



*Whether you're young and just  
Starting out in life...*



*Or you're up in years and  
You've seen it all...*



*You can travel the world  
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## INTRODUCTION

People often ask me what I write. I reply, “I write what I like to read.” So the next logical question is “What do you like to read?” I guess you could say that my taste in reading material is rather eclectic. I like romance (in most forms, including historical, contemporary, intrigue, and time travel), mysteries, and some non-fiction. I like books that contain a good dose of humor. So, that is what I write. To date I have books published (and all available) in six genres. I thought there were five, until men started writing to me to tell me that, as one fellow put it after reading *Dakota Printer*, “That is the greatest western I’ve read since Zane Grey died.” So, I added westerns to the slate. These are the genres that I have tackled:

- Historical romance
- Contemporary romance
- Time travel romance
- Cozy mystery
- Young adult
- Western

Four of the books have a seasonal flair, but can be read any time of the year. They are *A Lumberjack Christmas*, *A Christmas Dream* (obviously Christmas), *In St. Patrick’s Custody* (St. Patrick’s Day) and *Recipe for Murder* (Halloween).

I love writing. I love the characters who bounce around in my head, giving me orders, dictating their actions to me like I am a mere stenographer—not the person who gave them life! I am, really, living my life’s dream. I never knew it could be this much fun! I have enough books in my brain that the way I figure it, I have to live to be at least 124 to get them all written! People have asked me what I am going to do after that. The answer is simple: by that time I’ll have that many more ideas.

Which brings me to another question people ask me. “Where do you get your ideas?” That answer is very simple, too. All you have to do is to keep your eyes and ears open. There is nothing more fun than observing human nature—and then embellishing it! Maybe that’s why people keep asking me why I patterned a particular book after them. And that is from people I’ve never met or heard of before that! I have also included, at the beginning of each book’s entry, a bit about “the story behind the story,” or what inspired each story.

But the most rewarding part of writing is hearing from readers who like what they have read. It gives me chills up and down my spine when people tell me that their life has been made a little bit better because of some of my words, even if it is just that it made them laugh. After all, Readers' Digest got it right when they started their humor column, "Laughter is the Best Medicine."

I am giving you this sampler of my books with the hope that it will lead you to buy and read some them. I also hope that if you are a die-hard fan of romance, or mystery, or whatever, that it will offer enough of a teaser that you might try something different—something you might never have tried otherwise. There are tons of talented new writers on the horizon. I hope you will try all of us out. We're just waiting for discovery.

Finally, I have included three new not-yet-published "teasers" that will be out this year, 2005. They are *Old Habits Die Hard* (the 3<sup>rd</sup> Patrick and Grace Mystery), *Tuesday Nolan* (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Women of the Week series), and *Pampas* (an Argentine romantic intrigue, which will also be released in Spanish. I am including the first chapter in both English and Spanish.).

Sit back, put your feet up, relax, and get ready to enjoy life—whether it's in historic Scotland, modern Beverly Hills, or a homeless shelter in New York City.

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# THE KEITH TRILOGY

## Book 1

### *Dunnottar*

*A No. 1 bestseller on Amazon.com for over 2 months!*

Dunnottar Castle, Scotland, the domain of the Clan Keith, close consorts of the royal family for many generations. The whole country is at war with itself: Scotland against England. William Keith, the patriarch, is the wealthiest man in Scotland, but he desires only to be known as the kindest; John, his younger brother, is eager to fight for his country, even if his motives are a little questionable; and Robert, William's oldest son, is off to battle, but his mother's only hope is that he finds a wife in the process.

Even the most seemingly righteous families have some deep, dark hidden secrets. The Keith clan is no exception; some of them so deep and dark even the other Keiths don't know they exist. But they are privy to secrets of King Charles II himself.

*From a No. 1 Best-seller on amazon.com  
to Best Time travel of 2003  
You can't beat a tale of the Keith Clan!*

It all began at the breakfast table. It was a long time ago--over 20 years, in fact. I was working on my first book, which was a Regency romance. I innocently mentioned to my husband, Ivan, that I needed some sort of a hidden or lost treasure in Great Britain.

His reply, without a moment's hesitation, was "Why don't you use our family jewels?" Well, this was the first I had heard of this! He told me the tale of the Scottish regalia, which had been hidden at Dunnottar Castle during the British Civil War to keep Cromwell from melting them down, which he had already done to the English regalia.

Being a natural skeptic (or knowing that he was prone upon occasion to stretch the truth a wee bit, I set out to prove him wrong. But a funny thing happened on the way to the rest of the story: I found out he was right. His great-grandmother Caroline (Keith) Smith was a descendant of the Keith clan from Dunnottar Castle.

And that, in the end, became the rest of the story. Please enjoy a trip back to a huge part of Scottish history and fame, and if you are ever in Scotland, be sure to make a trek to Dunnottar. And if you want to see the same jewels that the Keiths protected, they are on display at Edinburgh Castle.

***Dunnottar*** is a trip to the past and what started it all, both for me and for the Scottish regalia. ***Marylebone*** goes to the regency era, where I intended to go at the beginning, to the discovery of the same regalia, which had been hidden for 150 years. And ***Par for the Course?*** Well, it's a trip (on an oak tree root) that you will never forget. You've never seen history like this before!

## *DUNNOTTAR*

### Chapter One

The dashing red-headed John Keith sat on a stone, looking out over the sea in Scotland. As he looked up, he saw the things that were so familiar to him: the steps winding up the steep rocky cliff to the Castle Dunnottar, the great Clydesdale horses which were the mainstay of life at Dunnottar, the guards and squires perched atop the great wall, surveying the situation in case of attack.

He buried his head in his hands. All of it meant nothing to him any more. If only he could have brought his beloved Ann here, but she belonged to another. She would never see his beloved home of Dunnottar. Nor would his little Judith see it.

His heart ached for them. Even the threat of war, which was ever near at hand, brought a slight smile to his face. Shortly he would find a way to travel to London to offer his services to King Charles. He was sure that once he arrived in the *ton* he would be able to visit Judith, and if he was extremely lucky he might catch at least one fleeting glimpse of Ann.

It all seemed so long ago. Little Judith was already three years old. He had missed so much, he lamented, by not being there to see her grow up. Her first steps, her first words, her first tooth. He knew all of these things were mundane, but when you are not a part of them, they all loom larger than life in your mind.

He moved off the rock and lay back on the cool grass. The smell of the heather blowing in the air filled his being. There was nothing that could make a man more melancholy than the aroma of the heather. He gazed up at the sky, watching the clouds as they drifted lazily by.

"I do have one favor, as long as you ask," Squire Hastings said to his very close friend, John Keith. "If I am to go to Holland for King Charles, I cannot bear the thought of Ann being alone. Would you consider it too great a burden to check in on her from time to time?"

John Keith smiled. There was nothing he would rather do. Visions of the lovely, sprightly Ann Hastings danced in his mind. He pictured her beautiful red curls, which bounced to and fro gaily as she hurried about the house, always eager to serve those who came to call.

There was only one problem with Ann: she was deeply devoted to her husband, Squire Hastings. She would do anything to please him, and the look she got in her eyes as she stared at him... John

Keith would give everything he owned—which was worth a great deal—to have someone feel about him as Ann felt about Hastings.

"It would be my pleasure," he replied simply.

"You are the only man alive I would ever trust her with," Hastings told John. "I know you would never do anything to hurt her. Or me."

Day after day passed, with Hastings away in Holland, tending to the king's business. John Keith, according to the agreement the two men had, frequented Hastings' small home, always to check on the beautiful young Ann. Soon the visits became a part of his daily ritual.

"It is not just," Ann complained one evening as they sat on the settle in front of the cozy fire burning in the fireplace. "Why did he have to send him? There are so many other men who are as capable as he is."

"But you should be honored that King Charles trusted Hastings enough to carry out such an important task. Besides, I have heard rumors that the possibility of war is over and that Hastings will return shortly."

"Why couldn't he have sent you instead?" she asked. "Surely he trusts you as well. And you did not just take a bride. I would much rather be here with Hastings than with you!"

It went through him like a pointed arrow, wounding his heart as it entered.

"No," John Keith admitted to Ann, studying her with a new intensity. During the time they had spent together, he had become extremely drawn to the beautiful young woman. Now he watched the fire burning in her sparkling green eyes, brighter than the flames in the fireplace. He smiled warmly at her.

"Do you know how beautiful you are when you are angry?" he asked her.

She blushed, and the color that came to her cheeks just enhanced her beauty.

"I didn't say there was any justice in it," John continued. "But Hastings didn't argue."

"Oh, wonderful!" Ann sputtered. "And a lowly squire is supposed to stand before the king himself and say, 'Sorry, your majesty, but I just don't feel like going to Holland. I just got married and I can't bear to leave my wife!' How do you think the king would have reacted to such a declaration as that?"

John Keith threw back his head and laughed. She was right; it wasn't fair. But it was no more fair that Hastings had wed Ann. He could have offered her so much more. A life at Dunnottar would be far more fitting for such a woman as Ann than the life Hastings could offer her. For a brief passing moment, John wished that

Hastings was not on his way home. He could think of a thousand and one ways to console Ann in her loss.

He snapped to attention. What kind of a monster had he become? Hastings was one of his best friends and he had made a vow to him to protect Ann. He wondered if he could protect her from himself? He realized that his own intentions had become less than honorable towards her.

He never meant for it to happen, but someplace along the line John Keith had fallen hopelessly in love with the lovely Ann Hastings.

Hurrying to change the subject, he began to relate more tales of Dunnottar Castle and the Keith clan, one of the mightiest in all of Scotland, to Ann.

She listened intently, asking questions from time to time. She could almost picture the castle, perched high atop the stones, just from the way he described it. The Keiths, especially William and Mary, the patriarch and matriarch of the family, sounded like the most wonderful people who had ever lived.

"You must be very proud of being a Keith," Ann said.

"Aye, that I am," John admitted freely. "It is nearly the most wonderful thing to be a Keith."

"Nearly?" Ann asked, a twinkle in her eye. "And what would be better?"

John hesitated before answering. "To have a woman to share it with," he said slowly.

Ann laughed. "Surely any woman would be proud to be the wife of the great John Keith of Dunnottar."

"*Almost* any woman," John said. The one woman whom he would love to take with him to Dunnottar was sitting here, so close he could reach out and touch her. So near he could feel the warmth of her breath on his face. So near and yet he could never touch her. Could never claim her as his own. She belonged to someone else.

"If there is a woman who would turn you down," Ann said, winking playfully at him, "there must be something dreadfully wrong with her."

"No," John said. "The truth of the matter is, she is perfect. The only fault she has is that she has already been spoken for by another."

John wondered if she knew he was talking about her. She was so in love with Hastings, he doubted she had any idea how much he loved her. How much he wanted her.

With no warning, Ann broke into tears. John drew her close, wrapping his arms around her.

"What is it?" he asked. "Was it something I said? Something I did?"

"Of course not," Ann replied. "You have been wonderful to me. It is just that I miss Hastings so much. I know you would never understand, not ever having loved a woman, but at times when I lie in bed at night, I almost imagine I can feel him there beside me. I love the way he makes me feel. When he is with me, I am complete. When he is away, it is as if a part of me is gone, too."

John ran his hand over her red tresses, trying to console her.

"I am sorry," she said, drying her eyes on a corner of her skirt. "I do not mean to carry on. I am just so lonesome."

John did not know how it happened, but somehow they ended up in bed, in each other's arms, making mad passionate love. He caressed her tenderly, loving the touch and the smell of her. Before he knew it, he felt their love end in one giant, breathtaking crescendo, like beautiful music.

They lay exhausted, their bodies melding together as if they were made for each other. John was still awake when Ann fell asleep, her bosom heaving enticingly with each breath she took.

The worst part of it was that when he awoke in the morning, with Ann cuddled close to him, he had no feelings of guilt, in spite of the fact that he had made love to his best friend's wife. And in his own bed! If he had it to do over again, he wondered if he would be strong enough to resist the temptation, or if he would give in so easily to his passions again.

He carefully crawled from the bed, trying not to awaken her. He was afraid if he stayed there and she woke up, he would not be able to leave her alone. His entire being cried out to take her to him again, but he knew it was wrong. If all he had was one solitary night of lovemaking with her, that would have to suffice for his entire life. He knew he could never love any other woman. Not after Ann.

In less than a week, Hastings was back in London. Ann had continued to allow John to come to the house, but she remained cool and aloof to him. She had enough guilt over what had happened for both of them.

"Thank you," Hastings said when he found John Keith. "I asked Ann if you kept your word, and she said that you were very good to her."

John turned away from Hastings. He could not bring himself to look at him directly. He was glad that Ann had kept their secret. There was no reason for him to ever find out. Some things were just never meant to be revealed. Their one night was one of those things. He knew Ann would never hurt Hastings, and he saw no reason to do so either. It would serve no practical purpose, as he knew Ann would never leave Hastings—not even for a Keith and all the treasures of Dunnottar.

John was still lying on the grass just outside the confines of Dunnottar. His eyes were once again fixed on the clouds above him. He wasn't sure if he had fallen asleep and it was all a dream, or if it was merely a daydream. Whichever it was, the only thing he had left now—three years after that fateful night he spent with Ann Hastings—was his dream. His dream—and little Judith. No one could ever take either of them away from him. Even if they must remain secret forever, he would cling to them until his dying day.

"How dare you call yourself a friend?" Hastings bellowed at John Keith. He landed one swift blow to John's cheek, sending him reeling to the ground. It seemed so real, even now, that John rubbed his cheek.

"Get up, you coward!" Hastings screamed at him.

John Keith was no sooner on his feet than Hastings once more sent him sprawling. Not daring to get up again, John rubbed his jaw and looked up at Hastings. He did not need to ask what it was all about. He knew! Hastings had somehow found out about the one night he and Ann had...

John stared at Hastings. His eyes burned with rage. He had seen men at battle who looked less like they were intent on killing another person. John Keith was not a weak man, but he shivered now as the cowardice ran through his veins.

"Let me explain," John said, still not getting up. "She was so lonely. She said she missed you so much."

"Don't you go laying the blame on Ann!" Hastings screamed. "I asked you to look after her, but I never meant for you to try to horn in and take my place in her bed. *My* bed! And then, when I returned, you went right on calling on us as if nothing had ever happened. And all the while you were leering at my Ann. I forbid you to ever see her again!"

John Keith did not know if Hastings would give him an answer or not, but he had to know.

"How did you find out?" he asked.

"How did I find out?" Hastings asked. "You thought you could keep it a secret forever? And the nerve of it! Of course when the baby began to bulge..."

John gasped in disbelief. Ann was carrying a baby. *His* baby! And he would never be able to claim it as his own. Or would Hastings turn on Ann for her part in it and throw her aside? It was more than John dared hope for. If he chose to do that, he would be there to pick up the pieces. Would he have a chance to show Ann that he still loved her? If she was left alone, would she love him in return, or would she despise him for taking Hastings from her? Only time would tell. Surely Hastings would not want to raise John Keith's child as his own.

"I must speak to Ann once more," John Keith pleaded. "You may be there, if you wish, but I must tell her how sorry I am."

"I told you to stay away from her!" Hastings repeated. "You will never set eyes on her again! Nor the child!"

John felt a tear trickle down his cheek as he recalled the events of the past. It did not seem possible that it was three years ago. The pain he felt at the loss of Ann was as fresh as a newly-inflicted stab wound, with blood gushing forth from it.

At least Hastings had softened somewhat. He had arranged to take John and Ann's daughter, Judith, to the palace whenever John came to London. He showed great compassion, but told John that he must *never* reveal the truth to Judith—nor to anyone.

They had grown close. John often marveled at her looks. She was the exact image of Ann. It was, according to Hastings, her most redeeming quality. Hastings, in spite of his feeling before her birth, loved her as if she was his own child as soon as he saw her.

"Uncle John!" she called to him. He loved it when she came running to him and climbed up onto his lap. It was as close as he came to feeling happiness. He would accept their relationship as it was, but he would never be happy about it. She was his own flesh and blood, but no one would ever know it. When the kin at Dunnottar taunted him about finding a mate in his *old age*, he could not tell them that he had already found true love. They would have to think whatever they chose.

John stood up and began to make his way back through the tunnel in the hillside and up the long trek to Dunnottar. As soon as the time was right, he would inform the clan of his intentions to go to King Charles to offer his services.

His steps became lighter as he climbed. It would not be long before he would once again be in London and together with Judith. At least that was some consolation. A deep smile crept across his face as he thought of his daughter.

"Bring on the war!" he shouted into the wind.

## THE KEITH TRILOGY BOOK 2

### *Marylebone*

**MARYLEBONE**, the sequel to **best-selling DUNNOTTAR**, flits back and forth between London and the Scottish highlands during the regency era. Handsome young James Keith, wanting to remain anonymous, visits “the clubs” in London, where he encounters Caroline Kent, who has just returned from Vienna after studying the piano.

Caroline is immediately enraptured by the mysterious Scotsman, but he seems to disappear every time she gets close to finding him. She calls on their mutual friend, the Duke of Hamilton, to help her locate him. Keith, who is using the alias Robert Paterson, swears Hamilton to secrecy, as he is on a personal quest to locate the Scottish regalia, which was hidden by the Keith clan at Dunnottar Castle more than one hundred years earlier.

**Complete with two mysteries** (who is the mysterious Scot and where is the regalia), throw in a famous person (Walter Scott), a secret which Caroline’s father, the Earl of Kent, has kept buried almost as long, a surprise about the “mad King George” and you have the makings of a read that will delight you for a long time to come.

I am firmly convinced that in the life of a writer, there are no “accidents.” Thus it was in part of the divine plan for this trilogy that I stumbled across an entry in an old Encyclopedia Britannica that I spotted the entry on Sir Walter Scott. One small paragraph made mention of the fact that he was the primary person who was responsible for discovering the whereabouts of the Scottish regalia, after it had been missing for almost 150 years. Yes! I now had my regency romance, which I had planned as my very first book.

I don’t know how other authors pick the names for their characters. For me, they just sort of “pop into” my head. That was certainly the case with the family of the Earl of Kent. I knew nothing about the Kent family of London. However, as I was writing *Marylebone*, the earl himself definitely had a mind of his own. No matter what I did, I could not make him like—or even tolerate—King George III. I had no idea why he had such a dislike for the king. Finally, frustrated, I went to my old encyclopedia, and that was where I discovered that the *real* Earl of Kent certainly had justification for his feelings towards the king. So, from there on, it became a necessary part of the story. It is true what they say, that truth is stranger than fiction.

The actual regalia of Scotland, consisting of the crown, the orb and the scepter, as well as some other jewels are today on display at Edinburgh Castle in Edinburgh, Scotland. They are taken out of their glass case once a year and displayed before a large crowd of people who gather to get a closer view of them.

Ah, the stuff fairytales are made of!

MARYLEBONE

Chapter One

The table had been laid and the Earl of Kent and his lovely wife, Lady Josephine Berkeley, sat at their usual places. The only difference of note was that there was today a third setting, which was as yet vacant.

"It is so delightful to once again have Caroline here with us," the earl said. "I do know how important her music is to her, but I have so missed her."

"It is a truth," Lady Kent said, "that the house has appeared to have a silence which would not rid itself until the moment she returned to walk through the doorway."

Caroline entered the room, her beauty radiant and her dress more befitting a formal evening than the normal activities of the day ahead.

"You do, I presume, have plans for the day?" her father inquired. "It is not that the person appears thus every day."

"I do indeed!" Caroline responded enthusiastically, a lovely smile crossing her countenance. "In the post when I returned from Vienna I found a voucher from Almack's. Oh, Father, I have arrived! I am one of *them*! Tonight I shall join the friends I have so longed to be a part of. It will be splendid!"

"But to ready yourself so early in the day," her mother asked, "is that a wise decision?"

"Oh, but Mother," Caroline protested, "I am nowhere near ready. I must have my hair done. And I will not wear this to the club! I have donned this just in the event that some of my friends may come calling here at Berkeley Manor, having heard of my return. I would not want to be caught unawares, after having been to the continent. They would think me such a ninny!"

"You know, of course," Lady Kent said, "that your friends are always welcome at our home. We would never want you to sense that there was any other way we would have it."

Caroline had always appreciated the fairness with which her parents had treated her. It had been difficult for them to release her from their care, especially her being their only child, when she had so wanted to go to Vienna to pursue her piano studies. Yet they had made the sacrifice and allowed her to do as she wished. She had no idea how valuable this statement would become to her, nor how much it would be challenged in the near future.

Once the meal was completed, Mrs. Scarborough came to Caroline and inquired, "Might I be of service to you today? I would assess that you have a large number of duties for me on your first day back at the Manor."

Caroline had missed Mrs. Scarborough, her personal attendant for the bigger share of her life, almost as much as she had missed her parents during her stay abroad. It was such a satisfaction to know that she was there to tend her every whim and fancy again.

"Indeed I shall require your services," she replied. Then, defying all customary procedures, she jumped to her feet and ran to Mrs. Scarborough, throwing her arms around her to greet her warmly. "I have missed you so much!" she exclaimed. "*Everyone* should have a Mrs. Scarborough of their very own!" That the two women, although so very opposite in every way, were extremely fond of one another was obvious to any beholder.

"I will take my leave," Mrs. Scarborough said, "and I shall await you in your chambers, my lady."

Mrs. Scarborough entered Caroline's private chamber, gazing in awe at the trunks which seemed to fill every spare inch of floorspace. She hesitated only momentarily before going to the one which stood open and began to take one of the dresses from it. She lifted the gown, a beautiful pink creation with rows and rows of rich European lace encircling the skirt, and held it up in front of her. The fact that Caroline was a goodly six inches taller than she was did not enter the woman's mind for a fleeting moment. She walked to the mirror, and for an instant she was a beautiful young woman at a grand ball with every lord in the room having his eyes fixed on her. She was still enraptured in her dreams when Caroline entered the room.

"Would you care to accompany me to Almack's this evening?" Caroline asked, smiling as she watched Mrs. Scarborough drop the gown to the floor, hoping for a way of escape.

"Oh, Miss Caroline!" she said, her face filled with color. She said nothing more, as she found no words to explain her disturbing her charge's private belongings. She had no right to have dabbled in the trunk, and of that she was fully aware. Finally she added, "I am so sorry; I just could not help myself!"

"Your behavior is permissible," Caroline said kindly. "Everyone has a perfect right to fill their heads with visions and dreams—no matter who they are or of what age."

"It is so wonderful to have you here again," Mrs. Scarborough said. "It was so quiet with your presence missing. The Manor suddenly seems as if it has been revived."

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The day passed all too slowly for the lovely Caroline; the festivities which awaited her at Almack's seemed an eternity away. There was, as she had expected, a steady flow of her friends who came calling, anxious to renew old acquaintances and to hear the latest news from the continent and to see the fashions she was certain to have brought with her, knowing that she had returned by way of Paris.

"The Duke of Lennox to see Miss Kent," Forrester announced.

Caroline had been busily engaged with the alterations of her gown for the evening, a beautiful royal blue which she and Mrs. Scarborough had chosen from her new garments. She was pleased that she was presently indisposed, so as to cause the duke to wait her arrival in the drawing room. He was not one of her favorite people, yet he was a close personal friend of the family. Politeness to him came as a duty, rather than a pleasure.

"Tell him he must wait. I must finish the fitting of my dress first," she instructed Forrester.

Forrester promptly delivered the message to the duke, offering him a glass of brandy, which he was always known to accept a little too willingly.

After the dress was fitted and the proper adjustments arranged, Caroline decided she had made her call wait sufficiently.

As she made her entrance, the Duke of Lennox dropped his glass, spilling the few sips which remained, at the sight of her. She had been gone scarce a year, yet she had blossomed into the most beautiful young woman he had ever laid eyes on. He was determined that he would pursue her until he had made her his conquest. Little did he know how much Caroline despised him.

Caroline could not help herself. Before she could stop herself, she said snidely, "Is the glass as slippery as my lord himself?"

One of the things the Duke of Lennox had always admired about Caroline was that she spoke exactly as she thought, not just framing her words as she thought her listeners might wish her to speak. It made a conversation with her always so much more of a challenge. He was pleased to learn that she had not lost this art while she was abroad.

The duke was at a loss for words, which was as uncommon for him as it was for Caroline. He was not known for his silence, although often the thoughtlessness of his speech was quite widely proclaimed. After a considerable period of silence, he finally spoke.

"It has been told that a voucher from Almack's has been issued you. Knowing that this is the first day of your return, I thought perchance you might desire an escort for the occasion. If you would do me the honor, I would be most delighted to have you at my side."

Acknowledging that it would indeed be better to go with even the Duke of Lennox than alone, she agreed, but felt that she was compromising greatly by accepting his offer.

“I shall arrive for you at seven,” he said, taking his leave. Caroline cringed. He made it seem as if she was a personal possession of the duke, which she surely would never become. She found comfort in the fact that he would undoubtedly be quite soused soon after they arrived, leaving her free to enjoy the rest of the evening.

As she descended the winding stairway to meet the Duke of Lennox, the time to depart at hand, Lord and Lady Kent stood in awe of their daughter. She had, indeed, grown to be a most desirable woman during her absence.

The duke stood, his mouth agape, as he watched the grace with which she moved. She now had her corset in place, tightly drawn at the waist to accentuate her already full bosom into a state of near explosion. It was further accented by the low neckline, which she had purposely chosen for this event, so the diamond and sapphire necklace which had once been worn by her grandmother would glisten more than ever before as its light bounced off the royal blue of the satin in her gown. She had never looked lovelier, nor had any other woman in the entire kingdom.

The duke held his hand upwards to assist her into the carriage. She carefully gathered her layers of petticoats about her, smoothing the skirt with its yard upon yard of fullness to offer her most perfect appearance on this important event.

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There was a rustle of whispering throughout the club as she entered, her hand enrapt in the arm of the Duke of Lennox. He was, as usual, dressed in the best finery, yet he seemed to be invisible by comparison to the lovely Caroline Kent. He was but a sparse two or three inches taller than she, yet he puffed his chest to its fullest, appearing much as one who had just won a trophy for the fox hunt or the Royal Race, and is exploiting his triumph.

Caroline tried to hear what was being said, and was successful as she neared the table where Julia Hampton and Elizabeth Grayson were seated.

“It might be known,” Elizabeth stated, “that she would make her premier appearance on a Wednesday!”

“The very same!” Julia replied. “As if she had forgotten in her absence that this was the night of the dance. There will be no men for the likes of us tonight, you may well be assured of that!”

Caroline spoke in ever-so-friendly a manner to the two women who had long been her friends as she passed their table. The Duke

of Lennox issued her to a table of their own, very near the center of the room, where all could see his conquest. He gloated extensively as one by one the patrons came to their table to extend a warm welcome home to Caroline. He found it quite perturbing that the only persons who seemed to take an interest in her were of the male persuasion.

It was disturbing to Caroline as well, as she did wish to maintain her long list of friends from among the young women of London. If she was going to become a pivot of Society, she must do nothing to alienate them or she would soon find her name eliminated from the list of favored guests.

As she had feared, it was a matter of mere moments until a long line seemed to be forming to lay claim to his prize for their dance. As she was whisked about the dance floor, Caroline felt every inch a princess, and she appeared to fill the part well. Never had she been happier in her entire life. She had waited for this day for years. As a young girl, she had envisioned the inside of Almack's and the festivities which occurred. She was not disappointed and had no way of knowing that every other woman in attendance tonight despised the very fact that she was present.

Overtaken by a sudden sense of guilt, she opted to return to the table with the Duke of Lennox. He immediately called to the wench to bring him another brandy, which Caroline saw immediately was not what he needed. As they sat there a man who was seated in a corner, surrounded by numerous young men, became obnoxiously loud and ready.

"'Tis the return of the Old Oak Tree," the men said, rising to his feet and speaking so everyone could hear him. "My good friend," he continued on, picking up a chair and holding it in his hands as though he were addressing it. "It is indeed wonderful to see you again." The man rolled his eyes backwards into his head as he spoke. "And how are things in your great kingdom of Prussia?"

Caroline felt herself becoming ill as she watched this man. He spoke in a most peculiar manner, with spittle running from the corners of his mouth.

"Whoever is that man?" she asked the duke.

"That, my dear," he answered, "is the Prince of Wales—the future king of Great Britain."

"It cannot be so," Caroline protested. "But he appears quite mad!"

"So he wishes. You see, the king has been ill in the past, purported to be mad, he was, and the prince wishes to take over the reign of the realm. So, if he can convince all England that the king is once again stricken with a loss of reason he can succeed in his devilish plot."

"But the prince, why does he speak so?"

“’Tis well known that he is the most talented comic in England. Too bad; he should be content with that for his lot in life. He would be much better at it than he would at trying to play the role of a king.”

Caroline seemed relieved when a young man asked her to dance, as the duke kept leaning closer and closer to her as he spoke. The whole room sat in awe—or rage—depending on the gender of the beholder, as they circled the floor.

Suddenly, with no warning whatsoever, there was a horrendous outburst from an inner room. Caroline had heard that there were other quarters at the club where many of the young men of the day gathered to gamble and she assumed, correctly so, that such was the case now. She did not know, being a newcomer, that the young women were forbidden entrance to such rooms. Always a girl of great curiosity, she left the dance floor, leaving her partner moving to the music alone, so sudden was her departure. She raced to the door from which had come the noise and burst in upon the group.

It did not take long to realize that one of the young men, a stranger to her, was having a most successful turn at the hazard cards, making the other men in attendance very angry.

Looking about the tables, she recognized all of the men with the exception of the man who was causing the ruckus. She was not able to take her eyes from him. His frock, a royal blue which did indeed make him seem to be royalty in the flesh, was trimmed with extravagant gold braids adorning the brocade of the coat itself. His eyes, as blue as his frock, danced about. He obviously was most accustomed to winning. The defeat of his opponents, worthy as they might be for one another, made his countenance glow. Never, in all of her travels abroad nor at home, had Caroline seen such a man.

The stranger glanced upward, catching a glimpse of Caroline, and again turned his face to the table.

“My lords,” he said, “it would appear that I have broken the coffers, and so I bid you all *adieu*. With that, the most stunning man took his absence from them all.

The gentlemen stared in wonder at Caroline. Never had a woman dared to invade their domain. The Duke of Lennox, seeing her plight, quickly removed her from the room and ushered her back to their table. Her face was a deep red once she realized what she had done.

“I beg you forgiveness,” she pleaded with the duke. “I seem to have this terrible custom of entering into things of which I have no right to involve myself. This appears to be one of them—again.”

“I suppose I should be angry,” the duke replied, “but I find it extremely difficult, if not totally outside the realm of possibilities. I

find myself incapable of becoming upset with one as lovely as you are tonight.”

“But that man,” Caroline asked, “is he an acquaintance of yours?”

“No,” the duke replied. “The man has not been in my presence before. He is but a stranger to me.”

“But obviously one of great breeding. His conduct was above reproach, even in the face of trouble. And his manner of dress, it was the most magnificent garb I have ever beheld on a gentleman.”

The duke had intended to capture the heart of his lovely lady tonight. Now it appeared that she was stricken by another, a total stranger at best.

“He spoke with a foreign accent,” she noted, “one of perhaps Scotland. He must be of the house of one of the fathers of that land. Surely he is nobility. He had such...”

“I beg you, let us take our leave,” the Duke of Lennox said, interrupting her and making not even the slightest apology nor excuse.

The fact that the duke was suddenly of a most unpleasant nature was not evident to Caroline. She had other things on her mind. She must learn more about the stranger.

Higgins appeared with the duke’s carriage and only as they mounted it did it become evident to Caroline that while she had been touring the dance floor with the many gentlemen of the evening, the duke had imbibed an exceedingly excessive amount of his all-too-famous brandies. She reached for his hand as he plummeted to the ground, unable to keep his footing.

Higgins came from the front, dropping the reins, to give assistance to the duke, assuring that he was properly seated inside the confines of the carriage. As they settled on the soft velvet seats, Caroline was relieved that the duke soon fell fast asleep, leaving her in peace on the journey back to Marylebone Street and the safety of her home. The reputation of the Duke of Lennox had been widely spread for many years. He knew what he wanted, and he would go to any end to achieve his desired goal. Only as yet, Caroline was unaware that what he wanted was *her!*

Relieved that it was but a short ride from St. James’s Street to the Manor, Caroline hurried to depart from the coach before the duke awakened from his stupor. She would much prefer, particularly tonight, not to have to deal with him—in this state or any other. Her mind was preoccupied with the stranger she had seen earlier and with learning his identity.

As she entered the Manor, her father was seated in his study, poring over a pile of account books. Assuming that they were excess work from the bank, of which he was the principal officer, she paid it no mind.

Caroline tried to quietly go up the stairway to her chamber, hoping to avoid the questions her father might put to her. However, the swishing of the satin from her gown alerted him of her arrival.

He cleared his throat. "Did you find it all you had expected?" he asked.

"That and more," she replied. She did not want to have to explain the events of the evening to her father. She most assuredly did not want to have a confrontation with him about her thoughtless act of barging into the forbidden room, nor of the obsession she felt for the stranger.

"And Lord Lennox?" the earl asked.

"He was quite indecent," she said. "It seems that, as usual, he partook of too much spirits at Almack's. He was, to my good fortune, asleep when we arrived home. I did not trouble him with such a mere formality as to escort me to the Manor. Higgins proved to be quite the gentleman, as always, offering me his company up the walkway."

"Then if you will excuse me," her father said, "I must continue with the books." With that he retreated again to his library, where he sat with a frown on his face.

Caroline was most grateful for the privacy of her own chamber. She had much to mull over in her mind. It was unexplainable, but she knew she must learn more about this man she had seen tonight. As she retired to her bed, sleep was slow in coming. She formulated a plan to try to locate him. He was obviously a man who enjoyed the games of the day, being the expert he had proven to be at Almack's. The most logical place to start, she reasoned, would be at the various clubs on St. James's Street, where gambling was allowed. As she lay quietly, she made a mental list of the various clubs where that would be possible.

Caroline smiled to herself as she thought, "Even our choice in the color of our frocks is equal." Her mind conjured up a mental picture of him, seated as he had been, with his royal blue brocaded waistcoat. She was quite certain that if she had been able to get close enough to him to compare the two, the hues would have proven identical.

Mrs. Scarborough, she thought, would be most apt to lend her assistance. She trusted her implicitly, and she could confide in her above anyone else she knew. She did not want her mother and father to know of the stranger. Once she learned his identity, that would be time enough to relate her interest to them. Besides, she laughed, there was certainly nothing to relate to anyone at this point.

Tipton would not have to be informed of anything. It had long been a custom of Caroline's to visit St. James's Park many afternoons, accompanied, as always, by Mrs. Scarborough. She

most often gave Tipton leave during such trips to go where he wished. He would return at a pre-appointed time to collect them to return to Berkeley Manor. He would be none the wiser, she reasoned.

Feeling more comfortable with her plan in tact, she finally fell into a deep sleep, her unconscious mind filled with dreams of her mysterious man, from whom she could find no escape.

The rain was falling when Caroline awoke in the morning, casting a question on her very plans for the trip to St. James's Park. Nonetheless, she thought, a ride into the center of London was most appropriately called for, since it was to be her first such visit since her return. She hurried to dress, anxious to be about the business of the day. She rang the tiny delicate bronze bell, which she knew would bring Mrs. Scarborough skittering to her side.

"Yes, Miss Caroline," Mrs. Scarborough said as she hurried through the door. "Might I be of assistance?"

Caroline often wished that Mrs. Scarborough, whom she considered to be her closest confidante in the whole world, could bring herself to be less formal with her, yet she knew her upbringing and training forbade such actions.

"I have for us a plot, which we must begin to put into action today," Caroline said, all the while continuing to pull herself into her corset. "If you would be so kind?"

Mrs. Scarborough immediately went to her, pulling on the cords of the corset, wishing that her own slightly rounded figure should look so fine, even without a corset.

"Tighter," Caroline ordered. "I must have it tighter."

"My lady," Mrs. Scarborough argued, "if it becomes much tighter you shall not be able to partake of the fineries that have been prepared for you. All of your favorites. Many of them have seen the table since the day you left."

"But I must insist on your complete discretion in this matter," Caroline said, as if the few exchanges of mundane affairs of the day had never occurred.

"Of course," Mrs. Scarborough hastily agreed. "I would never betray you, Miss Caroline. My word is yours. Now, if I might hear of your plan...then we may begin."

Caroline was aware of the fact that Mrs. Scarborough loved anything which involved a smither of mischievousness. As a young child, the numbers were beyond recall when together they had created varied circumstances which would have been considered questionable at best. It was most pleasing to her that she would be able to once again pursue such actions.

Caroline recounted to her the events of the evening past and the mysterious stranger who had held her every moment captive.

