



Tombstone, Arizona. 1881. Wyatt Earp's shootout outside the O.K. Corral and Geronimo's escape from a U.S. government-controlled reservation, along with the red-sashed Cowboy rustlers, have made for chaotic conditions. Adding to that the Apaches have been launching a war of revenge against the settlers, Mexicans, and just about everyone else.

In the middle of this is a Cherokee faction squatting temporarily along the juncture of the San Pedro and Babocomari Rivers. These transplants from a settlement overrun by Ponca Indians in Oklahoma, plan to migrate to Mexico. Unexpectedly, Dakota, a warrior soon to marry eighteen-year-old Sequoia, is murdered. Then Sequoia's plan to establish trade with the settlers goes up in smoke. She escapes from an altercation with Cowgirl dairy farmers, who are the milk suppliers in the area, on one of their horses. The mare is returned to its owner, Pidge Swafford. Wanting to string Sequoia up like a common horse thief, she places a bounty on her head, making her an outlaw.

The strength of their unity is tested in this Wild West world Sequoia's tribe have been thrust into.

**ANN GREYSON**  
*Cowgirls & Indians*



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# *Cowgirls & Indians*



## *Prologue*

*1881. The Arizona frontier*

SEQUOIA GAVE DAKOTA A LONG, STEADY LOOK from beneath lowered lashes as they rode their horses side by side. Since their time in Arizona, she had grown — more than aware of her deep-rooted feelings for him. This was what love was.

Shifting his eyes to the trail ahead, Dakota kicked his horse's flanks to make him move faster. He rode ahead, and in the dust cloud behind him she trailed along.

“Race you there!” Dakota called back.

He spoke so softly the words were almost lost amid the thunder of the two horses' hooves. Sequoia snapped her reins and urged her horse faster, until his golden-brown mane was flying in her face. Even more bothersome, the

cool wind whipped at her face, but she kept going. At every stride of her horse, she drew nearer to Dakota.

The horses approached the Cherokee encampment neck and neck, breathing hard. Their tribe was squatting there, a good ten miles north of Tombstone. Originally, the tribe had set out for Mexico from Oklahoma. When they came into Arizona, they stumbled into a conflict that was in full bloom between the Apaches and just about everyone else, such as the U.S. Army, the settlers, and the Mexicans. The small Cherokee band found themselves in the middle of this hostility. Their White Chief decided to stay put awhile and quickly sought unoccupied land for refuge purposes.

They stayed neck and neck long enough for her to reach out and wave, their horses speeding across the desert terrain. It was still a tie, and they were almost at their destination.

She didn't know whether it was her competitive instinct or desire to step up to his challenge that made her push her horse harder than she had done previously. When her horse passed Dakota's, she let out a whoop of triumph into the desert air. She reined in her mount and laughed, savoring the fruits of victory. Seemingly unaffected, Dakota simply grinned as he pulled back on the reins and slowed to a trot the short rest of the way. In silence, they tied up their horses in the small corral.

As she started to walk away, he said, "Wait. Let's watch the sunset."

Sequoia turned around to answer him. "I can't, because I promised my mother I would help with the dinner preparations."

Just then, pockets of shadows fell around them. The bright turquoise of the sky was fading into orange, with a wash of pink to the east.

"Look how marvelous it is," he said, gazing up at the sky.

"Yes," she agreed, casting her eyes up momentarily. "I'm going now."

Dakota stepped close to her and placed his hands on her shoulders, his eyes gazing down right into hers. She blinked a couple of times and tilted her face to meet his gaze. He leaned closer. A pulse in her neck throbbed visibly. They weren't more than four inches apart.

"Let's go sit on the rock. If Chenoa scolds, you may tell her I kept you," he said to her.

"But it's so cold," Sequoia protested, huddling into her brown shawl, trying to rid herself of the chill.

"Just for half an hour. I'll keep you warm," he said, pulling her by the arm.

"Oh, all right," she said, giving in.

Five minutes later, Dakota and Sequoia were sitting side by side on a large boulder at the edge of the encampment. The sky changed again, but this time the orange dwindled down to a dark pink tinged by a bit of red. They huddled, hand in hand, and silently watched the breathtaking scene.

A beat later she turned her eyes to him. His long, black hair shimmered, reflecting the last of the sun's rays. She



could not take her eyes off him. Deep inside, she craved his company when he wasn't with her.

