your wife, Owen Woulfe, please come upstairs."

Owen mounted the steps two at a time still holding the precious bundle in his arms.

Winter Sun moved to Trevor and the knowing smiles they exchanged reflected the happiness they shared.

Trevor's embraced his wife with one arm and placed his other hand on Rory's shoulder instructing, "let your Pa see your mother first. Give them a few minutes alone."

Rory nodded in understanding.

Harriet picked up all the linens and mat instructing Rachel to pick up the covered basket to give to Winter Sun. Becky held the door open for the women and then quietly closed the door behind her so Owen and Reilly would have some privacy.

"Our son is beautiful Mrs. Woulfe. Thank you," Owen said lovingly sitting on the side of the bed. Reilly never looked more beautiful to him. Her hair was long black and shining against the bright white linen of the pillows. "He'll grow up to be a handsome lad like his Momma is beautiful. He looks like you."

"He has my hair but his body is pure Woulfe. Did you see his hands? His feet?" Reilly laughed playfully. "He's your son for certain."

"How are you feeling?" Owen suddenly remarked worriedly. "He's so big."

Reilly placed her hands on Owen's jaw and shook it gently, "I'm wonderful. I've never felt so wonderful. If I wasn't so tired from being awake all night I'd probably jump out of this bed and scrub the cooking floor."

"You are incredible, Duchess," Owen laughed. "I love you more and more every day. You will not however, jump out of this bed for several days. That is an order!"

"Shoshone women go right to work after childbirth," Reilly lied.

"They do not!" Owen corrected. "And you know it. They are separated for a month. It is the time for their body to heal and bond with the child. Don't even try to tell me Winter Sun hasn't told you."

"I can't fool you," Reilly giggled. "Are you happy? Are you happy with another son?"

"Duchess, if I were any happier there would be two of me," Owen replied. "You know how the Shoshone let a medicine man name a child or they give a name to a child because of a vision?"

"Yes," Reilly said suspiciously.

"Well, Red kind of named our son," Owen informed reluctantly.

"He did? What name has our son been branded with? Please enlighten me," Reilly said cocking an eyebrow and taking the precious bundle from Owen's arms into her own.

"Colter, Colter Woulfe," Owen announced. "Red said he was born as big as a colt."

"Colter is a fine Irish name," Reilly agreed opening the quilt and staring lovingly at her sleeping son.

"There is another name I'd like to add. I'd been thinking about it if we had a baby, boy or girl," Owen said softly while admiring his son with the loving eyes of a father.

"You never told me you were thinking about names," Reilly said lifting Colter's little fingers with her own fingers. "I felt we were both so afraid of losing our baby we never mentioned we cared if it was a boy or girl or even discuss names."

"Well I have to confess I was thinking of names and I wanted a healthy baby, that's all that mattered," Owen answered brushing his fingers along Reilly's cheek.

"What names were you thinking about that would be for a boy or girl?" Reilly questioned.

Owen swallowed, "Madison."

Tears swelled up in Reilly's eyes immediately, "Why?"

"I owe all that I have to a man I never knew," Owen declared. "I have my wife and two sons because of this good and gentle man. His life was cut short because of a ridiculous and foolish war, but I gained you. He would never live to have a child and I think it is my thank you and tribute to him from a grateful husband and father."

"Oh Owen," Reilly sobbed. "You are a wonderful husband."

"Then we'll name our son, Colter Madison Woulfe," Owen proclaimed.

Reilly nodded and patted the quilt surrounding her son repeating, "Colter Madison Woulfe."

Rory burst in the room, "Can I hold my brother?"

Reilly patted the bed, "Come sit by me."

When Rory settled on the bed, Reilly gently lifted Colt, as he would be nicknamed, and placed him in Rory's arms.

Trevor and his Rose walked in the room beaming proudly.

"How are you feeling baby girl?" Trevor asked moving closer to the bed. "Thank you for a fine healthy grandson."

"I'm feeling wonderful, father," Reilly smiled. "Mother told me Colt decided to do most of the work."

"Ah, so you agreed on the name Colter?" Trevor grinned.

"It's a fine Irish name," Reilly laughed. She felt nothing but joy, happiness, and exhilaration after giving birth. It was wonderful.

"Aye, that it is," Trevor snorted. "When this storm ends I'll send a telegram from Franklin to let Garvey know he has another grandson."

After nearly everyone on the estate had come in to congratulate Reilly and Owen. Reilly admitted she was starting to tire. "You realize, Owen, Colt was born on the first anniversary of baby girl's death?"

"That makes him very special, don't you agree?" Owen replied lovingly. "A day of joy and a day of sorrow. I guess that kind of describes life in general."

"Tomorrow will you tell baby girl we thank her for her brother?" Reilly asked barely able to keep her eyes open.

“I promise,” Owen vowed.

Reilly closed her eyes with Colt in her arms. Owen laid on top the covers. They slept peacefully until Colt let out a wail that shook the room. He was hungry. Owen jumped up and chortled, “And so it begins, Duchess.”

Chapter Thirty

Colter was secured comfortably in his elaborately decorated cradleboard and was able to watch his mother and father decorate the Woulfe family Christmas tree. Next to Colter was Misery, who had decided he was Colter's personal bodyguard. Since Colter was born, whenever Misery was in the house you would find him next to or near Colter.

"Duchess, will you stop?" Owen grouched.

"Stop what?" Reilly answered stretching to string a cranberry garland over a large branch near the bottom of the 10-foot tall pine.

"You are here to supervise, not participate," Owen replied coming down the ladder. "You just had a baby less than a week ago. You shouldn't be exerting yourself like this."

"But I feel fine," Reilly protested hanging on to the cranberry garland Owen was attempting to take away.

"Let go of it, daughter," Winter Sun ordered. "Owen is right, and don't even try to argue with me. You may feel fine, but your body needs time to heal."

"Just sit down and supervise," Owen commanded.

Reilly plopped herself on the divan with a large pout. "The tree top star is crooked, and the popcorn garland missed an entire section of boughs, and the glass ornaments aren't balanced. You're missing four branches in the middle," Reilly began pointing out.

"You've created a monster," Trevor chuckled immediately walking over to the tree with some glass ornaments.

"At least she's a beautiful monster," Owen chuckled climbing the ladder to adjust the tree top star. "The beautiful mother of my children."

Becky was helping string popcorn garlands with Rory when she looked out the window. "Red's Home! He's back!" She leapt from the chair and ran to the door to greet her husband. A gust of icy cold fingers poked at everyone in the parlor as Becky opened the door allowing the snowstorm to enter, as well as her husband. Colter's face puckered at the cold wind gust. Misery growled a warning to the cold wind that disturbed his charge.

A well-bundled snowman entered the foyer. "I got here in time," Red breathed. "Ye ken the storm is a big one."

"I believe this will keep up until Christmas Eve," Owen remarked. "Saint Nicholas will be certain to have lots of snow this year."

"Look at you Red Magruder, your nose is red!" Becky scolded. "Take off those overcoats and get by the fire."

"I won't be arguing with ye," Red answered. "I'm frozen tae my bones."

"I'll get some hot chocolate for you," Reilly volunteered rising from the divan. "I assume I'm permitted to do that!"

"If ye don't be minding, I would be wanting a good Scotch Whiskey," Red requested.

"I'll get it for you," Trevor replied walking to Owen's study.

Winter Sun and Becky helped Red take off his winter coverings. He was shivering as he stood in front of the fire to warm up.

"Did you get everything?" Owen asked Red.

"Aye, that I did, Boss," Red shivered. "We were lucky this year. Everything had come in."

"Good," Owen said. "I'll help unload the wagons."

"Jacob is takin care o that," Red replied quickly with his teeth chattering.

"Here's your whiskey," Trevor announced handing a glass to Red.

"Och, thanking you I am," Red answered taking a swig. "Ahh, the only other good warmer is a wife."

"Comparing me to a shot of whiskey?" Becky teased.

"Och, never!" Red retracted. He put his strong arms around his wife.

"Any news at Franklin?" Owen asked while buttoning his overcoat.

"Nae, it be quiet," Red replied taking another swig.

"We needed these strong snowstorms and icy winds to cool down some hot heads," Owen said quietly. "This will be my best ever Christmas and New Year."

"Need me to come and help too?" Trevor asked.

"No, thank you. You can stay and finish up decorating the tree," Owen answered walking out the door. "Be certain to fill up those holes on the four branches." Owen smiled at Trevor and winked. He buttoned his coat, wrapped his neck with a woolen muffler Reilly had knitted for him, put on his hat, and after putting his gloves on opened up the door to help Jacob.

This time the cold draft upset Colter. He began crying. Misery barked at the unseen cold disturber of his baby.

Reilly took Colter out of the cradleboard. He started cooing. "There little man, you just wanted Momma to hold you. Didn't you?"

Colter nuzzled into Reilly's breast attempting to eat through the cloth.

"Are you hungry?" Reilly chuckled. "You will excuse us. Colter is hungry and I think he needs to take a nap."

Winter Sun cuddled into Trevor's arms watching her daughter and grandson leave the room. "This is a wonderful holiday, this Christmas of yours. I believe this will be the happiest one yet."

"It will be my happiest Christmas. I have you, Reilly, Owen, Rory, and now little Colter," Trevor beamed.

"Will you come with me to the Warm Dance this year?" Winter Sun asked.

"Rose, you'll never be farther away from me than two feet ever again," Trevor replied. "We'll celebrate the Warm Dance together."

"I truly love you, husband," Winter Sun said happily.

"Don't you ever forget that, Rose," Trevor reminded lovingly. "We'll never part again. Never!"

"I have been so foolish," Winter Sun admitted. "I will never be so foolish again."

Their kiss sealed the promise.

"Let me give you a hand," Owen shouted to Jacob in the strong wind.

"I got six big boxes still on the wagon to unload," Jacob shouted back. "This is going to be a grand Christmas. Everything has come including the pretty doll for Freedom and the pretty new calico frock for my Rachel."

"This is a powerful storm," Owen muttered to himself while he unloaded a large box taking it into the machine and tool shed that Rachel and Jacob resided over. "It's more cold wind than snow."

After unloading the wagon Owen set about opening all the boxes until he found the package he was looking for. "It came!" he announced happily. Quickly he unwrapped the brown paper revealing a wooden box. Owen opened the small wooden crate and inside was a ornately carved woman's jewelry box.