“I must find that man,” she said. “If the remainder of my life is to be spent in search of him, so be it. But I must have that man!”

It was most unusual for Mrs. Scarborough to disagree with Caroline, but she felt that in this instance she must do so. It was her duty, she reasoned. She could not let her charge err in such a way as to live a life of misery and despair.

“Missy,” she said, her voice filled with love and concern. She had not called Caroline “Missy” since she was a very small child. “But of this man, you say you know nothing. He may be, I fear, a millstone hung round your neck. He may well cause you more pain and sorrow than you can bear.”

“One so well-bred and so fair of appearance can bring nothing but good!” Caroline argued.

Mrs. Scarborough had a desire to pursue the argument further, but felt that it would be quite futile. She knew Caroline sufficiently to recognize that once her mind was set, it was a permanent state.

The two finished with the duties pertaining to her dressing and then went to the dining room to join the earl and his wife. She had warned Mrs. Scarborough to refrain against mentioning the plans for the day. “I will handle it with the delicacy it requires,” she assured her abigail.

As they partook of the morning meal which had been so carefully prepared to suit Caroline’s fancy, she noted that her father seemed unduly preoccupied about something. She thought about the way she had seen him studying the books from the bank the night before and decided against questioning him about the cause of his wrinkled brow. Perhaps, she thought, it will lighten his troubles if he has something else to contemplate.

“Mrs. Scarborough and I are going to the center this morning,” she announced. “I have always enjoyed watching the people gather in St. James’s Park. I so missed it in Vienna. It is a beautiful city, with the mountains and all, but it is not London. It is not home. Even the rain and the fog seems a welcome sight to me.”

“That is quite acceptable,” her father said. “I shall have Tipton ready the carriage. I do, however, have one request first. You have not touched the piano since you returned. After we have finished dining, would you favor your father with a selection?”

Caroline smiled. Her father had always enjoyed her musical talents. She was glad that perhaps she could help him with whatever seemed to be the problem at hand. He had always appeared to relax to the sound of her playing.

Caroline made her way to the music room, seating herself at the piano and running her fingers up and down the scales to limber herself after several days’ absence from the instrument. She had practiced faithfully every day while she had been in Vienna. It was

good to return to it again. She seemed to forget her own quest of the day in the course of her music.

“I must neglect you no more,” she muttered, not loud enough for anyone to hear. “If I do not prove faithful to you, my little friend, I shall be like a woman who has been scorned by her lover. You do need a kind and gentle touch.”

It would perhaps seem strange to some to hear such a person conversing with an instrument, but to Caroline her piano was as real as anyone she had ever known. It did, indeed, seem to come to life at the touch of her fingers.

While in Vienna, Caroline had studied under one of the former pupils of the already famous Joseph Haydn. His music was widely acclaimed to be the most inspirational of the century. She broke into song of one of the master’s compositions.

The Earl of Kent sank into the velvet chaise which was near the piano. He did not sit with his customary poise and erect posture, but slouched. As the music swelled, it seemed to breathe life into his troubled being. He straightened himself and seemed intent upon his daughter’s every movement.

When Caroline completed the selection she turned to her father.

“Do you approve of what I have learned?” she inquired.

“It is a marvel!” he exclaimed. “Such ease, such beauty in the notes. I have never heard such music!”

“It is the Maestro,” Caroline explained. “His music is like heaven here on earth. He could take sounds that were not meant to be together and when he combined them, they were beyond description. I was so fortunate to have studied under Herr Franz. Thank you, Father, for allowing me to privilege the time in Vienna afforded me.”

She walked over beside her father and gently kissed his cheek. She thought she saw a glimmer of a tear, but she could not be certain. She knew better than to question him about it.

“Something is turning about like a whirligig in that pretty little head of yours,” the earl said, making it more of a question than a statement.

“Your mind is working too much,” Caroline chided. “It is too long hours at the books. You do imagine it all.”

Caroline knew that her father had always been capable of determining her every mood by the way she played at the piano. At least that, she thought, has not changed. But I must not tell him. Not until I learn more of the man who has come to taunt my every move.

And the earl, sensing the hesitancy in her voice, knew it was best to await the time when she would confide in him. Past experience had taught him that in due course she would come to him. To her mother, perhaps not, but to him, yes. For the moment,

he was just grateful to have her back with them—back where she belonged. Back where he could tend her. She was a young woman, he knew from looking at her, but she was still his little princess.

“I would enjoy listening all the day,” her father said, “but I must take my leave. The books await me. I will bid you farewell for now. But I shall expect more of your lovely hands this eve. Have a fair journey to your park,” he said as he left the room.

Caroline was anxious to make her way to the park, yet as if to call down some magic force she returned to the keyboard, intoning a plea for help in finding the man she so longed to see again.

As they neared St. James’s Park, she watched carefully from the windows of the coach, hoping that fate would be kind to her and she would catch even a glimpse of him.

The rain turned from a heavy downpour to a light, steady mist. As Caroline and Mrs. Scarborough stepped from the carriage, Tipton quickly raised the yellow silk bumbershoot and placed it over the head of Caroline, waiting for her to grasp the handle of her own accord.

“And Mrs. Scarborough?” Caroline asked. “She is to ignore the dampness and walk in the protection of the trees?” Caroline asked jokingly.

“I have my own protection,” Mrs. Scarborough answered, opening her own bumbershoot as she stepped from the coach.

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Caroline and Mrs. Scarborough made their way to the rear of Almack’s, watching the door closely for someone to depart from the club. When the head master left, Caroline quickly made her way towards him.

“Sir,” she said, “if we might persuade you to answer some queries for us, we would be most appreciative.”

The man jumped at the approach. He had not expected to find someone outside his rear door, and certainly no one of the breeding of Caroline, the daughter of the Earl of Kent. Oh, yes, he knew who she was. There was scarce a soul in all of London who had not by now heard of her return from Vienna and of her scandal at Almack’s when she tried to enter men’s quarters, nor of her great beauty. To converse in truth with the magnificent lady was beyond his fondest imagination. He was near the state of dumbness, not knowing what to say to her.

“I—It—what—I am at your command, your grace,” he finally replied.

Caroline placed her hand over her mouth to stifle a chuckle. She was, after all, hardly royalty. “If it would be possible to bring to your mind, sir, the events of Wednesday last, here at Almack’s. If

you recall the man who seemed to be in control of the hazard table. He was a stranger to me, and it appeared that he was little known to the other gentlemen at the table as well.”

“Yes, my lady, I do bring to mind the lord to whom you refer. It would be most right if I should tell my lady of the young man,” he explained. Caroline’s heart jumped suddenly within her. If she only knew who the stranger was, she would know more where to begin her search for him.

Seeing the anxiety which overcame the young woman, he hastened to continue with his explanation.

“But I fear, my lady, that the gentleman to whom you refer has indeed not graced us with a return visit. He has, rather, vanished into thin air. I did inquire as to the other clubs to see if perchance he had been to their sites, but I have been informed that he appeared but once at the Kit-Cat Club. It was there, I have heard it told, that he was able to recite poetry with the best of the lot—equal to Walter Scott himself—and of the tales of yore, he was the most learned of those in attendance. Then, as here, he disappeared, not to be heard from again. Also, he appeared on one occasion at Boodles, where it is well known by all that their cuisine is the nearest to divine in all London. He sampled the fare, and declaring it not to his liking, put to quite a scene and then made haste to depart. Of his person, none else is known. From whence did he come? He speaks with the brogue of a Scotsman. To whence did he disappear? No one seems to know. Who is this man, of obvious breeding and well-being, who has come to cause a puzzlement to all? No one knows. And, I must admit, you are not, my lady, the first to inquire of his whereabouts. It would seem that he has stolen the hearts of every young woman in London who was present here when you dared to cross the threshold of the playing room when he laid claim to the wherewithal of the others in attendance.

“But surely,” Caroline protested, “someone must know. He must reside somewhere. He cannot sleep with the horses!”

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Day after day, come rain or shine, Caroline and Mrs. Scarborough could be found at St. James’s Park, traveling between the clubs, inquiring of the mysterious stranger. Caroline was convinced that one day she would again find him, but each day proved to be fruitless in their hunt.

“Miss Caroline,” Mrs. Scarborough said finally, “there is no rhyme nor reason to your search. We have looked everywhere in the center, and we have failed to locate even one clue as to his whereabouts or identity. I fear, my dear, that it is a lost cause we

pursue. Your perseverance is to be admired, but you must not waste your entire life on such nonsense.”

“Nonsense!” Caroline cried. “It is not nonsense! I will find him. I *must* find him! I cannot live without him! I must continue the search.”

Fearing that Mrs. Scarborough was upset with her insistence in this matter, she opted for remaining at the Manor. She made her way to the piano, playing soft melancholic music which came from her heart rather than from any written music she might have studied in the past. So entranced was she with her music, she did not notice her father enter the room and sit beside her in the large chair he loved to occupy when she played.

“My darling Caroline,” he said, breaking the silence he had held during the music. “I cannot bear to see you thus. You are so sad; your music reveals your heart. What is it that troubles you so?”

Caroline knew she could not confide in her father, as dear as he was to her. He would never understand her obsession with this stranger. And he would certainly never give a nod of approval to her pursuing any man, least of all one of whom she knew nothing. Her position in life decreed that they must find the perfect mate for her—one whose background and standing was at least equal to hers, if not above hers. No, as much as she wished to share her thoughts and feeling with her father, she knew she could not do so. She would have to continue by herself. Now it appeared that even

Mrs. Scarborough might desert her in her quest.

## THE KEITH TRILOGY

### BOOK 3

“Best time travel of 2003” (*Affaire de Coeur Magazine*)

### *Par for the Course*

*Par for the Course* returns to Dunnottar Castle and the Keith clan, but in a new and exciting way. Mikki Jeanotte, a young golf pro at St. Andrew's Golf Course, just outside Aberdeen, Maryland, has been summoned by a strange-sounding woman who insists on having a private early-morning golf lesson. As Mikki waits for her, in a dense fog, she trips on an oak root, finds a black goopy orb she hits to kingdom-come, only to have it burst into a million feathers, and wakes up with her head on the lap of the man of her dreams. How did Mikki get from 1996 and St. Andrew's Golf Course, just outside Aberdeen, Maryland, to the 1500's and St. Andrews Golf Course, just outside Aberdeen, Scotland, with her head in the lap of Lord Robbie Keith, Viscount of Kintore, and in the company of the world's first woman golfer: Mary, Queen of the Scots? She soon discovers that the fate of Queen Mary lies in her hands, and she enlists Lord Robbie's aid to carry out the most far-fetched plan history has ever known. The twist at the end will have you laughing for months to come. It's history like you've never seen it.

Lincoln Golf Course in Grand Forks, North Dakota, early one foggy morning. Ivan and I were driving past it, and the fog was eerie, with a thick layer that was impenetrable, but it started about a foot and a half off the ground. Below that, it was clear as crystal.

“Imagine the things that could happen at a golf course on a day like that,” I pondered. And from there, my mind began to whirl at the speed of a hummingbird’s wings. Baltimore, Maryland, has been Ivan’s favorite spot on earth ever since he was stationed at Aberdeen Proving Grounds in the 1950s when he was in the army, right before he went to Korea.

Hmm, there seems to be a formula here. Take one dose of Aberdeen, begin in Maryland, then transport someone who is involved in golf and transplant them to Aberdeen, Scotland, the home of St. Andrew’s Golf Course, but set them back in time to the days of Mary, Queen of Scots, who was in fact the very first recorded woman golfer in history. Add in our now-beloved Keith clan, since the William Keith who was the head of the clan then, was Queen Mary’s protector, and she spent a good deal of time at Dunnottar Castle. Now, what if our modern golfer was from someplace that Mary would have recognized. Paris! Yes, Mary had lived there for many years during her first marriage. But let’s move Paris from France to Paris, Texas. Imagine trying to explain to the queen why somebody from Paris talks with a nasal Texas twang! And what else goes with Texas? Why, horses, of course! Every Texas cowboy has a horse! And the Keiths were noted for the raising of the first Clydesdale horses.

Then, the day the book was sent off to my publisher, I was talking to a young woman, who just happens to be the niece of my cover artist, Bonny Crow. She was having what my kids called an “Alexander’s very bad, terrible, horrible no good day,” as per their favorite children’s book by that name. She asked me what the name of my lead character in *Par for the Course* was. When I told her it was Michelle, she said, “Well, you could at least have made it Mechi!” (That was her name.) So, I raced home and called my publisher. Yes, it was a simple matter of replacing Michelle with Mechi, thanks to the “select” and “replace all” feature on the computer. And Mechi was the star of the book! When I got my first copies, I took it over to Sam’s Club, where she works, and showed it to her. Her reaction was delightful. “Oh, this is so embarrassing! Hey, come here, guys, and look at this!” In the matter of a few minutes, as far as the employees at Sam’s Club, it was not *Par for the Course*; it is *The Mechi Book*. That is what makes writing so worthwhile—making somebody a little bit happy!

# ***PAR FOR THE COURSE***

## ***(A Time travel)***

### Chapter One

"Life isn't fair!" the red-haired actress on the TV said, banging her fists on the wall.

Mechi Jeanotte stared at the screen. She always watched *Another World*, but she didn't even seem conscious that she had *General Hospital* on instead. Maybe it was fate. It certainly echoed her own experiences over the past few days.

In less than one week her father had died, she had moved clear across the country to begin her first job as a golf pro at St. Andrew's Golf Course, just outside Aberdeen, Maryland, and the only boy—no, man—she had ever dated told her he was getting married. And it wasn't to her!

"You're damned tootin' life's not fair!" she shouted back at the portable screen. "Not this one, anyway!"

She had practiced so hard to get rid of her Texas twang, but it came through loud and clear now. She didn't care. The only good thing she could find to think about was that so many things had been fouled up that it couldn't get any worse.

"Dad!" she cried out, knowing he couldn't hear her.

It had all been so sudden. One minute he was there talking to her at the breakfast table, and the next minute he was gone. Gone!

Forever! There wasn't any solace in the fact that he had at least stuck around for the first twenty-three years of her life, unlike her mother, who died when she was almost too young to remember her.

Sensing the futility of her plea to her missing father, she turned her focus to Robert Pearson. If she admitted the truth to herself, she knew that part of her life, at least, was for the best, having ended as abruptly as her father's life. She tried to imagine the rest of her life with him. It sent cold shivers up and down her spine. He was the dullest, most boring, spoiled, arrogant person she had ever known. What had she ever seen in him, anyway?

The truth of the matter was, nobody else had ever paid her the slightest bit of attention. She had always suspected that the only reason he liked her was so he could ride the thoroughbred horses

she and her father raised on their ranch in Paris, Texas. She had seen him plenty of times, trotting through town, the girls swooning over his shiny black hair and his slim, trim body. He acted like that

horse was his! The nerve of it, she thought, suddenly overwhelmed with relief that she wasn't there anymore and that he didn't have any interest in following her to the ends of the earth. Shoot! He didn't even follow her to the end of the block after he told her he was going to marry Helen Jean Berkeley. Well, let him try to make his way in her world of society balls, oil tycoons' meetings and fancy shindigs. They'd all find out in a hurry what a fraud he was and she would dump him as fast as he had just dumped Mechi. She had known Helen Jean all her life, and she was nobody's fool. She'd end up taking him for a ride; she was sure of it. Served him right, too. She had made a clean break with everything as soon as her father's funeral was over. Now, she was determined to make a fresh start. She had a new job, a wonderful apartment, the glistening pink 1957 Cadillac convertible she had always dreamed of owning... Maybe life wasn't fair, but it wasn't all that bad, either.

"B-r-r-r-ing!"

Mechi jumped at the sound of the phone. She quickly reached to grab it. "It must be the club," she reasoned aloud. "Nobody else has my number yet."

"Hello."

"Mechi?" came the deep male voice she knew so well. "Are you okay? I feel really bad that I didn't make it back in time for Dad's funeral. Can you ever forgive me? I know it wasn't fair to leave you with everything to do..."

"Hold it, little bro!" Mechi yelled into the phone, interrupting Brian, her older brother.

She couldn't find it in her heart to tell him that it had been so long since she had seen him that she had almost forgotten she even had a brother. After all, they had never been real close. He was twelve years older than she was, and he went off to join the Navy when she was just a little girl. On the few occasions when he had come home on a furlough, he had seemed more like a stranger than a brother. Now, with the death of their father—their only link—she found true solace in the sound of his voice.

"I really mean it," he insisted, continuing as if she hadn't said a word. "You know I would have been there if I could have."

"I know," Mechi said, sarcasm running rampant in her voice. "Just like you were when Mom died. Or when I was in the school play. Or when Dad had his heart attack a few years ago. Oh, sure. I understand perfectly. It was never your fault. Blame it on good old Uncle Sam! He doesn't have a heart. Well, sometimes I think you don't, either."

"Jeez!" Brian said, breathing a deep sigh of relief that she had finally stopped. "Try to apologize to some people!"

"I'm sorry," Mechi said slowly. "I didn't mean to get on your case. It is just that it's been a really rough week." She swallowed

hard, hoping the lump in her throat would disappear before she broke out in hysterical sobs.

"I know," Brian said. "I really am sorry I wasn't there for you. I mean, we're all we've got left. It's just you and me, kid. The two of us against the big old ugly world."

"I'll make it on my own," she said. "I don't need your help, either!" she wanted to add, but decided against it. "By the way, where are you calling from?"

"Oh!" Brian answered excitedly. "I almost forgot. We just docked in South Carolina. The ship will be in port for about a week. I've managed to get a few days free, 'cuz of Dad and all, you know. I'll catch a bus tonight. I'll be in Aberdeen early tomorrow morning. Suppose you could meet your big brother at the bus depot? That is, if it's not too early for you. If it is, I can just wait it out until you get up."

"Don't worry about it," Mechi said. "I'll be there. What time does it get in?" She wasn't going to tell him that she hadn't been sleeping anyway, so she might just as well be there to pick him up. At least it gave her something different to look forward to.

"Six-fifteen," he said. When she was silent he added, "I told you it was early."

"No," she said. "I'll be there." She hesitated a few moments, then added, "It will be good to see you. Honest!"

"You, too," he said. "See you tomorrow, then."

Mechi heard the click of his receiver, but held hers in her hand for a few minutes before setting it back in its cradle. She meant it. It would be good to have her brother there with her, even if it was only for a few days. Like he said, all they had left was each other.

Mechi suddenly began to laugh. Yeah, she was going to make it. She would show dear old Robert that he was the last thing in the world she needed. Nobody with an ounce of love or compassion would walk out on the girl he claimed to love the same week her father died! It was unthinkable! Revolting! Utterly uncouth! No, she didn't need the likes of Robert Pearson. What an old stuffed shirt, anyway! Imagine! He wouldn't even let her call him Bob, or Robbie, or anything else. He was so formal even the girl he claimed he was going to marry had to call him Robert! And he had told her time after time that he loved her!

Love! The word seemed to have barbs sticking out of it on all sides. Robert Pearson didn't have the foggiest idea what love was all about. The only thing he loved was himself. She should have seen it coming, but she was as blind as a bat. Was she really that desperate?

Well, no more. She was sure her mother had loved her, but she had gone and left her. She knew her father loved her. Oh, he didn't come out and say so, but his actions told her countless times. She

was the apple of his eye. Yes, she knew what love felt like, but she would probably spend her whole life searching for that kind of love and never find it.

She yawned and stretched, then glanced at her watch. She hadn't realized that it was so late: nearly midnight. If she was going to get an early start in the morning, she should turn in for the night and at least try to get some sleep. If only she could keep from having those awful nightmares. Visions of people dressed in old-fashioned costumes kept coming to take her away with them. She didn't know who they were, or where they were going or what it all meant, but she always woke up in a cold sweat afterwards. But, in some strange, inexplicable way she felt like she belonged with them. Like it was the only place that really held any peace for her any more. Especially the big, virile man who scooped her up in his arms as she fell and carried her off—to safety, she hoped.

None of it makes any sense, she thought as she climbed into bed. She reached up and switched off the lamp which sat on the table beside her bed.

"B-r-r-ring!"

Mechi groped around in the dark for the phone. It must be Brian. Nobody from the club would call her this late at night. She should have known as much. He was canceling out again. The ship had to leave earlier than they planned.

"Hello," she said softly into the phone.

"Miss Jeanotte? Michelle?"

A strange-sounding English-accented woman spoke into the phone.

"Yes," Mechi said cautiously. "Who is this?" It sure wasn't Brian. Or anyone else she recognized, either.

## ***DAKOTA PRINTER***

"Papa" Joseph Levine and his granddaughter, Mary Jane, run a small weekly newspaper in newly settled Fargo, Dakota Territories. Following Papa's bout with illness, he puts an ad in the Minneapolis *Tribune* for an assistant. At the most opportune time, handsome, meticulous Johathan Bohner appears. Jonathan and Mary Jane get off on the wrong foot from the start, but before long their sparks turn to kindling, and love begins to heat up.

Jonathan soon lets it slip that he has an ulterior motive, which he calls his "crusade," and he challenges Mary Jane to seek for her crusade as well. With the appearance of a minister from Chicago and a schoolteacher from Rochester, MN, life in Fargo blossoms. Even Libbie and Col. George Custer put in an unexpected appearance.

When Jonathan goes to help the Indians out on the prairie, fate steps in and Mary Jane fears she has lost her true love. Can they possibly find a future together on the prairie in the 1870s?

A bit of background—the story behind the story.

My husband, Ivan, is the grandson of an old-time newspaperman. His grandfather, Walter Cole Smith, had small town weekly newspapers in many Minnesota and North Dakota towns. *Dakota Printer* is by no means his story, and yet it is. Papa Levine is patterned very much after Walter Cole Smith. The rest of the story is fictional, yet many of the incidents you will read about are based on tales he told Ivan and the other family members.

I had a great deal of fun incorporating the Indians (no, they were not called Native Americans in the 1870s) into the story. You see, I grew up in the middle of the Chippewa National Forest in northern Minnesota, but it was many years later that I discovered that I had some Indian (Mohawk) blood flowing through my veins. I endeavored to show them in the light of the fine people they are. Ivan has a belief, and I think he is right, that no matter who you are or who you encounter, you can always learn something from the people around you. The most brilliant engineer in the depths of Africa can learn how to properly hang a hammock from a native. This is what I hope to portray as you meet the Indian friends in *Dakota Printer*.

Finally, I read several books about the Custers, including Libbie Custer's own memoirs, *Boots in the Saddle*. They did stop in Fargo on their way west, but I don't know that George Custer left his plans with a newspaper man. But a fiction writer does have the privilege of creating a "what if" scenario.

## DAKOTA PRINTER

### Chapter One

"I don't care what you use the money for," Papa yelled. "You know how I feel about liquor. It is the curse of the white man, and now you want to give it to the Indians. As if they don't have enough problems of their own!"

"But don't you see?" Olaf Larson argued. "We can use the money to feed the families who are practically starving here on the prairie, what with the drought this summer and all."

"When I set up *The Prairie Pioneer*," Papa—as everyone called Joseph Levine—said, "I made it perfectly clear from the very beginning that the newspaper would not tolerate any hanky-panky about booze. It is man's worst enemy. Now you, of all people, Olaf Larson, try to convince me not to drop your account because of some small piddling matter like your having a still on your farm! Ha!"

Mary Jane had busied herself in the kitchen, preparing dinner for her grandfather. She could hear Papa and Olaf discussing something, but when the voices grew louder she ran to see what was happening. Papa was a kind, gentle man and it took a lot to get him that excited.

"Papa," Mary Jane exclaimed, "remember your heart!"

"My heart! Enough with my heart," Papa retorted. "Always it is my heart. I have never had a pain in my heart in my life. My heart, indeed!"

Mary Jane knew he was right. She had taken care of her grandfather ever since they had arrived in this forsaken land of the Dakota Territory two years ago, in 1871. His heart was as strong as that of Nellie, their trustworthy horse, and she knew it. But she needed some sort of argument, and a weak heart was as good as any.

"Mary Jane," Papa warned, "this is between Olaf and me. It does not concern you. Go on about your work."

Mary Jane knew she could not win an argument with Papa. She would not interfere, yet she would stay on as an observer to make certain no one took advantage of her beloved Papa.

"I know the seed you fetch from Minneapolis is good and that it helps the farmers. I also know your price is fair," Papa told Olaf. "But if you get some of your money from that still of yours, I will not be a part of any further advertising you wish to do. You will have to go hunt up your own business. Good day, Mr. Larson."

Papa walked to the door, holding it open for Olaf. Seeing that he was not about to leave, Papa went about his work, sputtering to himself about the sins of the white man being sown among the red brothers. Olaf pursued the argument, making his sale of the proceeds from his still seem almost righteous.

Mary Jane watched the scene from the sidelines, unaware that an intruder had appeared on the scene. Sensing that the argument was not about to be settled, the stranger stepped into the arena of battle.

"If you don't mind, sir," the man said, "I think I could offer a solution to this problem which would be agreeable to both of you."

He did not wait for anyone to acknowledge him or give him a go-ahead, but proceeded forthwith.

"I presume, sir," he said, looking directly at Papa, "that you are the owner of this fine newspaper."

Papa did not speak, but he nodded his head in agreement.

"And you, sir," he said, facing Olaf Larson, "must be a customer who has done a fair amount of advertising in the paper. Is that correct?"

Olaf nodded as well. Mary Jane could not believe her eyes. Who was this stranger? And what right did he have to interfere in the business which she and Papa had worked so hard to protect from such men as Olaf Larson?

"There seems to be a difference of opinion with regards to a still which one of you owns. How valuable is the advertising you get in the newspaper?"

"It is invaluable," Olaf replied. "I could not make a decent living for my family if I could not get any ads placed."

"Then," the stranger continued, "it would seem quite logical if you would agree to rid your land of the still and there would be no more problems."

"Is that okay with you?" the stranger asked Papa.

"It would be just fine," Papa said, "except that I do not trust him now that I know he has been hiding the firewater all this time. I could not be certain that he would destroy it."

"If I went along, sir, would that satisfy you that it was truly done?" the stranger asked.

Mary Jane had taken just about all the interference she could handle from this strange young man. In the first place, she reasoned, he did not look like he belonged in this part of the country at all. He was extremely well dressed, complete with his immaculate black suit, stiffly starched white shirt and necktie—even down to the shiny gold watch chain hanging from his pocket. Papa would certainly not trust such a man as this to prove that such an important task had been accomplished.

"And just who do you think you are?" Mary Jane demanded of the stranger.

"Begging your pardon, ma'am," he replied, so courteously it made Mary Jane almost nauseated. "I do believe we have not had a proper introduction. Jonathan Bohner, at your service." He bowed deeply as he spoke.

"So?" Mary Jane responded. "That is supposed to mean something to us?"

"I am here in response to the ad your father took out in the *Minneapolis Tribune*. It seems he had need of help with the newspaper, and I have wanted to come further west for several years. It seemed like the perfect answer to both of our problems."

Mary Jane laughed heartily. "*You* want to live in this place?"

"Does that strike you as funny?" he asked Mary Jane. "Did it ever occur to you that I did not expect to find a beautiful young woman like you out here on the prairie either?"

"Enough with the barbed-wire tongues," Papa admonished. "There is work to be done, and if you are willing to do it, Mr. Bohner, so be it. Bring back your report to me as soon as possible."

Olaf Larson and Jonathan left, without saying another word to either Mary Jane or Papa.

When it was time to eat, Mary Jane went into the print shop to fetch Papa. He came and sat at the table, trying to make conversation with her, but she sat pouting, not answering him at all.

"If you can't be pleasant, you might just as well excuse yourself and go to your room," Papa said, scolding Mary Jane as if she were a little girl, not a grown woman of twenty-three years. She hated it when he treated her like that. Papa had raised her ever since her mother and father had both died on that dreadful trip from Wisconsin to the Dakota Territory, but she still did not like to be treated as a child.

"I'm sorry, Papa," Mary Jane said. "It is just, I didn't know anything about you putting that ad in the *Trib*. And you don't know anything about that man. He doesn't look at all like the kind of man you could trust in this country. He looks like a city slicker!" Papa could detect the derision the word held for her by the tone of her voice.

"I didn't realize that I had to ask your permission before I did anything," Papa snapped.

Mary Jane sat, her head bowed, staring at her plate and pushing the food from one side to the other. After a long silence, she spoke softly. "I am sorry, Papa. Of course you do not need my approval. You always know the right thing to do. It is just..."

Papa did not interrupt, but waited for her to continue.

"I thought you and I were doing so well, now that you were over that terrible cholera. I was so afraid that I would lose you, just like I lost Mama and Daddy."

Papa felt the pain she sensed. He had felt it too. He reached for her hand, taking it gently in his own.

"Don't you see, Mary Jane? That is why I put the ad in the *Minneapolis Tribune*. I knew we needed help. Running this paper is too much for a woman. It is too much for me until I get my strength back. I placed the ad and left the answer up to the Lord. Judging by what we witnessed this morning, I would say that He has done a fine job of supplying our need."

Mary Jane did not want to admit to such easy defeat, but she knew in her heart that Papa was right.

There was little conversation during the meal, but once they were finished they busied themselves about the job of printing the edition which was due the following morning.

Since Papa's illness, Mary Jane had assumed much more of the physical part of the printing job than she had done before. She never complained, but her shoulders and back often ached from the weight of the heavy platen as she pulled it up and down, up and down. She lifted her arms to bring the large metal plate down to print another copy of the sheet she was running on the press. It took both hands to move the heavy disc, and she felt it stick as she tugged extra hard. Just as she felt it free on her, her skirt—large and billowing as always—caught in between the two surfaces.

"Mary Jane!" Papa hollered. "Let me help you. Your skirt!"

Before she realized what had happened, Papa was pulling on her skirt to try to rescue it from a permanent impression of the *Prairie Pioneer*. They both fell backwards onto the floor, the platen making a loud *clang* as it swung back to its original position. Papa began to laugh. Mary Jane was angry for a moment, then she joined Papa in the laughter.

They were so engrossed in the situation at hand they did not hear the door open. Jonathan Bohner stood gazing at the pair, wondering if perhaps he had made a mistake. He had certainly never expected to find himself in the midst of a pair like these two!

"Oofta!" Papa said, standing up and brushing himself off. As a final touch, he swirled the ends of his handlebar mustache between his fingers. Feeling quite presentable again, he went to help Mary Jane to her feet. She knew she must look a mess. Her hair was disheveled from working over the press all day. Her white blouse, stiffly starched and crisp in the morning, showed signs of various headlines from the paper. She tried to smooth her full, long black skirt, as if that would right all the wrongs of her appearance.

"Do you remember what you said when I was so sick?" Papa asked. "You said that you and I would make a real team. What a

team we are! I think God answered just in time, sending us this fine young man to help us. From the looks of both of us, we can use all the help we can get."

Mary Jane knew that this was not the best time to argue with him, but she was very uneasy about the stranger who had waltzed his way into their business with no forewarning. They had gotten along by themselves for this long; she was not willing to share the work of the paper with anyone else. It was Papa's paper—and hers. She certainly did not want to share it with someone who looked so—her mind groped for an apt description—perfect.

"Might I be of some assistance?"

Mary Jane did not turn to look towards the door. She knew that the stranger, Jonathan Bohner, was there again. Why did he have to show up at the most inopportune times?

"We are doing quite well without you," Mary Jane snapped. She did not mean for it to sound the way it had, but what was said was said.

"I can tell," Jonathan replied, a smirk on his face.

Papa came to the rescue, trying to clear the air. "We do have a paper to get out before the morning. It would be a good time to find out if Mr. Bohner here knows his printing business or not."

Papa turned to Mary Jane. "Why don't you fix us a fine supper? I am sure Mr. Bohner must be hungry." Adding it as a slight afterthought he said, "Did Olaf get rid of his still?"

"Totally," Jonathan replied. "It is dead and buried. I helped him bury the whole operation under a ton of dirt myself."

Mary Jane looked at Jonathan in wonder. How had he managed to do any physical labor and still look immaculate? It made her more conscious than ever of her own appearance.

"Speaking of food," Jonathan said, "I did not realize how good that sounded. I am hungry enough to eat a horse!"

Mary Jane saw her opportunity to get back at him, and she grabbed it gladly.

"How did you know what I was going to serve?" she asked, a gleam sparkling in her eyes.

Jonathan stopped dead in his tracks.

"You aren't serious, are you?" he asked.

Papa laughed. "Eat Nellie? We may be a lot of things, but cannibals we are not! Nellie is one of us. Without her we would never get to the scene of the crime, or the story, whatever it is."

"Whew!" Jonathan said, beads of perspiration popping out on his forehead. "For a minute there you had me going. I have heard some strange stories about life on the prairie. I just thought..."

"Never fear," Papa said, patting Jonathan reassuringly on the back, "we don't eat anything we talk to."

Mary Jane was glad to make an exit. She hoped that Jonathan Bohner would forget this whole affair, finding her and Papa on the floor in a heap.

Jonathan looked at Papa. "We have some work to do, I do believe." He did not wait for any further invitation, but went straight to the press. He took a large stack of the paper that was resting atop the workbench along the wall. He screwed it securely in place on the platen. He pulled the lever, making it look as easy as picking up a chair from the floor.

Papa watched the young man in amazement. Jonathan was not a large man. In fact, he looked rather fragile. But appearances can be deceiving; Papa had always known that.

Jonathan lifted the platen from the rollers, extracted one sheet of the paper and began to lower it for the second copy.

"How many of these do you want printed?" he asked.

"One hundred and fifteen," Papa answered. That was a job which usually took Mary Jane about three hours, putting one sheet at a time on the large metal plate.

Papa sat and watched, his eyes filled with wonder, at this man. "If he is half as much of a man on his ideals," Papa thought, "as he is on that machine...God has indeed been good to us!"

In the kitchen, Mary Jane set about preparing the wood cook stove so she could cook the meal. She had gathered wood early in the morning, knowing it would be a busy day at the paper. Now she was glad she at least had that much of the situation under control. She took the poker and carefully stirred the ashes to see if there was any life in the fire from dinner. Finding it dead, she took a piece of dry bark and lit it with the long, wooden match, dropping it quickly into the stove. The fire caught immediately on the small pieces of wood she had set in place. Seeing that it was burning, she carefully set a larger log on top, knowing that it would burn for the period of time she needed heat for her cooking.

It was late October, and even though the days had been warm, towards evening it got quite cool. The fire felt good and Mary Jane loved the smell of the wood burning.

Mary Jane chuckled to herself. She could hardly wait until Jonathan went to one of the farms in the country and smelled their fires. She would not warn him of things to come, such as the cattle ranchers who burned the manure to keep warm during the winter. Jonathan wanted to learn about prairie life, so learn he would.

Looking out the window, Mary Jane realized that it was getting late already. The sun was almost hidden behind the horizon. The days were getting shorter, and winter would be on them all too soon.

Mary Jane shuddered as she thought about winter. Last year had been her first without her parents. She was glad she still had Papa

to face another winter with her. She would never get used to the horrible prairie wind. It howled as it came through the cracks in the house. In Wisconsin and Minnesota there had been many trees to shelter the buildings from the wind. In the Dakota Territory there was nothing around anything except wide open spaces. The only protection they had from the weather was the fire of the barrel stove Papa had built and the fire in the cook stove. Mary wondered if Jonathan Bohner would be of a mind to help her fetch wood from the banks of the Red River, or if that would be beneath his dignity.

Mary Jane looked up, hearing someone behind her. She expected to see Papa, but as she fixed her eyes on the person before her she began to laugh, then quickly covered her mouth to hide the grin she could not contain.

"What happened to you?" she asked, looking at a completely black-faced Jonathan Bohner.

"That dumb ink!" he sputtered. "Nobody told me it was nearly liquid. In Minneapolis we use paste ink. Where ever did you get such a hair-brained idea as to use liquid ink?"

"Didn't Papa tell you?" Mary Jane asked. Not waiting long enough for an answer, she continued. "That is the winter ink. You just got ahold of the wrong can by mistake."

"Winter ink?" Jonathan almost shouted. "Whoever heard of winter ink? Ink is ink! Never in all of my born days have I ever heard of such a thing!"

Papa walked in, his eyes filled with tears from the laughter. Mary Jane enjoyed the way he lost his calm, collected image. She longed to say "Turn about's fair play," but she bit her tongue and thought better of it.

"Wish you hadn't come, lad?" Papa asked.

Jonathan was too busy washing his face and hands off in the basin to answer. Once he looked up, Papa and Mary Jane again burst into laughter.

"At my expense?" he asked. "What is it now?"

"You look just like a black man who white-washed his face," Papa answered. "Here, look for yourself."

Jonathan held up the broken piece of mirror that was all that was left of the mirror they had brought when they first arrived.