His manner changed. He cast his sparkling black eyes at her. She didn't know what the intensity in his face meant, but she tingled. Now, he was ready to do this.

Suddenly he became serious. "Last night my father came to my teepee and told me that I was to be married on my twenty-first birthday next month. When I was much younger, he and my mother had chosen a girl for me, somebody I already knew. You. My parents will put together a wedding feast. Our marriage has been arranged. Is that what you want?"

"Yes — I love you. I want to marry you," she said instantly.

A feeling of great happiness overcame him. He smiled wide. Love was glowing in his eyes as he looked at her unblinkingly. The only thing Dakota was certain about was that he wanted to love her, forever.

"I've always loved you, Sequoia," he confessed, his voice very low.

Without hesitation, she wrapped her arms around him, but all the while her gaze searched his face. He whispered sweet compliments about her long hair, light brown eyes, and small hands. They started to laugh. And soon they were laughing so hard that they couldn't stop and rolled over together so that he was underneath her. They exchanged shocked looks with each other. Then smiled blissfully, laughing until the sun disappeared and the darkness came on.

At dinner time, all the Cherokees, Dakota and Sequoia included, were sitting around the fire eating. These were happy times for the tribe, despite living in the bush of the hostile Arizona territory.

## *Chapter 1*

**T**HE RECENTLY OPENED TIVOLI SALOON ON Allen Street under the proprietorship of John D. Ahlers had quickly become the center of entertainment for the thriving Arizona mining town of Tombstone. Rough and barnlike in appearance, it was particularly notorious for its clientele of gamblers and miners. However, on this Saturday night, the saloon attracted the likes of First Lieutenant Randall Davis, along with four men in his charge. Just in case of any real trouble, they were there. They had also shown up for a few drinks and some amusement.

Three days earlier, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 1881, a violent shootout between Virgil Earp, the town's marshal, his brothers Wyatt and Morgan, and their associate Doc Holliday against the Clanton gang had taken place. The incident had occurred in a narrow, vacant lot adjacent to C.S. Fly's photographic studio on Fremont Street, behind

John Montgomery and Edward Monroe Benson's O.K., (which stood for Old Kindersley), Corral. The livery, located on Allen Street, was equipped with stables, wagon sheds, and stalls for horses for the purposes of providing public transportation and the care of livestock.

The shock of the gunfight was still fresh on people's minds. It was the talk around the saloon, which was jammed with a raucous crowd, drinking around the gaming tables.

They all fell silent when Randall Davis and the soldiers stepped through the batwings, presumably because they caught a glimpse of their blue and gold uniforms. Moments after Davis and the men took their seats at a table, hushed whispers whipped around the room.

The first lieutenant had not been seated there very long, before he was whistled at by someone at the bar. He glanced in that direction to see a lieutenant colonel from his cavalry regiment. Officer Derrick Neilsen was dressed in civilian clothing and standing with one foot on the bar rail. All were stationed at Camp Huachuca, about twenty miles southwest of Tombstone. Neilsen waved a hello in his direction. Before Davis could react, the waitress arrived at their table and curtsied.

"What can I get you boys tonight?" the waitress asked, flipping her hair over her shoulder, and beaming at them.

Shortly after the piano began to play louder and faster, the buzz of conversation slowly resumed.

The barkeep set down a glass and poured in a finger of whiskey. The lieutenant colonel fixed his eyes on the glass. He took it, tossed it down in one gulp.

“That was your third drink,” the barkeep told him.

“Exactly what I needed. Yesterday’s detail, monitoring the funeral procession of Billy Clanton, Tom McLaury, and Frank McLaury, exhausted my patience. There were so many people around you’d think you were at a Fourth of July celebration. Let alone the fact that the march of the dead played by the Tombstone brass band is still ringing in my ears,” Neilsen ranted drunkenly.

“They say the Earps shot the McLaury’s down in cold blood, as a power play against the Clanton gang,” the barkeep said as he wiped the counter with a damp rag.

“Who are they?” the liquor breathed Neilsen asked with an upraised brow.

“It was just some folks.”

“Don’t listen to those fools. It was a fair fight,” the lieutenant colonel said and pushed away his empty glass.