"That your present for Missus?" Jacob asked.

"One of them," Owen shared. "And inside of it is this diamond wedding band for Duchess and a gold band for me. When we were married we used her first husband's wedding ring and mine from Meredith. This is our wedding band. She is mine forever. Duchess is my joy and happiness. Duchess is my wife. I asked Pa to have it made and sent back before Christmas."

"Lawsy we sho do have a lot to thank the Lord for this Christmas," Jacob grinned widely.

"We sho do!" Owen agreed. "I think if I were any happier it would be sinful."

Reilly finished feeding her greedy little baby. Colter was sound asleep after his mother had fed and rocked him. Gently she placed her son in his cradle. Misery took his guard position next to the cradle. "I can

count on you to make certain nothing happens to our precious, Colter. Good boy,” Reilly praised and petted Misery.

He wagged his tail and barked in agreement softly, “Woof.”

Reilly went to her chest and pulled out a large sack. She then pulled out several books and special calico material and ribbons. “You watch Colter for me, Misery. This is my only chance to wrap my presents,” Reilly whispered to Misery. “Owen is more protective over me than a mother hen.” Reilly laughed quietly, “But, if truth be known, I really love that about him.”

Misery agreed, “Woof.”

“Tomorrow is Christmas Eve,” Reilly sighed happily into Owen’s strong arms when he stretched out in the bed.

“The best Christmas Eve I’m going to have since I was ten years old and Pa bought me my first pony,” Owen answered gaily pulling Reilly closer. “Duchess, you are the best thing that has ever happened to me. I love you with all that I am.”

“Blessed Christmas to you,” Reilly choked with happiness. “You are the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me.”

“Next to Rory and Colter,” both Owen and Reilly said in unison. They laughed happily and kissed each other with emotions beyond passion. It was a kiss of devotion.

“Do you hear the wind?” Reilly asked snuggling into Owen.

“It’s a cold wind,” Owen replied kissing Reilly’s hair. “Better stay close to me all night so I can keep you warm.”

“Do you think Colter is warm enough?” Reilly questioned worriedly.

“I just added a big log to the fire and his cradle is near the fireplace,” Owen reassured. “Our son should be warm enough.”

“I like that word,” Reilly giggled. “Our son. When I first met you, I had no hope of ever having my own baby. You’ve given me so much.”

“You’ve given me more,” Owen replied softly. “We’ll have even more babies. I promise.”

“Would it be wrong to want a little girl next?” Reilly queried barely audibly.

“We’ll work on that in a year or two,” Owen responded tenderly. “I think Rory, Colter, and baby girl would want a sister.”

“Owen?”

“Yes, Duchess?”

“I think you are wonderful!” Reilly admired. “How I was so fortunate to get you, Rory, Colter and even now my mother and father are together. It’s almost to wonderful to be real.”

“You’ve been through a lot and deserve all the happiness you can grab,” Owen remarked lovingly.

“And so do you,” Reilly retorted.

"I'm enjoying every moment, Duchess," Owen replied. "There is enough sorrow in this world."

"Owen?"

"Yes, Duchess?"

"Rachel told me about a Major McGarry and four Shoshone men by the ferry. Is it true? Did he butcher them?" Reilly asked. "Please tell me the truth."

"You women weren't supposed to hear about that," Owen answered suddenly becoming rigid and his voice terse. "Did Jacob tell Rachel?"

"No, she overheard Jacob and Red talking about it," Reilly clarified. "Tell me what happened."

"Duchess, this is Christmas. I don't want to spoil our happiness with stories of a drunken madman!" Owen exclaimed. "The snows came late this year and right now all I can do is hope that the snows will be heavy enough to keep everyone apart."

"So it is true," Reilly sighed collapsing into the mattress. "I can't believe the service that Philip Madison belonged too allows such animals officer bars."

"It isn't the U.S. Army, Duchess," Owen explained. "It's the militia. It's not the same. Anytime you have undisciplined and ill managed militia, you have trouble."

"Then how can they just kill innocent men?"

"A lot of people like the militia see the Shoshone as animals," Owen said sadly. "They don't understand the natural ways, the gentleness, the serenity of the Shoshone. What they don't understand they fear. What they fear they destroy. They certainly cannot see that it is they who are the animals."

"Or destroy what they envy," Reilly added. "I can see where these miserable unhappy people envy the love and happiness of the Shoshone family. They are jealous of the deep spiritual balance and contentment of the Shoshone."

"I think you may have a very good point there," Owen agreed. "We can hope we have a quiet and calm winter. Go to sleep, Duchess. Colt is going to wake up in a few hours and demand to eat."

"Yes sir!"

Christmas morning arrived and an excited Rory jumped on his father who was still sleeping. "Wake up! Wake up! It's Christmas!" Rory shouted.

Misery growled at the din.

Colter woke up to the clamor and decided he was wet and hungry.

"Okay, Okay!" Owen chuckled. "Want me to get Colt for you, Duchess?"

“Yes, please,” Reilly yawned. “I’m so tired. Colt was up twice last night.”

Owen crawled out of bed and picked up his baby boy. “Oh, he’s wet!” Owen stated. “Rory, since you woke up your brother, you are going to help change him. Get a new nappy and soaker.”

“But it’s Christmas!” Rory complained.

“Next Christmas remember to wake us up quietly,” Owen chided. “Go get the nappy and soaker.”

Grudgingly Rory walked to the small armoire and pulled out the requested articles. He trekked back to his father and watched as Owen removed the offending soaker and after removing the nappy cleaned Colt’s bottom with a dampened cloth. Colt protested the cold wiping.

Owen bundled Colt in a fresh warm woolen blanket and carried him over to Reilly who was asleep. Owen chuckled as he placed Colt next to his mother and gently woke Reilly up. It was a difficult challenge. Reilly was sound asleep. Once Colt was eating Owen took Rory downstairs to look at the Christmas tree. To Owen’s surprise there was a lot more presents under the Christmas tree. He knew Reilly had been busy last night between Colter’s feedings.

“Wow! Oh Boy!” Rory shouted with glee burrowing into the presents.

“Hold on partner!” Owen ordered. “We have to wait for Colter, your Momma and Grandparents.”

“Aw gee!” Rory complained. “I’ll go get Grandfather Trevor and Grandmother Rose.”

“You needn’t worry about that,” Trevor announced cheerfully. “You made enough racket to wake the dead!”

“Where’s Pink Dawn?” Winter Sun asked securely wrapping her robe in the cool room.

“Upstairs feeding Colter,” Owen answered putting two large logs on the dying fire embers. “It seems my over excited Rory woke up his baby brother Colter. His punishment is waiting to open his presents.”

“I’ll fix us some nice hot cider while we wait,” Winter Sun volunteered. “It sure is a cold morning.”

“I’ll come help you,” Trevor said following his Rose. “The way Colt eats, it may be awhile before our Reilly can come downstairs.”

“Can I open just one present, please?” Rory pleaded. “Pretty please.”

“Just one,” Owen conceded. He understood the excitement of Christmas morning for an eight-year-old boy. Rory was smarter than most his age, but he was still a boy at Christmas morning.

It was a difficult choice with so many packages beckoning him to open them. He chose one and it was from his grandfather Garvey. Paper flew everywhere. “Wow, look father! It’s a steam locomotive!”

“It’s great!” Owen admired looking at the train. He already knew that his father had sent a complete train set to his grandson. It had been

planned for sometime and Owen had crafted some miniature houses, trees, and a miniature canyon for the tracks and trestles with Jacob's help. Owen loved building even in miniature. After all the presents were opened, Owen planned on taking Rory to the joining hall where he and Jacob had placed the miniature canyon.

Several minutes later Trevor and Winter Sun brought hot apple cider and sugar cookies Reilly had baked the day before with Rachel's help.

Owen and Rory quickly devoured several cookies when Misery appeared in the parlor.

Trevor laughed, "There's Misery, Colt is near."

Reilly walked into the room carrying a quietly sleeping baby. "I'm afraid Colter decided to sleep through his first Christmas morning."

"Can I open his presents?" Rory asked quickly and with exuberance.

"Of course you can," Reilly laughed.

Rory opened all his presents first. He received a small rifle from his father, buckskin shirt and moccasins from Grandmother Rose, a complete train set from Grandfather Garvey, new boots and hat from Grandfather Trevor, and best of all four books from his mother.

"Don't you think those books are a little old for the boy," Trevor whispered to Reilly while watching Rory eagerly page through a medical anatomy book. He looked at two others that were for diagnosis and treatment of disease with herbals and new medicines.

"Of course they are now! Not for long," Reilly whispered back. "You forget I am also his teacher. Rory's reading and thinking are way ahead of other boys his age. I want to continually challenge his mind so he wants to keep learning. He'll need to ask me what some words mean and look them up in the dictionary I bought him. He'll grow! We mustn't limit learning by age."

Payton Lee

Ω

Chapter Thirty One

"I take it you like my Christmas present?" Owen chuckled observing his wife admiring the diamond ring she received from him Christmas morning almost a month ago. He had walked into the cooking room checking on his breakfast when he found Reilly staring at her new diamond wedding band.

"I love it. It sparkles in the sunlight with all the lovely rainbows I feel in my heart," Reilly sighed happily. "Please come with us to the Warm Dance."

"I'd like nothing better, Duchess," Owen replied taking his wife in his strong arms. "Unfortunately half of the ranch hands are down with a cold including Red, and he's my number one man since Jonah left to work for the Mormons."

"We'll really miss you," Reilly said snuggling into Owen's powerful chest.

"I wouldn't even let you go if it weren't for the fact Winter Sun, Trevor, Rory, Colter, and Misery were going with you," Owen said firmly while pressing his strength around Reilly's delicate frame. "I'm going to be a very lonely man for a few weeks."

"And I a very lonely woman," Reilly agreed. "Still, I want to celebrate mother's holiday with the people. It's time I learn more about my heritage. It will give Rory and Colter an understanding of their proud heritage."

"I'd say that Colter is too young to understand," Owen teased raising his hands in defense, "but, you already set us straight on not limiting learning by age restrictions."

"Don't you forget it either," Reilly laughed. "It works for old age also. You're never too old to learn."

"Are you calling me old?" Owen asked warily.