"The saints preserve us!" he exclaimed. His face was, indeed, white. But beyond the area he had cleaned was a complete circle of the black ink. Seeing how funny he looked, even Jonathan could not keep from laughing.

"Now," Mary Jane said, "would you two mind getting back to work so I can get on with the work of preparing the meal?"

Almost as if in obedience, both men turned on their heels and left the kitchen.

Jonathan pondered Mary Jane, standing over the stove, peeling the potatoes and cabbage as she dropped them into the pot of water that was boiling on the stove. She looked so at home there, yet she had seemed as if she belonged in the print shop, even when she sat in a heap on the floor. He wondered if there was any place she did not seem to belong.

"Well," Jonathan remarked, "I guess we are pretty well evened up now, wouldn't you say, sir?"

"First off," Papa commented, "you may call me Mr. Levine, or if you prefer, most everyone in these parts calls me Papa. Papa is just fine. But 'sir' is a little too much. Sounds like some fancy high-falutin' place. And as you have just seen, we aren't exactly that."

The two men laughed. Papa put his arm on Jonathan's shoulders. "I think I am going to like you, lad. I really do. And I think God has been very good to us. Welcome to Fargo, Dakota Territory. We are glad you are here."

Jonathan thought about his trip with Olaf Larson early in the day. Olaf had said that Papa had the strongest principles of anyone he had ever met. He told him that Mary Jane was his granddaughter, not his daughter, as Jonathan had assumed. He did not know much about his new surroundings, but he was learning a great deal about his employers in a very short time. Papa and Mary Jane were obviously totally devoted to each other. Their sense of humor was one of the rarest he had ever come across. He felt so at home, even after only part of one day, it was hard to realize that he had been there such a short time.

Papa handed Jonathan another can of ink. He very carefully opened it, fearing that it might spray him like a skunk attacking his prey.

"Oh, good," he said, "it is the summer ink."

Papa, between snorts, tried to explain. "In the winter it is so cold here in Fargo that the ink freezes up and it takes nearly a week to get it soft enough to run onto the rollers. So while it was still soft enough in the summer, I mixed it with some oil. But in the summer it gets so hot the stuff will melt right out of the press and the paper will turn into one big blob. So I took some tar and mixed it with the summer ink. So you see, the cans that are marked with an 'S' are summer ink, and the cans that are marked with a 'W' are for winter ink."

"You can't be serious," Jonathan replied.

"Never been more so in my life. You haven't seen anything until you have seen a Dakota winter!"

Jonathan wondered if Papa was trying to scare him off.

Jonathan snickered to himself. Never, he thought, had he ever seen a man like this one. The more he thought about Joseph Levine

and his granddaughter, Mary Jane, the more fascinating they seemed. What would have driven them to this forgotten place called Fargo? Why was she with her grandfather? Why were her parents nowhere to be found? There were many unanswered questions, but, he reasoned, he was in no position to pry just yet. He felt certain he would learn the answers—in time.

Jonathan went about his work on the old creaking press. Papa marveled at how fast he could make the thing move.

"Young blood," Papa said, barely audible.

"What did you say?" Jonathan asked, not stopping to listen any more carefully than was necessary.

"Nothing," Papa replied. "Just keep on with the press. At the speed you are going, you will be all finished by the time we go to eat. Then we can relax for an evening. What a luxury!"

Jonathan screwed another pile of paper onto the platen of the press.

"By my calculations that should be the last one. Would you care to check?"

Papa went to the pile of printed papers and began to count.

"Yeah," he said, "that one should do it."

Papa began to assemble the sheets and folded them in half, ready to be sold for a penny a piece in the morning. He worked swiftly, feeling a new surge of energy from simply observing this young man. His strength seemed to be contagious.

Jonathan approached Papa and sat down beside him.

"Mind if I give you a hand?" Jonathan asked Papa. "Looks like you have it pretty well under control by yourself, though."

"Don't mind if you do," Papa said. "The best way to tell a true boss is to see how little work he can get by without doing."

Jonathan could not imagine Joseph Levine as being lazy. There were probably many things he was, but lazy was certainly not one of them. He had noticed the strength in Papa's eyes as he sat watching him pull the lever on the press, raising the platen up and down quickly. He was certain that Papa had done this for many years, but now he seemed too frail to exert that much pressure. Still, Jonathan was sure he could do it if it came down to his doing it himself or forsaking his beloved paper.

There were only ten papers left to assemble when Mary Jane came into the shop. "Anyone care for something to eat?" she asked.

Jonathan did not waste a second in jumping to his feet and racing towards the door.

"You two children go ahead," Papa said. "I will be along as soon as I finish the last few papers."

Jonathan turned back to face Papa. "I am sorry, sir. I did not think. I will help you."

"No," Papa argued. "I will finish them myself. You have already earned your keep today—and then some. Scat!"

Mary Jane felt uneasy as she and Jonathan entered the kitchen, alone together. She was glad Beulah Hegdahl did not know Jonathan was here. There would be some scandalous talk if she found out.

The food was already on the table and Jonathan went to sit at one of the three places that were set. He waited until Mary Jane took her place, then chose one of the other two seats.

"No!" Mary Jane shouted. "That is Papa's place. He always sits at the head of the table."

Jonathan wondered how there could be a "head" to a round table, but he did not ask any questions. He silently moved to the other place and sat there.

"I prefer to wait for Papa," Mary Jane said, "but you may begin right away, if you like."

"Thanks, but no thanks," Jonathan said. "I will be glad to wait for your grandfather."

Mary Jane noticed the difference. She had made a mental note earlier when he had referred to Papa as her father. *Olaf, no doubt*, she thought.

It was only a matter of a few minutes until Papa joined them.

"What? Nobody is hungry?" he asked. Then he smiled broadly. "I know," he said teasingly, "Jonathan is afraid to try the meat. I can assure you, my boy, that it is not horse meat."

"It is dried buffalo meat," Mary Jane explained. "It is really quite tasty."

Jonathan had never eaten buffalo meat any more than he had eaten horse meat, but it did not hold the same vulgarity in his mind. He was willing to chance it.

Papa bowed his head, giving thanks to God for the safety of the day and for His provisions for them. "But especially," he added, "thank you, Lord, for our new friend."

Mary Jane and Jonathan echoed a resounding "Amen." *Perhaps*, Mary Jane thought, *this will not be so bad after all*. It was good to see Papa enjoying the company of this stranger in their midst. If it made Papa happy, she could put up with it.

Jonathan reached for the tall glass of milk in front of him. He sipped it slowly, nearly choking on it. He was not prepared for the warmth of it going down his throat.

"Sorry," Papa said. "In a few weeks we will probably have ice from the river. But what we cut and packed in sawdust last year did not last long enough. Hope you can put up with some few inconveniences around here. Trust you knew, before you left the big city, that this would not be your waiting ground for heaven."

You might even have to make a few sacrifices. Are you prepared for that?"

Jonathan liked the straightforwardness of Joseph Levine. He did not appreciate someone who tried to paint a brighter picture than was the portrait of reality.

"I am quite prepared," Jonathan answered, "to do whatever is necessary. Your advertisement was very sketchy; I can see why. If anyone knew what this place was like, he would never come."

"Does that include you?" Mary Jane asked.

"No," he replied. "I am a glutton for punishment." Jonathan wondered if he should add something about his reasons for coming to the Dakota Territory, but he decided against it. There would be plenty of time for that later. He had always felt uneasy about sharing his dreams with others; they would think he was crazy. Somehow, he knew that Mary Jane and Papa would understand. At least Papa would.

During the meal, Papa asked Jonathan about his trip. He had come on the stagecoach, not at all like the trip they had made two years earlier. Papa told of the trip they had made, with his son and daughter-in-law both dying en route. Jonathan could feel Papa's pain as he recounted the story. He told of the cattle they had brought, with over half of them dying from the heat. He told how they had brought a small amount of furniture in the covered wagons and had to use some of the wood from it for heat the first winter, as the blizzards were so severe they could not get to the riverside to cut any firewood. "The Indians," he explained, "attacked the main wagon, and when they saw how sick Mary Jane's mother and father were, they went and got herbs and berries to try to nurse them back to health."

Jonathan watched Mary Jane as Papa talked. He wondered if she liked it here in the Dakota Territory, or if she was just here because Papa was here. Whatever the reason, she seemed quite adept at anything she tried to do. She certainly was a good sport, trying to run the press, even when it knocked her to the floor.

Papa continued, telling of setting up the printing press in the small tarpaper shack he had constructed as soon as they arrived in Fargo, and how they had later finished building the log house they now occupied. Tears filled his eyes as he related losing his beloved wife and the guilt he faced over this tragedy. He told of his fight to get a doctor to move to Fargo to eliminate further deaths, and how Doc O'Brien had kept him alive, nursing him back to health with the help of his wife, Margaret.

Jonathan jumped, having had no warning from Papa before he banged his fist on the table.

"Enough!" Papa shouted. "There have been some hard times, that is true. But God has been good to us. We have been able to

fight some of the evils on the Red River Valley. We have had more success than in other towns. And now we have you. God has indeed blessed us. Don't you agree, Mary Jane?"

Mary Jane nodded, sensing how much these two men were alike.

After talking for awhile, Papa said to Jonathan, "You are welcome to stay in the print shop, if you like. If you don't like," he said, grinning, "you may stay wherever you want. But there are no fancy hotels here. The choice is yours."

"If you don't mind," Jonathan said, "I believe I prefer the shop to the outdoors, with the buffalo and Indians out there to keep me company."

"Mary Jane," Papa asked, "where is the extra mattress? We will need it for Jonathan."

"It is on my bed. I will fetch it."

"No!" Jonathan protested. "I cannot take your mattress. I will sleep on the floor or a quilt."

Mary Jane smiled warmly. "I have another mattress. That one is there because I did not know where else to put it. You are welcome to use it."

Admitting that it had been a very long day and that he was tired, Jonathan said he would like to retire for the night.

Papa wished them both goodnight and went to his small room. He, too, was tired. Mary Jane checked all the lanterns to be sure they were extinguished. Ever since the awful fire at the Sloakum farm, she had been more careful about it. Satisfied that everything was safe and secure for the night, she too went to her room, climbing up the ladder to the loft, which was her domain.

"Goodnight, Lord," Papa prayed. "Thank you for your provision for us here at the printshop. What a blessing he will be." And Papa slept, peacefully.

"Dear Lord," Mary Jane prayed, "thank you for answering Papa's prayers. Help me to be decent to him—and not jealous of his friendship with Papa."

In the print shop Jonathan prayed silently as he slipped into the warm covers Mary Jane had given him. "Help me to be all I need to be for these people. And help me find the fulfillment to my dreams here..." And Jonathan was asleep, unaware of the eyes

which peered at him through the cracks between the logs.

## ***AND THEY CALLED HER GENERAL LEIGH***

Leigh Davis was raised as the son General Alexander Davis never had and always wanted. When the war hit, she found a way to serve by taking supplies and food to the camp at nearby Harpers Ferry, while her father went off to be a personal aide to President Lincoln. Clad in her normal buckskins, her long blonde locks tucked under her cap, the men in camp heard her refer to her father. Thinking she was his son, they joked about her being as bossy as General Lee. And so, they called her General Leigh.

Grant Sinclair, a spy for the South, kept bumping into General Leigh, until one day he was wounded and she took it on as her responsibility to nurse him back to health. This was the relationship between Leigh and Grant.

Could their differences, as great as those that existed between the other Lee and Grant, survive despite all the obstacles of the war?

Packed with both emotion and hilarity, ***And They Called Her General Leigh***, is a fresh take on the Civil War, and the brave men and women who served during this trying time.

I think it was Tom Clancy who instigated a whole new genre, “thrillers,” with his book *Hunt for Red October*. I decided I wanted to duplicate his act—not with another thriller, but I wanted to start a new genre, too. While it seemed like everything that could be done had already been done, I wanted to write “hysterical historicals.”

I had an editor one time ask me if I ever wrote anything serious. I replied, “I am very serious about my writing, but I never write anything very serious.” Someone told me, about a week later, that the same editor had used that quote at a conference in Texas where she was speaking, and she didn’t even give me credit for it!

Anyway, I think it might be working. People are calling *And They Called Her General Leigh* a “Civil War romantic comedy.” Why would anyone want to start a hysterical historical genre with a book about war? Elementary, my dear Watsons! In doing research for genealogy, both for our own families as well as for others, the one outstanding thing I noticed was that almost all of the men wrote about in their letters and journals were the pranks, funny songs, games, etc. that kept them from going insane. Yes, a sense of humor was their salvation in the face of horrors and atrocities of war. This was what I hoped to portray with this book.

And just as a final FYI (for your information), many of the officers in the book are real historical people, yet there was no General Alexander Davis, at least not to my knowledge. However, a friend of mine who is a history professor at a university who specializes in Civil War history is still trying to find him in the tomes in his office and at various libraries. I told him he was fictional, but he insists that nobody could be that “real” if he wasn’t “real”!

## ***AND THEY CALLED HER GENERAL LEIGH***

### Chapter One

General Alexander Davis sat across the table from his cousin, Jefferson Davis. The general's wife, Mercy, was busily scurrying about the kitchen, readying the tea and biscuits for the two men.

"It is so exciting," Jefferson Davis said. "I can hardly believe they have chosen me! I am the president of the Confederacy. We have plans to attack at Sumter tomorrow. We will secede from the Union before we will agree to Lincoln's terms."

"*President* Lincoln!" General Davis shouted, obviously irritated by the lack of respect shown by his cousin.

"I want you to lead our forces," Jefferson Davis said. "You can go to Virginia with me today."

Mercy watched her husband with great interest. For at least six generations, the Davis family had produced a war hero. She wondered if her husband would be able to pass up such an invitation, in spite of his disagreement with the ideals Jefferson Davis had set forth.

"I am honored that you think enough of me to request my services, but I must refuse. I do not agree with the secession of the southern states. Here in Maryland, we have chosen to go with our own consciences; as to where that will lead us, it is up to each man as an individual. I must support the president. If I am to fight, it will be on the side of the right."

"But where does that leave us?" Jefferson Davis asked. "If you will not head the troops, who can we get?" His voice was filled with desperation.

"I suggest you get Bobby Lee. He is from Virginia. Surely he will defend his birthplace."

"Ah, yes," Jefferson Davis joked, "but you know, of course, that he is second best. Everyone has heard that Robert E. Lee placed second from the top when we were at West Point. But how many people know that you, my very own cousin, placed at the top of the class? Now, I will have to settle for the man below you again. Is there no justice in this land?"

The two men shook hands as Jefferson Davis took his leave. Alexander watched him as he rode off, knowing that for the immediate future they were opposing forces. He hated such disagreements, but just as his cousin was too stubborn to listen to reason, so was he, the general, too rigid to give in to Jefferson's demands.

Alexander walked slowly into the house and sat down. He called Mercy to come and sit by his side.

"Are you sure you did the right thing?" she asked. It was unusual for her to question her husband's decisions in such matters.

"I am positive," Alexander replied. "Does that bother you?"

"Me? Why, did you forget that I am from Massachusetts? Our whole life has centered around freedom for all men--black or white alike. I am very proud of you for the stand you took with Jefferson."

Mercy leaned forward and kissed her husband. She felt him pull away from her, ever so slightly.

"What is troubling you?" she asked.

"I cannot hide anything from you, my little Mercy," Alexander said, a faint smile on his lips. "And what makes you think I am troubled?"

"When my own husband does not want to kiss me, there is something very wrong!"

"Do you remember what Nathan Hale said during the Revolution?" the general asked.

"A great many things, I suspect," Mercy teased.

"Yes, but he is remembered for one in particular."

"Which was?"

"I regret that I have but one life to give for my country," Alexander said. "I, too, have that same regret."

"Do not speak thus!" Mercy ordered. "If there comes a war, and if you are called to serve, I pray that God will bring you safely back to me at its end. I cannot think any other way. If I thought you were so incompetent on the battle field as to get yourself killed, I should lock you in chains and irons and not allow you outside the house."

Alexander laughed heartily at such a picture. He was a large, strong man, over six feet tall and muscles to match the greatest fighter in the land. His now graying beard and mustache added to the appearance of gruffness.

"I was thinking about someone other than myself."

"I do not understand," Mercy said.

"For generations the Davis families have all had at least one son to fight for the cause in which they believed. I love Leigh dearly, but she cannot go by my side to fight for the freedom and unity of our country."

"Did I hear my name?"

A young person appeared at the doorway and joined Alexander and Mercy Davis. It was hardly distinguishable whether the figure in question was that of a boy or a girl. While the facial features appeared quite feminine, the buckskin garb she wore, the cap perched on her head, hiding her long blonde curls, and the heavy combat boots indicated it might well be a boy.

"Leigh, come here and sit with us," her father invited.

"Yes, sir," she replied, sounding like one of the general's charges, rather than his daughter.

"Leigh," he began, "it appears that the likelihood of war is more than we had thought. If it comes to that, and if my services are desired, I shall have to leave and fight for the good of the country."

Leigh studied her father's face carefully.

"On which side?" she asked hesitantly.

"Why, on the side of the president, of course. Do you even need to ask?"

"I saw cousin Jefferson leaving a short time ago. I assumed he would ask for your help. I heard he is in charge of the southland now. Isn't that what he wanted?"

"That is what he sought," the general explained, "but he did not get what he wanted. He left empty-handed."

Leigh straightened in her chair. She loved her father, but she had never shown any affection for him. He was, after all, the general. He demanded respect from her, and he had always gotten it. Now, if he left for the war, she would show him that same respect, even if her heart ached to tell her father just once before he left that she did love him.

"General Davis! General Davis! It is news from the President himself! He is looking for you."

The officer jumped off his horse, yelling as he ran into the house, interrupting the family gathering.

"General Davis! President Lincoln wants you to be the general for the forces of the north. He wants you to report to him at Washington tomorrow. Oh, sir, he is so counting on you. Please do not disappoint him."

The general did not hesitate before giving his reply.

"Please return to President Lincoln and tell him that I shall be honored to meet with him tomorrow. Tell him that my answer is a definite yes."

"Oh, thank you, General Davis!" the officer said, shaking the general's hand vigorously. "It will be an honor to serve under you, sir!"

Mercy offered the man some morsels, but he declined, saying that he must return to the president immediately. She insisted, however, that he take some bread and dried beef with him.

As they lay in bed, Alexander held his wife tightly. Neither of them mentioned the dreaded war, nor talked of his departure in the morning. They had tonight, and for the moment that was all that mattered.

When they were finally ready for sleep, Mercy said softly, "I am sorry to be such a disappointment to you."

"Such nonsense!" Alexander said. "You have never done anything but the best for me. No man could have asked for a better wife than you, my dear. I know I am a man of few words, but before I depart, I must tell you how much I love you."

"It is just," Mercy began to sob, "I know how much you always wanted a son. I have never been able to give you that son. Only Leigh. She will never be a son to you, even though she can do anything any boy could ever do, and probably do it far better."

"I love Leigh just as much as if she had been a son," Alexander said. "And I certainly do not hold it against you that you could not have any other children. Why, when I thought you were going to die, well, I couldn't even stand to think of it. I don't know what I would have done all these years without you. Raising Leigh by myself..."

Suddenly Mercy laughed through her tears.

"I couldn't talk, but I could hear you. I never did tell you that I heard what you said to me that horrible day so long ago."

"I don't remember myself," Alexander admitted.

"You told me that you loved me and you needed me. Then, as if you thought another approach would be more affective, you *ordered* me to get better! Like I was one of your little soldier boys!"

Alexander smiled at his wife as he ran his fingers through her auburn hair.

"Well, it worked, didn't it?" he asked.

In the morning, as General Alexander Davis sat with the two women in his life, the mood was one of sadness. They knew he would be leaving in a few minutes, but no one knew how to bring up the subject. Finally, Leigh spoke.

"I shall miss you, Sir."

Alexander realized how firm he had been with his daughter. At a time like this, it was not necessary for her to address him as her general.

"I hope that you will think of me while I am away. And that your thoughts will be of the many hours we spent together. We are closer than most men and their sons. I am very fortunate to have you, Leigh. And another thing, you may address me as 'Father,' not 'Sir.' It is much more fitting, today, somehow."

"Father," Leigh said. Her tongue seemed to stumble over the word. She realized that it was the first time she had ever addressed her father as anything other than "Sir."

Alexander stood up and walked to his daughter's side. He pulled her up and embraced her warmly. Leigh bit her lip to keep from crying.

"I love you, Leigh," her father said.

"And I love you, too, Sir--Father," Leigh said, returning her father's embrace.

"You have a very important job to do while I am away. You must care for your mother and see to her safety. I am depending on you."

"I won't let you down, Father. I promise!"

Alexander went to Mercy and gathered her into his arms. She was so tiny, she seemed almost lost. Yet, as Leigh watched them together, she knew that they belonged right where they were--in each other's arms. She had never given men much attention before, but now she wondered if she would ever be that fortunate. With her luck, all the available young men would probably get killed in the war and it would be the end of the human race!

"If I have to report for duty right away," he told Mercy, "I will send word to you. And whenever I am anywhere near the area, I will sneak away from the troops and come to you."

"I will be here, waiting for you," she assured him.

General Alexander Davis, his army uniform well groomed, rode towards Washington, D.C., where he knew the president was awaiting him. He had met the president on numerous occasions, and he sensed how difficult this day must be for him. As he rode, the news of the Confederacy's attack on Sumter traveled far and wide.

"They interrupted a picnic!" the rider informed the general. "Can you imagine? With women and children scattering in every direction for their own safety!"

General Davis pushed his horse harder, anxious to make himself available to President Lincoln. His thoughts now turned to home--to his wife, and to Leigh.

*I wonder if I did right by her?* he pondered as he rode. *I trained her as if she were a son. Why, I even named her Leigh, after Bobby Lee. What kind of a name is that for a girl? And what comfort will she be to Mercy while I am gone? She can't help her cook or sew or tend the house. She knows nothing about such matters.*

His mind filled with pictures of Leigh as she was growing up. He insisted that she dress in buckskins and "practical" clothes from the time she was old enough to toddle around. He envisioned her as they rode off together, father and son--*no, daughter*, he reminded himself--when he taught her to track the enemy, whether it be animal or human. He saw her as she sat at the table, studying such things as arithmetic, reading and writing. He caught a glimpse of her as she went on his surveying jobs with him, then as she tended the garden and fed and milked the cattle and slopped the pigs. Yes, Leigh was a child any father could be proud of. But, he realized suddenly, he had never allowed her to be his daughter.

What had he done to this child of his? She was not a son, yet neither was she a daughter.

The tears streamed down the general's face as he saw, for the first time in his life, what a failure he had been. He was one of the most successful military leaders around, but at what cost! He had paid for his fame and rank in life with his very own daughter's life.

Leigh and Mercy began to share the chores on the farm. While they had never been close, the general's absence formed a bond between them which defied words.

"How good for us that your father taught you about running the farm," Mercy said to her daughter one morning as they made their way to the barn. "I am afraid I would destroy the place while he is away. But I have you to teach me about such things."

"Mother," Leigh scolded, "you would do no such thing. If you were forced to do it alone, you would manage quite well. You always do whatever is needed."

A rider pulled his horse into the yard. Mercy ran to greet him.

"Do you bring word of Alexander? The general," she added quickly.

"Yes, ma'am," the soldier announced. "He is helping President Lincoln call out the troops this very moment. They are being called out from nearly every state in the Union for ninety days."

"Ninety days?" Mercy asked.

"Yes, ma'am. The president figures that in ninety days everything will be whipped back into shape. And he doesn't figger on losin', neither."

Mercy smiled. She was sure that neither the president nor her husband "figgered on losin'."

The soldier started to ride away, then called back to the two women, "Case you wanna join up, mister, they's a camp settin' up over in the woods near Harper's Ferry. They can use all the young men they can git."

Leigh raised her fist in the air at the soldier, then sat down on the dewy grass and began to laugh.

"Isn't that something, Mother? Maybe I should join up! Dare say most of the men wouldn't even notice the difference!"

"Leigh Davis!" Mercy yelled. "Don't you ever get such a crazy idea! Why, I'd skin you alive all by myself, just like your father taught you to skin a deer, if you ever tried such a stunt."

Day after day, Leigh tuned her ears to listen to the noises as she rode through the woods. She could hear the soldiers talking, groaning, singing, shouting and sometimes even laughing. She had learned that they were all Union men, so she knew they would be friendly to her, especially once they knew her father was General Davis.

Leigh sneaked out to the barn, unloaded the goods from her leather saddle bags, and hid them under a hay stack in the corner. She stood back and took account of all the items she had accumulated. There was not nearly enough to feed an army, but it would soon be sufficient to make a big difference to one small troop.

"Only a few more days," she said aloud, stroking one of the cows as she spoke. "Wish you could go with me, Bossy, but I'll just have to take the extra butter I've been saving in the ice house."

"I'm going out to check around the farm," Leigh told her mother as the dusk settled in. "It's cooled off a bit, and I want to make sure any cows out in the meadow are okay."

"I really wish you wouldn't go alone," Mercy told her daughter. "I hear the men shooting. So far, I think it has just been to keep them in shape, but one of these times it could be for real. It isn't safe out there."

"Mother," Leigh argued, "you know I can take care of myself. Besides, there aren't any men to go along. You know they've all joined up with the army. They all know me, and if they see me, they'll watch out for me."

"Well," Mercy said, "don't be gone long then. It will be dark before you know it."

Leigh slipped into the barn and loaded all of the food she had collected. She put it into four big leather bags, then strapped them on the back of Bucky, her faithful horse.

As she rode through the woods, she was unaware of the shadowy figure which lurked behind one of the huge oak trunks. The young man, obviously a soldier, wanted to make sure no one would spot him.

If that's a Union man, the soldier wondered when he spotted the stranger, why isn't he with the rest of the troop? Could it be a deserter?

As he watched the horsebound figure head directly for the camp, he ruled that possibility out. A deserter would be riding in the other direction, and much faster, too.

Smelling a strange scent, Bucky veered to the right and went directly to the stranger's hiding place. He tried to run, but Leigh and Bucky raced after him.

"Care to tell me who you are?" Leigh asked, keeping her voice at a husky level. She knew the only way she would be safe was to pull off the charade her father had taught her so well. If the soldiers all thought she was a man...

"Just a soldier trying to get a little peace and quiet," the young man answered. He, too, was hiding his true voice. He did not want to be recognized as a rebel by his Southern accent. "It's so

crowded and noisy over yonder," he said. "The men got no respect for another man's privacy. None whatsoever."

"So you come out and sit alone in the woods?" Leigh asked.

"Got a better solution?" he asked. "By the by, where are you headed? Haven't seen you around the camp."

"I'm not one of them," Leigh said.

The stranger pondered this statement. Was it possible that this was another spy from Lee's side? Unsure of himself, he decided against asking.

"But you're going there?"

"I brought some grub," Leigh explained. "If you come on in, there's enough for everyone to get a little. Thought it might help the men's morale, at the least."

"I'll be along in a few minutes," he said. "Go on in ahead."

In almost no time at all, Leigh could not only hear the sounds of the camp, but she could see the crude tents that were set up. She slowed Bucky to a walk and quietly approached the edge of the camp.

Nearby she saw another young boy, writing in his journal. He did not look as old as Leigh, and he looked desperately alone.

"Psst! Soldier boy!" Leigh whispered.

"Stop or I'll fire!" the boy shouted, aiming his rifle at Leigh. His yell brought a number of men running to aid him against the intruder.

"Peace!" Leigh said. She laughed as she thought that she sounded more like an Indian than the general's daughter.

"Somethin' funny?" one of the soldiers asked.

"Nothing you did, Sir," Leigh replied, glad for the proper upbringing her father had given her. "A little respect can go a long ways," he had said, time and time again.

"State your name, rank and company," the man ordered her.

"Leigh," she replied. Before she could go any farther, she felt and saw the barrels of at least a dozen rifles pointed at her.

"As in Robert E.?" an officer asked.

"Well, sort of," Leigh replied. "I was named after the scoundrel, but that was before he chose up sides against us. Leigh, that's my first name. Actually, I got Leigh from my father. He was at West Point with Bobby Lee. My last name, it's better. It's Davis."

The rifles, which had come to rest, were pointed at her again.

"As in Jefferson?" the officer asked. Leigh laughed once more.

"No, sir. As in General Alexander Davis. He's in Washington right now, helping the president set up the whole messy war."

"And you are lost from your troop?"

"No, sir," Leigh said. "I'm not a soldier. I'm just a civie watching out for my mother."

"I can't believe the general wouldn't recruit his own son," one of the men muttered. "If we're good enough to fight, so is he."

"I'll thank you to show some respect for the general's son!" the officer snapped at the soldier. "I'm sure the general had his reasons."

"Actually," Leigh said, "the reason I came is to bring some fresh food for you. Line up, all of you! Single file! I'll pass out the grub so you all get your fair share. If I let you loose after it, the first of you will get fat and the last will die of starvation."

The men, not questioning her orders, formed a single line. The officer who had defended Leigh headed the line. Leigh made her way, giving each of them one small portion of fresh vegetables, a homemade biscuit with a tiny dab of Bossy's butter, and a sliver of dried beef. The men, forgetting their manners, ate like the pigs at the general's farm. It had been a long time since they had seen such fare.

Leigh sought out the *soldier she'd met earlier*. *He was nowhere to be found. Maybe, she thought, I imagined him.*

Leigh took her leather pouches, jumped onto Bucky's back and headed off into the evening wind.

"I'll be back with more whenever I can," she called to the men as she disappeared.

One of the men remarked to the others as she rode off, "He takes charge just like the general!"

"We'll call him General Lee!" one of the other soldiers remarked, causing all of the men to laugh. "The south may have their General Lee, but he can't hold a candlestick to *our* General Lee!"

It was only the officer in charge, the man who had been so quick to come to Leigh's defense, who saw her cap blow off in the wind and her long golden tresses fall freely over her shoulders.

"And we'll call *her* General Leigh!" he said, too softly for anyone to hear.

## **A TWIST IN TIME**

### ***HOUSE CALL TO THE PAST***

Maria Hallett has been captivated by the dashing pirate, Black Sam Bellamy, but he leaves her--alone and pregnant in 1713. The baby nearly dies at birth, but Maria Hallett's father, John, goes across a field to entice modern OB-GYN doctor, Angus McPherson, to come to her rescue.

Dr. Angus saves the baby's life, using modern means, but is shocked when he learns he has made the ultimate *HOUSE CALL TO THE PAST*. When Maria is accused of witchcraft, he opts to stay with her in the past, offering to marry her to save her from a lifetime in prison. Maria agrees, but vows she will never love anyone but Black Sam.

Can Dr. Angus win her love? And can he protect her from Black Sam, if he returns? A page-turning challenge ensues, proving that hopefully good once again triumphs over evil.

Have you ever thought that history just didn't seem fair? That was the case when I heard about Maria Hallett. She was accused of witchcraft, and in the past few years she has received a lot of attention, even though she lived in the early 1700s. According to historical facts, she did fall in love with the pirate, Black Sam Bellamy, and had his baby. Also, history records that the baby died soon after he was born.

So why all the interest at this late date in the fair young damsel? It is due, primarily, to a fellow by the name of Ken Kinkor and his crew who were determined to dredge up Black Sam's ship, the *Whydah*, that was supposed to have been shipwrecked off the coast of Cape Cod, as legend has it, when he was coming back to Maria with the treasure he had promised to bring her.

Everybody on the ship, with the exception of Black Sam himself, was found at the time of the shipwreck, but the ship itself went missing. Until...Ken Kinkor and his expedition were successful. There is now a museum set up to house the treasure, which is the largest pirate treasure that has ever been recovered. The Discover Channel has made a documentary of the raising of the *Whydah*. *National Geographic* has published several articles about Sam and Maria themselves, as well as the *Whydah Expedition*.

Well, I finally got tired of everybody picking on my 13<sup>th</sup> great aunt, Maria Hallett, so I decided to take matters into my own hands and redeem her. I love the fact that Richard Seltzer, in a review of *House Call to the Past*, said "But this witch needs no redemption. She's simply delightful--witch or no witch. I look forward to the promised sequel, 'Port Call to the Future.'" Richard Seltzer for samizdat.com reviews.

Yes, when you hold the power of the pen within your fingers, anything is possible—even a change in history! This one is a fun ride! Come on along!

## *HOUSE CALL TO THE PAST*

### CHAPTER I

Maria Hallett shivered as another gust of wind forced its way through the cracks in the house.

"Has the makings of a really nasty one tonight," her mother, Mary, said. "Hope your father makes it back before it's so bad he can't."

It didn't matter how many storms she lived through, Maria would never get used to them. There was something so eerie, so haunting about the Cape Cod winds.

"It's blowin' up a foul night out there," John Hallett said as he nearly fell through the door. He hurried to secure the iron rod across it, lest it blow open.

"Don't make no sense to me!" Mary Hallett growled. "Here you are over buildin' a new house for the Thacher girl and you can't even set our own place in order. Might as well as not be sittin' outside for all the good these walls do us. You can look outside and see the sun by day and the moon by night, the cracks are so big."

"It was good enough for Grampa Andrew this way. I reckon it's good enough for us," John told his wife. "He never set a lick of paint or a dab of mud to these walls all the years he lived here. Don't know why we need to do no better than him."

John leaned back on his wobbly chair, his hands held tight behind his full head of black, shiny hair, and laughed.

"'Makes less work for the women,' he used to say," John said. "Claimed the wind blew the dust right out the other side of the house so Grandma didn't have to waste her time on such silly matters as dusting the furniture."

"As if she had any furniture to dust!" Mary said. "I remember their house all too well. A disgrace, it was! Course not that ours is any better. And you a carpenter!"

A new gust of wind blew through and little Hope hurried up into her father's lap.

"I'm scared, Papa!" she exclaimed.

"Now, my little one," he said, running his hand over her long, brown locks. "I won't let anything happen to you. And that is one thing you can count on."

Off in the distance the long, low moan of a ship's horn echoed through the fog and the rain. Maria sat up quickly and listened for the sound again. Twice more it blew, warning any other vessels in the harbor that it was heading for shore.

"There's sure to be a lot of drunken sailors in town tonight," John said. "Best all the young maidens stay clear of Crosby Tavern."

He cast a threatening eye at his daughter. Maria had always had a wild streak in her, and she was as apt as not to wander off, regardless of the storm outside.

"Leave the girl alone," Mary warned John. "Tisn't any wonder she takes to wandering alone. You've not trusted her since the day she was born."

\* \* \*

The family turned in soon after the evening meal was finished. When the small children were all tucked in and the fires had been tended to offer what warmth they could, the older ones followed suit and went off, muttering about the weather.

"No sense in sittin' up around here," young Joseph said. "Like as not the wind'll blow out the candles again as soon as I get 'em lit."

Maria lay quietly on her straw bed. She waited until she was sure all the others in the house were asleep, then she quietly climbed out and began to dress.

In her relatively short years of life, Maria had found more ways to get into trouble than any other resident in all of Yarmouth. Tonight would be no different. The call of the wild storm raging outside enticed her to join it.

Maria made her way down the lane to Crosby Tavern. She knew if she was going to find excitement, that was the one place to look for action.

She cringed, pulling her bright red cape up over her head to try to keep the rain from saturating her. She ran as fast as she dared, given how slippery the boardwalk was.

The door to the tavern swung open as she reached her hand out to run inside, as if the crowd was expecting her. She hurried through it, pulled off her cape and swung it around. The water splashed to and fro, sending the men inside away from her to avoid getting wet.

"Bad one tonight," the tavern owner said to Maria. "I figured you'd be here 'fore long."

"Hope I didn't keep you waiting," Maria said, winking at Mr. Crosby. "Had to be sure the rest of them had nodded off 'ere I left."

"Rounds for everyone!" Crosby called out cheerfully. "Maria's here!"

The sailors who had pulled into the harbor before knew Maria by reputation. She knew how to lead the men on just far enough to

drive them mad, then she would disappear into the night, climb into her cold clammy bed at home and wait for the dawn. This night was destined to be the same as any other when the sailors set in until the weather cleared.

The men, young and old alike, made their way to the table where Maria sat. She talked with each and every one, some alone and some in groups, blinking her huge brown eyes at them and shaking her long, brown curls from side to side.

One young sailor, Maria noticed, stayed by the bar and watched her as all the other men made their way to Maria's table. Even when she was alone for a few minutes he kept his distance.

Maria summoned Crosby to her.

"Who's the new one by the bar?" she asked him, motioning towards the stranger with a tip of her head.

"Heard him called Sam," Crosby said. "Guess if you want to know any more than that, you'll have to ask him yourself."

"Send him over!" Maria commanded.