The barkeep grabbed the glass, and pulled a clean rag that was tucked into the pocket of a white apron tied around his waist over his black pants. He did a quick wipe around the inside of the glass, then put it away behind the mahogany wooden bar.

“How many men have you killed with that pistol of yours?” the barkeep asked with his back to him, staring at the guns behind the bar.

The firearms had been surrendered in compliance with City Ordinance No. 9, Tombstone’s gun control law. The ordinance stated: “It is hereby declared unlawful to carry in the hand or upon the person, or otherwise, any deadly

weapon within the limits of said city of Tombstone, without first obtaining a permit in writing.”

“Do Mexicans and Indians count?” Neilsen asked with a laugh.

The barkeep smiled at him in the back bar mirror that was webbed with cracks.

A dancing couple moved to a slow, light tune played on the piano, through the crowd over to the bar. The man broke their embrace and asked the barkeep for a bottle of champagne.

“That’ll be five dollars,” the barkeep said as he put the bottle on the counter.

The lieutenant colonel gave the couple a glance, then looked curiously at Randall Davis, drinking a gin sling alone. The men Davis had arrived with had gone to the bowling alley.

The six-foot-tall lieutenant colonel ducked his head slightly to avoid banging a coal oil lamp hanging from the rafters as he clumsily dragged himself over to Davis’ table. Talking as he sat down, Neilsen started a conversation about a close encounter with Apaches. Like the good officer he was, Davis listened intently to him.

“The talk around town is that Geronimo is already across the border, in the Sierra Madre, the Devil’s Backbone, the roughest region in Mexico. He’s not headed in this direction, despite what Mayor Clum said to the assemblage. You know that Citizens’ Safety Committee comprised of local businessmen and citizens,” he said in a slurred voice.

Davis nodded and sipped his drink sparingly, surveying him over the rim of his glass. He was all too familiar with the town's pathological focus on Geronimo. Believing the chief of the Chiricahua Apache was coming to Tombstone had thrown people into a permanent state of anxiety. Many men took up arms while all the women and children took shelter in their homes.

A waitress passed, and Neilsen called out: "Senorita — would you bring a shot of whiskey?"

And Davis knew at that moment it was going to be a long night of talk and drink. With Lieutenant Colonel Neilsen you'd come to expect it. At least, that was until the soldiers in his charge returned to the table.

"Change of plans. All the lanes are full. We didn't get a game in," one of the men said to Davis.

"We got tired of waiting," another soldier said as he sat down.

The waitress delivered the drink to Neilsen, who in turn placed a quarter on her tray. A blissful sigh escaped from his lips, and the lieutenant colonel threw back the shot. Davis and his soldiers were quiet, with their eyes fixed on the hard drinking lieutenant colonel, who was obviously drunk. Neilsen wrinkled his nose as the heat of the whiskey hit his belly, then looked around the table and grimaced.

"I'll be off now. I need some fresh air," Neilsen told them, his voice unsteady.

Neilsen snorted, then mumbled something under his breath as he stood up, then walked toward the bar.

“I want my gun back,” Neilsen demanded of the barkeep, setting one hand down on the bar.

“Are you leaving so soon?” he asked as he retrieved the weapon.

“I’m just going outside for a few minutes, for a breath of air. With that Geronimo running loose, I can’t take any chances,” Neilsen slurred his words, which were spaced far apart, his voice shaking.

An odd expression came over the barkeep as the lieutenant colonel holstered the pistol and walked away.



## *Chapter 2*

**O**UTSIDE THE TIVOLI SALOON, THE HUSTLE AND bustle of passersby intermixed with the comings and goings of saloon patrons. On this dark October evening, even the Indians were trying to get their heads around the gunfight between the Wyatt Earp — John Henry Holliday gang and the Clanton — McLaury gang.

In the shadows, two Cherokee Indians were walking up the wooden walkway beside Fourth Street, traveling from Fremont Street.

“Is there something wrong, Dakota? You haven’t said anything. I thought you were interested in seeing where the shootout took place,” the Indian whispered.

“I was. Thanks for showing me the lot. It just didn’t look very exciting,” Dakota whispered back.

Twenty-year-old Dakota shook his long, black hair forward. The rest of his hair fell over a buckskin coat over

a white shirt tucked into tan pants, which complemented his moccasin boots.

“Because you’re just thinking about Sequoia. Aren’t you?”