"Of course not," Reilly answered seeking her husband's arms once more. "I was talking about me learning about the Shoshone." She held up her hand once more in the sunlight's rays.

"Are you looking at your ring again?" Owen chuckled.

"Yes, how did you know?"

"I see your rainbows twinkling."

"Pretty," Winter Sun said announcing her arrival with the notation of the rainbows reflected on the wall. "Are you all packed for the trip yet?"

"Yes mother," Reilly replied. "We are ready to go with you and father tomorrow morning."

"Only one more night left with a warm bed," Owen grouched. "I really don't know how I'll get along without you for the next two weeks."

"This is the last week of the Warm Dance," Winter Sun explained. "I've always been there. I waited this time to bring my daughter and grandsons. I believe Pink Dawn is strong enough now. We won't be gone that long. At least not as long as I usually am."

"Even a day is too long, Winter Sun," Owen grumped. "Yet I understand the need to go. I am unhappy because I cannot go with you."

"We'll all go together next year," Reilly volunteered hugging Owen. "Does it make you feel better knowing that I'll miss you?"

"Only a little, Duchess. Only a little," Owen replied bending down to apply a loving kiss.

The next morning, dressed warmly for the bitter cold weather, the Woulfe party set out for the winter grounds of Chief Bear Hunter's camp.

Owen watched the troupe fade into the western horizon. "Are you a bachelor again, boss?" Jacob chided.

"Yeah," Owen replied. "I don't like it one bit."

"I sho don't want to be no bachelor no mo," Jacob agreed. "My Rachel takes real good care of me and our little gal, Freedom."

"Let's get to work on that broken sled," Owen ordered. "The sooner I get to work. The sooner time will go by and my Duchess will be with me again."

Chief Bear Hunter greeted Winter Sun. "We were thinking you would miss the Warm Dance."

His four children as well as other children from the camp surrounded Bear Hunter. He had been telling the children stories of the Shoshone people.

"Our daughter needed time to recover," Winter Sun explained. "This is my husband, Trevor Stewart. Do you remember him?"

"The Red Fox?" Bear Hunter laughed. "Of course I do. We are happy to have you back on the land of the people."

"Everyone seems to be in a good mood," Trevor observed. "The Warm Dance is going well?"

"It is good, we have good food to celebrate," Bear Hunter remarked to Winter Sun. "Big Beaver's food has helped for the loss of food in the Cache Valley due to the settlers' cattle. We also had a good rabbit hunt."

The camp was filled with many Shoshone families and the celebrating was loud and festive. Many more temporary grass shelters had been raised for the visiting families of Bear Hunter's, Sagwitch's, and Lehi's camp on Beaver Creek.

"We have a lodge prepared for you, Red Fox," Bear Hunter informed. "Winter Sun, Pink Dawn, Morning Medicine, and Colt will be comfortable there with you. It is a large lodge for the sister of Washakie."

"You do us honor, Chief Bear Hunter," Trevor accepted graciously. "This will be the first time Pink Dawn will remember living in a Shoshone lodge."

"This dog that is near your Pink Dawn, is not that the dog of Big Beaver?" Bear Hunter noted.

"Yes, it did belong to Owen Woulfe. The animal just decided he belongs to Colt," Winter Sun replied following Bear Hunter as he led the family to their lodge.

Bear Hunter bent down to open the flap.

Winter Sun prodded Reilly to enter first. She helped Reilly remove Colter's cradleboard and then handed him to her when she was in the lodge.

"Oh my, this is so beautiful," Reilly commented on the paintings adorning the lodge's skin walls. On holders were several parfleches beautifully decorated. She noticed a tripod in the center of the lodge with an iron pot hanging over a small fire. The soup smelled wonderful. The lodge had several blankets on the ground and the lodge felt warm and cozy.

"My sisters have made us pine nut gravy," Winter Sun announced. "We will enjoy this Warm Dance and lodge. "Are you comfortable, Pink Dawn?"

"Absolutely," Reilly answered. "It feels so warm and cozy."

"There is firewood in the corner," Trevor noticed. "They have given us everything we will need for our visit."

"We even have hot water we can use from the springs by the bluffs," Winter Sun explained. "This is a good location. We are close to those springs."

"That pine nut gravy smells delicious," Reilly said inhaling deeply. "Is anyone else hungry?"

"Starved!" Trevor declared and proceeded to pull out the carved wooden bowls that had been left for them. "No spoons, baby girl."

"I know, mother explained everything to me," Reilly replied grinning.

At that moment three Shoshone women entered the lodge. They carried large leaves holding flat breads, pots with beans, and pieces of freshly cooked buffalo.

"Thorne Bush, Ground Squirrel, Cricket Legs!" Winter Sun greeted. "Where is Dadabaychee?"

"She is in the separate lodge caring for her newborn daughter, Naymee." Ground Squirrel answered as she placed the breads on a blanket near Trevor.

"Sagwitch must be proud. He lost his first wife Hewechee, only last year. This is happiness for him," Winter Sun said taking the buffalo meat and putting it upon metal plates. "Where are his sons?"

"The younger sons of Chief Sagwitch are playing in the willow dugouts they have built with the other children," Ground Squirrel replied. "The children play happily with full bellies this Warm Dance in their dugouts on the river bank."

"I remember as a child father let me build snow forts with the other children," Reilly reminisced. "It was ever so much fun. Rory, would you like to join the other children in their river dugouts?"

"Can I?" Rory asked hesitantly of Ground Squirrel.

"Eat your food first. Have a full belly, then you go and play with the other full bellies of happy children," Ground Squirrel chuckled. She then joined Thorne Bush and Cricket Legs serve the bread and beans to their hungry guests.

Rory ate his food quickly and left to play with the other children.

"Your Rory may be ahead of the other children educationally, but he is still a boy," Trevor suggested to his daughter.

"That is the way it should be for a healthy child," Reilly agreed finishing her delicious food knowing Colter would wake soon for his supper. "May we visit Dadabaychee? I would love to see her little girl. When was she born?"

"Naymee was born twenty nine sunrises before," Cricket Legs answered sitting next to Colter.

Misery growled a soft warning.

"This dog dwelling in your lodge protects your child I see," Cricket Legs said carefully shifting back a little from Colter.

"Bad dog!" Reilly reprimanded. "The people who enter here as our friends are allowed to touch Colter."

Misery laid down his head with a quiet, "Woof."

Cricket Legs then started removing the cords tying Colter in his fur lined cradleboard. Gently she picked up the sleeping baby. "Your son is big! When was he born?"

"Twenty nine sunrises before," Winter Sun calculated. "He is the same as Naymee."

"This boy may have been born on the same sunrise, but he is not the same as Naymee. He is twice the size of Naymee," Cricket Legs laughed cuddling Colter. "Dadabaychee should see what babies this Big Beaver makes."

"Perhaps she will divorce Sagwitch to have a child of Big Beaver," Ground Squirrel teased.

"I think not," Thorne Bush enjoined. "Chief Sagwitch is very happy with his first and only daughter. He takes good care of his wife and family. He even buried his Hewechee with her poto. His love is strong and good."

"As it is with all your chiefs," Winter Sun added. "Bear Hunter cares for his sons and daughter with the same love of which you speak. He keeps only one wife and treats her with honor."

"And you know of the honor Washakie gives to his family, including his sisters," Trevor teased. "I'll never forget the bridal dowry I had to pay for you."

"A price well spent, husband," Winter Sun shot back in humor. "Chief Washakie spreads his seeds like a rabbit. He is not so particular about his wives."

"Now Rose honey, that has only been since his Crimson Dawn died in childbirth," Trevor defended.

"All the more reason he should treasure only one wife," Winter Sun said stubbornly. "I do not like men taking many wives. It reminds too much of the Mormons."

"A good man should know he can handle only one woman well," Trevor offered. "I certainly know my limits. You are more than enough woman for this man."

"It is good that you know this wisdom, husband," Winter Sun responded shaking her fist playfully.

"I think it is time I go join the warriors," Trevor trembled in the same good humor. "It is safer to be with warriors than women banding together." He rose and left the lodge.

"You have a good husband," Ground Squirrel commented.

"I know," Winter Sun smiled thoughtfully. "I love him with all my spirit."

"What of your man?" Thorne Bush asked Reilly.

"My husband treats me as any great queen of the world," Reilly replied thoughtfully. "Owen is good, kind, strong, handsome, wise,"

"Why did he not join you at our Warm Dance if he is so great as you say?" Cricket Legs asked Reilly while she rocked Colter gently.

Although Misery did not growl, he crept closer to Colter and watched carefully. He did not know this woman.

"It is because he is good and kind," Reilly excused. "He could not leave the ranch in disrepair while most of the help were ill with colds."

"Big Beaver must repair sleds to send more food to the people," Winter Sun defended. "There are repairs to be done to the lodges of his workers. He will not suffer any one to go cold or have troubles."

"I think I should divorce Bent Foot," Thorne Bush laughed. "I should seek out this wonder warrior named Big Beaver."

"You would do battle with me first," Reilly teased in the good humor of the atmosphere in the lodge. "Big Beaver is worth fighting for."

"I fear you would do me great harm," Thorne Bush giggled. "I shall stay married to Bent Foot."

The women continued their good-natured bantering and teasing with each other for several hours. Colter woke and Reilly fed him amidst the good humor surrounding her. All noted how Misery remained close to Colter regardless of who held him.

At dusk the women left the lodge.

"We will take you to Dadabaychee and Naymee tomorrow," Ground Squirrel promised.

"Now we must return to our lodges and warm the beds of our husbands," Thorne Bush laughed. "Do not be too sad Pink Dawn. You have your new son and Morning Medicine to share the warmth of your bed. It is such a shame your Big Beaver could not come."

"Stop it!" Ground Squirrel chided. "You will have Pink Dawn dislike us. Enough teasing."

Thorne Bush looked forlornly to Reilly. "Are you angry with me?"

"Of course not," Reilly chuckled. "Go warm your bed for Bent Foot. My Big Beaver gives enough warmth in one night to equal seven sunrises of your Bent Foot."

"Ho! Ho!" Thorne Bush laughed. "I must tell my husband of this wonder warrior. Perhaps he will try harder to please me."

"You can only hope," Reilly smiled gleefully. She had enjoyed these hours with the Shoshone women. After they had left she spoke to Winter Sun, "Mother, I really like it here. I can hardly wait to see Dadabaychee and Naymee."