The tall dark stranger ambled slowly over to Maria, pulled a chair out, turned it around and sat down, folding his huge muscle-bound arms across the back of the chair.

Maria gasped as she watched him. The men at the tavern had always been just plain men to her—something to toy with. This one was different. He was a MAN! She loved a challenge, and Sam was definitely that. She had never really loved a man before, but she was determined that she would win this one over before the men set sail.

"Sure hope it's a long storm," she said absent-mindedly.

"Why's that?" Sam asked.

"Hate to see you set sail before your time," Maria answered.

Sam laughed heartily at the young girl, his long black hair trailing behind him. He wondered if the other men had been successful in enticing Maria to have their way with them. He hoped not, as he was determined that he would win her over before he left the shores of Cape Cod, and he wanted to be the first who had loved her.

"Name's Sam," he said, smiling at her. There was a gleam in his eye as he spoke. "Sam Bellamy."

"Mine's Maria," she said. "Maria Hallett."

The other men drifted to and from the table, but Sam kept his place, studying her every move. He had never seen a girl like this. So young. So beautiful. So sure of herself.

Suddenly, Maria jumped up and grabbed her cape. She wrapped it about herself and headed for the door. The wind was still fierce and the rain hit her in the face as she ran to the house. She knew she had to get there before her father was up, or she would be

severely punished. He still thought of her as a child, but she felt like a woman. Especially tonight. What had Sam done to her?

"Stop!" a voice from behind her called out.

Maria ran faster. The men all knew her limits, and none had ever dared to follow her before. Instinct told her it was Sam. She was tempted to stop, but she wouldn't give him the satisfaction of thinking he had won.

"Stop!" the voice commanded again.

Such force and power in that voice, Maria thought. It would be so easy to stop and let him do whatever he wanted to with her, but that was not the way she played the game. She continued running until she reached the safety of the house. She ran around to the back of it and entered. She lifted the rod, which she had left ajar to insure her entry when she returned, and set it in place, securing the door against Sam Bellamy.

Sam pounded loudly on the door.

"Go away!" Maria hissed at him.

The pounding continued.

Maria's heart began to race. Her excursions to the tavern had never been found out by her father, and she didn't want that to change. Carefully, slowly, she moved the rod just enough to open the door a tiny crack. She knew that with one good push it would open, sending the iron bar crashing to the floor.

"Maria," Sam said. "I just want to talk to you."

"Tonight at Crosby's," she said. "Now, get out of here! I don't want my father to wake up!"

Understanding the situation, Sam turned and walked away, vowing to hold her to her word later or he would return to her home, even if it meant facing her father. In the meantime, he would ask around town and learn all he could about the lovely Maria Hallett. He had known many women in his time, but none who had infuriated him like she did.

"She is a witch! And she has me under her spell!" he muttered to himself as he walked to the inn to get at least a few hours sleep before morning came. Like Maria, he hoped the storm would be a long one.

Maria slipped her cape off and threw it on a chair in the corner of the room to let it dry out, then she hurried upstairs to her bed. She piled her clothes on the end of the bed and pulled her nightdress over her head. She crawled into the bed, which was cold, and lay there for a long time, wondering what it would be like to have a man there to keep her warm. Sam Bellamy, she thought, would do quite nicely.

The image of the newcomer kept marching back and forth in her mind's eye. She pictured his long, curly black hair. She imagined she was running her fingers through it, pushing it back from his

forehead. His dark, piercing eyes seemed to stare right through her. His fingers, so graceful and strong, fondled her warmly, causing her to blush, even in the darkness.

With such thoughts as these, she finally drifted off to sleep. She was unaware of the movements around her; it had been a long night.

Mary Hallett was the first to get up in the morning. It was still blowing and raining outside. She hurried to dress in the cold, shivering as she did, and then went to the huge walk-in fireplace. She took the poker and jabbed at the few live coals until the logs leapt into flames. That would last, she thought, until John was there to put more wood on the fire.

Mary went out into the kitchen and began preparing breakfast for the brood. Soon she was joined by John. One by one the children began to descend and gather around the fireplace. First came Thankful, then John, followed by Joseph, Samuel, Seth, Hannah, Mercy and finally young Hope. Only Andrew, who had recently moved to his own home with Mehitabel, his new bride, and Maria were missing. John walked in and surveyed the group, much as if he were inspecting them for the day.

"Where's Maria?" he asked. "I swear, that girl would sleep the entire day away if we'd let her."

"It's no wonder," Hope said. "I heard her talking to somebody at the door real early this morning. I don't know if she was comin' or goin'."

"Who would she be talkin' to?" John asked, knowing he would not get an answer from anyone but Maria herself.

"I don't know," Hope said, "but when she got upstairs she was all full dressed. I watched her put on her nightdress and climb into bed."

John went over to the cape he saw on the chair and felt of it.

"It's still damp," he said. "Hannah, go fetch your sister. Now! Tell her I want to speak to her immediately."

Hannah hurried to obey her father, tripping over the huge timber at the bottom of the stairway and mumbling about the condition of the house, much as she had heard her mother do day after day.

"Maria!" Hannah said, shaking her sister to awaken her. "Maria! You better get up, and you better be fast about it. Hope went and told Pa about you comin' in this morning, and Pa's *real* mad."

Maria rolled over and pulled the covers up over her head, groaning.

"Maria!" Hannah hollered, shaking her even harder than before and pulling the quilts back to let the cold air have its full impact on her sister. "Did you hear me? Pa knows you were out late last night, and he's mad!"

Maria jumped up and looked accusingly at Hannah.

"And how did he know I was out?" she asked. Hannah was the only one Maria had ever told about her excursions to Crosby's Tavern.

"It was Hope," Hannah explained. "She heard you come in and saw you come get undressed for bed. She went and told Pa."

"I'll have that girl's hide!" Maria said as she pulled her clothes on. She was in such a hurry she did not notice that the hand-stitched embroidery trim of her petticoat was on her backside, rather than on the front where it would be seen by all when her jumper was unbuttoned.

As Maria got downstairs, she realized that all the members of the family were in the kitchen with their mother. All, that is, except John. He sat on a stool in front of the fireplace waiting for his daughter. Fury burned in his eyes as he looked at her.

"I'd like an explanation," he said, trying not to yell. "And it better be a good one!"

"Explanation of what?" Maria asked innocently.

"Of your actions, that's what. I hear tell you were up talkin' to someone long before light set in. Now, suppose you tell me who he was and what you were doin' with him."

Maria wondered why her father automatically assumed it was a *him*. It could just as easily have been a woman. Still, there was nothing to be gained by arguing such a point with him.

"It was a stranger, Pa," she said. "He was caught in the storm and he set his boat in to dock. He went to the inn, but they were full up, what with the storm and all, so he began to wander the streets, trying to find a place to get in out of the rain."

"And you invited him in?" John asked.

"Pa!" Maria snapped. "What do you take me for? You and Ma ain't raised no fool! Of course I didn't let him in! Why, I sent him off packin' to the Widow Clark's house. Everyone knows her place is more of an inn than the inn itself."

"Sounds logical enough," John agreed. "But tell me, how is it you happened to be dressed for this meeting? Hope said you had your clothes on when you came back upstairs."

"Why, Pa, surely you wouldn't want me to entertain a stranger in my night clothes. Why, that's positively indecent! The very idea!"

John was so taken aback by her quick responses, he completely forgot about the damp cape which sat behind him. If he had questioned Maria about that, she might have been hard put to explain it away.

"Go help your ma with breakfast!" he ordered, shaking his head as he watched her go. "I'll never figure that one out," he said to himself.

The girls had finished clearing the breakfast table, set the food to cooking for the dinner and were busy at their looms. Maria, of all the Hallett girls, was the most talented when it came to weaving beautiful fabrics. People had been known to come from Boston to purchase them.

Mary came over to the corner of the rear room to inspect each of the girl's work. She smiled at each of them, then went to Maria and felt the fine finish she had on her goods.

"It is even better than usual, Maria," her mother commented. "Is there a special reason for an added touch today?"

"I can't imagine what it would be," Maria said, smiling back at her mother. *It's the presence of Sam Bellamy*, she thought to herself. He weaves magic over me. Never have I felt like this. If only I could see him again.

"I hate to send anyone out in this weather," Mary said, "but you know it is almost time for Mehitable to deliver. I am worried about her. You know how she hates a storm."

Hope began skipping about the room. "Mehitable Annable of Barnstable," she sang as she skipped. "Mehitable Annable of Barnstable."

"Hope! Enough!" Mary said. "How many times have I told you it is not polite to poke fun at someone else? Not even their name."

"But Mama," Hope protested, "I'm not makin' fun at her. It's pretty, Mama. I like the way it sounds." Hope resumed skipping and singing "Mehitable Annable of Barnstable. Mehitable Annable of Barnstable."

Mary knew it was useless. Besides, Mehitable would certainly not be out and about on such a day as this, so she would not hear Hope. She would try to break her of the habit another time.

"I'll go, Ma," Maria volunteered quickly. "I don't mind the weather. It will clear my head out."

"Are you sure?" Mary asked.

"Yes, Ma," Maria insisted. "Besides, I helped her last year when Desire was born. I'll know just what to do if she needs help."

"Be careful," Mary warned. "And if you decide to stay to help them, be sure to send Andrew back home to let us know."

"I'll be sure, Ma. Lest he's needed, too. You know how Mehitable sticks to him. She's scared silly to let him out of her sight. Specially with the storm and all. It'll be even worse."

"I suppose you're right," Mary said. "I'll leave the back door ajar a wee bit, case you need to get in late."

Maria had her cape on, the hood pulled up securely over her head. She dutifully hugged her mother, fretful for each minute's delay.

Maria ran out of the house. She would go help Mehitable, but she had some other business to tend to first. She headed for

Crosby's Tavern, hoping she would find Sam Bellamy there, even though it was early in the day.

"Well, Maria," Crosby said when she came in, "you're out and about early in the day. I didn't figure the storm would scare you away. Somethin' I can do for you?"

"Yes," Maria replied, seeing that Sam was nowhere in sight. "That newcomer, Sam Bellamy. Any idea where he might be?"

"Last I heard, he was askin' all over town about a certain young miss, name o' Maria Hallett."

Crosby grinned at Maria, the wide spaces in between what few teeth he had left, evident.

"Don't rightly know just how far he's got," Crosby continued, "but last report I heard he was headed down to your Uncle Jonathan's place. Course I don't know if he's apt to like what he hears there."

Maria ran from the tavern. She had to get to Sam before Uncle Jonathan filled his head with tales that weren't true. Or even if they were true, she didn't want Sam to hear them.

\* \* \*

Sam heard footsteps behind him. His black wool jacket was pulled up around his neck and the seaman's cap did little to protect his face from the wind and rain. The rain sparkled on his face.

He turned to see who was following him, and was not surprised at all to find that it was Maria. Somehow he had known she would come looking for him.

"Sam! Come with me!" Maria begged. "It is far too horrible for either of us to be out here in this mess. Let's head over to the inn. We can get a good meal and besides, we'll be in where it is nice and warm."

Maria winked at him through the rain. "Anyhow, I heard tell you were askin' questions about me. Well, if anyone can answer them, whatever they are, I guess it could as well be me as the next one."

"Your wish is my command," Sam said teasingly. "Lead the way."

Together they ran through the storm until they reached the inn. Sam hurried to open the door and they entered, both laughing and panting for breath.

Sam took Maria's cape and shook it out at the doorway. He hung it on the row of hooks, then did likewise with his own jacket. He stood back and studied Maria. His eyes rolled back in his head at the sheer joy he felt from her beauty. Suddenly he began to laugh.

"I know I'm all wet, and I probably look a real sorry sight," Maria said, "but it ain't nice to laugh at a lady!"

"I didn't think you'd be one to mince words," Sam said. "I wasn't laughing at you. Well, not exactly."

"Would you care to explain yourself, Mr. Sam Bellamy?"

"It's just that last night, over at the tavern, I couldn't help but notice the lovely handwork there was on your petticoat."

Maria turned crimson.

"Today when I asked about town, one of the main things I heard was the beautiful stitching and weaving you do. So, I was sure you had done the work yourself."

"What's so funny about that?" Maria asked.

"Well, I expected to see it today. I had a mind to pay you a fine compliment about it. But, well, I can see you don't have it on."

Maria looked at him in embarrassment. She could have left well enough alone, saying that she had opted for a plain one today. But no, she was not one to take the easy route on anything. To make matters worse, she said, "But I've donned the same one today."

Maria looked down towards the floor. To her surprise, the stitching was missing. It was then she realized in her hurry to answer to Pa, she must have put it on backwards.

To Sam's surprise, Maria hoisted her loose gown, which she always wore on top of the petticoat, revealing the intricate embroidery on the back of her petticoat.

"Does it meet your approval?" she asked, dropping her loose gown with the slightest teasing flip, showing no more to this near stranger.

Sam thought of the tales he had heard about Maria as he had inquired about her. With all he had learned, he knew she was a delightful flirt and a big tease, but he was not prepared for such forward actions as these. It made him furious that she stopped with this simple action. He longed to see what other treasures lay beneath the hidden gown she sported.

Midway through the meal Mrs. Howe had served them, Maria gasped.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I have to get to my brother Andrew's house. That's where Ma sent me. His wife, Mehitable, is due for birthin' anytime now. I've gotta be there in case they need me, with the storm. Mehitable, she's deathly scared of storms."

Maria put her cape on as she made her escape.

"Wait!" Sam called after her.

"Tonight, at Crosby's Tavern," she called back to him. "I'll meet you there."

Sam stood and watched her disappear into the sheets of swirling rain. He returned to his meal. As he ate, he thought how utterly

frustrating this young tart was. Never had he known a woman who could infuriate him the way Maria Hallett did.

"Goody," he mumbled. "The townspeople say they call both Maria and her mother 'Goody.' Now if that isn't the strangest thought I've ever had. Her mother, perhaps, but Maria Hallett is no *Goody*—not to me, nor to anybody else, I suspect."

He went up to the room he had taken for the duration of the storm and lay on his bed, staring at the rough-hewn timbers above him, pondering the strange witch Maria. It was like, he thought, she had cast her spell over him, causing him to come at her every beck and call.

\* \* \*

The sixth day after he had set foot on the land at Yarmouth, the sky looked like it might begin to clear. Sam Bellamy knew that he was going to claim Maria as his own, he would have to move fast or he would be gone. The thought of Maria being possessed by another sent shivers up and down his spine.

Sam made his way through the lanes, asking where he might find Maria. Finally, John Dexter informed him he had just seen her toting some of her fabrics to the Thacher home.

"Probably for the upcoming bride," he said. "Thankful is soon to become the wife of young John Hallett."

After getting directions to the house, Sam made his way to the Thacher house and asked if Maria Hallett might be there.

Maria, hearing his voice, dashed out the back way and ran down the hillside towards the Hallett house. Sam, however, saw her and chased after her.

Sam grabbed her, and in the midst of the rain, which was by now no more than a heavy mist, he pulled her to himself, clutching her tightly and kissing her passionately.

Maria swallowed hard to catch her breath. True, there had been other sailors who had tried to take liberty with her, but she had always fought them off. With Sam, it was different. She longed to defend herself against his attack, but she did not have the strength—nor the desire—to push him off. She knew, as Sam did, that in a few hours he would undoubtedly be gone. Gone from Yarmouth. Gone from Maria. Perhaps gone forever.

"Come with me to the inn," Sam begged. "I need you."

Maria could hardly believe her actions. She followed him willingly, even anxiously. While she was afraid of what might await her when they got to the inn, she did not possess any way in which to deny his request.

Sam and Maria quietly made their way up the back stairway to Sam's room. Once inside, Sam shed his jacket and waited for Maria to rid herself of her heavy red cape.

"Red suits you well," he said to her. "Red is the color of danger to a sailor. A red sky is a warning of bad weather to a sailor. A red flag means trouble on a ship. Red on you means you are the worst enemy man can know."

"You see me as an enemy?" Maria asked, hurt in her voice.

"No, not exactly as an enemy. As a dare. A challenge. Never have I known another woman equal to you. You drive me mad. When I am near you, I cannot control what I think or do. When you are away from me, you are all I can see. My head is filled with your image both by day and by night."

"And just what do you intend to do with me?" Maria asked. She knew the answer, even before he spoke. She knew she should run for the door, for the protection of her home and her family, but she wanted Sam as desperately as he wanted her.

Sam walked to her, taking her once again in his arms. They were so big and so strong, yet they were full of tenderness, love and compassion. He began unbuttoning her loose gown, then slipped it from her shoulders, allowing it to fall to the floor at her feet. He looked down at her shoes. While all the other women he had seen in Yarmouth wore leather Indian moccasins, Maria sported shiny red fabric slippers, which he assumed she had made herself.

Sam knelt down in front of Maria and gently lifted her foot. He removed one of the slippers, then the other. He traced the outline of her toes with his long, slender finger.

Maria began to giggle. She had always been ticklish, especially on her feet. Her reaction caused Sam's excitement all the more. He began to run his fingers up her soft, smooth legs.

Maria pulled away from him, retreating to the corner of the room. She was in no position to leave, not half dressed, but at least she would make him play games with her before he could claim her as his conquest.

Sam chased after her, placing both hands on the wall around her. Maria ducked, escaping from him, and jumped helter-skelter onto the bed.

"Come and get me!" she challenged.

Sam jumped onto the bed, but she moved just in time for him to land on the feather mattress, sinking into it like an angel lost in a cloud.

"Try again!" Maria teased.

This time Sam was successful. He grabbed Maria and hurled her onto the bed. He placed his leg over hers to prevent her from getting away again. He leaned over her, kissing her and tenderly

fondling her taut, bulging young breasts. She was as well-formed beneath the loose gown as he had imagined.

Maria lay still, her breath coming in short gasps from the desire which was building within her. She wanted to tell Sam that she had never known a man before, but she was afraid of scaring him off.

Sam loosened the camisole ties and the string which held her petticoat in place. He carefully removed her garments and made love to her. Long, hard, passionate love.

It was only as their passions consumed each other and Maria screamed from the momentary pain that Sam realized what he had done.

"I am your first?" he asked, shocked.

"Yes," Maria replied. "My first. And my only. Oh, Sam, please say you won't leave me. Do you have to go back out on the ships?"

"Yes," Sam said, rolling over beside Maria. "But I will find a way to seek a fortune on the seas, then I will return to you. Please say you will wait for me."

"I will wait. And I will watch every day until you return."

\* \* \*

Maria soon made her way back to the Hallett home, hoping no one had missed her. She went to Hannah, the only one she had confided in about her innermost feelings about Sam, and told her what had happened.

An hour later, Maria wept alone as she heard the mournful whistle on the ship. She knew it meant that Sam was gone. She would wait for him, just as she had promised. Still, she could not help wondering if he would be as true to her as she intended to be to him. And she wondered if he would *ever* come back to her.

## CHAPTER II

Dr. Angus McPherson hurried into the house. He seemed to fit into the scene at the old historical farmstead as if he belonged there. It was almost as if he was from another time, yet he thoroughly enjoyed all the conveniences his modern-day life afforded him.

The sweat was running down his face, as he had just finished his daily morning run. He prided himself on his physical fitness, and a ten-mile jog set him in stead for the day ahead.

Dr. Angus, as everyone called him, went to the bathroom and washed his face with a cool washcloth, then he returned to the living room, where he could relax. He loved his slow, leisurely Saturday mornings when he didn't have to make his rounds at the hospital in Brewster until later. Besides, as an obstetrician, he had only delivered two babies in the whole week, so his case load was lighter than it had been in quite a spell.

He opened the door on his huge VCR cabinet and ran his fingers over the tapes. When he came to the tape of *Brigadoon*, he smiled and pulled it out.

It's a fascinating premise, he thought. One day in every hundred years the old town of Brigadoon in the Scottish highlands came back to life.

Dr. Angus' thoughts spun back to his mother. They had watched this movie together dozens of times. How he missed her. It had been almost a year since she had died, but he felt a closeness to her as he pondered the movie. Instinctively, as if in his mother's memory, he popped the tape into the slot on the television and turned it on.

He sat in his big old overstuffed chair and put his feet up on the hassock in front of him. He leaned back, prepared to enjoy the mood of the moment to the fullest.

Corky, his lop-eared cocker spaniel, heard him come in and raced to the chair, jumping onto his lap and licking his face.

"Calm down," Dr. Angus said to the dog. "We've got a good three-hour run on this one. If you're going to watch it with me, you better behave yourself."

Dr. Angus laughed at himself. Was he really that desperate? His mother had tried her best to mate him with a number of the influential, available Cape Cod women, but he had not been interested. He had to concentrate on medical school, he had argued with her. Then he had to get his practice established.

Now, sitting alone with his VCR and Corky, he wondered if he would grow old alone. Maybe it was time for him to start looking in earnest.

"For you, Mom," he said aloud, as if she could hear him.

The movie began, and in short order he was caught up in the intrigue of the plot. His mind traveled back in time, through the years, to the quaint Scottish village.

He was so caught up in life in Brigadoon he was unaware of the nasty turn the weather had taken outside until he heard a loud crash of thunder and saw a bright bolt of lightning fill the sky.

At the same instant, there was a loud *crack* and the electricity went out and the phone rang.

Dr. Angus jumped up. He reached for the power switch on the TV to turn it off so it wouldn't burn out. Then he grabbed the phone.

"Dr. Angus McPherson," he said into the phone receiver.

"Oh, Dr. Angus!" the woman on the phone shouted. "I am so glad you are home! I think I have gone into labor. Sam is gone and I'm here alone and there is a terrible storm outside and I'm scared and I don't know anyone here. I just knew we shouldn't have moved until after the baby came."

Dr. Angus recognized Blair Smythe-Black's voice immediately. He was tempted to laugh at her, but no one ever laughed at Blair Smythe-Black! He remembered her first visit to his office.

"I am Blair Smythe-Black," she announced. "I am kin of the Kennedy's. Well, almost," she had said, almost apologetically.

She had gone on to explain that her mother had *almost* married Sargeant Shriver. And since Sargeant Shriver had married a Kennedy, she figured that *almost* made her a Kennedy.

"Anyway, my father's mother was a Hallett," she had told him. "You know, the Hallett's of Yarmouth."

Dr. Angus knew the Hallett's of Yarmouth by reputation. Most everyone on the Cape knew the Halletts by reputation, but the reputation wasn't always that good.

"My great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather was Andrew Hallett. You know, the one that came over on the Mayflower."

Blair had hung her head sheepishly as she admitted, "Well, he *almost* came on the Mayflower. He would have, but he missed the boat. It was about ten years later when he finally made it to America." Her eyes had sparkled as she exclaimed, "Well, he did come on the Mayflower that time. So what if it was the ship's sixth trip across the ocean?"

Dr. Angus laughed silently, now, thinking of how he had decided she was the *almost* Blair. The woman with a claim to fame—almost. Well, now it seemed that she was going to have a baby, and it sounded like it wasn't *almost* to happen, but was the real thing.

"The weather out there looks terrible," Dr. Angus told Blair over the phone. "I know a really fine OB man in Hyannis. Why don't you let me call him? It would be a lot safer for both of us."

"But you promised!" Blair whined. "I wouldn't have moved away if I had thought for a minute that you would back out on me."

"OK. I'll leave right away. You call a cab and get to the hospital. I don't

want you driving in your condition. I'll meet you there as soon as I can."

"By the way," Dr. Angus added as an afterthought, "Where is Sam, anyway? Will he be there when the baby comes?"

"Oh, you know Sam," Blair said. "He's gone out fishing. Only with this awful storm I'm sure he'll be back in any time now. I'll leave a note for him. Just in case, I called the Coast Guard and they are going to try to locate him."

"See you in a bit," Dr. Angus said, hanging the phone up and bending over to tie his jogging shoes. He debated about changing his clothes, but decided against it since the weather was so bad. A jogging suit was just fine for a day like today. Besides, he'd have to change when he got to the hospital anyway.

He went to the side door of the house which led into the garage. Corky ran out ahead of him and as soon as he opened the car door the dog was inside, his tail wagging and his tongue hanging out.

"I don't think this is a good idea," Dr. Angus said, scratching the dog behind the ears.

Corky cried, pleading to accompany his master.

"Oh, all right. But you have to stay in the car when we get there. Most hospitals frown on dogs visiting the patients."

As if he understood, Corky curled up on the seat and went to sleep almost instantly.

The car wound its way over the road which led from Brewster to Hyannis. From time to time Dr. Angus had to pull off to the side of the road until the rain and wind let up enough to see before he continued.

Dr. Angus's mind wandered off to Brigadoon as he drove along. He wondered what the people in that far-off place would think if they could see such things as automobiles and airplanes.

Highway 6 led right through Yarmouth. As he passed by, he thought of Blair and her Hallett relatives. The ones who almost made it on the Mayflower.

Dr. Angus had always been fascinated by history. That was part of the heritage you had by growing up in colonial America, even if it was nearly four hundred years after the Pilgrims first set foot on the land.

After Blair had told him about the Halletts, Dr. Angus had done some research on his own. He learned that they were quite wealthy

people, but that Andrew, Sr., had come over with a passage listing as a "servant."

This had intrigued him, and he had delved farther and farther into the background of the family, until he had learned the truth behind the entry. Andrew Hallett, he had been told, was as tight as could be with his money.

"He could put a Scotsman to shame, he was so tight," the old man from Yarmouth had told him. "A slave could come over free on the ships, so he struck a deal with a friend of his. He came over listed as the other gent's slave. Then they split the fare, so it cost each of them only half as much as usual. Of course his wife and all six children, who were born in England, also came for free that way."

Dr. Angus listened as the old man spun the time-worn tale of Andrew Hallett.

"As soon as they set foot on American sod, the man began giving orders to Andrew Hallett. Well, he wasn't about to stand for that! 'I am Goodman Hallett now that we have landed, and don't you ever forget it!' And it was known far and wide that he never took another order from anyone as long as he lived."

Now, passing through Yarmouth, Dr. Angus felt a strange sensation. It was like nothing he had ever felt before.

"It is just the storm," he told himself.

Just then a bright bolt of lightening illuminated a field off to his right. There, standing in the middle of the field, was a man, frantically waving his arms at Dr. Angus.

Dr. Angus weighed the alternatives as he continued on the road. This man obviously needed help, but so did Blair Smythe-Black. After all, she was his patient. This man meant nothing to him. He had no idea even who he was. He owed his allegiance to Blair.

"Hel-l-l-l-l-p!"

The strange man's voice echoed through the wind, daring Dr. Angus to ignore him.

There were other doctors at the hospital in Hyannis. In fact, they had some of the finest doctors on the Cape. The Kennedy's had seen to that.

Dr. Angus swung the car around, feeling it veer from one side of the highway to the other on the slippery pavement. This man's cry for help seemed to haunt him. He could not escape it.

He could no longer make out the figure, as the rain was nearly blinding. He wondered if he had imagined the whole thing. Perhaps he had watched too much *Brigadoon*.

He pulled the car alongside the road and ran into the field, instinctively grabbing his medical bag. Corky was at his side, barking as they went through the tall, marshy poverty grass. He listened for the voice, but it was silent.

He was sure he had made a mistake. There was no one here, or he would still be calling to them. Feeling quite foolish, Dr. Angus turned and headed back for the car.

"Help!" Again, that voice. "Crack!" Again, a bolt of lightening, revealing the man, still waving frantically for Dr. Angus to come to his rescue.

Dr. Angus soon was standing directly in front of the man. He shook his head, hoping it would clear. Was it possible? Or was the weather playing tricks on him?

The man held a hand out to Dr. Angus. Dr. Angus slowly took hold of it, shaking it. It was cold and clammy, but then so was everything else on a day like today.

"Please!" the man pleaded. "You have to come help me. I have heard that you work miracles for people in trouble. You must come with me."

"What seems to be the problem?" Dr. Angus asked.

"It is Maria, my daughter. She is having a baby, and no one will help her. The midwife will not come to the house. They all say she is a witch."

"A witch?" Dr. Angus asked, talking as they ran across the field towards

Yarmouth. "But there haven't been any witches since 17— something or other."

"It doesn't matter," the stranger said. "Just come help her. I am afraid she is going to die. And maybe the baby, too."

Dr. Angus was moved by the anxiety of this man for his daughter. He could not deny him the right to medical care. Besides, wasn't that his specialty? He was, after all, a *baby doctor*.

"She may be a witch," the man said, "but she is still my daughter, no matter what she has done."

As they entered the town, Dr. Angus looked around. It was as if he had just walked into another century. The houses were all small, typical buildings. The Cape was full of such homes, but these homes looked to be almost brand new.

Dr. Angus searched for cars and traffic. It was a stormy night, but there were no cars. Not even parked along the streets. In fact, there were barely streets. Here and there he saw a horse tied in front of a house, or a candle light in a window. There were no street lights. There was no sound of anything, save a few voices from inside as they passed one house after another.

"Here we are!" the man said. "Hurry, before it is too late."

He pounded on the door. A woman, dressed in an old-fashioned long, full dress, opened the door. She held a bloody rag in one hand.

"Mary!" the man said. "Thank God he has come to help. I knew he would."

"It is too late," the woman sobbed. "The baby was just born. He is dead. And poor Maria, she is nearly dead as well."

A million questions ran through Dr. Angus's mind. He wanted to know who these people were. He wanted to know how he got there, and if it was really a different time, or if he was dreaming. He wanted to know why the people thought this man's daughter was a witch. And how did this stranger know who he was, and that he could help in a medical emergency? "Not now," he said aloud, hardly aware that he had spoken.

"Yes, now!" the man argued. "She needs you right now. In there."

The man pointed to a small cot near the fireplace. The woman was retching in pain, tossing from one side to the other. The baby was on the corner of the cot, the umbilical cord still connecting the lifeless form to its young mother.

Dr. Angus hurried to her side, his black leather bag in his hand. He set it down, opened it and took a scissors out of the plastic seal to cut the cord. He leaned over the tiny creature and felt a very faint pulse.

"I think we can do it," he said to the new mother. He proceeded to push, ever so gently with just two fingers, on the baby's chest and to blow into its mouth and nose.

Since they all thought the baby was dead, no one had even tried to clean it off. Dr. Angus repeated the CPR technique, his face covered with the coating which enveloped the baby.

He stood back, checking once again for a pulse, when the baby began to cry. Softly at first, then a bold, loud scream.

The stranger came running into the room. He grabbed his daughter's hand and spoke to her.

"It is going to be all right. I told you people said this doctor could work miracles. The baby was dead, and he has given him life. It is wonderful! Just wonderful!"

Dr. Angus abruptly pushed him aside in order to get to Maria and tend to her. She was hemorrhaging and he knew what he needed.

"Can someone get me some ice?" he asked.

Mary Hallett, who had joined them, looked at her husband in disbelief. John's stare was equally blank.

"Surely you know it's only September. There's no ice to be had for months yet."

Dr. Angus shook his head, puzzled. It is the past, he thought. I don't know how, or why, but these people have never heard of making ice until everything freezes over in the winter.

"The well," he said. "Is the water from it cold?"

"It's always cold, bein' below ground like it is," John answered. "You want I should fetch you some?"

"Yes," Dr. Angus replied. "And hurry! We have to get something cold in here to stop the bleeding."

John called out to Seth to bring some water. Dr. Angus realized, for the first time, that all the family members were just around the corner, anxiously watching his every move.

"Come on, little lady!" he coaxed. "Just try and relax. We'll have this over in no time."

He handed the baby to Mary and instructed her to clean him off. Mary obediently took him into the kitchen and washed him off. She took a piece of fabric and wrapped the baby in it, holding him close to her and singing softly. He responded by a gurgle, then slipped off to sleep—a calm, peaceful sleep—in his grandmother's arms.

Seth returned with the water. It was indeed cold, Dr. Angus discovered as he put a clean cloth into it. He packed Maria to try to control the bleeding, and when he was satisfied that it was under control, he reached again into his medical bag.

Dr. Angus held a syringe up to prepare it for Maria. The room was suddenly silent, as they all watched this man work his magic on Maria. He inserted the needle into Maria's arm, causing her to cry out in agony. Never had they seen such a thing as this.

John came running to Dr. Angus and tried to pull the needle from Maria's arm. Dr. Angus fought with him, waiting until all the medication was well-drained into her veins. Then he withdrew it, tossing it into the fireplace.

"What are you doing?" John demanded.

"I am giving her a sedative," Dr. Angus replied.

"And what is that?" John asked.

"It is something to make her rest. In just a few minutes she will be calm and it will be much better for her. I don't want her moving about so the bleeding starts again."

By the time Dr. Angus had finished his explanation, Maria was completely relaxed and asleep. Her arm dropped to the side of the cot.

"She's dead!" Mary screamed. "You killed my daughter! What have you done to her?"

John grabbed her, trying to awaken her, but it was no use. The sedative had done what it was supposed to do. If only they could understand that.

"You saved the baby, but you killed my daughter! I will see you hanged for this! You are a murderer! You will pay for your sins!"

Dr. Angus pulled one of the chairs up along side Maria and sat beside her. He watched her chest rise and fall with each new breath she took.

"Come here," he said softly to John and Mary. "Put your hands here."

He took Mary's hand and gently guided it to Maria's chest.

"Feel that," he said. "That is your daughter's life. She is not dead. She is merely sleeping. In a few hours she will be awake, but she will not feel the terrible pain she felt earlier."

"You had better hope so!" John sputtered. "For your sake, you better hope so."

After much persuasion, Dr. Angus convinced the rest of the family to leave him alone there with Maria.

"She needs her rest," he explained, "and I will keep an eye on her. It is getting late, and you would be better off going about your regular chores."

Reluctantly, they left him alone with Maria.

Dr. Angus could hear them whispering in the kitchen about his strange means of doing things. He could also hear them preparing the evening meal. He had not realized how hungry he was until John returned with a bowl of soup and a piece of bread for him. He gladly accepted it, and in a few minutes John had returned to eat with him.

"I suppose this all seems strange to you," John said. "I am sorry we have not been too cordial. But we were so worried about Maria."

"Tell me about yourselves," Dr. Angus said.

"I am John," the man said. "My wife is Mary. Our children are Thankful, John, Joseph, Samuel, Seth, Hannah, Mercy and Hope. Then there is Andrew, but he is married and lives across the meadow with his wife, Mehitable. Oh, and of course Maria. But you know Maria."

John pointed to the young girl on the bed.

"That is Maria."

"Do you by any chance have a surname?" Dr. Angus asked. "John what?"

"Beggin' your pardon, Doctor. I nearly forgot. It is Hallett. John Hallett."

Dr. Angus looked at the man in surprise. So this was the famed Hallett family. The one who had sired Blair Smythe-Black. At last, he was going to have a chance to get acquainted with the infamous Halletts of Yarmouth.

As he studied the man in front of him, he wondered why Blair Smythe-Black would be so proud of such a family as this.

"Of the family of Andrew Hallett?" Dr. Angus asked. "The Andrew Hallett who almost came over on the Mayflower?"

John laughed. "Then you've heard of us, I see."

"More than you know," Dr. Angus said. "Far more than you know."

"Andrew Hallett," John explained, "was my grandfather."

"Andrew Hallett, who came here in 1635, was your grandfather?" Dr. Angus asked incredibly.

"Yes," John answered. "Does that surprise you?"

"A bit," Dr. Angus said. "If you don't mind my asking, what year is this?"

"1713," John answered, appearing amused by the lack of knowledge of this man who had just resurrected a dead baby.

Maria stirred on the cot. Dr. Angus reached over to check her pulse, then smiled at her father.

"She's going to be just fine," he said. "She should be awake pretty soon."

He had no sooner spoken than Maria opened her eyes and looked up at the strange man who hovered over her.

"Who are you?" she asked. She reached down to feel her stomach. It was no longer bulging with the baby she had carried inside her. "My baby?" she asked, panic-stricken.

"Your baby is just fine," Dr. Angus said.

"Pa?" Maria asked. "Is he lyin' to me?"

"No, child," he said, "your brand new son is sound asleep in the cradle out with his grandma. He's as bright and shiny as can be."

## ***MY DEAR PHEBE***

A war was coming! Ten-year-old Phebe Irvine was just plain scared. It was all anyone talked about. But war didn't really mean much to Phebe; it was something a long ways away from Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. The letters from her Uncle James, who lived near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, brought it much closer to home. And then her best friend, Sarah Tuttle, had to say goodbye to her father, who left to join the army.

In *MY DEAR PHEBE*, children learn how war affects everyone, even if there were no battles nearby. Phebe learns how to deal with the fears, anxieties and pain caused by the war, as well as having personal problems in her own family.

In the face of whatever terrors face today's youth, they will learn to cope with them by visiting another war, the Civil War, enabling them to better handle today's problems and threats.

*MY DEAR PHEBE* is based on the **actual letters** Phebe Irvine received from her Uncle James. A "must read" for young adults everywhere, as well as an excellent source book for teachers, libraries and parents.