“Not necessarily, Cholo,” he said, then, after a little more thought, he admitted, “Okay, maybe I am.”

Cholo had strong, square facial features. His wavy black hair, cascaded down past his shoulders, and spilled from the scarf wrapped around his head. He wore a bearskin coat over a white shirt, and tan pants tucked into tall deerskin boots. In his waistband was the handle of a large knife, but Dakota wasn’t carrying any weapon.

As they turned onto Allen Street, the light from the streetlamps behind them was almost lost, and the shadows grew darker. They were approaching the entrance of the Tivoli Saloon. The cool night breeze carried with it the sound of the batwings being pushed open.

Up ahead on the boardwalk stood a tall, 46-year-old man, the dim moonlight reflecting off his green, keen eyes. He wore a dark brown coat over a black suit with a cavalry holster on his hip and a white dress shirt. Confused and a little disoriented, he turned around full circle before staggering around the side of the saloon.

“When Johnny comes marching home again, we’ll give him a hearty welcome then. Hurrah, hurrah,” sang the man, gleefully.

Following the singing, Cholo and Dakota stepped out of the shadows into the light of the electric streetlamp. They

stopped and stared at the man trying to unfasten his pants to relieve himself against the wall in an alley.

In that instant, the man noticed them out of the corner of his eye. He turned around and found himself face to face with two Indians. The look on his face indicated that he wasn't pleased to see them.

"What kind of world are we living in? A decent law-abiding man can't relieve himself in peace in this town without Apaches sneaking up on him."

"We meant you no harm! We were just passing by. Please excuse us," Cholo said, nudging Dakota with his elbow, moving back a few steps.

In that brief instance, he jerked his Smith and Wesson nickel-plated pistol, cross-draw style, with his right hand from his left hip, then pointed it at them.

"Stop right there. I am Lieutenant Colonel Derrick Neilsen of the United States Army, and you will address me as ... I mean, you will do exactly what I tell you or I will shoot you where you stand!" he demanded in a sluggish drawl.

In his intoxicated mind, Neilsen's fear stemmed from knowing that Geronimo, America's "Most Wanted Man," was somewhere out there. He had been on the loose since breaking out of the San Carlos Apache Reservation with a band of followers on September 30. During this time the U.S. Army had taken control of the reservation from civilian authority. In almost one month's time, Geronimo's guerrilla style tactics and military maneuvers were the talk of the newspapers.

But he didn't have anything to fear. These Indians weren't from Geronimo's band. They had made no aggressive moves whatsoever.

Cholo was shocked to be looking down the barrel of the officer's gun. For a heart-stopping moment, he thought he was about to die. His eyes lowered to the ground. He couldn't stand the way Neilsen looked at him and didn't want to provoke him any more than he was already provoked by their presence here.

On the contrary, Dakota wasn't about to cave in. Like a brave warrior, he stepped forward and stared Neilsen directly in the eyes with an emotionless gaze that made the scene more frightening. Deep inside he was tired of the white man's hold on the Indian's land, and the fact that his people were diminishing in alarming numbers.

"We are Cherokee. We haven't done anything wrong. So, we'll be going now," Dakota said brazenly and quickly turned away, pulling on Cholo's arm.

"Don't you turn your back to me! I know you Indians were up to no good out here. You think being Cherokee gives you the right to do whatever you want?" Neilsen yelled, then pointed the pistol toward the sky and fired.

The sound of the bullet was deafening. In that same moment, a handful of men had spilled out of the Tivoli Saloon and into the street. They had heard Neilsen's voice and the gunshot and hurried over to check things out. All the while, Cholo and Dakota froze in their tracks and were dead silent.

“I’ll answer that for you. You have no rights in this town,” Neilsen said, and moved a few steps toward them.

More folks gathered on the boardwalk and in the street to watch the scene. Things looked grim, but Cholo was ready to take off running the moment Neilsen was distracted. He thought they had a chance to escape because the drunk lieutenant colonel was too out of it.

“You get them, Doc Holliday!” yelled a man.

The crowd burst into laughter. But Lieutenant Colonel Neilsen wasn’t laughing. He simply stared at them, waiting for them to quiet down. And that was when Cholo grabbed Dakota’s arm, then started running, dragging him with him.