"You make my spirit sing, daughter," Winter Sun replied and took Reilly and Colter in her embrace. "Come, let us prepare our beds."

"We should add some more logs to the fire," Reilly noticed. "We'll need it to stay warm."

"I'll do that," Trevor answered walking into the lodge. "I had to drag Rory away from his friends. He wanted to stay even longer, but fortunately all the boys were called home by their parents."

Soon the family settled in for a sound and contented sleep.

Back at Bear Lake Owen tossed and turned. He missed the warm soft body of Reilly Woulfe next to him. Rolling on his back he complained, "This is going to be a long two weeks."

Chapter Thirty Two

"It is good to see you old friend," Trevor addressed Chief Bear Hunter.

"You are welcome in my camp always, Red Fox," Bear Hunter acknowledged sitting next to Trevor and sharing their lunch. "I am sad that you and Winter Sun could not join us sooner. You only enjoyed but a few days of the Warm Dance."

"I came to visit with you my friend," Trevor replied. "I have heard so many stories and so many things I wanted to council with you. That could not be done with so many here and during the Warm Dance."

"What have you heard that you come with Winter Sun just to speak with me?" Bear Hunter chuckled. "You have not been with your wife since I was but a young brave. I think it is more to the truth that you would not leave your woman alone. Afraid she will leave you again?"

"All you say is the truth, but I did want to talk to you about these things I have heard," Trevor admitted.

"What are these things you hear?" Bear Hunter asked his good friend. "I have always spoken the truth to you since you became my spirit father when you saved my life."

"I'm counting on that," Trevor sighed heavily. "Is it true that you are heard saying you are going to kill the white men?"

"No," Bear Hunter denied. "I have never said such a thing. It would be unwise of a Chief to speak so loosely. You know this."

"I wanted to hear it from you," Trevor shared. "Have you been taking cattle from the white settlers?"

"I take nothing. You know this also, speak to me what is in your heart," Bear Hunter advised solemnly.

"I heard that four young warriors were horribly killed because your people took cattle and you ignored the Major's orders to return the stolen cattle," Trevor told the chief and his friend.

"I could not return what was not taken and what we did not have."

"Why didn't you let Big Beaver know? He would have given you cattle to give to the Major. Your warriors died horrible deaths."

"They died as proud warriors. It is the way I will choose to die. They did not cry like women or children."

"They are still dead!" Trevor exclaimed angrily. "I don't want people like McGarry or Connors to have reasons to slaughter you."

"These men invent their own reasons. There is nothing we can say or do to stop their taste for Shoshone blood. These men do not understand us, so they fear us. Since they fear us, they want to kill all of us."

"And so you let them?" Trevor growled.

"If I attacked this Major to save the life of my four warriors, I would have risked the lives of all in my camp," Bear Hunter returned heatedly. "Is this what you would have had me do?"

"Of course not," Trevor retorted. "You are a wise and good chief to your people. What do you plan to do about this militia that has come?"

"My friend, I am at a loss to answer you," Bear Hunter admitted sadly. "I am not certain what to do for my people. My heart is torn so many ways."

"Talk to me Bear Hunter. What is in your heart?"

"Sagwitch encourages me to become friends with the Mormons. Washakie counsels to become friends with the Great White Father in Washington. Washakie says he is stronger and greater than the man Brigham. Pocatello tells me to fight all the white men."

"This doesn't tell me what you are going to do," Trevor urged.

"You see my friend, my heart feels all three of these things. The Mormons are here and some are good and feed my people, but they take the land with no thought of Mother Earth. The settlers' cattle trample our food and we must beg from them to feed our children. Washakie is right in knowing the Great White Father who lives where the sun rises is more powerful than the Mormons, but they live here. I am angered that my warriors are treated poorly and killed. I sometimes want revenge for their blood like Pocatello, but as chief of my gentle people I cannot lead my warriors in battle and make so many widows and orphans," Bear Hunter explained. "So you see my friend, Red Fox, my heart is pulled in different ways. I wish to camp in peace this winter and make the decision on what is right to do. This winter I will pray to Tam Apo and ask what I must do for the sake of my people."

"Will your warriors listen to you and remain peacefully in the camp this winter?" Trevor asked.

"It is not my warriors that steal or kill any white men. The warriors of Pocatello cause some of this trouble. There are also less peaceful Bannock and Goishute that plunder and kill," Bear Hunter told Trevor. "None of this is caused by my people, yet this man Connor and McGarry pursue us savagely."

"Unfortunately you and your people are convenient targets, and easy prey," Trevor warned prophetically. "Promise me that if another incident like the cattle theft occur you will seek me out."

"I have seen the eyes of this McGarry, Red Fox. He is a crazy man. The fire water has destroyed his mind," Bear Hunter enlightened. "If there is time, I will ask Big Beaver or you, my friend, for help."

“Our men are weak from hunger and worry for their families,” Sagwitch added entering Bear Hunter’s lodge. “This is why I tell you to become friends with the Mormon people.”

“Washakie says not to trust the Mormon people. He says trust the blue coated people,” Bear Hunter responded. “I trust neither. I wish only to live in peace and have food for my family and people. I want the white people to stop trampling our food and fencing our land. I want them gone.”

“Just how are you going to make them go away?” Sagwitch taunted. “Washakie did not make them go away. He went away to the protected mountains of the winds. He keeps his people away from the white people and makes war on the Crow. He does not make the white people leave. I tell you my brother, you must make peace with the Mormons and get their protection.”

Bear Hunter laughed, “This is why you have become chief. You speak to the heart and make people believe what you say is true.”

“You don’t believe this to be true?” Sagwitch asked seriously. He took the offered bowl of pine nut gravy from Beawoachee, Bear Hunter’s wife.

“I am chief also,” Bear Hunter smiled tugging the skirt of his beloved wife’s skirt playfully. “I have not decided yet what is true.”

“The settlers will not stop coming, Bear Hunter,” Trevor found himself saying. “When this war is over there will be more coming to your land. They will bring back the soldiers to push you off your land. They found the yellow rock near here. More and more will come to rape your land.”

“What do you think I should do?” Bear Hunter asked furrowing his brow. “Everyone seems to have ideas as to the fate of my camp. Do I fight with Pocatello? Do I run away and hide like Washakie? Do I lay down like a woman for the Mormon?”

“It is too late for all the people. Instead of continuing to fight each other, you should have united as one and sent the whites back permanently. Instead you chose to continue your individual camp style and the white men have successfully divided all of you and will continue to do so to keep you weak,” Trevor replied prophetically. “As long as you remain divided you are dependent upon the Union.”

“What are you saying?” Chief Bear Hunter demanded. “We should have destroyed all of you when you first came here? You should not be my friend?”

“Friendship is individual and based on equality. Power is based on unified money and force used for domination,” Trevor answered. “I must tell you I believe Washakie is doing it the right way. He is friendly toward the Union but keeps his people away from everyone. He has already claimed his territory and it is respected. At least they will respect it for awhile.”

“I will think about this,” Bear Hunter said thoughtfully. “I know I must make a decision soon. That crazy man hung my four warriors and

riddled them with bullets. Someday the white men will pay for the atrocities they have committed on us. I will decide.”

“It must be soon,” Beawoachee whispered. “The crazy man pursues us.”

“Do not worry,” Bear Hunter chided. “Painted Nose and Running Tongue only reported of soldiers walking toward us.”

“They carry the big noise gun,” Beawoachee reminded as she sat next to her husband. “I worry for you. The crazy man pursues you as a cougar pursues its prey.”

“You worry too much,” Bear Hunter assuaged stroking Beawoachee’s arm gently.

“My Reilly told me it is the woman’s job to worry,” Trevor chuckled sipping his pine gravy. “She also told me women do it well.”

“Tell me stories of your absence my friend,” Bear Hunter urged Trevor to change the subject.

“Yes, we are most interested in this time you have spent in the big cities of the East with your daughter,” Sagwitch agreed.

“Let me hold Naymee,” Reilly requested of Dadabaychee after she had nursed her daughter. “Sagwitch must be pleased to have you back in his lodge.”

“He is more pleased to have a little daughter,” Dadabaychee commented. “All of his children have been sons. He wanted a daughter very much.”

“Does he hold her?” Winter Sun asked while she made a special wind catcher for the baby to watch.

“Yes, he holds her carefully and talks to her, telling her how beautiful she is,” Dadabaychee bragged. “At night he rocks her cradleboard in his legs until she falls asleep. He loves little Naymee very much. My husband is a good and loving father.”

“Does little Beshup like his new sister?” Reilly queried while she touched Naymee’s little nose.”

“He was confused being only eight seasons old, but soon he tried to play with Naymee. Hinnah and Pato are taking more care of Beshup now,” Dadabaychee told Reilly. “Soquitch and Yeager no longer spend time with Hinnah and Pato. They are in training to be a great warrior and chief as their father.”

“You are so proud of your husband,” Winter Sun noted.

“Sagwitch is a good husband and wise chief,” Dadabaychee concurred. “I have great reason to be proud of him.”

Colter began crying. Reilly gave Naymee back to her mother and fed her hungry son.

“Your man is known to be good and wise,” Dadabaychee said as she rocked Naymee to sleep. “Is he happy with his new son?”

“Big Beaver is delighted with his new son,” Reilly replied smiling as her son nursed greedily.

Misery crept closer to her side.

Ground Squirrel entered the lodge and brought her daughter Early Spring to visit. She handed a gift to Dadabaychee. It was a miniature lodge exquisitely decorated and perfect in detail. “Early Spring has outgrown her toy lodge and decided to give it to Naymee,” Ground Squirrel explained. “Early Spring has a new playhouse lodge she has made herself.”

“How proud of her you must be,” Dadabaychee praised. “Thank you for the gift. I am certain Naymee will love this toy.”

“You are welcome,” Ground Squirrel accepted. “Where are Morning Medicine, Hinnah, Pato, and Beshup?”

“They are playing in the willow lodge pits they have dug,” Dadabaychee answered. “This is such a wonderful time for all of us. A time to be together and play.”

“No wonder my son Flying Arms wished to go there and play,” Ground Squirrel laughed. “He tells me he likes Morning Medicine very much.”