The family histories of both my husband, Ivan, and my own have been the fodder of several of my books. This one, *My Dear Phebe*, has a special place in my heart.

My great-grandfather, William Henry Hallett, was married twice. His first wife, Mary Ann Adelaide Springstead, was my great-grandmother. His second wife, Edith Tuttle, was the daughter of Phebe Irvine, the main character in *My Dear Phebe*. I guess you could call her my “step-great-great grandmother.”

My grandpa, Walter Hallett, often spoke of the children from his father’s second marriage as “the second batch. You know, like those rolled out sugar cookies; the second batch is never as good as the first batch.”

It was sort of a fluke that my brother stumbled across the location of several of the “second batch” when he was stranded in a blizzard in Canada. When he handed me a little crumpled up piece of paper with their phone number on it, it led me to a wonderful treasure of family history, including copies of the actual letters to Phebe from her uncle, which became the basis of this book. The entire content of the letters are at the back of the book.

Timing sometimes is everything. Ask a comedian. *My Dear Phebe* was released the first week in October, 2001, right after the devastating terrorist attack on America. It soon became a source of inspiration and openness between teachers and students, as well as parents and their children. It opened the doors for the children to be able to share the fears and trepidations they felt after such a tumultuous time. I am proud that the first copies of the book were donated to the schools in Ground Zero in New York City as a cooperative effort between me, my publisher (PageFree Publishing, Inc.) and the printer (Lightening Source, Inc.).

Please share this book with your children and your grandchildren. Don’t just buy it for them; read it with them.

## *MY DEAR PHEBE*

### Chapter One

"I am glad we don't live in Pennsylvania any more," Maria Irvine told her husband, Thomas. "The letter from James today said many of our friends there are joining the army to fight in the war. Maybe, if we are lucky, they won't come this far to look for soldiers."

"Even if they do," Thomas said, laughing, "they won't come looking for me. I'm not much good to them, one leg being shorter than the other."

"That's why I fell in love with you," Maria said, patting his knee. "I knew I would never have to give you up to somebody else."

Phebe, their ten-year-old daughter, sat on the top step, listening. All they ever talked about anymore was "the war." She had read about the Revolutionary War in her history book at the little one-room schoolhouse down the trail in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan. It was hard to imagine anything as awful as it sounded. Now everybody said there was going to be another war.

"Everyone says Abraham Lincoln is such a wonderful president," she thought as her mind wandered. "If he really is, why can't he stop the war?"

Phebe had never been to any of the southern states, but even in Philadelphia she knew there were people who had slaves. Was that really so wrong? The few slaves she had met seemed happy the way their lives were. They talked about freeing the slaves, but she wondered what they would do if they didn't have their rich families to work for.

"It's not that far away," Phebe heard her father say. "President Lincoln has sent a letter to every state, including Michigan, telling them to get troops together and wait for their orders. One of the first men to volunteer was Caleb Tuttle. He leaves Saturday to join the troops in Lansing."

"Caleb?" Phebe's mother asked, sounding surprised. "But what will Esther and the children do?"

"The same thing as every other family who is left alone," Phebe's father said, shrugging his shoulders. "It won't be easy."

Phebe sat, frozen, on the step. Sarah Tuttle was her very best friend. She thought about Josiah, Sarah's oldest brother. He was

only fourteen. He would have to be the "man of the house" if their father went off to the war.

Phebe quietly tiptoed back to her bedroom. She stopped in front of her parents' door. Her mother said they had gotten another letter from Uncle James Irvine. She knew exactly where it would be. Maybe, if she read it, she would learn more about this war business and just how dangerous it really was. Uncle James knew *everything!*

Back in her bedroom, she carefully struck a flint and lit a candle. She held the letter carefully so it would not catch fire. She squinted to make out the words on the paper with the tiny flame that flickered.

"Dear Thomas and Maria," it began. "The war is upon us. While I am fortunate to not have to go to battle myself, so many of our friends have already left."

The letter was filled with names that meant nothing to Phebe, but she knew they must be people her father knew. Six years ago they had left Monroe for Philadelphia, then a few months later they had headed for the frontier of Upper Michigan. Phebe was only four, and all she could remember of the people in Monroe was what she had heard from her parents. It was even hard for her to picture her own grandmother.

She heard footsteps in the hallway. She hurried to blow out the candle. If she was real quiet, they would think she was asleep.

"I will go over to see Caleb in the morning," Phebe's father said. "Maybe he will feel a little better if he knows we will keep an eye on things for him while he is gone."

"How long do you think the war will last?" Phebe heard her mother ask.

"Not long," her father answered. "Hopefully not long."

Phebe tossed and turned all through the night. Every time she fell asleep she dreamed of men, young and old, all lying on the ground covered in blood. She would wake up, the sweat pouring off her body, and sob silently. Poor Sarah! What would she do if her father was one of those bodies?

Finally, deciding that she would go with her father to the Tuttle farm in the morning, she drifted off to sleep.

*Mysteries*

## **THE PATRICK AND GRACE MYSTERIES**

### ***IN ST. PATRICK'S CUSTODY***

Grace Johnson, elderly New York City widow, "ran away from home, and at my age!" she says. Patrick O'Mally, retired New York cop, comes to her rescue by taking her to the homeless shelter where he volunteers. Grace quickly becomes their most valuable employee.

The fun begins when a priest from St. Patrick's Cathedral recruits them to help solve a mystery: the statue of St. Patrick has disappeared! They are led on a merry chase by a young girl, and along the way they just happen to solve the one murder case that has bugged Patrick for years, as well as get caught in the middle of an attempted poisoning.

*IN ST. PATRICK'S CUSTODY* is the first in the **Patrick & Grace Mystery series**.

For more than thirty years, my husband and I have run a charitable organization, Mission Socorro, in the Red River Valley of northern Minnesota and North Dakota. During that time we have dealt with hundreds of homeless people and families. One thing I have learned, in dealing with them, is that with one missed paycheck or one too many unforeseen illnesses, it could be any one of us in that same situation. And they have been some of the most fascinating, colorful people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. At the same time, of course, some of them are real characters, which was fun in adapting the general idea of many of them to be residents of the Haven of Rest Homeless Shelter in New York City. Also, we stayed for a short time before one of our trips to Venezuela at the Sunday Breakfast Association in Philadelphia. They have no idea that some of the staff there were “models” for some of the characters in *In St. Patrick's Custody*. I hope they will be pleased if and when they see themselves on the pages.

Patrick and Grace have become my favorite characters—my friends. The same is true of many of their readers. Women from all across the country, whom I have never met, have asked me how I chose them to pattern Grace after. I simply tell them that “Grace is not really anybody, but a whole lot of everybody.” One editor, from a very staid, fundamental publishing house, after reading *In St. Patrick's Custody*, wrote in her rejection letter to me, “I really liked Patrick and Grace. I was so jealous of Anne Douglas. I wanted to have coffee with Grace every morning. *If only they hadn't been so Catholic!*”

I didn't purposely set out to make them Catholic, nor did I make them non-Catholics. They just showed up that way, and there was no way I was going to change their habits. I think you'll enjoy them, no matter what their religious persuasion. I can't imagine them any other way!

As a writer, we hope we can impact other people's lives. If I had set out to do this, it would never have succeeded. However, when people began to read *In St. Patrick's Custody*, it gave them the urge to go to their homeless shelters to volunteer. I can only say, “Patrick and Grace, you done good!”

## ***IN ST. PATRICK'S CUSTODY***

...Get into more trouble than a couple of two-year-olds and more fun than a barrel of monkeys getting out of it  
--A review of *In St. Patrick's Custody*

### CHAPTER ONE

Grace reached into her jacket pocket, took out a small bag of sunflower seeds and opened them. She carefully threw a few of them onto the sidewalk in front of her and watched the birds as they swooped down to grab them, one by one, in their beaks. They flew off, far enough to feel safe, cracked them open, dropping the shells to the ground and devoured only the insides.

It was cool this early in the morning. She pulled her scarf up around her neck, shivering slightly. She should have put her hat on, but it was March. The calendar said it was nearly spring. She didn't want to delay the coming of her favorite season by letting Mother Nature think she couldn't take the weather she was dishing out.

She loved sitting on the benches at the Promenade and Channel Gardens in Rockefeller Plaza. The flowers were just beginning to peek their heads up above ground, and it seemed that each day they got a little more daring as they reached for the warm sunshine. She had a clear view of St. Patrick's Cathedral, with its towers reaching up to the heavens, far above the mundane buildings of everyday.

Most of all, Grace loved watching the people as they hustled and bustled by, not stopping to notice her. They were on their way to work and the way they scurried along reminded her of James. They had spent their entire lives hurrying, and now they had nothing to hurry for.

James had been a good husband, but Grace felt guilty. Try as she might, she could not cry over losing him. He had been so ill, she hated to see him suffer. Now he was gone; he was at peace. Her whole life had been one of devotion to her family. She had waited on James hand and foot, as if he was incapable of tending his own needs. She had done her grieving early—while he was still alive.

Off in the distance Grace watched a little girl stoop over and draw the squares on the sidewalk for hopscotch. She hopped on one foot, trying to maintain her balance. She was so frail and thin

looking, Grace's heart went out to her. In her arms she held a scruffy dog who seemed as undernourished as the child. As she tipped to one side, the dog took the opportunity to jump to his freedom. He scurried to the area where Grace was sitting, sniffing at the ground where the bird seed was scattered.

Grace's mind turned to her own three children. Missy was so near, living just over in Brooklyn, yet she hardly saw her anymore. Her girls were getting bigger, and Missy had them enrolled in just about everything there was for them. They were in dance class, drama class, ice skating, piano, art... The list went on and on. Missy had done well for herself, marrying a lawyer and all. She had her own life.

Grace's smile turned to a frown. She was sure, for the fourth or fifth time, that Betty Andrews, her neighbor, had been talking to Missy on the phone. There was some good to be said for the thin walls in the little apartment where she lived. Many were the times she had been able to listen to the people on all sides of her apartment through the "rice paper" walls. The thought that they might have listened to her, too, never crossed her mind. Not even nosy Betty Andrews. But now, she wondered if Betty had called Missy or if it was the other way around.

No, she was sure Betty had called Missy. She would have heard the phone ring. She had seemed especially inquisitive lately about all three of her children, but especially Missy. Now Grace realized it was undoubtedly a mistake to have told her Missy's last name and where she lived.

Jerry popped into Grace's mind next. Logical, since he was the middle child. He had always been in the middle of everything. He and Wendy had a nice new home in Philadelphia. Their two boys were all wrapped up in football, baseball, hockey and basketball. This, too, was logical, since their dad was a coach at the high school.

"Strangers," Grace said out loud. "All except Bill." She knew, no matter what faced her, she could count on Bill to help bail her out. Not that she was looking for trouble, mind you, but you never know.

She tossed another handful of sunflower seeds to the birds, then glanced up only to see the face of the man who had been at the park every day. They had never spoken a word, but she wondered if he was stalking her.

Grace laughed. Why would anybody be interested in her? It wasn't like she was material for Good Morning, America.

"Top o' the mornin' to you, ma'am," the man said.

"And a good day to you, too, sir," Grace replied, breaking their weeks-long silence. He tipped his hat respectfully to Grace. She noticed that it was a policeman's cap, although he was not wearing

a uniform and he appeared to be too old to be on the force. "A fine one it is, too. The sun will warm the air quickly and it will shine on the Irish soon for the Saint Paddy's parade."

"Might you be an Irish lassie?" he asked.

"By my mother and father, sure, but I was born in this country. Never could figure out if that makes me an Irish washerwoman or an American miss."

"I'd say, by lookin' at you, that a washerwoman you'll never be. Not a lovely lass the likes of you."

"And you're full of blarney, too," Grace said, a twinkle in her eye.

The man moved over to sit beside Grace. She emptied the bag of seeds into her hand and threw the last of them for the birds.

"You really shouldn't be feedin' the birds the likes of those seeds," the man said. "They leave an awful mess on the way, and the hulls are terrible to clean up."

"And you have a better idea?" Grace asked, suddenly irritated that this total stranger was telling her what to do with her life.

The man reached into his own coat pocket and took out a bag of tiny cubes of bread. He began to toss them out, and the birds took them as eagerly as they had attacked Grace's sunflower seeds.

"See?" he said, grinning. "They like it just as well and there is no mess left behind."

Just as he said that, one of the pigeons flew overhead and left a bird dropping on the bench directly between them.

"You were saying?" Grace asked, laughing at the mockery the bird made of the man's remark.

"I stand corrected," the man said, joining her in the laugh. "By the way, my name is Patrick. And yours?"

"Grace."

Grace did not elaborate. There was no reason to tell him that she was Grace Johnson. That made her seem so common—so ordinary. Somehow, "Grace" seemed more elegant, more impressive. Although she didn't know why she should try to worry about what this man thought about her. In a day, or two, or three, he would probably disappear and she would never see him again.

"Do you come here often?" Grace asked, wondering why she was pursuing any further contact with this man. Something in his eyes, she thought. They look kind.

"Every morning," Patrick answered. "And I know you do, too. Or at least you have for the past month or so."

This man knew too much about her, Grace reasoned. It made her uncomfortable, like she was being trailed by a private eye. Maybe it was his hat.

Her mind flashed back to Betty Andrews talking to Missy. Had Missy, for some unknown reason, hired a private eye to follow her?

What did she think? She had lost her marbles just because she was getting old and her husband died?

"Since you know so much about everything," Grace said sarcastically, changing the subject, "have you noticed that little girl over there?"

Grace turned to look at the girl and her dog, but they had vanished into thin air.

"Which one?" Patrick asked, grinning at Grace, like he was about ready to agree with Missy.

"She was there just a minute ago," Grace said.

"Uh-huh!" Patrick said, nodding his head sympathetically.

"No!" Grace insisted. "She really was. I swear!"

"Anyway, I didn't see her," Patrick admitted. "I was too busy watching you."

Grace blushed like a teenager. She couldn't remember the last time anybody had made her turn red. Not even James.

"She was the most pathetic thing," Grace said, not giving Patrick a chance to say anything else that might embarrass her.

Suddenly Grace caught a glimpse of the little girl running away from them. The dog was once again in her arms.

"That one," Grace said, pointing to the girl.

Patrick stared at her. Grace was definitely right. She was the most pathetic-looking creature he had seen in a long time. She looked like she hadn't had anything to eat in weeks. But it was more than that. Something about her caused a chill to run up and down his spine. It wasn't something he could explain; it was something you learned to trust after years on the police force.

\* \* \*

Daily Grace looked forward with more anticipation to her morning trips to the park. Patrick had joined here every day and their friendship was growing. She had learned that he had recently lost his life-long companion, just as she had. He had worked on the New York police force all his life. "One of New York's finest," he told her proudly. He was a detective when he retired. He had come over from Ireland as a young lad. He did not remember anything about the "old country" firsthand, but his memory had been kept alive by the tales he had heard from his parents. He loved sharing these tales with Grace.

"It's the luck o' the Irish I'm here today," he said as he walked up to Grace. "You know, don't you, what tomorrow is? I'll not be in the park tomorrow."

"I told you I'm Irish too. Just mine happens to be second generation."

"Second-hand Irish," he said, smiling warmly at Grace. "That's good enough for me."

"Of course I know what day tomorrow is. It's St. Patrick's Day. And that stops you from coming to the park?"

"Anyone who's lived in this burg for as long as you ought to know that every Irish officer marches in the parade on St. Paddy's Day—active or retired. Why, I remember one year poor old Regis O'Toole got right up off his sick bed and made his way down for the march. He lasted the whole route, then he hitched a ride back to the hospital and promptly died."

"That's terrible!" Grace exclaimed. "Someone should have stopped him."

"What? And deprive a man of his dyin' wish? Why, he died with a smile on his face. And the last words he spoke were 'I've done me part one final time, and now I bid you all a fond adieu.' With that he lifted his last mug of Irish whiskey to his lips, sipped it and lay back on his pillow, having stepped onto the other side. Two days later the whole force had a wake the likes of which you've never seen. Then they tossed his ashes into the river, just like he wanted."

"So, I won't see you tomorrow?" Grace asked.

"Now I didn't say that. But it won't be 'til after the parade. Then I'll meet you back here at the park and we'll do something special."

"I'll fix a picnic," Grace said, enthusiastically.

"Sounds OK by me," Patrick agreed. "And I'll pray for a sunny day."

And today, as had become their custom by now, Patrick walked Grace back to her apartment. He came inside and they had a cup of tea, then he was on his way, whistling "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" as he went down the steps and out the door.

\* \* \*

Grace left her door slightly ajar and listened as she heard Betty Andrews hurry to call Missy. She strained to hear, but even with the thin walls she realized that Betty was just barely speaking above a whisper.

"Policeman..." "Home again..." "I'll let you know..." That was all she could make out. Whatever was Missy up to?

Grace knew by now that Patrick was on the level. She had finally told him about the phone conversations between Betty and Missy. Patrick assured her that he had no part in it, and she found no reason to doubt him. Why, he even promised to protect her if she needed it! And she just knew that he was on the lookout to see if she was being followed. That's why he had decided to walk her home from

the park every day. More and more they were becoming almost inseparable.

\* \* \*

The day was exactly as Patrick had ordered. The sun was shining and there wasn't a hint of a breeze anywhere.

Grace went to the spot on the parade route that they had agreed she would watch for Patrick. The parade passed by her as she waited and waited for a glimpse of him. She finally sat down on the curb. She wished she had thought to bring a portable chair, but in all the years she had been in New York she had never gone to see a St. Patrick's Day parade. Now she knew why.

Patrick let out a long, loud wolf whistle.

"Hi, ya, Gracie!" he shouted, throwing a kiss to her.

Grace turned her head, pretending he was calling to someone else. Not to be daunted, Patrick ran from his place and grabbed her by the hand.

"Come on, you can walk with me for a couple of blocks."

Grace tried to pull away, but Patrick was much too strong for her. Finally, finding no alternative, she walked along beside him, her head down, hoping no one she knew would recognize her.

\* \* \*

In Brooklyn, Missy was busily chatting on the phone with Betty Andrews.

"Yes, I think it would be best," Betty said. "She's really become quite..." She hesitated, searching for the right word. "...odd," she concluded. "This morning she took to the street real early. I mean real early. Like six o'clock early."

Missy listened, frustrated that her mother's life had become such a maze of confusion. She hated the idea of putting her into a nursing home, but it just wasn't safe for her alone anymore. And none of the kids had time for her. Why did life have to be so unfair?

She dropped the phone, leaving Betty dangling on the other end with a blur of sound buzzing in her ear.

"Lee!" she shouted at her husband. "Come here! Quick! You'll never believe this! Never in a million years!"

Lee came in from the den, where he had been reading the morning paper.

"What's all the excitement about?" he asked.

"It's Mother! Can you believe it? Right there! Look!"

Missy pointed at the screen, but all Lee saw when he looked at it was a group of young girls dancing an Irish jig as they made their way down the streets of New York.

"That doesn't look like your mother to me," Lee said, laughing at Missy's over-active imagination. "She's looking younger every day. Hope it runs in the genes."

"You're making fun of me," Missy said, pouting. "She was there just a minute ago. I saw her with my own eyes. Go ahead, kids, tell your father you saw Grandma in the parade."

Michelle shrugged her shoulders. "I didn't see her," she said.

"Me either," Kim echoed. "I think you've been into the Irish whiskey, Mom. But then, I guess it is St. Patrick's Day."

"I don't know how," Missy said, "but someday I will prove that my mother has completely lost her sanity. She would never have done such a thing while Daddy was alive."

"Whatever you think, dear," Lee said as he returned to his newspaper.

From time to time the TV cameraman caught a glimpse of Grace on the tape. One little girl, bored with waiting for her mother in Tiffany's, watched the parade on the store TV monitor. She smiled as she spotted Grace in the middle of the policemen, thinking that she wished she had a grandmother like that. She had seen her in church at St. Patrick's Cathedral several times, but she didn't even know her name. All the other kids in school had grandmothers, but hers were both dead. She looks so nice, she thought. If only I could give her a hug.

As the parade was almost over, Grace blinked and rubbed her eyes. There, running to and fro among various bands, was the tiniest little man she had ever seen. He was dressed all in green from head to toe.

Grace thought about pointing him out to Patrick, but decided against it. She rubbed her eyes again. The long walk must be causing her to hallucinate. There's no such thing as a leprechaun! she told herself silently. Get a grip on yourself! And then she saw him wink at her and wave.

For some crazy, unknown reason, she thought he must be her good-luck charm.

Maybe Missy's right, she thought. You have lost it, old lady. And with that she squeezed Patrick's hand as hard as she could. Maybe she needed him to watch out for her.

At the end of the parade route Patrick and Grace went to Grace's apartment to get the picnic she had prepared earlier. Betty watched through the slit in the door, craning her neck to hear what they said. She simply shook her head as they left, laughing like a couple of young school kids, a basket in one of Patrick's hands and Grace's hand in his other one.

"Such foolishness!" she sputtered as she headed for the phone.

"I know we usually walk to the park," Grace said, "but if you don't mind, I'd like to take the bus today. I think I'm about walked out."

"No problem," Patrick said as he steered her to the bus stop, even though she knew its every station. Truth was, his feet hurt, too. It had been a long time since he'd been on the beat, but today he felt like he was back there.

Patrick helped her onto the bus to Central Park. It was not their usual spot, but they decided it was a better choice for today as the park was always filled with theater players, bands and all sorts of activities.

As they stepped from the bus, Grace pointed to a small empty picnic table. She started towards it when she was bombarded by a little girl, wrapping her arms around Grace's waist so tightly Grace thought she might quit breathing.

"I know you," she exclaimed excitedly. "I saw you on TV. You're famous, aren't you?"

"Jessica!" the little girl's mother called to her. "Whatever are you doing? Get over here! Right now!"

The little girl whispered to Grace, "I've seen you at church, and then I saw you on TV. I like you. I'd like you to be my grandma."

"Let's just pretend I am," Grace said, kissing her lightly on the top of her head and giving her a big squeeze.

"What was that all about?" Patrick asked.

Grace shrugged her shoulders. "Beats me," she said.

\* \* \*

Safely tucked away in the middle of a clump of bushes, the little girl who had been playing hopscotch several days earlier watched, wishing with all her heart that she could go give Grace a hug, too. She wasn't so sure about the man, but she thought she liked the lady. In fact, she knew she did.

\* \* \*

When they finished eating their picnic lunch, Patrick reached across the table and took Grace's hand tenderly in his.

"Bet James never gave you a St. Paddy's Day like this, did he?"

Grace laughed. "No, but then he was Swedish!"

# ***RECIPE FOR MURDER***

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Patrick and Grace Mystery

## ***RECIPE FOR MURDER***

Patrick O'Malley, retired New York City cop, and Grace Johnson, Jill-of-all-trades at the homeless shelter where she escaped in the first Patrick and Grace Mystery, take flight to Nebraska when they hear that Walter Schmidt, Grace's cohort from the kitchen at the shelter was found hanging in the apple shed. What seems ilke a perfectly simple suicide soon turns to a devious plot, with family secrets abounding on every side. Small town life is at its best, where outsiders are "suspects" from the start, but soon Patrick and Grace have a lineup of suspects of their own.

The primary clue is the letter to Patrick and Grace, which contained a key to a safety deposit box. In the box? A *RECIPE FOR MURDER*. But was it really worth killing for? Obviously someone thought so.

The Patrick and Grace Mysteries have a set pattern. The first one, *In St. Patrick's Custody*, is set in New York City at the Haven of Rest Homeless Shelter. *Recipe for Murder* has them following one of the minor characters, Walter Schmidt, to his hometown of Albany, Nebraska. The series will proceed in this way. The third book, to which I will give you a peek in a minute, will return to the homeless shelter in New York City. It is *Old Habits Die Hard*, and is the case of the missing Mother Superior. A fantastically fun new character, Sister Babs, will stir your heart and tickle you clear down to the tips of your toes. The fourth book, *Ma Fia's Murder Mystery*, will take place mainly in Six Flags over Georgia, with a side trip to Disneyland in Orlando, Florida. Grace's daughter, the one who wanted to put Grace in the nursing home, is horrified. She says on the phone, "I knew you were going to get all messed up in something nasty when you were hanging around Patrick all the time! Now look at you! You're mixed up with the mafia!" There's more fun to be had all along the way.

## ***RECIPE FOR MURDER***

### PROLOGUE

Patrick O'Mally and Grace Johnson, senior citizen spies extraordinaire, have just completed their first caper as a team.

Patrick, retired Irish cop, and Grace, who ran away from home to avoid being put in a retirement home by her children, are finally relaxing in Grace's apartment at the homeless shelter, which provided her with not only a job but a real sense of self-worth.

Even Grace's children have accepted Grace's instincts as the perfect partner for Patrick's experience after the pair of super sleuths solved what was perhaps the Big Apple's most unusual kidnapping. The fact that they just happened to solve the one murder which plagued Patrick's career didn't hurt anything, either.

Now, with all of that behind them, can they settle back into a life of leisure watching old reruns of Perry Mason on TV?

### CHAPTER ONE

Patrick collapsed in the big overstuffed chair in Grace's apartment. He removed his shoes and began to rub his feet.

"You know, Gracie," he said, smiling at her, "I'm not as young as I used to be."

"Boy!" Grace said sarcastically. "That's deep!"

"Oh, come on," Patrick said. "You know what I mean."

"I think it's only your feet that have gotten old," she teased.

Patrick didn't argue. If she wanted to think he was still young at heart, who was he to protest?

Patrick O'Mally, retired New York Police Department detective, had survived an escapade with his new partner: Grace Johnson.

Grace sat on the sofa facing him. "Sorry you took me on?" she asked. She had never known anything as fulfilling as solving the mystery she and Patrick had just finished. St. Patrick--or at least the facsimile of him--was safely back in its niche at St. Patrick's Cathedral and they could relax.

Grace studied the apartment. So much had happened that it seemed like ages had passed since she had moved into the homeless shelter. She did love her work there; it was such fun to be around the people who congregated there daily.

"A penny for your thoughts?" Patrick asked.

Grace reached out and put her hand on Patrick's knee. "I was just thinking how lucky I am," she said. "I have my work here. I have my own little apartment. My kids have finally accepted the fact that I really do belong here. But best of all, I have you. Thank you, Saint Patrick."

Patrick grinned at her use of the nickname she had given him. He doubted he would ever tell her that Margaret, his first wife, had called him that, too.

"Want a cup of coffee?" Grace asked.

"No," Patrick answered. "I just want to sit here and look at you."

Grace couldn't help herself. She blushed like a young schoolgirl.

\* \* \*

A knock at the door interrupted them, much to Grace's relief.

"I have a letter for you," Juan, one of the residents at the shelter said with his strong Spanish accent.

"Which one of us?" Patrick asked. He assumed, of course, that it was for Grace, since this was her apartment.

"Both of you," Juan said, handing the letter to him. He closed the door behind him as he left.

Grace went over to Patrick and perched on the arm of the chair.

"Who's it from?" she asked.

"I don't know," Patrick said. "There's no return address."

He studied the envelope carefully.

"Go on and open it!" Grace said, her voice filled with exasperation. She hated surprises! "You'll never find out any other way."

Patrick, ignoring her, said, "Hmmm. Postmark is from someplace in Nebraska. Albany. I thought Albany was in New York."

"Silly!" Grace shouted at him. "Are you going to open it? Or do I have to do it for you?"

She grabbed the envelope away from him, ripping the corner off in the process.

Patrick craned his neck to see it, too. It was only one page long, and at the bottom of the letter it was signed, "Sincerely, Walter."

"It's from Walter!" Grace said excitedly.

"Okay, now we know who sent it. What does it say? What is he doing in Nebraska?"

Walter Schmidt was a former resident at the homeless shelter. He had been in charge of the kitchen when Grace first came there. They had spent many interesting times over a cup of coffee in the morning before they began preparing breakfast for the other

residents. One morning when Grace went to the kitchen, he was nowhere to be found. He hadn't said a word to anyone, just up and took off. Of course that wasn't so unusual. Lots of the residents were just drifters--there one day and gone the next. But Walter had seemed different. He belonged.

"Seems to me he said he hailed from Nebraska," Grace said. "Someplace on the east side. Could have been Albany. Yeah, I think it was."

"So, are you going to read it?" Patrick asked. "You were in such a hurry."

"*Dear Patrick and Grace,*" Grace read, squinting at the writing. His penmanship left a lot to be desired. "*Sorry I left without saying anything to you. My mother called, and my father had just died. I had to go back home. Hope you are both OK. Did you ever find that little girl and the statue? I hope I'm not putting you out too much, but I need a favor, and I don't know who to ask but you. I found a real recipe to success, but somebody doesn't want me to have it. If anything happens to me, take the key I'm sending you and go to First Bank in Norfolk. You'll find the secret there. Grace, you'll know what to do with it. If I don't make it, good luck! It can make you millionaires. Sincerely, Walter.*"

Patrick picked the envelope up from the coffee table and shook it. A small silver key fell out.

"What do you suppose that is all about?" he asked.

"I don't know," Grace replied, "but let's try to find out." She stood up and walked to the phone. She dialed the operator.

"Could you get me the area code for Albany, Nebraska?" she asked.

"Thank you."

She dialed 402, followed by the number for information.

"Yes," she said in response to the operator's offer of help. "Or at least I hope so. I am looking for someone named Schmidt--that's spelled S-C-H-M-I-D-T--in Albany, Nebraska."

"No, I'm sorry. I don't have a first name. How many are there?"

"Well, if there's only one, let's just pretend that's the right one, shall we?"

Grace was usually pretty level-headed, but she had to find out if Walter was all right. She didn't have time to waste on useless chit-chat right now.

Grace repeated the number out loud, and Patrick wrote it down in his trusty little notebook he always carried in his inside breast pocket.

Grace hung the phone up and then walked to the sofa, where she sat looking at Patrick. For some reason, she felt uneasy about this whole thing.

"Did you get a name, too?" Patrick asked.

"Oh, yes. Nelda. I remember Walter saying one time that his mother had the phone listed in her name because his father wouldn't pay for all of her long-distance calls."

"So you are going to call Nelda?" Patrick asked, making her seem somehow like a friend rather than a stranger.

"In a minute," Grace said.

"What's the matter?" Patrick asked. "You look scared."

Grace hesitated. Finally she confessed, "I guess I am. I don't know why, but I have this awful feeling in the pit of my stomach. Maybe it's a premonition or something."

Patrick laughed at her. "Or women's intuition?" he scoffed. "In the department we called it a *gut instinct*." His expression suddenly assumed a somber appearance. "Trouble is, call it what you want, it was very seldom wrong."

Grace took the notebook from Patrick and walked, slowly, to the phone, dialed the number and waited while it rang. Once. Twice. Three times.

"Maybe nobody's home," she said hopefully.

"Hello," came the soft voice on the other end of the line in Albany, Nebraska.

"Is this Nelda Schmidt?" Grace asked.

"Yes," came the reply. "Who is this?"

"We are looking for a Walter Schmidt. Do you know where we could find him?"

"You...you know Walter?" the surprised voice asked. "Who are you?"

"We are friends of his from New York. Is Walter there, please?"

"He was," Nelda answered, then Grace thought the phone must have gone dead. Or Nelda had fainted. Or something dreadful had just happened.

"Nelda!" Grace yelled into the phone. "Nelda! Mrs. Schmidt! Are you still there?"

Patrick jumped to his feet and ran to Grace's side.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"I don't know," Grace said, holding her hand over the mouthpiece for privacy. "She was just there. She said Walter was there. Then there was this awful, dead silence."

"I'm sorry," the voice finally said. "I didn't mean to startle you. Who did you say you are?"

"My name is Grace Johnson," Grace said. "Walter and I are friends."

"*Were* friends!" Nelda snapped. "Nobody is his friend any more. Never will be."

"What's wrong?" Grace asked, feeling sick to her stomach. So her gut instinct was right. Something terrible had happened to Walter.

"Is...Is Patrick there with you?" Nelda Schmidt asked. "Walter told me about both of you. He thought you were just wonderful the way you were trying to find that poor little girl and all..."

"Yes," Grace said, "Patrick is right here beside me."

By now Grace had tilted the phone receiver far enough away so Patrick could hear too.

"I'm right here, Mrs. Schmidt," Patrick said. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"Nelda, please," she said. "I hope you don't mind, but I feel like I know you. Walter talked about you so much."

Nelda blew her nose loudly, causing both Patrick and Grace to jump back from the phone until she had finished.

"It's Walter. I know he didn't do it. I went out to the shed this morning to get some apples. He'd been keeping all of them this year. I told him we needed the money from the orchard, but he said he had a plan that would make us a whole lot more money than I could imagine. He wouldn't sell a single one."

Grace and Patrick listened silently for her to continue.

"That's when I found him. He was...hanging there by a rope from the rafter."

Grace turned white. She sank into the nearest chair, the phone still in her hand but the cord stretched to the limit. Patrick moved right along beside her.

"How did it happen?" Patrick asked.

"The sheriff was just here. He said there was no question. He said it had to be suicide."

Grace couldn't believe it. Walter was always so cheerful; so upbeat. Had it all been just an act? Was he really capable of taking his own life?

"And what do you think?" Patrick asked.

"I know it wasn't!" Nelda insisted. "I knew Walter. He was a good boy. He'd never do anything like that. And especially not right after Charlie..." Her voice trailed off into oblivion.

"Don't let them do anything to the body," Patrick said, barking orders at the bereaved mother. "Gracie and I will be on the first plane we can get. Just hold tight until then. Oh, and one more thing. Don't tell anybody we're coming. Just in case there is foul play."

"There was," Nelda said matter-of-factly.

Grace smiled at Patrick. He always knew what to do.

"And Nelda," Grace added, "I don't believe Walter committed suicide, either."

The conversation ended, and Patrick and Grace sat staring at each other. They both knew there was more to this than met the eye. There had to be.



# ***Old Habits Die Hard***

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Patrick and Grace Mystery  
(Due out in Spring, 2005)**

This is just a little sneak preview of the next mischief Patrick and Grace get into. Patrick's favorite saying is "Old habits die hard," so it is a bit off-setting to him when that is the clue that shows up on top of a pile of nun's habits every time Mother Superior disappears. As always, they get into all kinds of trouble, and they have Sister Babs, a fun, sort of "out in left field" nun who definitely "has a habit." Yes, she hides a bottle of her beloved drambuie under her habit every time she goes into the wine cellar to fetch the communion wine. And the visits get more and more frequent. She is psychic "when the Spirit moves her," or as one of her sister nuns puts it, perhaps more accurately, "when the *spirits* move her. Here you go!

## CHAPTER ONE

"I can't really tell you," Philip Douglas, the director of the Haven of Rest Homeless Shelter said into the phone. "I expect them any time."

In the hush of his office, an intruder could easily have heard the bellowing of the voice on the other end of the phone line.

"I'll have them call you just as soon as they get here," he assured the raving caller. "I'm sure it won't be long."

He hung the phone up and turned his eyes heavenward. "Please, make them hurry," he said, his prayer interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Come in," he called out, not wanting any interference right now. Maybe he should go to the airport to meet them. Patrick O'Mally and Grace Johnson, his favorite retirees, were due back from Nebraska, where they had solved the mystery of who had "done in" poor Walter, the cook from the homeless shelter.

He smiled as he thought of them, and how fast the time had passed since Patrick had brought Grace to the shelter, alone as a new widow. She had certainly been a godsend to them.

"Hiya, Father," Patrick said cheerfully as he walked to the desk, his hand outstretched to greet his friend. It didn't matter that Philip Douglas had left the priesthood to marry Anne, the sexy lady lawyer who had captured him away from his chosen role. "Once a priest, always a priest," Patrick had told Grace when he first took her to meet him.

"Patrick! Grace!" Mr. Douglas said, hurrying around the big desk to embrace first one, then the other. "Am I glad to see you!" He smiled as he added, "Boy, when God answers, He doesn't fool around."

"Couldn't stand the eggs, huh?" Patrick teased, referring to the runny, nearly raw eggs Anne Douglas insisted on serving the men at the shelter.

"No," Mr. Douglas said, his expression suddenly turning very serious. "I can even tolerate them. If only Father O'Brien would quit calling. I don't know what's bugging the old man, but he's about to drive me right up the wall."

Suddenly, Patrick began to laugh.

"It's not funny!" Mr. Douglas insisted. "He's almost beside himself. He won't tell me what's bothering him. Says he has to talk to you as soon as you get back."

Patrick laughed again. "Remember the deaf man at the café in Albany?" he asked, winking at Grace. She joined with him in laughter.

“Care to let me in on it?” Mr. Douglas asked. “I could sure use a good laugh.”