“Rory is having a wonderful time and is enjoying his new friends,” Reilly enjoined. She placed her sleeping son back into his cradleboard.

Misery took his position of guard next to Colter.

“That wolf dog seems to think Colter belongs to him,” Dadabaychee noted.

“Misery does think Colter belongs to him,” Reilly answered. “I am actually glad Misery is so protective. I would almost dare anyone to try to hurt him.”

“It is good until you must discipline him,” Winter Sun joked.

They all laughed until Ground Squirrel shared her news.

“I have heard the militia is coming here,” Ground Squirrel shared. “Two of our men have seen them marching towards us with many wagons.”

“Are they coming here?” Dadabaychee gasped. “Perhaps we should leave.”

“The men say they are unkempt and stupid,” Ground Squirrel gossiped. “They laugh at how funny they are.”

“So there is nothing to fear,” Dadabaychee breathed in relief. “My Naymee is so young to move yet in this cold.”

“Were there any horses?” Winter Sun queried.

“No. All the men walked except for two officers,” Ground Squirrel informed.

“That is not normal for the militia,” Winter Sun mused. “Something is not right there.”

“I agree,” Reilly stated. “Especially in winter. They would only bring so many wagons carrying ammunition and food for many cavalry units.”

“What makes you say this?” Ground Squirrel asked curiously.

"My first husband was a Lieutenant in the Union Army," Reilly explained. "He would often explain maneuvers to me."

"Your first husband? He walks the ghost path?" Dadabaychee asked.

"Yes, Philip Madison died in the first battle of this war," Reilly told her. "Philip was one of the best that graduated from West Point Academy."

"Here women die sooner than the men," Ground Squirrel noted. "Even though the men are warriors and battle, more women die."

"I still remember when my brother, Washakie was asked to give our women to the Mormons as wives," Winter Sun chuckled. "He told them he did not have enough women for the white men, but if the white men would give their daughters to his warriors he might consider allowing a Sosoni' woman to take a white husband."

"What did the Mormon do?" Ground Squirrel questioned.

"They never brought the subject up again," Winter Sun laughed.

"Your brother has a good sense of humor," Dadabaychee commented. "Yet he allowed your man to take you."

"Ah yes, but Red Fox had to pay a very high price," Winter Sun laughed happily.

The women shared some more time talking and weaving and then returned to their lodges for the night.

Chapter Thirty Three

“Red Fox,” Winter Sun called to husband who had been standing talking to Bear Hunter.

“Excuse me,” Trevor apologized to Bear Hunter. “I’ll get ready and we’ll leave in a few minutes.”

Bear Hunter nodded his head in approval. He made his way to his pony to wait for Red Fox.

“What is it Rose?” Trevor asked of his wife. She never before interrupted a conversation.

“I wish to leave,” Winter Sun communicated uneasily.

“We will in a few days,” Trevor said.

“No husband! I wish to leave today!” Winter Sun demanded.

“What burr got in your saddle,” Trevor queried. This was not like Rose at all.

“Tindup had a vision last night,” Winter Sun said firmly and showing nervousness. “He saw this camp completely destroyed by the militia.”

“Rose honey, it was just a dream,” Trevor excused. “You’ve never left a dream frighten you before.”

“Tindup’s dream only reflects my own feeling of uneasiness,” Winter Sun told her husband. “My feelings in this are strong. I wish to leave right now.”

“I just promised Bear Hunter I would survey land north of here in the mountains to try and find a safer camp.”

“Bear Hunter may be too late,” Winter Sun protested. “I want to leave now!”

“Even the people leaving with Tindup aren’t leaving until tomorrow first light,” Trevor countered. “I promised Bear Hunter. We’ll talk about this when I get back. He’s waiting for me.”

“Pink Dawn and I will prepare to leave,” Winter Sun said obstinately. “We’ll discuss this when you get back.” Winter Sun stomped angrily away from Red Fox returning to their lodge.

Trevor shook his head. He had never known Winter Sun to be this stubborn. Perhaps they should leave if she felt that strongly about it, but he

would discuss it with her after he returned with Bear Hunter. He didn't dare tell his Rose he most likely would be gone overnight.

"We will pack," Winter Sun ordered when she entered the lodge.

"Father agreed?" Reilly questioned watching her mother retrieve the parfleches.

"He is off with Bear Hunter," Winter Sun complained. "Red Fox will do as I ask. He knows when I feel this strongly he will not argue."

"Does he believe Tindup's vision?" Reilly queried beginning to fold her treasured doeskin dress that was a gift from Chief Washakie.

"It does not matter if he does," Winter Sun grouched. "We will be leaving when he returns."

"You mean he doesn't believe Tindup?"

"He considers the vision merely a dream," Winter Sun replied angrily. "I feel something stronger. We will prepare to leave, daughter."

"Yes mother," Reilly answered dutifully. "We'll pack everything and be ready to leave."

The next morning many left with Tindup and Trevor returned with Bear Hunter later that afternoon.

"You're already packed I see," Trevor noted as he entered the lodge. He walked up to Winter Sun and put his arms around her. She shrugged him away. "You aren't angry with me?"

"Indeed I am!" Winter Sun regaled. "You did not tell me you and Bear Hunter would be gone all night!"

"Rose honey, we found a new camp," Trevor excused. "It was a bit farther than we thought."

"Will we leave tomorrow?" Winter Sun queried testily.

"My love," Trevor quivered putting his arms around Winter Sun. "We'll leave tomorrow morning at first light. I promise. Please don't be angry with me any more."

"That is very difficult to do," Winter Sun capitulated and sank into his strong arms.

Colter's crying woke every one in the lodge very early the next morning. Reilly rubbed her eyes to see Misery pulling the cradleboard with his teeth. Misery was partly outside and the cold wind was pricking at Colter's little uncovered face.

Trevor jumped up from Winter Sun's side tossing the buffalo robe and grabbing Colter's cradleboard before Misery pulled it outside.

Misery released the cradleboard and charged Trevor with a menacing growl nipping at Trevor's hands.

Taken aback by Misery's unusual behavior Trevor fell backwards. Reilly was up trying to retrieve her son. Misery once more released the cradleboard and charged Reilly with a growling menace. Reilly fell backward onto her father.

“Misery! What on earth has gotten into you?” Reilly screamed from her perch upon her father’s lap.

Rory woke at the noise. “What is it mother?” he asked rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

It was Winter Sun’s turn now. She walked straight and approached Misery, not the cradleboard holding Colter. Calmly Winter Sun spoke, “Misery, do you want to get Colter away from here?”

Misery again dropped the cradleboard and responded, “Woof!”

“I thought so,” Winter Sun assuaged scratching Misery’s ears. “We will leave right now. You cannot take Colter out in the cold yet. He has not eaten and he must be wrapped warmly for the cold. Do you understand?”

Misery responded once more, “Woof!”

“Good boy. Let me unwrap Colter and take him to his mother to be fed,” Winter Sun told the wolf dog. “Trevor, get our ponies ready. I’ll help you with the parfleches. Pink Dawn, feed and wrap Colter warmly. Rory, get up and dressed. We’ll eat the warmed stew over the fire, and then we leave quickly. Is that alright with you, Misery?”

“Woof!” Misery backed away from the cradleboard but curled in front of the flap and watched everyone carefully.

“What has gotten into that dog?” Trevor asked impatiently as he saddled the horses.

Winter Sun was packing the horses with the parfleches when she answered, “Misery is warning us. It is his instinct to protect Colter. I do not understand what he knows, but I sense he knows Colter is in danger.”

“What danger could there be?” Trevor queried.

“Have you so quickly forgotten Tindup’s vision? Do you deny these feelings of dread I have had the last few days?” Winter Sun asked fearfully. “I will not ignore the understanding of the father wolf. Neither should you!”

“I won’t ignore any of this my love,” Trevor complied lovingly. “I believe you and Misery. No more questions. We’ll leave as soon as Colter and Rory are fed and dressed.”

When Trevor and Winter Sun returned to the lodge Reilly had prepared Rory and Colter. They waited only a few moments as Reilly dressed warmly and secured Colter’s cradleboard on her back. Misery followed dutifully as the family appropriated their waiting horses.

“You are leaving?” Chief Sagwitch questioned as he emerged from his lodge.

“Misery seems to think we must take Colter home,” Trevor responded. “The mood this wolf dog is in, we decided it best to listen to him.”

“One does not argue with a wolf,” Sagwitch agreed laughing. “Have a safe trip.”

“Send my regards to Bear Hunter,” Trevor requested of Sagwitch. “We have no time to do our proper farewells.”

"I will do so," Sagwitch replied as his little son Beshup ran to him. "Where are you going so early?" Sagwitch asked his youngest son while picking him up and kissing his cheek.

"I'm sorry if we woke your family," Reilly apologized.

"Don't worry," Sagwitch assured. "I and my family always wake before the dawn. It is our time to pray."

"Give our love and blessings to Dadabaychee and little Naymee," Reilly said to Sagwitch. "Give little sister, Naymee, a kiss for me. I hope to see her again soon."

Sagwitch nodded and waved goodbye as the Woulfe family left into the darkness of the early morning.

"Well, my darlings, which way shall we return home?" Trevor asked. "Would you want to go through Franklin first? Perhaps buy some things before we go home?"

Misery suddenly growled fiercely and took the lead toward the east and the bluffs that would take them straight across to Bear Lake.

"I guess that's the way," Trevor chuckled. "Like Sagwitch said, you never argue with a wolf."

They had just approached the highest point of the bluff right after daybreak when they heard gunshots in Bear Hunter's camp below. They stopped their horses and looked down upon the camp.

"My God!" Reilly exclaimed in horror. She dismounted and ran to the bluff edge.

Trevor dismounted and watched in revulsion. "Bear Hunter's people don't have a chance. Rose my love, I am glad you listened to Tindup and I listened to you and Misery."

"Bear Hunter's warriors are jumping into the children's play dugouts," Winter Sun noted. "It looks as if they are defeating the militia."

"This time you must listen to me, Rose," Trevor said firmly. "The warriors are out gunned and out numbered. The Colonel is withdrawing to regroup."

"He is going to send the cavalry to surround the camp," Reilly gulped hysterically. "He's going to kill all of them!"

"How do you know this? Your Philip," Winter Sun asked with fearfully.

"Yes, I know these maneuvers," Reilly responded choking on her tears. "Father, we must do something. We must get help!"

"There is no help close enough to stop this slaughter," Trevor replied softly.

"There must be something we can do!" Winter Sun choked out. She then noticed Rory watching the slaughter below and tears freezing on his cheeks. "Rory, go back to the ponies and see to tying them securely."

"Misery!" Reilly declared. "Misery saved us. He can get help too!" Reilly called to Misery and the wolf dog came obediently. "Misery, go get Owen. Go get help!"

Misery barked wagging his tail and took off in a run heading directly east toward Bear Lake.

"They just killed Flying Arms!" Rory screamed in horror.

Trevor folded his arms around Rory and held him tightly to his chest. "Go tie up the horses, Rory. Do as your grandmother tells you." He released his hold on Rory just slightly.

Rory looked up at his grandfather and sobbed, "Why did they kill Flying Arms. He was just a boy like me. What did he ever do to them?"

"Nothing Rory, absolutely nothing. It's just like what happened to your true mother, Meredith. She did nothing in the quarrel that took her life," Trevor explained lovingly. "So many innocents just happen to get in the way of ignorance and greed. It is always innocents that get slaughtered in military actions."

"It's genocide!" Reilly spat angrily. She was watching as the cavalry took their positions surrounding the camp and charged it. Reilly watched in disbelief as she saw her friends and their children executed. Thorne Bush ran to the river and was gunned down. Early Spring was running in the camp when Reilly saw her receive three bullets in her back. Horrified Reilly watched as Silver Star's baby was taken from her cradleboard and his head bashed against an aspen tree.

Rory was sent to tie the horses and told to stay there as the grown ups watched helplessly as they saw the militia shoot old men, warriors, women, and young children. Some they shot directly in the face. After the cavalry was completely in the camp they grabbed small babies by their legs and swung them into tree trunks until their heads were bashed in and they were lifeless.

The hours of screaming and gunfire continued until Winter Sun, Trevor, and Reilly watched as young women were pulled out into the snow and raped brutally. When the soldiers were done with them their heads were split in two with axes. They watched in revulsion as the wounded Shoshone were axed or shot. Reilly could take no more and began retching. Winter Sun feeling ill herself took Reilly in her arms and walked back to the horses and Rory.

"We need to build a fire, Rory," Winter Sun said quietly while helping Reilly remove Colter's cradleboard from her back. "We must help any survivors. We will offer our food and warmth here."

"If there are any survivors." Reilly cried retching once again.

"There will be. There has to be!" Winter Sun cried in return. "Colter will want to eat soon. We must prepare a shelter. Come Rory, we can all make a small lodge with our blankets."

"Yes Grandmother," Rory answered jumping up and running to the horses to get the blankets.

Reilly, Winter Sun, and Rory quickly built a shelter and Rory started a fire like his father had shown him. His time with his father had been well spent in the fine art of survival.

The shelter had been built just in time. Colter woke and was hungry.

Trevor remained at the edge of the high bluff watching the butchering of Colonel Connor's militia. Nothing had ever driven him to such anger until now. He wanted to raise his rifle and shoot everyone of that militia, but he allowed his logic to maintain control. He was only one man, limited ammunition, and two wrongs never made a right. Trevor always practiced what he preached. Finally he could take no more. As he watched the militia pick up their dead and shoot any Shoshone survivors he walked away from the bluff edge. The final act he witnessed was the brutal murder of Chief Bear Hunter.

Winter Sun greeted her husband with her warm arms. She sensed he must have witnessed horrors that no man should have. Trevor's sparkling loving eyes were dull. His eyes were red, swollen, and puffy. Tears had frozen on his cheeks. Trevor always walked with a strong gait. His shoulders were usually squared and upright. Winter Sun noted he trudged slowly and his shoulders sagged in weakness and sorrow.

Behind her father, Reilly saw smoke rising in the background. She smelled the lodges burning.

Owen was working on the barn when Misery found him. Misery immediately grabbed the arm of Owen's heavy coat and started tugging.

"What is it, Misery," Owen said cheerfully. "Where is Duchess and Colter?" He stood straight and strained to see any sign of his family.

Misery ran ahead growling and barking furiously. Then he would come back and pull on Owen's coat growling.

After several minutes of this, Owen realized something was wrong. "You wouldn't leave Colter. Is Colter in trouble?"

Misery barked furiously and once more tried to lead Owen away.

Jacob noticed Owen and Misery, "You think somethin is wrong, Boss?"

"I know something is wrong. Misery wouldn't leave Colter unless he was in terrible danger. Danger that he couldn't protect Colter from," Owen replied with dread. "Let's get on our horses and follow Misery."

The two men quickly saddled their horses and were following the fast running wolf dog. They pushed their horses to the limit. After several hours of hard riding they found themselves staring at a simple tent shelter on one of the bluffs.

Trevor emerged from the tent shelter aiming his rifle.

"What the devil is going on here?" Owen remarked as he slowed his horse to a trot and jumped from its back. He ran toward the tent shouting, "Trevor!"

Trevor ran toward his son in law and embraced him, "Thank God Misery found you and brought you back."

"What in blue blazes has happened?" Owen huffed fearfully. "Where are Duchess, Colter, Rory, and Winter Sun?"

“They’re in the lea,” Trevor answered. “Thanks to Misery, we are all fine. That wolf dog saved our lives from the militia massacre down in the camp. I’m going to give Misery the biggest steak I can buy when we get back home. In the meantime we have a lot to do.”

Jacob had gone to the bluff and saw the carnage. “Boss, somethin horrible happened! Them militia men is dragging their wounded away and there are a whole bunch of dead Shoshone.”

“What?” Owen gasped and walked swiftly to Jacob after hearing from Trevor that everyone was safe.

Owen gazed upon the carnage below. Old men and women, children, babies, and ponies bodies lie upon the ground. Only two or three lodges still stood. The bodies of young women lie upon the snow; their skirts were raised exposing their private parts. Owen had never seen such carnage in his life. Anger was followed by deep sorrow. “Jacob, go back to the ranch and bring help, wagons, blankets, firewood, and food. I can only hope there are some survivors we can help.”

“Yassuh, boss. I’ll get on it,” Jacob replied already sick to his stomach from the scene below. Jacob remounted and headed back to the ranch.

Owen went into the temporary lodge and found his Reilly and sons. Misery was at his post near Colter’s cradleboard. “Thank God you’re alright,” Owen wept. He took Reilly in his arms and held her powerfully as he kissed her.

Several minutes and kisses later Reilly wept softly into her husband’s shoulder, “I love you with all my heart.” This was the first time Reilly let down her guard and allowed her emotions to flow. “They killed them. They killed babies, children, and innocents. Oh God, it was horrible. May those men be damned in hell forever!”

“Pa told me Misery saved your lives,” Owen whispered into her hair. He was trying to calm her. In his heart he knew she had seen everything happen from the carnage below.

“It’s true. He woke us by trying to pull Colter out of the lodge. It was only a few hours before the militia attacked,” Reilly cried softly. “If it wasn’t for Misery, we would be dead with all of the camp.”

Owen released Reilly and held his son Rory. He tousled his hair. “I’m proud of you Rory. You remembered everything I taught you.”

Rory snuggled into his father’s arms. He wept openly, “Pa, they killed my friends. I saw them shoot Flying Arms. He was just a boy like me.”

“I’m sorry son. I’m really sorry!” Owen replied gently. He allowed Rory to cry in his arms for some time. When Colter woke up for supper Owen untied and removed him from his cradleboard. Owen held his precious son in his arm and whispered a silent prayer of thanksgiving. His family was together and safe.

While Winter Sun and Rory prepared some food and Reilly fed Colter, Owen took his father outside and watched the militia leave for a

camp away from the massacre. They saw Mormon wagons and sleds coming toward the militia.

“Did you see any survivors?” Owen asked his father in law. “Where are Bear Hunter and Sagwitch?”

“I saw Sagwitch fall from a horse and then I lost sight of him,” Trevor replied. “I watched as they brutally kicked, whipped, shot Bear Hunter, and then killed him. They heated a bayonet and ran it through his head.”

“Oh God,” Owen choked and fell to his knees. “How can they call us humanity?”

Chapter Thirty Four

Near dusk the soldiers had left and Owen and Trevor noticed some movements. There were survivors. Trevor immediately shouted to the moving figures, "Come here! We have food, shelter, and fire to warm you."

Slowly a few women, children, and elders appeared. At the first attack they had run to the thickets to hide. Some were wounded and Owen helped those two or three survivors up the bluff. He even carried a child on his back. Trevor helped the elder woman up the bluff. They took them immediately to Winter Sun for hot food and care.

Winter Sun knew who they were, but the people were in shock and so dazed they couldn't even speak. They had been wounded with stray bullets even in hiding and they had watched their mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers, uncles, aunts, their entire family slaughtered.

Owen brought another women inside to Reilly and declared, "I'm going down to the camp. I have to see if there are any wounded I can help. There are some Mormons already there. I want to help."

"I want to come too," Rory piped up earnestly.

"You're too young for this son," Owen warned lovingly.

"May I ask father, just when are you old enough for this?" Rory questioned. "I have already seen my friends killed before my eyes. I saw babies swung around and their heads smashed in. Was I too young, father? If it wasn't for Misery and Grandmother I would be one of those bodies next to my friends."

The truth of Rory's words left an impact with Owen just short of being caught in the middle of a major earthquake. Owen's voice quivered as he released his reply, "You're right son. Come with me." Owen turned to Trevor and requested, "Trevor will you stay here and help anyone you can? I don't know if Jacob will bring the wagons in tonight, but I need you to be here until he does."

"I'll stay here. Are you sure you want Rory to come with you?" Trevor asked worriedly.

"Yes, the boy has seen enough. Perhaps helping out will heal his wounds of spirit," Owen answered and began walking to the horses. Rory was already on his pony and waiting for his father.

Together Owen and Rory slowly reined their horses down the trail. They saw two more survivors and yelled to them to go to the fire above. They would find hot food, shelter, and fire to warm them.

"Father, they all look like dead people," Rory noted. "Their eyes are dull and lifeless."

"I know son, it's shock," Owen agreed somberly. How could one survive this slaughter and not be affected in this way? How would he feel if his Reilly, Rory, and Colter had been killed? His thoughts were interrupted when Rory suddenly dashed ahead of him toward a grove of trees. Owen looked to see a cradleboard hanging from a branch and he heard the baby crying.