“There was a deaf guy at the café,” Patrick began to explain. “I presume it was his son with him.”

“The kid was waving his hands so fast, I swear he was screaming at his father, even though he didn’t utter a sound,” Grace said, picking up where Patrick left off.

Patrick kicked in with the next installment of the story. “His dad was sitting there, shaking his head and doing sign language back just as fast and furious. I think he must have been trying to tell him to shut up.”

“Then the father tapped his son on the arm,” Grace said. “He pointed to his son, then put his hands in front of him—both forming a fist—and twisted them one way then the other.”

“He pointed to himself,” Patrick said.

“Then he put his fingers like this,” Grace continued, shaping the letter ‘w’ with her three middle fingers, “and pushed them up into the air.”

“And that means...?” Mr. Douglas asked.

“Simple,” Patrick answered. “You don’t even have to understand sign language to figure that one out.”

“You drive me up the wall,” Grace explained as she repeated the gestures again.

Mr. Douglas, sensing the exasperation the father must have felt, could see the humor in the situation. He laughed along with Patrick and Grace. The phone rang again.

“Haven of Rest. Philip Douglas speaking.”

“Yes, they are right here. Just a minute, I’ll put Patrick on.” He sighed deeply, then handed the receiver to Patrick, shaking his head. “I don’t know what it is, but it sounds like a matter of life or death,” he whispered to Grace. “I’ve never seen him like this.”

“Except the time they stole St. Patrick,” Grace said, referring to the icon of St. Patrick from St. Patrick’s Cathedral that she and Patrick had recovered for them.

“Yeah, right,” Mr. Douglas said. “How could I forget that?”

“Come on, Gracie,” Patrick said, pulling her towards the door. “We’ve got our work cut out for us. I’ll explain on the way over to the cathedral.” As he slammed the door shut, he called back to Mr. Douglas, “Thanks, Father. I’ll fill you in as soon as I can. *If* he’ll let me.”

“It’s the priest who has the sanctity of the confessional,” Mr. Douglas called after him. “Not some retired cop.”

“If we hurry we can catch the bus and not have to wait for the next round,” Patrick said, continuing to pull Grace along with him.

“Why don’t you take the delivery car?” Mr. Douglas suggested. He reached into the desk drawer and pulled out a set of keys, then

tossed them to Patrick. Patrick dropped Grace's hand and made a first-rate catch of the keys.

"Thanks, Father," he said.

And they disappeared from his sight.

"Lord," Mr. Douglas prayed, "I don't know what it is this time. But I'm asking you... No, I'm *begging* you to watch over them. You know what kind of messes they can get into..."

\*\*\*

"Philip?" Anne Douglas asked as she poked her head in the door. "Do you have a couple of minutes?"

"For you, darling, always," he said, his face lighting up at the mere sight of her. Yes, he told himself for the umpteenth time, it was worth every second of it. Nothing was as important to him as his wife. Not even God or the church. God forgive him; he loved her too much for words.

\*\*\*

"It's Mother Superior," Father O'Brien said to Patrick and Grace as they sat in his office. "She has just disappeared."

"Where did she go?" Patrick asked.

"Boy! You really can be so..." He paused, afraid of insulting him, especially now when he needed his help so desperately.

"Dumb?" Patrick asked, saving him the embarrassment of putting his thoughts into words.

"You said it," Father O'Brien said, but he didn't argue.

"Do you have any ideas at all? Or any clues?" Patrick asked.

"Only this," Father O'Brien said. He handed Patrick a crumpled note which read *Old habits die hard*. "It was stuck on top of a pile of rumbled up old nun's habits and there was a bottle of Old English Furniture Polish beside them."

"Hmm," Grace said, looking thoughtful. "I think we'd better talk to Barbara." She stood up and headed for the door.

"Barbara Parker?" Father O'Brien asked. "But we got that whole thing settled before. Just because Cheryl tried to poison me, that doesn't mean my housekeeper had anything to do with this."

"Maybe," Grace said. "Maybe not." Patrick shook his head and followed her. He might be the cop, but Grace was the one with the tremendous instincts.

"Women's intuition to the rescue," Patrick said to the old priest as he left. "Catch you later."

And again, as they had done with Mr. Douglas, they vanished.

*Contemporary  
Romance*

# ***MONDAY KNIGHT***

## **Book 1 of the Women of the Week Series**

Monday's child is fair of face,  
Tuesday's child is full of grace,  
Wednesday's child is full of woe,  
Thursday's child has far to go,  
Friday's child is loving and giving,  
Saturday's child works for its living,  
Sunday's child is fair and wise and good and gay.

**"Monday's child is fair of face..."** Monday Knight had heard it from the day she was born. Her whole life revolved around it; today she was the leading model in the world. But in the twinkling of an eye it was all gone; thanks to one drunk driver.

Dr. Stephen White, world's most noted plastic surgeon, was her only hope. Clad in anonymity, he vows to do the impossible when she shows him a picture of Monday Knight and says that is who she wants to be.

Personal struggles seem insurmountable, but Dr. White's sense of humor supercedes, and among wigs, lingerie and dandelions, he sets out to win her over. All he has to do is convince her he truly loves her; it is not just pity.

**The Women of the Week series** began in a B Dalton bookstore in Grand Forks, North Dakota. A young woman came up to me and asked me if I knew where she could find a book with the old poem that starts out “Monday’s child is fair of face...”

My kids tell me that you can tell you have been “hanging out” in the bookstore too much when people mistake you for a clerk. However, I went to the section with poetry and found a book that contained the old, well-known poem and handed it to the customer. And that got me to thinking!

What if a child was named for the day of the week on which she was born, and her parents drilled that into her head so much that her whole life literally revolved around that line of the poem. That was the birth of Monday Knight, born on a Monday, raving beauty, top model of the world. But what if that was all gone in the twinkling of an eye? How could she continue? Ah, yes, the wheels of my mind were definitely turning!

But a funny thing happened on the way to Monday Knight’s success. Rarely, if ever, have I seen the life of a fictional character take on a life of its own. I suppose Harry Potter has, too. Monday’s new adventures began when she met the pop music group, Smash Mouth, at a local Grand Forks restaurant, and they said they were going to take her on tour. True to their word, they even held her up for the audience to view when they appeared on “Live with Regis and Kelly,” and I have heard that they did the same thing in live performances in different places. Then she was invited to a special viewing of a celestial event in the mountains of Connecticut. That was followed by a fan setting up a website just for her. You can view it at <http://mondayknight0.tripod.com> . She gets her own e-mail and has even accumulated more free hours on AOL in snail mail CDs than I have!

This is just the start of the fun of the Women of the Week. Each book will feature a woman who was named for the day of the week on which they were born, and whose life revolves around their line from the poem. On the following page is a short glimpse at the other Women of the Week.

## **MONDAY KNIGHT INTRODUCES THE WOMEN OF THE WEEK!**

***“Monday’s child is fair of face.”***

Monday Knight is a very successful model who is just about to begin her career in movies. Her one asset is her beauty. She has moved to Los Angeles and her agent just informed her that she got a part in a new movie starring Tom Cruise. She is driving to the studio in her flashy red Ferrari convertible when she is hit by a drunk driver. At the hospital, Dr. Stephen White, the country’s leading plastic surgeon, is summoned. She can’t believe she will ever amount to anything again, because she has lost the only thing that ever mattered to her, despite his insistence that she is “beautiful on the inside--where it really counts.” After her final plastic surgery she looks in the mirror for the first time and discovers she is more gorgeous than ever. She is finally able to commit to Dr. White when he proposes to her--for the umpteenth time. Her recovery has hit all the national newspapers and magazines, and her agent comes to tell her on the day she is released that the movie she was to appear in has cancelled her contract. Before, she would have been crushed at such news, but now she is able to take it. He then tells her that they have issued a new contract; she is to play the lead against Tom Cruise in the same movie.

***“Tuesday’s child is full of grace.”***

Tuesday Nolan is a typical “Miss Manners.” She lives in Charleston, SC in a huge old colonial mansion. She has been to finishing school and is a graduate of an all girls’ college. She has made it her goal to restore the south to what it used to be, and to pursue this plan she has established the “Tuesday School of Grace.” On her way to a large flashy function she is approached by a tattered homeless man who asks her for money to buy a meal. She is appalled at such a person, but he sticks to her like glue, appearing almost everywhere she goes. Finally, in desperation, she determines to reform this uncouth creature into someone worth living. What she doesn’t know is that he is a topnotch reporter, William Hart III, who is working undercover to get a story. He has just as much upbringing as she does, but if he reveals that to her he will blow his cover. He tries to “woo” her, but she can’t even think of such a thing, despite the cries of her heart to yield to him. When she finally does, he reveals the truth about himself.

***“Wednesday’s child is full of woe.”***

Wednesday Hubbard has had a difficult life. She was raised by her mother, a single parent, in St. Petersburg, Florida. She has never

known her father, and has just set out on a search to find him. She works as a waitress in a little diner, near the famous circus training grounds, and she often serves the performers. Her whole life has given her a dour outlook on life. She seldom, if ever, smiles. Gerald Coe, a clown known as “Jericho,” makes it his ultimate challenge to bring a little joy to her life. One day he appears with a bull dog, who looks as down in the mouth as Wednesday, and presents it to her, saying “This is your Joy.” On one momentous day that she agrees to marry Jerry, he presents her with another surprise: her father!

***“Thursday’s child has far to go.”***

Thursday Spain is a high school Spanish teacher in a small town just outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She has always wanted to travel to Spain, and she finally gets her chance when the local Spanish club decides to take a trip there. On a lowly teacher’s salary she could not afford it, but if she gets enough students to go she will get her airfare free. On the airplane over she meets computer programmer, Raul Espinosa, who is also on his way to fulfill his lifelong dream: to be a matador, just once. They hit it off immediately, seeing the sights of the country together. When he is given the chance to fight the bull, he asks her to come watch him. She does, but when she sees him in danger her heart leaps to her throat and she knows she loves him. As soon as the fight ends, she proposes to him.

***“Friday’s child is loving and giving.”***

Friday Love is a social worker in Detroit, Michigan. She has come out of college believing she can save the world. She has been warned by her supervisor that she should not take her clients to heart, but she defies him when Guy Miller, a young widower, comes to her for help. His wife died of cancer, and he is left to care for his two children, five-year-old Ashley and seven-year-old Kevin. The final straw was when General Motors had another of their cutbacks, leaving him jobless. They meet the challenge together, establishing a charity for a local church to help meet the needs of the hundreds of other people in the same situation Guy faces.

***“Saturday’s child works for its living.”***

Saturday Fought has one goal in life: to climb the (corporate) ladder of success. She is a vice-president of a large New York City clothing manufacturer, which would be enough for most women. Not for Saturday. She has her eye set on the CEO position, which will soon become vacant when the current head steps down in retirement. The owner of the company has the spot slated for his

son, Brent Lombardo. The only problem, Brent is completely dedicated to his first love--art. People are just beginning to give him the recognition he deserves, and he escorts Saturday to showing after showing. She gradually realizes that there is a rung missing on her upward climb--a personal life. Opposites attract, true, but can they also reach a compromise that will satisfy both of them?

***“Sunday’s child is fair and wise and good and gay.”***  
Sunday DeWitt is a judge in Des Moines, Iowa. She “wields her gavel with a wonderful sense of humor,” according to the article in a national magazine which featured her. The district attorney, Daniel Winnett, has set out to see her disbarred, claiming that her flippant attitude has no place on the bench. Their personal battle heats up when they are stranded in a flood and have to wait for a boat to come and rescue them. The jury is still out on whether they can find happiness together, but the sentence is soon handed down by the superior court.

## ***MONDAY KNIGHT***

“Monday’s Child is fair of face...”

### Chapter One

Her head reeled from the screams of the siren. She fought to open her eyes, but her eyelids seemed like they were welded together.

The sound of the siren changed as they rounded the corner to Central Hospital, then the motor died--and she wondered if she had, too.

Monday Knight was on cloud nine less than half an hour ago. Her shiny red Ferrari convertible was as glitzy as she was. Her one attribute--the only one, as far as she was concerned--was her beauty. It was because of her good looks that she was one of the top models in the world. Now, because of her beauty, she had landed a role in Tom Cruise’s new movie. Granted, it wasn’t the lead, but it was considerably more than a bit part. She had moved from New York to Los Angeles for her big break, and she had it in four days.

*Life isn’t fair!* she wanted to yell at the world. But, her voice was as silent as her eyes were blind. She reached up with her hand and felt the moisture on her face. She didn’t have to see it; she knew it was blood. She always passed out at the sight of blood. At least she didn’t have to worry about that. She couldn’t see anything, and as far as she could tell she had already passed out.

"Doctor Stephen White! Doctor Stephen White! Report to ER stat!"

She felt her limp body being lifted from the ambulance onto the gurney and through the hospital doors and heard them slam shut behind her. *You are supposed to be quiet in a hospital*, she said silently. Why couldn’t she get the sound out to go with the words that formed in her head? Was she going to live? If she did, was it worth the effort? She felt her face again. If it was ruined, so was she.

"What have you got?" the deep male voice asked.

"It looks pretty bad, Doc White," someone said. "I figured you would want to take a look at it to see if you can fix it."

"I can fix anything," Dr. White said.

*What an arrogant fool!* Monday thought. Just wait until she could give him a piece of her mind! She would set him straight. Some things just can’t be fixed. At least not right.

A needle plunged deep into the veins on her arm. Then she was gone. She could not hear them as they worked feverishly to bring her back to life.

Police officer Clancy, who had been on the scene, showed up.

"Any idea who she is?" Sally Cane, the admitting nurse, asked him.

"Nope," he said. "Didn't even have any ID on her. Can't imagine a broad like her running around without a purse. Her shoes looked like they should have had a matching bag."

Sally laughed. "You've sure come a long way since you got married," she teased him.

"Yeah, I've got a whole new education," he said, patting the nurse on the behind as she walked away.

"Some old habits die hard," she smirked as she turned back and winked at him.

Monday could hear them talking again. "She's coming around!" someone shouted excitedly. She struggled, and finally she could make out fuzzy forms mingling over her. She tried to speak, but still nothing came out. Her throat felt sore. She reached up and realized that there was a tube sticking into her mouth. No wonder she couldn't say anything! Some people will go to any extreme to try to keep a woman quiet!

"She must be pretty well-fixed," a woman said.

"How do you figure?" a man asked.

"Simple, dopey. Look at her shoes. And her blouse was from Theodore's down on Rodeo Drive. I hear they don't even give credit. You know the kind of place; if you have to ask how much it is you can't afford it."

Monday groaned. They all rushed to her. She tried to bring them into focus, like the photographers who snapped their cameras at her for hours at a time. It wouldn't work. First they were fuzzy, then they started flying around the room.

"We're losing her again," someone said. They sounded like they were a million miles away. "Come on, Jane, hang in there!" that deep male voice ordered.

*I don't have to take orders from you*, her mind said. He had no control over her. Suddenly she knew that he controlled everything about her. Her life was in his hands.

She tried once more to see him. His voice was incredibly sexy. Did his looks match it? What kind of a life did he have? Was he married? Did he devote every waking minute to saving lives, like some noble hero?

They all gasped when she laughed.

"She's going to be okay," the doctor said. "Anybody who can laugh in the face of such an accident as she just went through, they will be just fine."

*If only you knew that I was laughing at you, Monday thought. Or what I am thinking about you. Hey, we haven't even been properly introduced, and already I am fantasizing about us. And I can't even see you straight.*

"Think you can fix her up as good as new?" someone asked.

"Sure," Dr. White said. "It would help a whole lot if we had a picture of her, though." He framed her face in his hands, turning them this way and that way. "Roman nose," he said, chuckling. "Deep set eyes. Very high cheekbones. Protruding chin."

"Sounds like you're describing Frankenstein," someone joked. "I'll bet she used to be pretty."

Dr. White shrugged his shoulders. "Who's to say? Not likely she's going to tell us for a good long while."

"How soon do you think you can start working your magic?" one of the young nurses, obviously awe-struck by the doctor, asked.

Monday thought she was going to barf. She was so sickeningly sweet. Syrupy! Ych! She hated people who mooned over somebody.

"We'll have to fix up the major part of the injuries before we can start the plastic surgery," Dr. White said.

Monday gasped. How bad was she? Maybe she had been right; maybe she was going to die. No, she couldn't do that. She had an appointment with Tom Cruise. Life would just have to wait for her to catch up to it.

"Jane," Dr. White said, taking hold of her hand, "if you can hear me, squeeze my hand."

Monday tried to apply pressure. His hand felt so warm. She wanted to let him know she was still there. Buried far inside her body, her soul was crying out for release.

"It's no use," a voice off in the distance said. "There won't be much change tonight. We might as well all go on about our work. The regular shift nurse can stay here."

"I'll stick around if somebody brings me a TV," the doctor said.

Monday heard a general exit. "Goodbye, Jane Doe," someone said as they left. "See you in the morning."

*Good God!* Monday thought. *They don't know who I am! They think I'm a Jane Doe!* What happened to her purse? She tried to remember what had happened. Her mind flashed back over the accident. She heard the scream that came from herself, but seemed to be from someone else. She felt the crash. She saw a young man run towards the car, reach in and grab her purse.

No wonder they didn't know who she was. Her driver's license and all her credit cards were gone.

How can I tell them to stop that thief? He could charge a million dollars to her, and there was nothing she could do about it.

She relived the *crunch* of the jaws of life as they peeled back the shiny red metal of her car, opening it like a can of sardines. She felt the horrible pressure as they pried her face out of the steering wheel.

"You sure about this, Doc?" someone asked.

"No problem," Dr. White said. "After all, it's Monday night. I don't have anything else to do."

"Oh, yeah, right," the other person said. "I'll send it right in."

The door squeaked as it closed. *Thank God!* Monday thought. *Finally somebody recognizes me. Of course I'm Monday Knight. Everybody knows Monday Knight.*

The next thing she heard was Frank Gifford's voice on the TV. "Hello, all you football fans. Welcome to the game. It is Monday night."

Monday groaned. She had never played second fiddle to a football game. Not even on a Monday night.

## ***TUESDAY NOLAN***

The second book in the Women of the Week Series. "Tuesday's child is full of grace..." Then why does she become a genuine klutz every time a certain man--who isn't at all what he appears to be--shows up? Meet Tuesday and her cohort Buffy. More fun than anyone is entitled to have, in Charleston or out of it!

## *TUESDAY NOLAN*

### Prologue

*"Tuesday's Child is Full of Grace..."*

Dear Ms. Nolan,

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Monday Knight. I have the same plight in life as you, I believe. I was perhaps blessed, perhaps cursed, with being named for the day of the week on which I was born. In addition, I was raised with the idea that the only thing I had going for me was the fact that I had a beautiful face. That led to my career as a model.

Then good fortune struck. I was injured in an automobile accident and my face was ruined beyond recognition. Thanks to an incredible plastic surgeon, I have been "resurrected." My new life is one of incredible adventure every single morning when I awaken. In case you have not read it, please check on the book about my experiences, named—surprisingly—*Monday Knight*.

I am trying to locate other women who have the malady of being named for the day of the week on which they were born. I feel that we would have a wonderful bond that no one else could share. You are my first "discovery." If you are interested, please e-mail me at [mondayknight1@hotmail.com](mailto:mondayknight1@hotmail.com). I look forward to your soon reply.

Weekly yours,  
Monday Knight

## *CHAPTER 1*

Tuesday sat at her desk, staring at her computer screen. A smile formed across her face. *Monday Knight!* There wasn't a single person in the civilized world who hadn't heard of Monday Knight, especially after she nearly died in that terrible accident. And she thought it was a stroke of good luck? She always figured people who had nothing but fantastic looks were a little bit flaky. Now she had proof positive of it.

Without giving more than a few moments contemplation to the e-mail, Tuesday hit "Reply" and began to type.

Dear Monday Knight,

Of course I know who you are. Everybody knows Monday Knight. I am flattered by your letter, and I would love to get acquainted with you, at least cyberly speaking. You were correct in your assumption. I was born on Tuesday. I was "born and bred properly," according to my mother, and taught a "perfect southern belle" must at all times and above all be the picture of grace and charm.

I am a graduate of Juiard School of Music. I am a concert pianist by profession. However, with the passing of my parents, I inherited the old mansion, Buffington Manor, in Folly Beach, South Carolina, and I have established the Nolan Finishing School. I presently have 7 young ladies who are studying the fine art of being a "Southern Belle" under my tutorage.

Please keep in touch with me. And I will endeavor to begin a search for Wednesday, whoever and wherever she might be.

Gracefully yours,  
Tuesday Nolan

Just as she hit the "send" button on her computer, Tuesday heard a scratching at the door of her study, and she knew instinctively that it was Buffy, her faithful Afghan Hound. She got up and opened the door just a crack so the dog could get in. Buffy went over beside the desk and plopped down in a most ungraceful-like manner.

"Buffy, you will never learn, will you?" Tuesday asked. "How am I ever going to teach the girls to be graceful when you insist on being so clumsy?"

Tuesday turned back to her computer and checked the rest of her e-mail messages. She hit "delete" on many of them, and others she typed back quick notes to inform the parents of her charges of their progress. She puzzled briefly over the next message, then opened it and began to read.

Dear Ms. Nolan:

*The Charleston Post and Courier*, Investigative Reporting Division, has heard rumors that there is some underlying reason for the recent development of your fine new establishment, “The Nolan Finishing School.”

We would like to have our ace reporter interview you on the reasons for the establishment of your school. Please reply to us here and we will set up a meeting at a time at your convenience and a place of your choosing.

Thank you for your gracious, and hopefully affirmative, reply.

Tuesday read the mysterious e-mail, then almost hit the “delete” key. Something stopped her, and she reread the message. She wondered what they meant—or what they knew. What sort of rumors were circulating through the city about her? Her family had been one of the most forceful, prestigious families of the entire state, and they certainly were above being the butt of somebody’s warped, over-active imagination. Her father had worked extremely hard to become successful. It wasn’t his fault what he had been deemed “new money.” Like that made it no good!

Tuesday seethed as she remembered her mother trying to get Tuesday into some of the elite events of nearby Charleston, only to be snubbed. Now it was her turn to pay them back. She would take these girls—plain, simple young women from the streets and the “ordinary” people of the region—and would turn them loose on society. And no one would be the wiser. She had even figured out how to doctor their family histories, when the time came, so nobody would question who they really were.

She looked at the end of the e-mail. Whoever was prying into her private, personal affairs didn’t even have the decency to sign his name.

Why did she assume it was a “him”? It could be a woman, but somehow she knew it was definitely a “him.” She thought about picking up the phone and complaining to the managing editor at the *Post and Courier*, but decided against it. She wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of admitting that she was, in spite of her curiosity, going to acknowledge the receipt of his message.

\* \* \*

Buffy began to whine loudly, just a few seconds before the bell on the iron gate in front of Buffington Manor buzzed.

“How do you do that?” Tuesday asked Buffy. “I swear, you are psychic!”

Tuesday got up and went outside and looked towards the gate. There stood a beggar. A down-and-out panhandler! She had seen this same man earlier in the day when she was in the city to pick up the music she had ordered.

As a modern success story, Tuesday felt an obligation to repay some of what they had done for her. "*Tuesday's child is full of grace*" She'd had it drilled into her mind from the day she was born. Her mother tried her best to teach her all the right manners, the ladylike moves, the Emily Post etiquette, and she had done so quite well, even though Tuesday had attended a public school. Yes, she was, true to her name, a very graceful young woman.

"Go away!" she called out to the disheveled man, in her slow, easy southern drawl.

Tuesday cringed as her eyes focused on the man. His clothes were wrinkled and too big, a black suit jacket and a brown pair of pants. *Anybody knows you don't wear black and brown together*, she thought. His black hair was too long, and far more mangled and matted than Buffy's had been when she rescued her from the shelter. His face had a five-o'clock shadow—no, it was more like an eight-o'clock cloud—and his mustache had a spot of something that resembled sour milk on one corner of it.

"All I want is enough to buy a decent meal," he called back to her. "Surely you can afford that." He smiled, and Tuesday almost softened for a moment. "I am so poor my penny loafers are penniless."

"It isn't a matter of whether I can afford it or not," she replied, walking towards him, even though she was repelled by his very appearance. "I do not wish to associate with the likes of you."

"Is that any way for a woman of means to act? Just enough for one meal. I'll even buy it at a fast food joint so it won't cost you much."

For some reason, his condescension caused Tuesday to laugh. She put her hand to her face, trying to hide her reaction. And she had to give him credit; his smart aleck remark about the loafers was a good line.

Buffy, sensing that this man was friendly, went bounding ahead of Tuesday and began to lick the stranger's hand through the iron fence.

"See? Your pup thinks I'm all right. Maybe you should take lessons from him."

"Buffy is *not* a *pup*! Nor is Buffy a *him*. Buffy—*Buffington*—is a thoroughbred Afghan Hound, with papers to prove it. And Buffy is definitely a *her*!"

The man laughed, realizing that he had just gotten the best of her. *Strike one!* he thought. If the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, maybe the way to a woman's heart is through her dog.

But he wasn't interested in her heart; he was interested in what made her tick. Or was that one in the same thing? Tuesday Nolan might well be a woman of high standing in the community, but there was more than a clock ticking beneath that mop of blonde curls. Oh yes, this woman had something going on upstairs, and he was more determined than ever to find out what it was. And someone as wise as Tuesday Nolan was probably not a true blonde anyway. It was obvious she was one smart cookie.

"Buffy!" Tuesday called out. "Come back here! Come on, Buffy!" Buffy kept right on licking the man's hand, completely ignoring Tuesday's pleas.

"Seems like he—I mean she—has better taste than her mistress. So do I get the money?"

"No!" Tuesday said, going right up to the fence and pulling Buffy away from him. The more Tuesday tugged, the more Buffy resisted. Buffy was almost half as tall as Tuesday, weighed considerably more, and was just as blonde. The pooch definitely had way more strength. Tuesday pulled harder, and as Buffy's collar came unhooked, Tuesday went sprawling onto the ground. Her straight navy pinstriped skirt slid well above her knees, and the slit was suddenly a lot higher than it was supposed to be! Her elbow skidded on the sidewalk, causing her to let out a blood-curdling shriek.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," the stranger said, sounding way too polite for a ne'er-do-well. He had to watch himself, or his secret would be out of the bag.

Buffy went over beside her and began licking her face. Tuesday tried to fight the dog off with her uninjured arm. "Help me up," she pleaded, but the dog just kept on licking her.

"If you had let me inside, I could have helped you."

"Never!" Tuesday said, trying to get up without losing all of her dignity. She pulled on her skirt and tugged at the torn sleeve on her white ruffled blouse. "It's all your fault! Now go! Get out of here, and don't ever come back! I never want to see you again!"

\* \* \*

As Tuesday headed for the house, Buffy now following protectively behind her owner, she heard the stranger say, almost too low to be audible, "Too bad they named you Tuesday. Seems to me *Grace* would have been far more fitting!"

He turned and slowly walked away, a very big grin spreading widely across his face. Yup, strike one was a definite hit. He had just made it at least to first base.

Tuesday clicked on a random key to reactivate the computer screen. There, staring at her, was that pesky message from the paper. She tucked it safely into a folder, then wondered why she had done that instead of deleting it.

*Maybe, she thought, it will come in handy if I have to call the police.*

The thought startled her. She'd had two odd events in the same day. Her life was usually so normal—no, it was downright boring—that two such events on the same day had to be more than a mere coincidence.

Her mind flickered back to the stranger. A bum! A plain ordinary bum! She shivered as she wondered if he was stalking her for some reason. Was he planning to burglarize her house and wanted to try to worm his way inside to “case the joint”?

Tuesday smiled at the choice of words that crossed her mind. She had never enjoyed crimes or mysteries until Amy had moved in with her.

Amy! Maybe this man was someone from Amy's past life. She had taken her in to try to help her. Was she going to have to pay a price that was way too high to keep her safe? What if this man was...Amy told her she was sure he was an older man... Was this stranger--this bum--a rapist? Should she follow her gut instincts and call the police? What would she tell them? He hadn't done anything to hurt her—yet. Was she, perhaps, his next target? His next victim?

She shut the computer down and went upstairs to find Amy. She was in her room, lying on her stomach on her bed, her head propped up on her elbows, watching reruns of *Law and Order*. She glanced up briefly, turned her attention back to the TV, then jumped up and asked, “What happened to you? You look like you've been mauled or somethin'.”

“Something,” Tuesday corrected. She wondered if she had taken on more than she could handle with her project to make ladies out of these girls. Amy was just one of the seven, but she still clung to her old habits.

“So...*some-thing*,” Amy said, carefully enunciating the word. “But seriously, what happened to you? Are you OK?”

“Yes,” Tuesday said, rubbing her elbow, which was beginning to feel the after-effects of the tumble she had taken. “There was some man...” she shivered at the sound of the word. He could hardly be classified as that, but she wasn't sure where else to stick him. He just wasn't the type of being to get pigeonholed into any certain spot.

“Did he...” Amy's face filled with fear. She had been attacked and raped as a mere youngster of only fourteen, and she didn't trust any man.

“No, no!” Tuesday replied, going over and sitting on the bed beside Amy. “He didn’t do anything to me. Buffy wouldn’t leave him, so I tried to pull Buffy away and her collar came undone. I was pulling really hard, and the next thing I knew I was lying there, sprawled all over the lawn.”

Amy tried to appear sympathetic, but she could not hold back the giggles.

“It wasn’t funny!” Tuesday protested, but she was soon laughing along with Amy, in spite of trying to remain cool, calm and collected. “Well, maybe a little. But I know I just humiliated myself something terrible in front of...”

“You know the man?” Amy asked.

“No, but he has accosted me twice now, both times today. I am afraid that for some reason he is stalking me.”

“What would he want with you?” Amy asked.

“Hmm,” Tuesday said, mulling his approach over in her mind. “He did ask me for money. I thought maybe he was trying to *case the mansion* to see what he would have to do to *break-and-enter*.”

Now Amy burst out into a full-blown roar of laughter. “You’ve been listening to too many crime shows with me. It sounds perfectly normal when they say something like that on *Law and Order* or *Perry Mason*, but it doesn’t sound right at all when you say it!”

“You are probably right. I guess I will never make a private eye, will I? Still, maybe you can help me with something. Will you accompany me to the office? I want to show you something. Or do you want to finish watching the program first?”

“Are you kidding? I have seen this one at least five or six times. I already know what happens.” She got a smug smirk on her face. “I just like to study the way they conduct themselves in the courtroom. I want to be just like Mariska Hargitay when I am a lawyer. You know she is Jayne Mansfield’s daughter, don’t you?”

Amy bounced down the twisting stairway to go to the office, and Tuesday walked primly and gracefully behind her, completely oblivious to the fact that she still sported her torn skirt and blood-stained blouse. She shook her head, wondering if these girls—her charges—would ever be what she dreamed they could be.

\* \* \*

At the offices of the *Post and Courier*, a lonely figure sat hunched over his computer, poking away at the keyboard, trying to find every single piece of information he could about Tuesday Nolan, Buffington Manor, the Nolan family, the Buffington family, and the emergence of the Buffington Finishing School. He was

unaware of the society editor, who was working late on a story for the morning edition, and he jumped as she spoke.

“What are you doing at Reginald’s desk?” The voice was clear and demanding.

The man looked up, a broad grin on his face. The society editor stared in shocked amazement.

“You—you are Reginald? But, what...” Then she laughed, holding her sides, until the tears ran down her face. “What happened to you?”

Reginald Vandercamp, head investigative reporter for the *Charleston Post and Courier*, cringed as he replied, “If you think I look bad, you should see the way *she* came out of the tussle!”

He clicked off his computer, pulled his jacket collar up and shuffled past Gloria Hayes, leaving her in limbo, wondering what on earth was going on.

“Good night,” he said as he turned off the light in his office and headed out to his shiny red BMW to go home where he could take a shower and shave.

# ***PAMPAS***

**(In English)**

Señor Raul Escobar. A handsome gaucho, who came to Argentina to lose his past, suddenly becomes the richest man in Argentina after he inherits the huge ranch of Señor Pancho Mendoza upon his death. His devotion to his benefactor is beyond question, but his life and the mysterious way he appeared at the ranch several years earlier is definitely suspect.

Samantha Leota Manchester. A spoiled rich girl, trained as an archaeologist, shows up for Señor Mendoza's funeral, on the arm of the American Ambassador. She asks for permission to "dig" on the land. Her grandmother revealed a secret, on her deathbed, that has sent "Sam" scurrying to try to find the hidden secrets of her past, which she wants to uncover, as much as Raul wants to bury his.

Doña Helena. The faithful housekeeper of Pancho Mendoza, who inherits the large house itself, but there is one string attached: Raul cannot move into the house unless he marries. Doña Helena, who tries to keep peace on the ranch, learns of Sam's secret, and eventually those of Raul as well.

Can these two people, so different, possibly keep from killing each other in their quest to reveal—and to hide—their pasts?

PAMPAS is filled with love, hate, intrigue, secrets, and loads of laughs. Even "the godfathers" get into the picture.

I fell in love with Argentina many years ago, when I had a very good friend in college who was from there. My roommate was also dating the son of missionaries from Argentina. The romantic idea of the gauchos, life on the Pampas (the plains), the playful romping on the beaches, it was all so intriguing.

Thus it was from that love that I created the story of Raul Escobar, a typical Argentine gaucho. But wait! Things aren't always as they seem to be. I think of Raul as a version of the Pace Picante sauce when those *real* cowboys shout "New York City???" Yes, Raul is about as Argentine as his counterpart, Samantha Leota Manchester. Or is she really tied into the country more than he is?

*Pampas* has it all—romance, intrigue, inspiration, mystery. You'll laugh out loud and maybe shed a tear or two as you weave your way through the lives of these people. It was a pleasant surprise to notice that on the page for *Pampas*, a number of Argentine travel agencies were advertising! This may be enough to make you book one of their trips!

This will also be my first venture into translating one of my books into Spanish. I am not sure I would have agreed to do that if I had realized just how much work it is. However, when I had several native Spanish speaking people check it out, I was pleased that they thought it was great. One woman even said, "Your characters are just as good in Spanish as they are in English!" Bravo!

## *PAMPAS*

### Chapter One

The tall, dark-haired stranger knocked on the door of the large hacienda. The house looked like an old southern mansion you might see in *Gone With the Wind*. It was early in the morning, but the man knew that life on the estancia, one of the huge Argentine ranches, began at the crack of dawn. He hoped to find the owner of the ranch at the house, before he left to make his daily rounds over the acres of land he controlled.

Opening the door, Doña Helena stood, wiping her hands on her apron. There was a smudge of flour on her face, and the man smiled as he saw it. Her appearance was meticulous; the blemish was definitely out of character.

"Is something wrong, señor?" she asked. "Why do you smile so?"

Not wanting to admit the truth, he replied, "It is because of your charm and beauty." He continued, "I would like to talk to the owner of the estancia, please. Is he in?"

Smiling sheepishly, as a young schoolgirl might, Doña Helena answered, "Yes, señor, he is in, but he is eating his breakfast right now. I do not like to disturb him, at least not until he has had his coffee." Doña Helena noted the disappointment on the man's face and added, "But you may come in and wait for him, if you like."

He accepted the invitation graciously and sat on a hard, straight-backed chair in preference to the lovely brocaded sofa Doña Helena indicated.

Doña Helena disappeared from the room, and the man sat, nervously twirling his large black hat, which was so typical of the gauchos. Although he appeared to be a gaucho—one of the wandering cowboys of the Pampas which stretched for 250,000 miles across Argentina—his speech betrayed him. He spoke with a strange accent.

Doña Helena told Pancho Mendoza, the owner of the ranch, of the stranger at the door.

"He probably wants work," Señor Mendoza said knowingly. "Everyone who comes wants work. Some day I will run out of land and out of work. Then what will they all do?"

Doña Helena joined him in laughter. The idea of Señor Mendoza running out of land was the most absurd thing she could imagine. He owned more than seventy thousand acres of ranch land, and it was continually growing.

As soon as he finished his meal, Señor Mendoza entered the huge living room where the man was seated.

"Doña Helena tells me you would like to speak to me," he said.  
":How may I serve you?"

"It is I who would like to assist you, señor," the stranger replied.  
"I am a good, hard worker, and I would greatly appreciate the privilege of serving you on your estancia, Señor."

Señor Mendoza studied the man carefully. His dress was that of the gauchos. He had the same thick, black, wavy hair of the gauchos. He wore the traditional black mustache, which was almost a ritual among the gauchos. But there was a slight Italian accent to his speech, although his Spanish was as fluent as if it was his native tongue.

"Where have you worked before?" Señor Mendoza asked him.