Rory reached from his pony and released the cradleboard from the branch.

Owen followed and jumped from his horse taking the cradleboard. The crying baby broke his heart. He opened the cradleboard and found the baby had a bullet in its shoulder but the cold had stopped the baby from bleeding death. Carefully examining the baby, Owen knew the bullet went through the fleshy part of the baby's shoulder and nothing was broken. He knew that the baby should be treated before it became infected and from the massacre story, Owen also knew the baby hadn't eaten since the morning.

"Rory, I think you should take this baby to your Momma. The baby needs to eat and you can help take care of the baby's wound," Owen suggested rewrapping the baby in the warm furs. "Your Momma can feed her."

"This is Naymee, Sagwitch's baby girl," Rory told his father. "I recognize her cradleboard."

"I'll go to the camp and try to find Dadabaychee," Owen promised. "You take her back to your mother. The baby needs medical care before the wound gets infected."

"I'll take her right to Momma," Rory promised. "Then I'll come back."

"No son," Owen forbade. "You stay there and help your mother treat the baby's wound. Understand?"

"Yes sir," Rory replied obediently.

Owen remounted and entered the camp. He found bodies upon bodies. They lay frozen. Many had their eyes open. Owen would bend down and gently close their eyes. He came across some Mormons looking for survivors as he was doing. He recognized Stephen Madigan and called to him.

"Owen? What brought you here?" Stephen questioned. "How did you find out so soon?"

"My family would have been part of these casualties if Duchess hadn't listened to Winter Sun and Misery. Then Duchess sent Misery to get me," Owen explained.

"Your family was here?" Stephen gasped in surprise.

"Yes, they were visiting the camp for the Warm Dance and Winter Sun's family and friends," Owen answered finding himself weeping. The realization that his family could have been victims in this travesty overwhelmed him. "They could have easily been victims of this slaughter."

"I'm sorry Owen," Stephen choked in his own emotion at this butchery. "I'm so sorry for all of this."

Both men found themselves crying and unashamed of the emotion.

"This is a tragedy," Stephen sobbed. "I heard from some brothers the militia came into Franklin and were bragging about the Indians they would kill. Unfortunately I didn't hear about it until late in the day when a soldier came asking for sleds to take their wounded into town. I had asked about the women and children of the camp and the man laughed telling me the women were well satisfied with the meat of their militia. I knew what he meant by that and brought my wagon. I could not believe the carnage and destruction that militia had caused."

"They don't even have jurisdiction in Washington territory," Owen wept openly. "They killed, raped, pillaged, destroyed, and every other vile action a man is capable of."

"Look at the tepee still standing," Stephen said pointing to Sagwitch's lodge. "It looks like a fish net. I was told each man was given 40 rounds."

"From the looks of this camp it looks like they used every bullet," Owen growled heatedly.

Their attention was drawn to the wailing sound of women. Several Mormons were already raising the two wounded women to the wagons. Their legs were broken from bullets. Apparently they appeared dead and were not ravaged and killed as other young Shoshone women had been. The Mormons had also found some children that were still alive.

"I'm happy to see some people still alive, but dear God, there are so few of them," Owen stated angrily.

They walked toward the back of the camp through the bodies of old men and women, children, babies, dogs, horses, and some warriors. There they found Beawoachee weeping loudly over a body. She was using her knife to cut her hair, as was the custom of a mourning widow. Her children surrounded her and were crying upon a body both Stephen and Owen knew had to be Bear Hunter.

Stephen walked toward them and when he saw Bear Hunter's body he covered his mouth and ran to the woods to retch.

Owen approached and although visibly shaken by the sight he remained strong for Beawoachee. Gently he removed the knife from her hand.

"Your hair is cut, Beawoachee," Owen whispered. "Bring the children of Bear Hunter to our camp. They must be cold and hungry. We need to warm them and feed them." If Beawoachee and the children had not been weeping over the body of Chief Bear Hunter, no one would have

known who it was. Chief Bear Hunter's body was so badly bruised from the beatings and being kicked, the body was misshapen. Rifle butts had crushed Bear Hunter's jawbone, nose and skull. His face was covered with blood and a deep wound in his ear revealed brain tissue.

Beawoachee's dead eyes looked to Owen and she cried from the bottom of her spirit, "My husband never cried. He never asked for mercy. He never uttered a sound. This angered the militia and they heated a bayonet and ran it through my husband's head. Why did they do such a thing?"

"I don't know Beawoachee. I don't understand any of this," Owen replied gently. "Come, we must care for Bear Hunter's children. They need food and warmth."

Beawoachee stood straight and took her youngest son's small hand. Proudly she walked through the camp. "My husband was a good and proud chief. I am his wife. I will be proud and raise his children well. My husband would want this."

Owen led Beawoachee to his horse and placed her and the youngest son upon it. "I'm taking you to our camp." As he led his horse out of the camp he came upon Stephen Madigan once more. "Has anyone found Sagwitch, Lehi, or Sanpitch?"

"We found the bodies of Lehi and Sanpitch. I was told Sagwitch is alive and just left the camp with his sons Soquitch, Yeager, and Beshup," Stephen replied as he helped a warrior toward his wagon. "Dadabaychee, Hinnah, and Pato are dead. We don't know what happened to the baby girl."

Owen knew, but he didn't say anything. He wouldn't tell them anything. He had his own plans for the baby girl named Naymee that Rory had discovered.

Winter Sun greeted Beawoachee and the children with a warm blanket and took them to a makeshift lodge erected by Jacob and several ranch hands. Inside the lodge they were left alone and Winter Sun fed Bear Hunter's widow and children. Winter Sun had been told of Bear Hunter's horrible death at the hands of the militia by one of the few warriors of Bear Hunter that had made an escape.

Jacob had brought six hands and five lodges that had been donated by some of the Shoshone that lived on Owen's ranch. They offered to share their homes with any survivors.

Owen sought Reilly out and found her in one of the lodges with Rory, Colter, Misery, Naymee, and two elderly women of the camp.

"How is Naymee?" Owen asked entering the lodge.

"Rory and I have treated her wounds. I have fed her," Reilly answered pouring hot stew into a wooden bowl for the elderly woman, True Heart. "Our son Colter just got his first lesson in sharing. He had to wait a little longer to eat supper."

"Was he terribly upset?" Owen queried.

“Just a little,” Reilly smiled to her husband. “Misery kept him company while he waited.”

True Heart took the bowl silently. Reilly then took another blanket and wrapped it around her.

“They are in shock,” Reilly whispered to her husband. “Rory and I are doing everything we can for them. Their families were killed before their eyes.”

“It was horrible,” Owen remarked unconsciously. “It was horrible.”

“Are there any more survivors we can help?” Reilly asked hopefully.

“Some Mormon families are down there helping the few that lived,” Owen answered taking a bowl of stew for himself. “I brought Beawoachee and her children to our camp. Bear Hunter, Lehi, and Sanpitch were killed. I was told Sagwitch and three of his five sons survived. Rory found his daughter, Naymee.”

“What of Dadabaychee?” Reilly asked.

“She’s dead Duchess,” Owen sighed heavily. “She died shielding Naymee. There was no one to nurse the baby. I think that’s why Sagwitch put her on the trees. He hoped someone would adopt her.”

“Owen,” Reilly hedged as she sat next to Owen.

“You needn’t say what is already in my heart, Duchess,” Owen said putting down his bowl and taking Reilly in his arms. “Baby Girl would want us to adopt Naymee. She can be raised with our Colter.”

“Naymee was born the same day as Colter,” Reilly told her husband holding his jaw in her hand. “We would have twins to raise. Our son and daughter, Naomi.”

“You thought of a name already for our daughter?” Owen smiled to his wife and love.

Reilly nodded. “I knew Dadabaychee would sacrifice her life to protect her children, just as I would have. I guessed she had done so when Rory brought Naomi home. I decided then to ask you to adopt her as our own.”

“We think alike Duchess,” Owen radiated in love. “I thought the same things when Rory told me it was Sagwitch’s daughter. I knew her mother was dead or Sagwitch would not have given up his daughter. I knew then I was going to ask you if we could adopt her.”

“Owen, Naomi has fed from my breast,” Reilly stated. “She is our child. Naomi is sister to Colter and Rory.”

“That is the way I want it to be,” Owen agreed. “I want no one to know our baby girl is Naymee. I want Naomi to grow up believing only that you and I are her parents. Naomi should never know she was a part of this horror. I want her to grow up in love and happiness.”

“Yes my darling,” Reilly whispered and kissed her husband’s lips tenderly.

"Do you agree, Rory?" Owen asked his eldest son after his tender kisses with Reilly.

"Yes, father," Rory answered solemnly. "I will be the best big brother Colter and Naomi could ever have."

"We are all agreed," Owen said proudly. "Rory, we need to check on your grandparents and see if we can help anyone else. Then we'll come back here, get a good night's rest and go home."

"What of the survivors?" Reilly queried. "We will be taking them back home with us until they recover and their families can come for them, won't we?"

"You see what kind of wife you are, Duchess," Owen grinned pulling Reilly's chin up with his thumb and forefinger. "You can already read my mind."

"Right, then I already know they will stay with us until they are ready to leave with family and friends, or..." Reilly smiled gazing into her husband's gentle eyes. "They can stay with us for as long as they want."

"Exactly my thoughts," Owen chuckled softly. "Come on, Rory! We'll go find your grandparents."

Colter began fussing so Reilly untied him from the cradleboard and began rocking him.

True Heart rose and gestured to hold Colter.

Reilly complied. It was the right thing to do. True Heart sat down rocking Colter in her arms and singing a Shoshone lullaby. Reilly sensed it was just what was needed to begin to heal the tragedy the old women had lived through. Reilly untied Naomi from her cradleboard and gave her to Losing Sight.

The old woman looked to Reilly and taking the baby girl, smiled. "There is death and there is life. The circle continues," Losing Sight said quietly. She began cuddling and rocking Naomi in her arms.

Reilly prepared more soup and bread over the fire. She was so grateful her mother had taught her to cook the Shoshone way. It took a little persuasion, but Reilly did get True Heart and Losing Sight to eat more food at suppertime.