"On many estancias," he replied. "Many of them far from here." Wishing to avoid too many questions, he added quickly, "But your reputation goes throughout the land of Argentina. You have the finest ranch in the country. It is my dream to work on your ranch, Señor Mendoza."

"Aha! A man after my own heart!" Señor Mendoza said with a laugh. "You know a good man when you see one! Flattery will get you everywhere!" he misquoted. "I will take you to meet the other men. I was just about to leave on rounds. Come along; we will get going before you get any later. I demand high quality work from my employees."

"Do you mean I am hired?" he inquired. Seeing the nod of the owner's head, he threw his hat high in the air and jumped up, clicking his heels together.

"Yippee!" he shouted.

Shaking his head in disbelief, Señor Mendoza said, "Of all the gauchos I have seen and hired, you have to be the strangest. You speak Spanish, but with an Italian accent, and you shout in English—like a Yankee. What is your name?"

"Raul Escobar," he said, extending his hand to shake Señor Mendoza's hand. "Pleased to make your acquaintance."

\* \* \*

It seemed as if that had been a century ago, yet only five years had passed since Raul had appeared at the huge estancia. Now Señor Mendoza was dying.

Raul had been out on the pasture land checking on the sheep when the sound of hoofbeats echoed on the ground beneath him. The horse was going so fast, it instantly spelled trouble to Raul. Turning to meet the visitor as soon as possible, Raul rode his horse even faster towards the sound of the one approaching him.

"Raul! Come quickly! It is Señor Mendoza!" It was Doña Helena. Her face was pale, in spite of the hot sun which was pouring down on her.

"What is it?" Raul asked anxiously. Doña Helena turned her horse around, and they raced together towards the hacienda, not losing a second of the precious time.

"It is Señor Mendoza," she repeated as they rode. "Something has happened to him! I think he has had a heart attack!"

They rode together in silence, both praying and hoping against all hope that the man they both had grown to love so much would be there to greet them as he had been so many times before.

Hurriedly, they dismounted their horses and dashed for the open door. Señor Mendoza was lying on the floor, his head propped on the hand embroidered silk pillow, just as Doña Helena had left him. Raul tried to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but it was of no help. His pulse was extremely weak; the color had drained from his skin; he did not speak.

"Hurry!" he instructed Doña Helena. "Call Dr. Pérez. Tell him to get over here right away."

Doña Helena went immediately to the phone, and taking a small black book from the drawer on the table on which the phone was sitting, turned quickly to the doctor's name and phone number. She had almost completed dialing the number before the receiver reached her ear.

"Hello? Dr. Pérez? This is Doña Helena at the estancia of Señor Mendoza." She did not hesitate for him to say anything in response. "I think Señor Mendoza has had a heart attack. Will you please come to the hacienda right away? Please hurry!"

Replacing the phone in the cradle, Doña Helena turned to Raul. "He is on his way, but it will take almost an hour before he can get here."

Doña Helena went to Señor Mendoza and knelt on the other side of him. The worry and concern showed on both of their faces.

"You love him, too, don't you?" she asked Raul.

He did not answer, but the dampness in his eyes spoke loudly to Doña Helena. It allowed her to read into his heart. He ached for the man he had come to love as a father.

His thoughts traveled back over his lifetime. He had never known his own father. His mother had told Raul and his brother very little of the man. Only his uncle had ever dared to speak to the boys of their father as he had grown up. Raul knew that he had been affiliated with the mafia and that he had been killed by the mob when he refused to let them threaten his wife and children. He had been told that his father had loved them very much, but it was a love he had never known. Until Pancho Mendoza...

Raul had taken a new name when he came to Argentina six years earlier. He had tried to hide his heritage. He was ashamed of the background of his father, and he did not want anyone to know that he was Italian. Señor Mendoza had detected his accent when he first arrived at the estancia, but he never asked him about it. There were many things that Raul hoped would never be discovered. As close as the two men had grown, Señor Mendoza knew better than to ask questions about things that did not concern him.

\* \* \*

A loud knock sounded at the door. Raul did not realize how long he had knelt beside the man—so hard on the exterior, but so tender in his heart.

Doña Helena, who had decided to go about the more mundane matters which were her duties, rushed to answer the demanding knock.

"Where is he?" Dr. Pérez asked. Seeing Señor Mendoza lying on the floor, he pushed her to the side and made his way to the silent body.

"Raul," he said softly, but with a great deal of authority, "please move out of the way. I would like to examine the old man. It is better if you are not here. If I need you, or as soon as I finish examining him, I will call you and let you know what I have found."

Raul rose to his feet, dazed at the condition of this man before him, and left the room, much against his better judgment.

Dr. Pérez moved quickly, checking the pulse of the once powerful man who now lay helpless before him. He withdrew his stethoscope from his worn black medical bag. Placing it in his ears, he took the end of it and warmed it with his hands before putting it on Señor Mendoza's chest. The thump, thump, thump of the heartbeat was barely audible. Dr. Pérez moved quickly, placing one hand on top of the other, then applied pressure to Señor Mendoza's heart. He hoped he would be able to revive him to a normal heart rate. He worked frantically on the nearly lifeless figure. For as small a man as the doctor portrayed, he seemed to be a giant as he put his whole weight and self into the efforts he was so deeply engaged in.

After fifteen minutes had passed, Raul could stand the suspense no longer. He broke into the room, intending to demand an explanation as to the treatment Señor Mendoza was receiving.

The body of Señor Mendoza was heaving violently up and down on the floor. Dr. Pérez was struggling to control it, but the weight beneath him was overpowering.

"Quick! Grab his arm and hold him down while I work on his chest!"

Raul raced to the unmanageable being and placed one of his powerful arms on each of the arms of Señor Mendoza. In spite of his great strength, he was unable to hold him completely quiet, but he fought desperately hard to maintain enough calm to enable Dr. Pérez to once again apply pressure to the heart.

Almost without any warning, the body was completely still. Feeling a tremendous relief, Raul removed his arms from the man and sat back, breathing as deeply as if he had just ridden after all the sheep on the entire estancia. "He is okay now! That was close, wasn't it, Doc?"

Dr. Pérez looked at Raul. He did not speak. He took his stethoscope and placed it on the chest. The silence of the moment filled the room. He removed the stethoscope and placed it carefully in his medical bag.

"He is going to be all right now, isn't he?"

Raul's face was filled with a million unspoken questions. If he still needed help, he reasoned, the doctor would still be listening to his heart.

Dr. Pérez stood up and offered a hand to Raul.

"I am very sorry, Raul. I did everything I could for Señor Mendoza." He looked at the hardened face of the gaucho. The weathered cracks of the skin seemed to break into pieces as the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "You don't mean..." His voice trailed off endlessly.

"I am sorry, Raul," Dr. Pérez said softly. "You cared for him deeply, didn't you?"

Raul did not speak. He could not speak. He opened his mouth, but his throat was parchment dry. He walked to the door and opened it for the doctor. He tried to say "Thank you," but once again, nothing would come out.

Dr. Pérez said, "I will get a death certificate and have it sent over here."

So final!

Raul knelt beside the lifeless figure on the floor. Just this morning, when they had eaten breakfast together, he seemed so vibrant—so full of life—so enthusiastic. He could not believe that this body was the same person. How could life end so abruptly? So without warning? So senselessly?

\* \* \*

The next two days passed slowly. There was so much to do, but Raul did not have the heart to try to do anything. Doña Helena,

who had been with Señor Mendoza all of her life, took full charge of all of the notifications, the funeral details, and the arrangements for the guests who would soon be swarming like a bunch of hungry bees.

The news had flashed over the radio and the television that Pancho Mendoza was dead. The people who had worked for him, those who had been involved with him in his business dealings, his attorneys, his friends, his enemies, the heads-of-state from many countries, were all gathered. The only people missing were his relatives. He seemed to be alone in the world, even now when he was converged upon by multitudes of people. He had never married, never had any children, and his only brother had died in a plane crash years ago.

With the funeral services over, the attorney went to Doña Helena and quietly conversed with her. There was a buzzing from one person to another. The disposition of Señor Mendoza's estate was a matter of great speculation. It had been, in fact, a matter of great betting odds in the casinos in Mar del Plata, the "Las Vegas of Argentina."

Doña Helena approached Raul. All eyes were fixed on them. Together they disappeared into the study. Señor Mendoza's attorney went to two other people, both who had been in his employ for a number of years. They joined the two who were already in the study. The attorney disappeared without turning to face the questioning eyes of the group that was standing, gazing at the door through which they disappeared.

"I know you all loved Señor Mendoza very much," the attorney began. "Señor Mendoza knew that, too. I have been instructed by Pancho to inform you of the disposition of his belongings as soon as the funeral is over. So, let's get down to business."

Raul squirmed on his chair. No one ever called Señor Mendoza "Pancho," he thought. How dare he?

The four members of the party stared in disbelief. They had no idea they would be the recipients of his kindness. They had partaken of his generosity during his lifetime; now they would indulge themselves in his goodness in his death.

"Doña Helena," the attorney continued, "You are to be the sole owner of the hacienda—the house proper. And you are assured of an income for the rest of your life from the profits of the ranch." He watched her as he relayed the news to her. She burst into tears. There was no need for words from anyone at a time like this. "There is one stipulation, however. You must continue to do the public obligations for the ranch, as Señor Mendoza always did."

The attorney turned to one of the two workers. "You," he said, "are to have the east five hundred acres of the ranch. You are to tend it as Señor Mendoza has always done."

Turning to the other worker, he went on. "You, on the other hand, are to have the west five hundred acres of the ranch. You also are to tend it as Señor Mendoza has done."

"Are there any questions?" he asked the group. No one spoke.

"Raul," he continued, "the balance of the holdings of Señor Pancho Mendoza are to go to you. The thousands of acres of the ranch proper are yours, as well as his grape vineyards in Mendoza Province. He has left detailed instructions at my office on how he wants to have you proceed, as if he were here watching you. I will get them to you tomorrow."

Raul stared in amazement. How could this be? The kid from the streets in New York City was suddenly a millionaire. He should feel like the luckiest person in the world, but at this very moment he would give it all up in an instant to have the man he had grown so fond of here in their midst instead.

Raul looked around the room at the other three who had just been given word that they too were beneficiaries of Señor Mendoza's great generosity. He could tell—from the look on their faces, from the damp eyes, from the quiet which penetrated the entire atmosphere, from the words which echoed off the walls without even being spoken—that the others felt the same way he did.

The attorney finally spoke, breaking the solemn stillness. It seemed almost sacreligious to even think of cracking a joke, and yet a deep smile was evident across his face.

"Oh, one more thing, Raul," he said, looking at him square in the face, "Señor Mendoza said that you will have to figure out where you are going to live. You are not allowed to move into the hacienda with Doña Helena, unless you should at some time decide to marry. Then you and your wife could reside there, but only if it is agreeable with Doña Helena."

The group roared hysterically. One thing they had all appreciated about Señor Mendoza—or should we say the late Señor Mendoza—was his wry sense of humor. It was evident, even now. He would not want these people, whom he had depended on deeply to be there when he needed them, to grieve his departure, no matter when or how it came.

The people who were in the large living room beyond had grown nervous and anxious. The chatter had died almost completely. The ears and eyes were all centered on the door to the study. Astonishment filled the faces of the beholders. What could possibly be so funny at a time like this?

"What kind of joke did the old man play on us?" It was the U.S. Ambassador who dared to speak. He had served Señor Mendoza well on many occasions. He had helped him amass his fortunes. He had a right to be remembered. He belonged in that room! A fierce

rage overtook him. He nearly shook from the anger which was experiencing. He deserved something more than to be sitting here among all these people, listening to the laughter coming from inside, like he was some stranger. He probably knew more about Señor Mendoza's holdings and business than anyone else here, except perhaps the attorney. Jeremy David Whitcomb was entitled to more than he was getting! But for once he did not know what to do about the situation. For years he had known power, but he was totally powerless now. It was a feeling he did not enjoy.

\* \* \*

The next morning the doorbell rang. Doña Helena went to answer it, and was surprised to find the attorney there so early in the morning.

"Where is Raul?" he asked.

"Raul?" Doña Helena said in surprise. "You, of all people, should know that he is not allowed to move into the hacienda." She smiled warmly. "He is out in the casita—the small house for the gauchos. Imagine that," she said, "a millionaire and still sleeping out there with the hired hands."

The attorney grinned. "Señor Mendoza would love it. He knew he could trust Raul. He said the one man he could depend on to not let his money spoil him was Raul. In fact, he said he could picture Raul living in the casita for the rest of his life."

"I did ask him to come in for breakfast," Doña Helena said. "It seems awfully empty in here this morning."

"If you don't mind," he said, "I will wait for him in here. I do have something I would like to discuss with both of you."

"Come join me in the kitchen," she invited. "I will give you a cup of coffee." She hesitated for a moment, then added, "Señor Mendoza always had a cup of coffee before breakfast. He always said he was a real bear before his coffee, but I never heard him say anything unkind about anyone."

The back door flung open and Raul came charging in. He sat down at the table, appearing completely oblivious to the presence of the attorney, and banged his fists on the heavy oak table.

"Where is my coffee?" he demanded. "I can't function until I have had a cup of that brew! Come on, woman! Bring me my coffee!"

Doña Helena laughed. His imitation of Señor Mendoza was almost perfect.

"Well?" Raul asked. "Did I pass?"

"He could not have done it better himself," she admitted. "If I had had my eyes closed, I would have thought he had been resurrected."

With no further hesitation, Doña Helena took a cup of hot, steaming coffee and set it before him on the table.

Turning to the attorney, Raul said, "Well, good morning, señor. What are you doing out here at the estancia at this hour of the morning? I thought you people slept until at least seven o'clock."

The attorney smiled. "You learn very quickly, just as Señor Mendoza said," he quipped. "You sound as cynical as he tried to sound. As a matter of fact, Señor Escobar, I am in my office before seven o'clock most mornings. Now, shall we get down to business?"

Taking a large box from the floor, he said to Raul, "Here you are. These are the deeds for all of Señor Mendoza's land."

Raul gasped. He had never seen a deed before, much less held one in his hands. Now, these were his? All of them?

For the first time in more than six years, Raul thought of his mother. He had put her out of his mind—forever, he thought. Why should she invade his thoughts now? Suddenly, he wished he could share his newfound wealth with her. She had worked hard to provide a living for him and his twin brother when they were growing up. He wondered, too, for the first time, where his brother was and what he was doing.

Snapping back to reality, he pushed such thoughts far back into a corner of his mind, making a very conscious effort to forget that they were there. It was an uncomfortable area of his mind; he did not wish to dwell on it.

"Well," Raul drawled, "you can keep them for me. I presume you handled most of that end of the business for Señor Mendoza. Am I right?"

"You are indeed," he replied. "I shall be glad to continue in your employ, Señor Escobar." Señor Escobar! It sounded so formal. He hated it, but realized that he would have to accept a new role. He had become Raul; he would become Señor Escobar. Change was one thing he had learned to handle quite well.

\* \* \*

The threesome was interrupted by the doorbell. Doña Helena, who had been busy about her duties, hurried to answer it.

"Is Señor Escobar here?" the man inquired.

"Yes, come in," Doña Helena said invitingly.

"I will wait here for him." Pointing behind him, he had a dozen sheep with him.

Raul went to the door, followed by Doña Helena and the attorney. Their curiosity had been duly aroused.

"May I be of service to you?" Raul asked the man.

"No, Señor. It is I who wish to serve you. I have heard that you are the new owner of the estancia. I wish to pay my respects to Señor Mendoza. He helped me purchase my first acres of land. I now have come to repay the debt I owe him. Here are twelve sheep to add to your flocks. Good day, Señor Escobar."

The three of them stood there, looking at each other. The man left in such a hurry, he virtually seemed to disappear.

"Well, well," the attorney chuckled, "you do seem to have that certain knack about you. A chip off the old block! That is the way Señor Mendoza started his first flock of sheep when he moved to the Pampas from Mendoza Province. You will do well, my boy. You will do very well."

As the three of them returned to the house, the attorney said to Doña Helena, "I do hope you can prepare for the fiesta."

"Fiesta?" she asked. "What fiesta? Señor Mendoza is barely dead! We cannot hold a party on the poor man's grave."

"I am sorry you feel that way," the attorney replied. "It was Señor Mendoza's wish that you have a party at the hacienda within a week of the time of his death to announce the new owner of the estancia to the world. They will all want to know. You must comply with his wish."

Raul, who hated publicity and crowds of people, shuddered.

"What must I do? I don't know how to give a party."

"It is no problem," Doña Helena said. "I have the guest lists from all of Señor Mendoza's parties. He never did anything but attend. I always did all the work. I can continue doing all of your work and you can get all of the credit. I can see it now," Doña Helena said, somewhat sarcastically, "Señor Escobar holds party in the estancia in the traditional Mendoza style."

They all laughed. They knew Señor Mendoza would have been glad to see them laugh. They could almost feel his presence among them.

***PAMPAS***  
**(En Español)**

Señor Raul Escobar. Un gaucho, bien guapo, quien vino a Argentina a poder echar a perder su vida pasada. De prisa, al morir su empleador y mejor amigo, Raul hereda toda la estancia. Su devoción al Señor Mendoza es sin preguntas, muy diferente de su propio vida y la manera en que llegó a la estancia hace varios años ya.

Samantha Leota Manchester. Una señorita de Nueva York, es en verdad una arqueóloga, y ha venido a Argentina a buscar la secreta que le reveló su abuela en su cama de muerte. Viene a la estancia para el funeral del Señor Mendoza, y pide permiso a conducir una excavación en la propiedad. Del principio, "Sam" y Raul se les ponen a puntos contrarios.

Doña Helena. La criada para el Señor Mendoza por muchos años, ella herida a la hacienda. Hay una sola estipulación: no puede vivir Raul Escobar en la casa menos que si se casa. Eventualmente, ella aprende de los secretos de ambos Samantha y de Raul. El problema es que tiene que proteger los dos el uno de la otra.

¿Es posible por ambos Raul y Samantha lograr a tener éxito en lo que necesitan en cuanto sus vidas pasadas sin destruir todo lo que

les importa? PAMPAS es una novela lleno de misteria, amor, odio, y mucha risa. Aún los compadres de la mafia aparecen.

***PAMPAS***  
**(En Español)**

Capítulo Uno

El extranjero, bien guapo y alto, tocó a la puerta de la gran hacienda. La casa se pareció como algo de un cine. Fue temprano, pero el hombre sabía que la vida en las estancias empezó a la madrugada. Esperaba que podía conseguir al dueño de la estancia a la casa, antes de que salió para su trabajo del día.

Doña Helena abrió la puerta, limpiando sus manos en su delantal. Tenía un pedacito de harina en su cara, y el hombre sonrió al verlo. Su apariencia fue casi perfecta, menos que eso.

"¿Tiene un problema, señor?" ella preguntó. "¿Porqué sonrie tanto?"

No deseando decirle la verdad, él contestó, "Es porque usted es tan hermosa. Me gustaría hablar con el dueño, por favor. ¿Está aquí?"

Sonriendo a él, también, ruborizándose como una joven, Doña Helena dijo, "Sí, señor. Señor Mendoza está en casa, pero está desayunando al momento. No le gusta que nadie le interrumpa, a lo menos no hasta que ha tomado su café."

Doña Helena notó que se vió un poco triste al oír eso, y dijo, "Pero usted puede entrar y sentarse hasta que termine, si quiere."

Aceptó la invitación, y se sentó en una silla de madera, en vez de la sofa o las otras sillas más elegantes.

Doña Helena salió de la sala, y el hombre dió vueltas a su sombrero, la clase que se llevaba cada gaucho. Aunque se pareció como un gaucho típico, su manera de hablar fue un poco diferente.

Al entrar a la cocina, Doña Helena dijo al Señor Mendoza del hombre que estaba esperándole en la sala.

"Probablemente quiere trabajo," dijo Señor Mendoza. "Cada cual que viene quiere trabajo. Algún día se acabará el trabajo. ¿Qué harán cuando sucede eso?"

Doña Helena rió. El idea del Señor Mendoza sin propiedad fue la cosa mas absurdo que podía imaginar. El era dueño de mas que setente mil acres de tierra, y se aumentó casi cada día.

Al terminar su desayuno, Señor Mendoza fue a la sala, donde le estaba esperando el hombre, todavía dando vueltas a su sombrero.

"Me dice Doña Helena que quisiera hablar conmigo. Estoy a su órden."

"Es yo que quisiera servir a usted, señor," dijo el extranjero. "Trabajo bien duro, y me gustaría conseguir una posición aquí en su estancia."

Señor Mendoza estudiaba al hombre con mucho cuidado. Su ropa fue lo de los gauchos. Tenía un bigote como todos los gauchos. Su cabello fue bien negrito, como todos los gauchos. Pero, sentío el dueño, fue algo un poco diferente. ¿Qué fue?

"¿A dónde ha trabajado antes?" le preguntó.

"En muchas otras estancias," contestó el extranjero. "Muchas que son bastante lejos de aquí." Esperando que no tendría que decir demasiado de si mismo, dijo de prisa, "Pero todo el país sabe del gran Señor Mendoza. Se dice que usted tiene la estancia mas magnífico en toda Argentina. He tenido muchos sueños de poder trabajar en su estancia, Señor Mendoza."

"¡Ay, Dios mio!" exclamó Señor Mendoza. "Un hombre bien inteligente!" dijo con una sonrisa bien grande. "Seguro que reconoce una cosa buena al verla. Halagos le sirven bien."

Señor Mendoza notó el acento del hombre. Aunque habló el español muy facilmente, oyó que había un poco del italiano mezclado con su español.

"¿Quiere decir que ya tengo la obra?" dijo el hombre. Al ver la inclinación de la cabeza del Señor Mendoza, tiró su sombrero al aire, sonó con un taconazo, y gritaba "¡Yippee!"

Moviendo la cabeza en incredulidad, Señor Mendoza dijo, "De todos los gauchos que he visto, usted tiene que ser lo mas raro. ¡Habla español, pero con un acento italiano, y grite en inglés— como un yanqui! ¿Cómo se llama?"

"Raul Escobar," le dijo, dandole la mano. "Con mucho gusto."

\* \* \*

Ahora, fue como eso fue ayer, pero en realidad habóan pasado ya un poco mas que cinco años. En otras maneras, fue si siempre había sido asi, lo mismo como hoy. Como si nunca sería diferente de un dia al próximo.

\* \* \*

Raul estaba pasando por las pampas, hacinedo la inspección diaria de las ovejas. Oyó un caballo, acercandole bien rapidamente. Por alguna razón, le gritaba de peligro. Dando la vuelta para ver quien fue, le sorprendió al ver a Doña Helena. Raul corrió hacia Doña Helena, tan rapido como podía.

"¡Raul! ¡Apúrate! Es el Señor Mendoza!"

Cuando Raul estaba suficiente cerca a ver a la cara de Doña Helena, ella fue tan blanco como si habia visto a una fantasma.

"¿Qué le pasa?" Raul le preguntó ansiosamente.

"Es el Señor Mendoza," Doña Helena le contó mientras que seguian corriendo hacia la hacienda. "Yo pienso que tenía un ataque del corazón."

Seguieron en silencio, ambos orando y esperando contra todo que el hombre que los dos amaron tantísimo que él estará allá a darles saludos al llegar a la casa.

Bajaron de los caballos y corrieron a la puerta, que estaba todavía abierta, como la habia dejado Doña Helena cuando salió. Al entrar, vieron al Señor Mendoza en el piso, su cabeza en la almohada seda.

"No se ha movido," dijo Doña Helena, una lágrima cayendo de su ojo.

Raul trató de dar le resperación boca a boca, pero no le hizo nada. Trató de tomar su pulso, pero fue muy débil.

"¡Apúrate!" Raul gritaba a Doña Helena. "¡Llame al Doctor Pérez! ¡Dígale que venga—ya pronto!"

Doña Helena fue a la escritoria y sacó el librito que contenía el número del doctor y casi lo marcó antes de que llegó el auricular a su oído.

"Hola," dijo el doctor.

"Hola," respondió Doña Helena. "¿Doctor Pérez? Soy Doña Helena, de la estancia del Señor Mendoza." No esperaba por el doctor a responder, pero seguía. "Creo que él ha sufrido de un ataque del corazón. ¿Puedes venir, ahorita?"

Ella fue a la sofa y se sentó, poniendo su cabeza en sus manos. No dijo nada.

"¿Bueno?" le preguntó Raul.

"Ah, ya viene," ella le contestó, "pero probablemente será casi una hora hasta que llegue."

Se arodilló al lado del Señor Mendoza, y Raul se le puso al otro lado del gran señor de la estancia. Fue muy obvio la preocupación de ambos por mirar a sus caras.

"¿Le amaba a él también, verdad?" le preguntó a Raul.

No le contestaba, pero las lágrimas en sus ojos casi gritaba a Doña Helena. Ella podía ver a su corazón. Le dolía por el hombre que amaba como un padre.

Sus pensamientos pasaron por toda su vida. Nunca conoció a su propio padre. Su mamá no contó a Raul y su hermano casi nada de su papá. Raul sabía que había trabajado con la mafia. Cuando amezaron a su familia, él no haría lo que querían, y le mataron. Su mamá les dijo que le amaba a los muchachos muchísimo. Todavía, fue un amor que nunca conoció Raul ni su hermano.

Hasta que conoció a Pancho Mendoza...

Raul usó a un nombre nuevo cuando llegó en Argentina, ya hace seis años. Tenía mucha vergüenza en su papá, así no quería que nadie sepa de que fue un italiano. Señor Mendoza anotó del principio que tenía un acento, pero después de aquel primer tiempo, nunca jamás lo mencionó. Raul tenía muchas cosas que esperaba que nadie descubriera. Aunque fueron como compadres, Señor Mendoza sabía más que preguntarle de tales cosas—cosas que no le importaban.

\* \* \*

Alguien tocaba a la puerta. A Raul no le daba cuenta de cuanto tiempo había pasado mientras que le arrodillaba al lado del hombre—tan duro y fuerte a como se vio, pero tan simpático del corazón.

Mientras tanto, Doña Helena había decidido a seguir con las cosas en la casa que le llamaron. Al oír alguien a la puerta, corrió a contestarla.

"¿Dónde está?" preguntó el Doctor Pérez, empujando a Doña Helena al lado, buscando el Señor Mendoza. Al verle en el piso, le acercaba y empezó a examinarle.

"Raul," dijo el doctor en una voz bien calladita, "favor de moverse un poco. Tengo que examinarle, y es mejor si usted no está aquí. Si le necesito, o tan pronto como termino con el examen, le llamaré para contarle de lo que averiguo."

Raul se levantó, negó la cabeza a mirar una vez más al pobre hombre, y salió, aunque no quiso salir.

Dr. Pérez movió muy rápidamente, tomando el pulso del hombre tan poderoso, quien ahora fue completamente inútil. Sacó su estetoscopio de su maleta médica. Lo puso en sus oídos, lo calentó, y lo puso en el pecho del Señor Mendoza. El latido fue muy débil. El doctor puso un mano encima del otro y empezaba a poner suficiente fuerza para que empezará a latir de nueva. Trabajó bien duro en el cuerpo, que casi no tenía vida ninguna. El doctor fue un hombre bastante pequeño, pero se pareció como un gigante, poniendo todo del sí mismo en lo que estaba haciendo.

Después de quince minutos, Raul no aguantaba y entró a la sala, pensando que mandaría a una explicación de lo que estaba sucediendo.

El cuerpo del Señor Mendoza fue brincando violentamente en el piso. Dr. Pérez estaba tratando a controlarlo, pero no pudo.

"¡Venga! ¡Agarre a su brazo mientras que sigo trabajando en su corazón!"

Raul corrió a su lado y puso uno de sus brazos—bien grande y fuerte—en cada de los brazos del Señor Mendoza. Trató de mantenerle calmo, pero no podía. Dr. Pérez siguió trabajando, y al fin el cuerpo se puso sin movimiento.

Sintiendo alivio, suspiró y puso su cabeza en sus manos.

"Por fin está bien," dijo.

Dr. Pérez miró a Raul. No dijo nada. Puso el estetoscopio en el pecho del Señor Mendoza y escuchaba. El silencio del momento llenó el cuarto. Lo quitó y lo puso en su maleta.

"¿Está bien ahora, verdad?" Raul le preguntó. Su cara mostró unos millones de preguntas que no podía dar la voz. Si todavía necesitaba mas ayuda, seguramente del doctor haría algo.

Dr. Pérez se levantó y dió la mano a Raul.

"Lo siento mucho, Raul. Yo hize todo lo posible..." Miraba a la cara—tan duro del clima y de vida misma—que fue lleno de lágrimas cayendo.

"¿Qué quiere decir?" mandó Raul. "No puede ser..." No podía decir mas—a poner las palabras en el aire.

"Lo siento mucho, Raul," Dr. Pérez dijo otra vez. "Le amaba mucho, verdad?"

Raul no dijo nada. No podía hablar. Abrió su boca, pero su garganta fue tan seco que las palabras no pasaban. Quería decirle a lo menos "Gracias."

"Yo te mandaré el certificado de muerte mas tarde," dijo Dr. Pérez.

¡Fue tan definitivo!

Raul se arrodilló al lado del cuerpo. Fue hace unos pocos horas que desayunaron juntos. Su amigo fue tan lleno de vida—tan entusiástico. Y ahora... Fue imposible a creer que fue el mismo hombre. ¿Cómo fue posible que cosas pueden cambiar tan rapido? ¡Tan estúpido! No debe ser.

\* \* \*

Los próximos días pasaron tan despacio. Había muchas cosas que hacer, pero Raul no tenía ganas de hacer casi nada. Mientras tanto, Doña Helena le puso a ella misma encargada de todas las cosas en cuanto el funeral, notificando a la prensa y los amigos del Señor Mendoza, y arreglando todo para las visitas de la gente que

vendrían a la estancia, seguramente enjambrando como un grupo de abejas enojadas.

Las noticias pasaron por el radio y la televisión que el Señor Mendoza se murió. La gente que habían trabajado por él, los que le conocieron en sus negocios, sus abogados, sus amigos, sus enemigos, los poderosos de muchos países, todos vinieron a la hacienda para recordarle el día del funeraria.

La única cosa que faltaba fue miembros de su familia. Entre toda la gente, pareció que el hombre fue muy solo. Nunca se casó, sus padres se murieron hace muchos años, y su único hermano se murió hace unos años ya en un choque de un avión.

\* \* \*

Al terminar las honras, el mayor abogado del Señor Mendoza acercaba a Doña Helena y le habló. Cada ojo en la sala les miraba, susurrando entre uno y el otro. Lo que sucedería con la herencia del Señor Mendoza había estado el tópico de muchas conversaciones durante los últimos días. De veras, fue el asunto mas importante a los casinos en Mar del Plata, llamados por muchas "Las Vegas de Argentina."

Doña Helena acercó a Raul. Todos le miraban, esperando a ver que dirían. Sin una sola palabra a la gente, los dos desaparecieron a la biblioteca personal del Señor Mendoza. El abogado acercaba a dos otros hombres quienes habían trabajados de él por muchos años. Ellos tambien entraron a la biblioteca. El abogado tambien entró, sin mirar a la gente alla fuera, ni diciendoles nada.

\* \* \*

"Yo sé que ustedes amaron al Señor Mendoza muchísimo," el abogado dijo. "Señor Mendoza lo sabía, tambien. Yo he recibido unas instrucciones de Pancho unos pocos dias antes de su muerte en cuanto su propiedades, que me dijo que debo de cuidar tan pronto como ya ha pasado las honras. Así, vamos a empezar."

Los cuatro miembros de la "familia" le miraban fijamente. No tenien ningun idea que recibieron algo de la amistad del Señor Mendoza. Habían recibido muchas cosas de él durante su vida, y ahora, aún mas en su muerte.

"Doña Helena," el abogado dijo, siguiendo, "usted será la unica dueña de la hacienda—la casa propia. Además, tendrás suficiente ingresos del rancho por todo su vida."

Le estudiaba cuidadosamente mientras le informaba de las noticias del testamento del Señor Mendoza. Ella inmediateamente empezaba a llorar. No tenía palabras a expresar a cómo se sentía.

"Hay una cosa mas," el abogado dijo. "Tu tendrás que seguir llenando las obligaciones del rancho, exactamente como siempre has hecho para el Señor Mendoza."

El abogado dió una vuelta para que podía ver a uno de los gauchos. "Y tu," dijo, "recibirás los quinientos acres en la parte mas al este del rancho. Tambien, tienes que cuidarlos como hizo el Señor Mendoza."

Mirando hacia el otro gaucho, el abogado dijo, "Y tu, a la vez, recibirás los quinientos acres en la parte mas al oeste del rancho. Tambien, tienes que cuidarlos como hizo el Señor Mendoza."

Pausó momentaneamente, entonces preguntó, "¿Hay algunos preguntas?" Nadie dijo nada.

Empezando a hablar de nuevo, dijo, mirando directamente a Raul, "Todo lo demas de lo que tenía el Señor Mendoza ya pertenece a ti. Hay miles de acres del rancho mismo, tambien las viñas allá en el estado de Mendoza. Yo tengo unas instrucciones detalladas en mi oficina. Tu vas a pensar que él mismo está mirandole. Los traeré por la mañana."

Raul miraba fijadamente, pero no vió nada. ¿Cómo fue posible? El muchacho de las calles de Nueva York—de prisa era un millonario. Debe sentirse como el hombre con mas suerte de todos hombres en el mundo. Pero, la verdad fue que ahorita, mucho mas preferiera tener el Señor Mendoza aqui en el cuarto con ellos.

Mirando a los otros hombres—y a Doña Helena—fue obvio que ellos pensaron la misma cosa. Todos tenían lagrimas en sus ojos. Nadie dijo nada, ni una palabra. No fue necesario.

Al fin, habló el abogado de nuevo. El silencio fue casi santo, y el idea de hacer un chiste fue imposible, aunque una sonrisa pasó por su cara.

"Ah, una cosa mas," dijo, mirando directamente a Raul. "Dijo Señor Mendoza que tu tendrás que decidir de donde vas a vivir. No puedes vivir en la hacienda con Doña Helena. Es decir, menos que si te casas."

Todos del grupo rieron bien duro. Si tenían que escoger una sola cosa del Señor Mendoza que le amaba lo mas, fue su buen humor. Ahora, aun despues de su muerte, fue muy evidente. Seguramente, él quiso que no les pongan triste.

"Si te casas," siguió el abogado, "puedes moverse a la hacienda—si Doña Helena es agradable."

La gente afuera en la sala fueron nerviosos y ansiosos. Todos fueron calladitos. Todos tenían su atención bien pegado a la puerta de la oficina. Los ojos se abrieron al oír la risa de adentro.

"¿Qué clase de chiste ha hecho el viejito?" Fue el Embajador Whitfield que habló. Muchas veces él había servido al rancho muy bien. Le ayudaba juntar su fortuna. No fue justo que no estaba allá en la oficina con los otros. ¡Fue enojadísimo! Pareció como un

extranjero. Probablemente sabía más de la propiedad del viejito que todos los demás de la gente allí presente. Jeremy David Whitcomb, embajador de los Estados Unidos al país de Argentina, debe recibir lo que le debía. Por muchos años, él tenía tanto poder; ahora fue sin poder completamente. ¡Fue un sentido muy desconocido, y uno que no le gustaba—ni un poquito!

\* \* \*

La próxima mañana Doña Helena oyó alguien tocando a la puerta. Fue bien temprana. Le asustó a ella. Al abrirla, vio al abogado.

"¿Dónde está Raul?" le preguntó sin esperar por un saludo.

"¿Raul?" preguntó Doña Helena con sorpresa. "Usted debe saber, más que nadie, que no puede estar en la hacienda." Le dio una sonrisa. "Yo supongo que está en la casita, con los otros gauchos. ¡Imagínese! Un millonario, y durmiendo allá, como siempre."

El abogado volvió a sonreírse. "El Señor Mendoza estaría bien contento al saber eso. Dijo que podía poner su confianza en Raul. Dijo que el único hombre en que podía depender que no le echaría a perder de todo su propiedad fue Raul. De veras, dijo que podía imaginarle viviendo en la casita por toda su vida."

"Bueno," admitió Doña Helena, "la verdad es que le invité a venir a la hacienda a desayunarse. La hacienda parece muy vacía esta mañana."

"Si no le importa," siguió el abogado, "le esperaré aquí. Tengo algunas cosas que tengo que discutir con los dos de ustedes."

"Ven a la cocina," le invitaba. "Tendremos café." Esperaba por un momento, y añadió, "Señor Mendoza siempre tomó una taza de café aún antes de desayunarse. Dijo que fue como un oso grande antes de tomar su café. Pero nunca le oí decir ni una palabra en contra de nadie."

La puerta en la cocina abrió, y entró Raul, gritando en voz bien alta, "¿Dónde está mi café?" Dió un golpe bien duro a la mesa. "¡Tu sabes que no puedo hacer nada hasta que he tenido mi café! ¡Traígame mi café, mujer!"

Rió Doña Helena estreptosamente. La imitación que hizo Raul del Señor Mendoza fue casi perfecto.

"¿Bueno?" le preguntaba. "¿Cómo hice?"

"Si tenía mis ojos cerrados, seguro que hubiéramos pensado que le resurgió de la muerte."

Sin esperar un momento más, Doña Helena puso una tasa de café en la mesa delante de Raul.

Mirando hacia el abogado, dijo, "Buenos días, señor. ¿Porqué es que ha llegado a la estancia tan temprano? Yo pensaba que la gente como usted durmió hasta como las siete de la mañana, a lo menos."

El abogado sonrió. "Aprendes muy rápidamente, como me dijo Pancho. Tu hablas tan cínico como me explicó. De veras, yo estoy en mi oficina antes de las siete casi cada día. Ahora, vamos a discutir lo necesario."

El agaró a una caja grande que estaba a su lado, puesto en el piso. Lo resbaló hacia Raul y le dijo, "Aquí tienes todo. Hay las escrituras para las propiedades que ahora son las tuyas."

Raul respiró con fuerza. Nunca jamás había visto a una escritura, mucho menos sentido una en sus propias manos. ¿Ahora, todas esas le pertenecieron a él?

Por la primera vez en mas que seis años, le permitió a sus pensamientos volver a su mamá. Había puesto a ella bien lejos de su mente. ¿Porqué entró ella a tal tiempo como éste? De prisa, quiso ver a ella. Quería compartir su fortuna con ella. Ella siempre trabajó tan duro para dar a Raul y su morocho lo que necesitábamos durante su niñez. Quería saber, también, por la primera vez en muchos años, de ¿dónde estaba su hermano, y que estaba haciendo?

Volviendo a la vida presente, puso tales pensamientos bien lejos de su mente, decidiendo a olvidar de ellos de nuevo. Fue una parte de sus pensamientos muy incómodo. No quiso vivir allá.

"Bueno," dijo Raul, "puedes guardarlas para mi. Yo imagino que usted hizo todas esas cosas para el Señor Mendoza. ¿No fue así?"

"Sí," le contestó. "Estoy a su orden para lo que quieres, Señor Escobar." ¡Señor Escobar! ¡Sonó tan formal! Lo odiaba, pero le dió cuenta que tenía que aceptar un papel nuevo. Bueno, lo había hecho mas antes. Le hizo Raul; le pondría a hacer Señor Escobar. El cambio fue una cosa en que fue un experto.

\* \* \*

Doña Helena oyó a alguien a la puerta de la hacienda. Ella se corrió a ver quien fue.

"¿Está aquí el Señor Escobar?" preguntó un gaucho.

"Sí. Pase adelante," le invitó cariñosamente.

"Le esperaré aquí," le contestó. "Yo tengo algo para el." Signalando atras, mostró a una dozena ovejas.

Raul, oyendoles, vino a la puerta. El abogado le siguió. Fueron lleno de curiosidad.

"A su orden," dijo Raul. "¿En que puedo servirle?"

"No, Señor. Es yo que viene a servir a usted. Yo he oído que usted es el dueño nuevo de la estancia. Deseo dar a mis respectos al Señor Mendoza. Me ayudaba comprar los primeros acres de mi ranchito. He venido a pagar la deudo le debo. Le traigo doce ovejas que puede añadir a las suyas. Buenos dias, Señor Escobar."

Los tres se quedaron, mirando al uno al otro. El hombre salió tan rápidamente, fue casi como desapareció.

"Bueno, Raul, es seguro que tienes las mismas características como Pancho. ¿Sabías que él empezó en la misma manera? Cuando vino aquí de Mendoza, un hombre llegó a la estancia con unas ovejas como un regalo. Seguro que vas a lograr a tener buen éxito, hombre. Buen éxito, de veras."

Los tres volvieron a la cocina. El abogado dijo a Doña Helena, "Yo espero que eres lista a preperar por la fiesta."

"¿Fiesta?" ella gritó. "¿Cuál fiesta? Señor Mendoza se acaba de morir, y ¿usted quiere una fiesta? ¡No puede ser!"

"Lo siento mucho que piensas así," le contestó. "Fue el deseo del Señor Mendoza que tengan una fiesta dentro de una semana despues de su muerte. La razón fue para informar a todo el mundo del dueño nuevo de la estancia. Todos están hablando de que va a suceder con toda la propiedad. Es una parte del testigo. No hay que hacer otra cosa."

Raul frunció el ceño. No le gustaba la publicidad. ¡Ni un poquito! "Pero yo no sé como producir una fiesta. No puede ser."

"No hay problema," dijo Doña Helena. "Yo tengo los nombres de los visitantes de todas las fiestas del pasado. El señor nunca hizo nada menos que asistirlos. Yo siempre hizo todo el trabajo. Puedo hacer lo mismo para ti. Y como siempre, tu ganarás toda la gloria. Ya lo veo," le dijo, su voz lleno del sarcasmo, "Señor Raul Escobar, el nuevo dueño de la estancia del Señor Pancho Mendoza, presente a una gran fiesta en la tradición Mendoza." Rieron bien duro. Sabían que seguramente el Señor Mendoza estaba riendose con ellos. Casí sintieron su presencia en medio de ellos.



*Noel  
Novels*

## *A Christmas Dream*

Susan Quincey has declared Christmas as "off limits." The loss of her husband in Desert Storm has definitely caused a "bah humbug" attitude, despite her 3 year-old son Jeremy's needs. Just when she thinks it can't get any worse, it does. Her car won't start, but Kevin Dockter, her boss (who has admired her since the day she applied for work) offers to "jump" her, then hooks his car battery to hers. Susan is afraid of Jeremy getting hurt, but Kevin wins Jeremy's heart and they both go to work on Susan.

*A CHRISTMAS DREAM* is a heart-warming Christmas tale, where even Santa gets a Christmas present. You will fall in love with the characters, from little Jeremy to Kevin's mother and even Buford, the lopsided reindeer. And yes, Kevin proves that miracles truly do happen at Christmas time, and in the most unexpected places.

Even the most mundane things and places can produce a marvelous story. How much more commonplace can you get than breakfast at—no, not Tiffany’s—McDonald’s! That’s where *A Christmas Dream* had its conception.

It was December, and Ivan and I had dropped our kids off at school and then headed to McDonald’s for breakfast. There was a typical family sitting near us. We remarked about how well behaved the little boy, probably about 3 or 4 years old, was. We should have known better. As soon as you even hint at such a thing, it is an automatic alarm for the child to act up, even if he didn’t hear what was said.

Well, that little boy was no different. He soon was standing up on the booth, stomping his feet and screaming at the top of his lungs, “I don’t want to go see Santa Claus! I don’t want to look at the toys! I don’t want to look at Christmas lights! All I want for Christmas is you for my daddy!”

It was pretty obvious, at that point, that this was anything but typical, and it wasn’t even a real family. The man, like he had choreographed the whole thing, reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out that little black velvet box. He reached across the table and took the woman’s hands. “I planned to do this tonight after Jeremy was in bed and everything was perfect,” and he grinned widely at her, “but I guess we can do it now just as well. Will you marry me?”

The woman looked like she wanted to disappear under the table. She sat, silent. Like he knew what she was waiting for, he added, “I do love you, you know.” And then she answered, “Yes,” returning his smile.

The little boy again jumped up and down, hugging his mother, then crawling under the table and jumping up and hugging the man. “We are gonna get married,” he shouted, “and we did it at Burger Donald’s!”

From there I built the rest of the story, trying to imagine what had happened to the little boy’s real dad. That was not too long after Desert Storm, and it had infuriated me that we lost more men and women to “friendly fire” than we did to enemy warfare. So, it is to those who so bravely—and needlessly—gave their lives for our freedom that this book is dedicated.

## *A CHRISTMAS DREAM*

### Chapter One

Susan Quincey sat in her car, the icy wind howling outside. She turned the key in the ignition once more, praying that the engine would somehow start this time. It groaned briefly, then fell silent.

She buried her head in her hands, the tears flowing freely. She hated winter. She hated cold weather. Most of all, she hated Christmas! At least this one. Christmas had always been such a happy time, but that was before...

"Ms. Quincey!" It was a man's voice, accompanied by a light rapping on the window. "Ms. Quincey! May I help you?"

Susan was glad the person on the outside couldn't see through the patterns Jack Frost had painted on the glass in the eight hours she had been inside the big Metropolitan Building, working dutifully at her job as a secretary at the insurance company.

She wiped the tears with the back of her scratchy wool glove and pushed the tiny latch that moved the window so smoothly up and down. Nothing. Of course, she reasoned. If her battery was dead, the automatic window switch wouldn't function any more than the motor would.

"I'm afraid my car won't start," she apologized as she opened the door to face Kevin Dockter, the president of the company, standing there.

"It's no wonder," he said. "I don't think my engine would start if I'd sat outside in this cold wind all day, either. Come on, I'll jump you."

Susan felt a smile cross her lips, in spite of her dedication to be a genuine Scrooge this year. She wondered what her friends back home in Florida would say if their boss—and a rather handsome one at that—offered to *jump them*. Only in a climate like Duluth, Minnesota would a girl understand that this lingo meant to hook two tiny clamps onto the battery of one car, two clamps onto the battery of the second car and try to get enough power from one car to the other so both would run.

"I hate to bother you," Susan said, embarrassed by the situation. "I'll just go catch the bus. I can get a wrecker to start it tomorrow."

"Nonsense," Mr. Dockter insisted. "It's no trouble." His smile warmed her even if the temperature was nearly thirty below zero. In a flash he was gone, then returned with his shiny silver Porsche.

Susan gasped. She had seen this car sitting in the parking lot day after day, and she wondered what it would be like to ride in it. Now, her mind drifted away momentarily into a dream world where she envisioned herself sitting in the front seat with Mr. Dockter—Kevin—beside her.

"Pop the hood, okay?"

His voice called her back to consciousness—her dreams crushed by reality. *Just like all the rest of my dreams*, she thought.

"Try it now," he said. She turned the key again. Sound! Weak at first, but then... It was running! Well, at least one thing went right. She would go straight home, she decided. The grocery shopping she'd planned could wait until some other time. She didn't dare turn the car off for fear it wouldn't start again. She would find something at home for her and Jeremy to eat.

She backed out of her parking space and opened the window to wave a "thank you" to her boss. The windows were still frosted over, but she had scraped a little hole to peek out of. It was only a few blocks home. There weren't many cars on the route, and she knew it well. She could always open the side windows enough to see if anyone was coming at the intersections.

Kevin Dockter waited a few seconds then followed her, far enough back so she couldn't see him. He laughed out loud as she stuck her head out the side window so she could see if it was safe to cross the intersection. Her windows were still fogged over, but he knew he didn't have a thing to worry about with her head protruding like a duck from the lake.

He played the pages from her job application over and over in his mind as he drove. She had a son: Jeremy. On the space marked "Marital status" she had clearly written "Widow." No name of a husband. No facts of what had happened. He had contemplated asking her so many times, but he knew he had no right to interfere. He was just her boss. At least to her, that's all he was.

He had been smitten from the first second he laid eyes on her. *Smitten*, he thought, smiling. Such an old fashioned word, yet it fit her perfectly.

Susan breathed a deep sigh of relief as she pulled into her driveway. It was good to be home. Home! What irony! She had lived all of her life in Florida until she met Mark.

Mark Quincey. The handsome, sensitive sweet navy lieutenant from Duluth, Minnesota, who stole her heart, swept her off her feet, knocked her socks off, just like in some old romantic flick. She had never been the same from the first moment she laid eyes on him at the Christmas ball the city put on for all the military men in the area.

She would have followed him to the ends of the earth. As a matter of fact, she wondered if that isn't exactly what she had done. When he was assigned to a special duty on the ships in Duluth, he was so excited at the prospect of going home that his anticipation quickly sparked her enthusiasm as well. Anyplace was wonderful, as long as they were together.

They were married before he had to leave. Neither one of them could stand the thought of being apart. It hadn't been a big wedding, as there wasn't time to make all the plans for something elaborate. The church was decorated for Christmas, so it was nice, despite the hurry of the affair. To her, it was perfect. She would always keep that day in her heart.

She sat, alone, daydreaming of what could have been. If only he hadn't gotten that assignment to Kuwait. His death was so senseless. He left before their son was born. Now Jeremy was almost four years old. He looked exactly like his father. It was the one spark in her life that kept her going—a piece of Mark to keep alive forever.

"Are you okay in there?"

Susan jumped. She could swear it was Kevin Dockter's voice. Why would he be here? Her mind must be playing tricks on her. There was no other explanation.

"Ms. Quincey!" he called again. "Susan?" Desperation filled his voice. Susan jerked the door open and hopped out.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, embarrassed by his presence. When she and Mark first arrived in Duluth, she fell in love with this big old Victorian style house the minute she saw it. Now it seemed so dilapidated, so run down. The windows were dirty, one of the shutters was hanging loose on one side, banging in the wind.

"I'm sorry," Susan apologized again.

"For what?" Mr. Dockter asked.

"For...that!" she said, pointing to the shutter. "For everything."

"No need to apologize," he assured her. "You didn't have to follow me home," she said, tugging at the end of her muffler which had entangled itself in the car door when she slammed it shut.

"I...I wanted to," he said simply, then hastened to add, "You never know what can happen on these streets. Especially way up here on top of the hill. If the streets get too slippery..."

Susan shivered. She hated these hills. Every time she went down them, especially in the winter, she was sure she would drive right into Lake Superior. She had even had nightmares about her brakes failing. How did he know? Or did everyone who lived in Duluth have the same fear? For the first time in months she felt almost *normal*. She pulled her scarf from the now-open car door and then shut it again.

"Thank you," she said softly. She glanced up to see Jeremy's little round face peeking out from behind the drapes in the living room. "I'd better go in."

She wondered if she should explain to Mr. Dockter that she had an almost-four-year-old son. Would he understand? Or would he

think she was some loose woman on the prowl? In answer to her unspoken question he asked, "Jeremy?"

Susan's face turned crimson. She had never spoken about her son—or her husband—to anyone at the office. How did he know about Jeremy?

She felt a sense of shame, then pride. It didn't matter what this big shot from work knew about her. He had a life of his own. Probably a wife who had dinner waiting and was at this very moment trying to explain to their kids why Daddy was late. She wondered if he was often late.

"Yes," she said. "He'll be wondering what's wrong." She turned to walk towards the house. She felt his hand, warm even through the thick sheepskin lined leather gloves he had on, rest on her shoulder.

"Aren't you going to invite me in? I mean, I did rescue a damsel in distress. Unless, of course, you can't stand the sight of your Sir Lancelot."

Susan laughed. Not just a smile this time, but a good, hearty laugh. Mr. Dockter laughed with her. He loved the look on her face—her dimples, her little turned-up nose, the sparkle in her eyes—when she laughed. It was not one of the reasons he had hired her. Recently he had noticed that she laughed less and less often. He set out on a personal crusade—a private one—to get her to laugh again. This was just the first step in carrying out his battle.

"I'm sorry," she apologized once more. "You are quite right. Please come in. I'll get you some good hot coffee."

As they walked, side by side, to the house she said, "I sure hope it doesn't stay this cold for long. It won't be much fun for Christmas at all. Nobody likes to run around with their teeth chattering."

The front door opened and Jeremy stood in front of them with a tiny porcelain reindeer in his outstretched hand. "Look, Mommy," he shouted excitedly. "I found your favorite!"

Susan grabbed the figurine away from him and stuck it in her jacket pocket. "Don't you ever get in that box again!" she scolded.

"I didn't get in it, Mommy!" Jeremy exclaimed. "It's too little! I'd never fit!"

Mr. Dockter laughed heartily. "Come here, Jeremy," he said, picking him up protectively. "Your mom's had a rough day. Her car wouldn't start and then I show up on her doorstep. You can't blame her for being upset."

"I don't care if a man shows up on her doorstep," Jeremy said, "as long as it isn't one of those mean men that came about my Daddy."

Susan looked helplessly at the two of them. She didn't want to burden anyone with the problems of her life. Certainly not her

boss! But as she looked at him, Jeremy held securely in his arms, she knew she had some explaining to do.

"I'll get the coffee," she said.

"If you don't mind," Mr. Dockter said, "I'd really prefer hot chocolate. If you have some, that is. I'm not much of a coffee drinker."

Jeremy laughed. "My mommy can't stand that yucky coffee either," he said. "But we both *love* hot chocolate!"

"Three hot chocolates, coming right up," Susan said as she disappeared into the kitchen.

# ***A LUMBERJACK CHRISTMAS... REVISITED***

## **Christmas miracles...**

In 1870, Martha Ferguson arrives in Hibbing, MN, intent on joining the fiancé she believes is waiting at the logging camp of Sawbill Landing. In Hibbing, she meets Dr. Byron Ferguson, who has been called to deal with a fatal epidemic. Devastation strikes when Martha finds her betrothed among dozens of other corpses. Determined to make the best of a poor situation, she aids with the crisis and finds herself drawn to the good doctor. As Christmas approaches, the entire camp needs a miracle.

It is Martha and a very special friend who led the residents of Sawbill Landing to a special Christmas tree and the truth that with faith they will find the power of miracles and love.

## **...Revisited**

Generations later, the Ferguson family, now living in Hibbing, MN, is as desperately in need of a Christmas miracle as the family has ever been. Martha, the youngest member of the family, is sure her mother and father are getting a divorce. Grandma Ferguson is in a nursing home, where she has remained silent for months. Grandpa Ferguson misses his wife so much he can't even see straight any more, while the town's Jewish Santa still mourns the death of his wife. Even the dog, Scooter-Doo, isn't herself! The miracles begin when one by one the family members visit Grandma and for the first time in months she speaks.

Can two lost hearts find their way back together? Can the old tree still make miracles? Is it too late to save the spirit of Christmas and the memories of miracles past?

Many years ago, in the late 1950s when I was still in high school, I spent several weeks at two logging camps in northern Minnesota: Sawbill Landing and Tomohawk. I was teaching Vacation Bible School for the American Sunday School Union. I had always envisioned the people at logging camps as big Paul Bunyan type "hunks." Instead, I found very kind, courteous men and several entire families. I fell in love with their lifestyle, and decided that someday I would let the world know what it was really like.

After the first day at the camp, the men came up with what they thought was a brilliant idea. Since we were there to teach the Bible, we might as well do it up right. Soon they were dragging sawed off tree stumps and planks to the “long house” for a real old-fashioned evangelistic crusade. Charlotte Lindgren, my fellow teacher, also a high school student, and I were to be the preachers. We decided to take turns; the first night she would preach and I would play the accordian, and the next night I would preach and she would play the accordian. To our amazement, we had a packed house, and the men and women, as well as the children we had originally come to minister to, had all gotten a good dose of “old time religion.”

While living at the logging camps, we heard a good deal of the history of the pioneers who started them. Many of them were Finnish settlers who had come there from Michigan. So, I decided to do something with *A Lumberjack Christmas* that I had seen done before. The first half of the book is a historical half, and the second half is a contemporary half, following the same family three generations later.

One final word is that I had a delightful time creating a Jewish Santa Claus. I have good friends in California who are a Jewish/Episcopalian couple. The book is dedicated to them. I love nothing better than a person with a good sense of humor!

## **A LUMBERJACK CHRISTMAS...**

### Chapter One

Martha Tinker climbed out of the stagecoach in Hibbing, Minnesota. She looked around, taking in the contents of Main Street. To her right the shingles hanging in front of the various buildings boasted a mercantile, a dressmaker, a physician, and the post office. Glancing to the left she saw a church and a hotel.

Not much of a place, she thought as she picked up her sole suitcase and headed for the hotel.

"I would like a room," she said to the man behind the desk.

"For how long?"

"Just overnight," she replied. "I'm leaving in the morning for Sawbill Landing."

The man's eyes lit up and he gave a full-hearted guffaw.

"What's so amusing?" Martha asked.

"You're going to Sawbill Landing?" His lips twitched as he struggled to contain himself. "Just how are you planning to do that? And *what* do you intend to do once you get there?"

"I expect I'll hire a horse and wagon," she said briskly. "And I'm going to join my fiancé, Max Wilson. Not that it's any of your concern." With a haughty jerk of her chin, Martha pointed her nose toward the kerosene chandelier.

"Ain't no wagons can make it over that trail," the desk clerk said. "And ain't likely nobody's gonna take a little bitsy thing like you out to the likes of Sawbill Landing."

A cold shiver ran up and down Martha's spine. True, it was mid-November and there was already more than a foot of snow on the ground, but this chill came from the inside out.

"Then I'll just have to walk there. Now, are you going to rent me a room for the night?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said, turning the guest ledger toward her and handing her a pen. He read what she wrote and gave her a key. "Upstairs and third door to the right, Miss Tinker."

"And just so you'll know, I'm going to spend several hours in prayer to find a way to get to my destination." She stomped up the steps, ignoring the chortles of the man behind her.

Before she reached the top of the stairs the bell on the door rang, signaling that someone had come in.

Martha turned around just in time to see a tall man dressed in black, standing at the desk. She stopped and listened, strangely drawn to the man.

"Do you have a room available for the night?" he asked, his voice deep and resonant.

"Yes, sir," the desk clerk answered. "How long will you be staying?"

"Just one night, sir. I'm heading for Sawbill Landing come the morning."

Martha nearly toppled down the steps at his response.

At the same time the color drained from the clerk's face. "This is most unusual. Two in one day. I never bought into that prayer business myself," he mumbled, shaking his head.

"Beg your pardon?"

"How do you intend to get there?" the clerk asked the man in black.

"Got myself a horse. Man I got it from said it would make the trip easy. Said he'd done it himself a time or two."

"If you say so." The clerk handed him a pen to sign the guest register.

The newcomer signed, glancing at the preceding entry. "And where is Miss Tinker?"

"Right here," Martha said, making her way back downstairs, her suitcase still clutched in her hand. She extended her hand to shake his and felt a warm tingle as they touched. *You're going to meet Max*, her common sense scolded.

"Pleased to meet you. Dr. Byron Ferguson at your service, ma'am." He felt an immediate attraction to the young lady, so prim and proper in contrast to the women he usually met here in the northern Minnesota woodlands. She didn't look as though she belonged in these parts.

"If you don't mind, sir, I should like to accompany you to Sawbill Landing tomorrow."

"You want to go to Sawbill Landing?" he asked. "But why?"

"My fiancé, Max Wilson, is there. He wrote to me in Boston, asking me to come." She set her suitcase down and took a letter, folded and well-worn, from her handbag and turned it over so only that line showed.

Byron laughed. "I can't believe he'd say that. Are you sure you read all of it?" he asked.

"Of course I did," Martha snapped. "I'm not illiterate! My father saw to it that I was properly educated at the finest schools in Boston!" Her bosom, although not extremely large, seemed to swell to mammoth proportions as she boasted. "He is--was--a doctor."

"Well, it seems we have at least one thing in common," Byron said, not acknowledging the change of tense Martha placed her father in. "As I told you when I introduced myself, I'm a doctor,

too." He bent over and picked up his black bag, which bore his initials, followed by "MD."

"And what takes you to Sawbill Landing, Doctor Ferguson?"

"This," he said, handing her a telegraph and allowing her to read it in its entirety.

*Need help immediately--*

*Stop*

*Men dying faster than flies--*

*Stop*

*Come or send someone--*

*Stop!*

Martha went weak in the knees, and her face cooled as the blood drained from it. *What if it meant Max?* What would she do if he were among the fatalities? *No!* He had to be all right. Surely he would have let her know if--but that was pure foolishness! How could he let her know if he had? No, she would not even entertain the thought.

"Are you okay?" Dr. Ferguson asked. "Here, let me help you over to the sofa so you can sit down."

Her purse, which she'd been clutching tightly, dropped to the floor with a loud *thud*.

"I'll be..."

And she landed right smack dab in his arms.

Byron carried her to the sofa, where he laid her down, and then raced back to get his medical bag. He pulled out a vial of smelling salts and waved them under her nose until she responded.

"I'm sorry." Martha sat up, grabbing her head to stop the room from twirling around. "I don't mean to be a bother."

"I don't think it's a good idea for you to go out to the logging camp," Byron said. "There's no telling what I might find once I get there. If and when whatever it is that has hit the camp lets go of the place I'll send for you." He paused. "Better yet, I'll come back and get you myself."

"No," Martha argued. "I have to go to Max. I have to see that he's alive and well." Her eyes filled with tears. "If anything happened to him--he's all I have left."

"Your parents?" Byron asked.

"Dead." She lowered her head. "They died in a fire. I was away at finishing school or I'd have been with them. So, don't you see? I have to get to Max. I don't have anybody else in the world. I have to go!"

"I still don't think it's a good idea," Byron said.

The desk clerk stood in the background nodding his head in agreement. "I promise I'll come back for you as soon as it is safe."

Martha remained undaunted. "I can be of great use to you," she insisted. "I often helped my father in his practice. I'm not a nurse,

but I know as much as many of them. Perhaps more. If it is as bad as it sounds, it will be too much for you to handle alone."

"I told you no," Byron said, sticking to his guns.

"Sounds to me like she could be real helpful."

He was surprised when the desk clerk stuck his two cents in.

"I guess a man can tell when he's licked," Byron said. "Okay, little lady. We'll leave as soon as it's daylight. But if it gets too rough for you on the trip you have to agree that you'll let me bring you back here."

"That's fair," Martha said. She'd freeze to death before she'd give in. She had to get to Sawbill Landing. She had to get to Max!

"You better go on up and get a good night's sleep," Byron suggested.

"You want something to eat first?" the desk clerk asked them both. "The Missus dishes up a mighty fine stew for the evening meal. I can get her to serve you a little early, if you'd like."

"That would be fine," Byron said, picking up Martha's suitcase and starting up the steps. "Which room?"

"Third one on the right," the desk clerk answered. "Right across the hall from yours."

Byron found relief in knowing she would be close to him. He wanted to keep an eye on her, although he didn't have any idea why.

Martha, on the other hand, bristled at this arrangement. "I don't need a guard dog."

"Only two rooms I've got empty," the clerk said simply. "I didn't plan it that way. Just like nobody planned two people showing up within minutes of each other, both headed for Sawbill Landing."

Martha shrugged her shoulders. "And I hadn't even prayed about it yet," she said. "An answer to prayer before it was even uttered."

Byron laughed. "I've been called a lot of things in my life, but even as a doctor I don't know that anybody has ever considered me an answer to a prayer. Yes, little lady, I have a feeling there might be a whole lot of *firsts* where you're concerned."

\* \* \*

The desk clerk had been right. Maybe it was because she was ravenous, but the venison stew his wife served them was the best thing she had eaten in days. Maybe weeks. Probably since the last meal she had shared with her mother and father before she left for finishing school. Byron also appeared to enjoy it immensely. In fact, he ate with such gusto that he did not, much to Martha's relief, indulge in any conversation. Before he could empty his mouth,

Martha thanked the hotel owners, excused herself and went up to her room, where her suitcase--and the most glorious feather bed she had ever seen--awaited her.

*Nonfiction*

## ***THE FLOOD OF THE MILLENNIUM: THE REAL HEROES, THE SURVIVORS***

In the midst of tragedy and trauma, an 80-something-year-old woman is surrounded by dozens of people; she is telling "Ole and Lena" jokes.

A pregnant mother of 7 children sends her daughter for help. The child's comment? "My mother is going to have a baby. There's water everywhere!" Of course there was; it was the middle of a flood!

An elderly gentleman who has no legs refuses to leave the temporary shelter--until a cute young blonde Salvation Army volunteer says she is going to the same place she is trying to convince him to go. His reaction? "Hey, Ma, you better start packing!"

These were the true-blue heroes of the Grand Forks flood in 1997: the every-day people who not only survived, but who overcame.

*The Flood of the Millennium* is the true story of what happened as the whole country watched in horror as the town was flooded--and then burst into flames.

When we had to evacuate our home, at 4 a.m. on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1997, we eventually ended up at the Grand Forks Air Force base. Since we had run a charitable organization in Grand Forks for almost 30 years, we were immediately “hired,” according to the colonel who was in charge of the Carl Ben Eilson School, where the people with physical needs were sent. My name tag said, “Janet Smith, Victim/Volunteer.”

As I recorded the medical histories of about 800 people, and listened to their tales of how they had escaped the rampaging waters of the Red River of the North, I realized that I had the makings of a good book.

I finished the book when we were out in a little town, living in a temporary home of a mobile home that a friend had made available to us. Before long people heard about it, and it was probably the most blatant example of true self-publishing around. When somebody sent me a check for the book, I would go to Kinko’s and have them make a spiral bound book to send out. Word of the book spread, and it made its way into nearly every state in the US, as well as a few copies to Germany, England, France and Holland.

It was early in 2004 that iUniverse Publishing told me they wanted to publish the book. I never thought I would see the day that I would argue with somebody who wanted to publish one of my books. I told them it was silly—“stupid,” to use my exact words. It was so long after-the-fact that nobody cared about it. They said people are fascinated by this kind of information for years after the things happened. They cited “Storm Stories” on TV as an example. So, I succumbed and let them publish the book.

To my surprise, the hierarchy in Grand Forks announced in March 2004 that they were planning all sorts of activities to remember the flood of 1997—7 years after the flood. The events took place the week of April 19<sup>th</sup>, the same week *The Flood of the Millinneum* was released. By that time, the book was becoming known as “my stupid flood book.” To people who said that was inappropriate, I affectionately referred to it instead as “my non-fiction horror story.” When I sat at Barnes & Noble in Grand Forks on April 19<sup>th</sup>, signing the books, people asked me if I would please sign it as “My stupid flood book.” Surprisingly, to me at least, people are reading it! Now you can, too.

*The Flood of the Millennium:  
The Real Heroes, the Survivors*

Chapter One

PREPARING FOR THE WORST

If Noah had faced the plight of Grand Forks, North Dakota, would he have had as much faith as he did in days of yesteryear? Yes, the entire city seemed doomed to disappear beneath a wall of water, but the people clung to what little hope they could still muster.

"This is your mayor, Pat Owens, asking for your help," the smiling but tired-looking woman on the TV said. "We have stood together through blizzards, ice storms, and now we are preparing to do battle for the worst flood of the century."

It was hard to imagine how any able-bodied person could resist her plea: "We need sandbaggers immediately."

And they came—in droves. From the Grand Forks Air Force Base, from the National Guard, from neighboring communities, from the high schools, from the University of North Dakota.

Surely, with all this manpower flooding the city, we would be safe from the water.

"The dikes are being raised to protect us to 52 feet," the radio blared, then added reassuringly, "The predicted crest is still 51 feet."

Huge military trucks roared up and down the streets, some loaded with dark gray clay and others with white plastic sandbags. They honked like a goose with a cold as they wove their way in and out of traffic.

It was Thursday, April 17, 1997. The people of Grand Forks, North Dakota were optimistically realistic as they prepared for the worst—and hoped for the best.

Certain areas of town were more prone to flooding than others. Those who had lived here through the flood of 1979 could hardly imagine that it could get worse than that. The streets had been filled with water, businesses were closed, and in house after house you could hear the *whir* of the sump pumps fighting to keep basements dry.

At Mission Socorro, a local charity where I worked, the phone HELP line rang day and night. People who lived in low-lying areas were hurrying to pack their most treasured

belongings in boxes.

"Where can I take them so they won't get wet?" people asked, one after another. "All of the storage places are full."

The hunt continued for barns, steel sheds and any place outside the flood plain to keep people's possessions safe.

"Be sure to label everything good," they were instructed. "It will be a mess to try to sort everything once you can take it back home."

The thought never crossed people's minds that there might not be any homes for them to return to. If they could just stay safe until the water receded...

On Thursday afternoon, I confided to a doctor friend that I was really getting tired. "I'll pray for you," he said. Then, as a way of further assurance, he said, "It isn't going to flood. I finally hired a professional to install a permanent sump pump in our basement drain. It wouldn't dare flood now!" I kidded him about thinking he was God—all knowing—and we laughed about it, knowing that the likelihood of his little sump pump doing much good was pretty far-fetched.

During a typical North Dakota winter, the main topic of conversation is the weather. This winter had been far from typical. There had been eight blizzards—the worst on record. The snowfall had reached record proportions—over 100 inches. Then came "Hard-Hearted Hannah"...the ice storm that was without equal. It had resulted in power outages that lasted for weeks in many small surrounding communities.

Now, with all of this, people were asking, "How much more can we take?" and, "Has God forgotten us?"

By Thursday night, people were lulled into sleep by the imaginary sound of water—everywhere. Regular television programming was interrupted periodically to bring updates on the level of the river: 51 feet, 51.4 feet, 51.9 feet...it was rising faster and faster. The trucks sped by, as police cars crawled through the streets, warning people on their blow horns to clear the way for the workers.

People in the most at-risk parts of town hired moving vans to tote their furniture to safety.

Judy DeMers, a state legislator and associate dean at the University of North Dakota Medical School, was preparing for a business trip to Detroit, Michigan.

"I think I will pack two suitcases," she said, "just in case I can't get in the house when I come back."

She lived in the Riverside Park area, on the northeast end of town. Her basement had nearly four feet of water during the 1979 flood. "It was nothing I couldn't handle," she said, "but I am trying to get most of the stuff upstairs, just in case."

I suggested that she leave the extra suitcase with a friend so she wouldn't have to lug it all over town in Detroit.

"Brilliant!" she said. "I can leave it at the office. I know it will be safe there. The water can't get up to second floor."

Many of the houses in that part of town were old, historic homes. So were the ones on Reeves Drive and the north end of Belmont Road. And downtown, which was primarily early businesses, was "the heart of Grand Forks." These areas would probably be the hardest hit.

And Lincoln Park, just off the golf course, was sure to suffer heavy damage. There had been a great deal of discussion over the years about building a higher, permanent dike. The opposition had raged, with many of the stately residences on the south end of Belmont Road arguing that they didn't want to lose their riverfront view.

Now a clay dike, nearly eight feet high, blocked their view of anything that was even vaguely picturesque, as it stretched across Belmont Road at 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South and another one at 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. It was ugly, dark and damp, but nobody argued now about whether it should be there or not.

Dr. John LaLonde, a good family friend and the doctor who had performed surgery on both my husband Ivan and me, lived on Belmont Road.

"We are on the safe side of the dike," he said, trying to sound confident. "We should be okay." Then, after a long pause, he said, "I don't know where we would go if it ever got over here."

"I can't talk now," Linda Norris, who lived along the "low section" of Belmont in a beautiful big two-story house, said. "I'm packing." I didn't argue; I wished I could go help her. Waves of guilt swept over me, as I thought that we lived more than three miles from the river, so we didn't have to worry. The water had never gotten that far. We were safe; I was sure of it.

"The entire city should be on the alert during the night," Milo Smith warned on the ten o'clock news. "The river has now reached 52 feet." He panned to a scene of men and women, young and old, passing sandbags from one person to another, moving as fast as they could, after hours of straining to protect the city they loved.

"I am from Grafton," one college student said, "but I feel like this is my home now. I can't leave until I know I have done everything I can to help."

This echoed the sentiments of people who had come from up and down the Red River, and from east and west.

"East Grand Forks has begun to evacuate people," they

announced on the news. "The point bridge has already been closed."

The *point* in East Grand Forks was facing double jeopardy. Not only did the Red River flow through, but that was where the fork in the river was, where the Red Lake River joined forces with the Red River.

Cars had already left for Crookston, 25 miles to the east in Minnesota. The water was creeping up onto the foundations of the houses. It was quickly becoming too dangerous for self-evacuation. Two sisters, both in their eighties, who lived together, were taken by helicopter from their home to Crookston.

"Don't forget our canes!" one of them yelled as they climbed into the seats. As the propellers whirred and lifted them into the air, they stared downward at the streets, which resembled long, lithe slithering snakes. What an experience—to live more than eighty years and then get to fly through the air! Was the thrill of the moment enough to compensate for the possible loss of a lifetime of safety in their own home? As they watched the water flow below, the fear of the unknown was overwhelming.

Would life in Grand Forks, North Dakota and East Grand Forks, Minnesota, ever be normal again? Would there be anything left?

"A new river reading has just come in over the wire," the newscaster announced. "It is now at 52.2 feet, and still rising. And that's the news. Have a good night!"

**"And one of the people that was like my right hand person, it was Janet Smith, who...had a lot of knowledge about available stuff in the area..." (Major Jane Hebert, USAF, Coordinator of flood efforts at Grand Forks Air Force Base)**

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