Chapter Thirty Five

Spring had arrived in Bear Lake. Reilly and Owen had taken their family to Soda Springs to buy a few things for the house and traveling toilettes for Winter Sun and Trevor Stewart. They would be returning to the East in May, next month.

Owen was carrying their four-month-old son, Colter. Reilly was holding their four-month-old daughter, Naomi. Both children were happy, well dressed, and well fed babies. Colter was the size of a six month old with thick black hair and warm gray eyes. Naomi was a petite baby that had thick black hair and warm brown eyes. Naomi nestled into her mother's shoulder and sucked her thumb contentedly. While Colter was loud and active, Naomi would be shy, reserved, and passive. Owen and Reilly were walking down the rough wooden plank walk to visit Owen's good friend, Raymond Priestly and his wife Anna. They had been friends for nearly five years. Raymond ran a small newspaper in Soda Springs.

Rory stayed with his grandparents when they went into a dry goods store to do some shopping.

"Owen!" Raymond greeted. "What do we have here?" Raymond commented taking hold of Colter. "And here?" he asked looking at Reilly following her husband into the room and holding their daughter. "My God man, have you had twins? I heard you were married again."

"Raymond, I'd like to introduce my wife, Reilly Woulfe. This is our son and daughter, Colter and Naomi. Rory is with his maternal grandparents."

"Congratulations!" Raymond cheered. "I was hoping you would settle down and get that family going. You always wanted one."

"I was jealous of you and Anna," Owen teased playfully. "I envied the two of you playing with your children. Where are Amelia and David?"

"They are in school right now. Soda Springs is becoming a big city. Not only do we now have a school with teacher, we also are going to have a fort." Raymond bragged cheerfully.

"When did this happen?" Owen questioned keeping Colter's wandering hands occupied. It had been less than six months since he had news from Soda Springs.

"Well actually it hasn't happened yet. I mean the school opened in fall last year, but the I just heard about the fort this week," Raymond

admitted. "It seems the Indians have been causing so much trouble lately, it was decided to build a fort in Soda Springs so we can patrol the trails."

"We've heard of some cattle and horses being taken," Reilly noted testily. "It's hardly worth building a fort."

"We've been told of harassment and murder of white families," Raymond defended. "It seems old Chief Sagwitch has a burr in his saddle against settlers and the Mormons especially since the battle of Bear River."

"You mean the butchery of Bear River!" Reilly snapped. Her voice startled Naomi. Little tears started to form in Naomi's eyes. Reilly calmed herself and rocked Naomi until she was nuzzling once more and sucking her thumb quietly.

"I don't understand?" Raymond queried. "We received communications that General Connor routed several hundred hostiles and after a heated battle finally subdued the attacking Snakes."

"General Connor?" Reilly snarled angrily. "He was Colonel Connor!"

"He received the commission of Brigadier General for his bravery and leadership in routing the Indians," Raymond replied quickly not understanding Reilly's angry question.

Owen cocked his eyebrow. "That's not what I saw."

"Saw?" Raymond gasped. "You were there? You mean I have an eye witness to the big battle?"

Reilly drew in her breath to catch her temper and emitted slowly, "It was not a battle. It was a militia slaughter! I was there."

"You were both there?" Raymond queried in disbelief. This was too good to be true for a newspaperman.

"I came in at the end," Owen informed quietly kissing Colter's little hand. "Reilly was there with the children the entire time."

"Would you tell me the story?" Raymond asked eagerly reaching for paper and charcoal pencil.

"You wouldn't and couldn't print the truth of the massacre," Reilly said somberly. "The good white people would be upset with it. I mean everything that happened there is something everyone in proper society wouldn't believe and deny."

Just then a tall middle-aged man in a General's uniform entered the printing room. Speaking with a slight Irish brogue he stated, "I've come for the interview you've asked for. I'll tell you about the Battle of Bear River and my successful military strategy of routing the hostiles."

"We've received information about your armory for the Bear River massacre from Washington City," Reilly cooed deceptively. She had the butcher in front of her and even though she knew she could not change anything it was an opportunity to vent her own anger and righteous blows against this animal called Brigadier General Patrick Edward Connor.

"It was the Battle of Bear River beautiful lady," General Connor bowed politely.

"Is it true you ordered howitzers to be used in your campaign?" Reilly queried. "And is it true you ordered a total of three hundred men to have 40 rounds of ammunition each?"

"Your information is accurate," General Connor grinned proudly.

"It is wonderful for you that women have no say in the government of this land," Reilly purred in utter and sickeningly sweet femininity.

Connor cocked his head and then smiled completely unaware of Reilly's meaning. "Such a beautiful woman such as yourself must be too involved in being a good wife and mother for a lucky husband and children."

"Oh General Connor, it is for your benefit I am so involved with my family, since I could not comprehend such a waste," Reilly said batting her eyelashes.

Owen remained silent watching and listening to his wife. It took all he had not to put Colter down and slam his fists into Connor's jaw.

"I don't understand madam, waste?" General Connor asked with confusion.

"Well sir, if my calculation are correct that would mean 300 men multiplied by 40 rounds, multiplied by 6 bullets the amount of bullets expended would have been 72,000," Reilly grinned wickedly. "We heard seventy five of your men were left behind with frostbite. The calculation of shells expended during your attack would have been 54,000."

"Madam, I don't understand the purpose," General Connor remarked still in a bit of confusion.

"You attacked a winter camp of approximately 400 old men and old women, fathers, mothers, children, and babies. We were told there was a total of 160 survivors, which I believe there were only about 90, but be that as it may; that is 225 shells per person killed," Reilly casually said coming in for the kill. "So you see sir, either your men were terrible marksmen, or it was a blatant waste of precious ammunition during the War Between the States. I would not have promoted you, but rather called you to court to explain this waste."

Raymond was paying close attention. He realized there was something more to this Battle of Bear River than he was told. Reilly and Owen Woulfe had been eyewitnesses. "I heard that was the ammunition allotted," Raymond concurred.

"You need to take care of your beautiful little girl," Patrick Connor evaded and tried to change the subject.

"You think our little girl is beautiful?" Owen asked barely holding his anger in check.

"Indeed! A lovely little baby, she is as lovely as her mother," Connor flattered hoping that would work with the intelligent woman taking her mind to her vanity.

"How many pretty little babies did you and your men kill at Bear River?" Owen growled angrily. "I counted fifteen babies. Eight were shot to death. At least ten bullets in each little body, or a bullet directly to their

face, or their heads were bashed into tree trunks, or they were clubbed to death with axes.”

“I beg your pardon,” Patrick Connor stuttered defensively.

“There is no pardon under heaven for you to beg for what you and your men have done,” Reilly roared heatedly.

“Have you forgotten watching your men shoot old men and old women? Have you forgotten seeing pregnant women’s bellies bayoneted and their fetus and babies ripped out of their wombs? Have you forgotten shooting young boys and girls directly in their face or their mother’s arms? Have you forgotten your men viciously raping young maidens and then bashing their heads in with axes? Have you forgotten giving the order to shoot all Shoshone wounded?” Owen barked viciously.

“I have no idea what you are talking about!” Patrick Connor shouted. He began to move backwards to the door.

“We were there Brigadier General Patrick Edward Connor,” Owen said quietly in contrast to his rage. “I saw the mutilated bodies. I saw the old men, old women, mothers, maidens, children, and babies. I saw it all. I took Bear Hunter’s widow from the site of your carnage. She told me how your men mutilated and tortured her husband for not crying. Chief Bear Hunter’s body was so horribly beaten I couldn’t recognize whom it was Beawoachee was crying over. Yet the tale is told Chief Bear Hunter was making bullets!”

“What fools do you think people are? Would a Chief such as Bear Hunter stop to make bullets in the middle of a battle. Isn’t that just a cover up to hide the brutality of your militia?” Reilly spat out in venom. “You would have no conscience to kill my baby or any baby if it meant a promotion for you.”

“Madame, you don’t understand,” General Connor countered. He backed up to the door.

“I hope you understand your name in the Shoshone is Butcher! Butcher of babies!” Reilly seethed.

Backed up against the door a red faced Patrick Connor opened the knob. “You don’t understand military action,” he said as he was fleeing the room.

Reilly shouted after him. “You are correct! I do not understand genocide! I especially do not understand genocide under the guise of military action.”

Naomi was in tears and it took all Reilly had to calm herself enough to pacify her baby daughter. “I’m sorry Naomi. You will never hear of this again, ever!”

Owen still holding a bewildered Colter used his free arm to embrace Reilly and Naomi. “Let’s go home.”

“Aren’t you going to tell me the story?” Raymond questioned in disbelief. He couldn’t fathom the reality of everything he had just heard. He knew it had been true especially by General Connor’s reaction.

“This story is lost in history,” Reilly said sadly. “It is lost because it happened during the bloody war. It will be lost in history until someone cares. At least someone that cares and can do something about it.”

“I can write it!” Raymond insisted.

“No one would believe the truth,” Owen replied. “You had to see the truth to really understand it. No one even cares. They were just Indians. The government has been methodically killing the natives of this land for almost a century. It isn’t going to stop. It won’t stop until the people are extinct.”

“This genocide under the disguise of military action will continue until the people are extinct,” Reilly agreed. “Unless we learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it. Unfortunately, it is the Euro-Caucasian folly to refute the lessons. The Catholics nearly destroyed all Protestants and Jews in the Inquisition. General Cromwell destroyed entire village populations in Erin. These are just to name a few. Bear River is not the beginning or the end of brutality, destruction, and genocide. Bear River is just another casualty of greed and power.”

“Bear Hunter once said to my father in law, ‘The white man will one day pay for his atrocities,’” Owen declared. “This was the greatest atrocity I have seen or heard of delivered to a peaceful and innocent Shoshone winter camp. One day the Euro Caucasians will pay when Mother Earth washes her ground of the people’s blood. I believe this, and it is deserved.”

“I have a feeling that sacred land of Bear River will be taken by the Mormons or settlers and those innocent spirits will haunt that land of soil bathed in their blood,” Reilly added. “I also believe with my husband that a price will be paid for this foul deed.”

Raymond was left in shock as he watched Owen and Reilly leave his newsroom.

Owen and Reilly returned home the next day and raised their family in peace, serenity, and love. Owen and Reilly set the example of Bear River Spirit for their children, ‘Home was where their heart was.’

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