Weaving their way through the crowd was difficult and slowed them down. Neilsen took aim and shot Dakota dead with a bullet through his back and into his heart. Dakota’s lifeless body fell hard to the ground.

Cholo looked over his shoulder and saw the lieutenant colonel was taking aim at him. Caught with no options, he had no other choice but to keep running.

In an ironic twist of fate, Cholo stopped to catch his breath on Fremont Street behind the O.K. Corral. He hid himself behind a mule-drawn covered wagon. In the midst of the struggle to control his own emotions, tears had begun streaming from his eyes. Seconds later, Cholo took off running into the darkness.

A little crowd stood around Dakota’s body. Realizing the other Indian was long gone, Neilsen gave a blasé shake of his head, then gestured with his hand in the air, as if saying who cares?

The lieutenant colonel spoke confusedly: “In President Ulysses S. Grant’s words, ‘The only good Indians were dead ones.’ Or was it General Phil Sheridan that had said that?”

“Dumb Indians,” he growled as he holstered his pistol, then turned around and relieved himself against the back wall of the saloon.

Minutes later, he sang as he approached the entrance of the Tivoli Saloon. “When Johnny comes marching home again.”

There were four soldiers in uniform standing by the batwings, watching two men pull Dakota’s dead body to the side of Allen Street, dumping it.

“First Lieutenant Randall Davis, you are a sight for sore eyes,” Neilsen said before fainting, his legs buckling, his body collapsing.

Two soldiers scrambled to his aid, put their arms around his shoulders and gingerly lifted him to a standing position. They guided him through the batwings, keeping their arms around him to steady him, entering the saloon where music and laughter continued to spin.

No doubt Neilsen’s behavior was a product of the times when the gun was the law. But he wouldn’t be taking the credit for killing Dakota. When his body was found, he would be declared to have been killed by persons unknown. The Indians had no legal rights since they weren’t citizens of the United States. The death of an Indian in Tombstone rarely made it into the newspapers, nor did the people of the town care to read about it.

### *Chapter 3*

SEQUOIA MOVED TO STAND NEAR HER MOTHER, and as the burial ritual began, she brought her hands to her heart. She should have been making her own wedding attire, rather than mourning her betrothed. And now, in a strange turn of events, she was huddled at her mother's side, disturbed. Her eyes were swollen from crying most of the night.

Above them was a white sky, a wispy scattering of clouds. The weather was raw, and a light rain started falling. It was as if the sky was weeping too.

Nahele, the White Chief, stepped to the front of those gathered. The five-foot-six-inches-tall, stocky-built 43-year-old wore a shaggy, buffalo-skin overcoat, and on his head was a tall headdress of white crane's feathers that seemed to increase his height. He spoke a few sentences,

whereupon they all began to mourn and feel tremendous sorrow.

“Ha-ha-ha-yah, ha-ha-ha-yah,” said everyone in their native tongue at the same time.

When Sequoia’s eyes briefly touched his, Chief Nahele shook his head, the small ornaments braided into his hair chiming. He could hardly help but be unsettled by the circumstance. Just a couple of hours ago, at the crack of dawn, he had ridden his horse to Tombstone to collect Dakota’s body. It was found near the scene of the shooting that Cholo had described last night.

The poncho fringed at the ends over a skirt made from deerskins protected Sequoia’s body from the cool wind. But not the rain, which the wind blew against her face, temporarily blurring her vision. Still, no matter where she put her eyes, she could only see Dakota’s face. It was the kind of love she had dreamed of as a young girl. She was still young, only eighteen, but looked younger. So, what was she supposed to do now? In the state she was in, she could never see herself loving another man.

This was an especially black day in Sequoia’s life. She breathed in the scent of lavender on Dakota’s body, lying only a couple of feet away on the ground. Nothing was so bad as that. His dead body had been washed and anointed with lavender oil, which was believed to have healing properties.

The lanky, beanpole-shaped shaman stood near the grave and studied Dakota’s body that was wrapped in a white cotton shroud for several solemn moments before he



began chanting and shaking a gourd rattle. Otherwise known as Soaring Eagle, he was responsible for the burial, while Chief Nahele officiated as master of ceremonies. Most importantly for the tribe, the White Chief helped them make decisions concerning lawmaking and to settle disputes between individuals. On this day of mourning, both played their parts to comfort the families of Dakota and Sequoia.

The grave was filled with dirt. Dakota's body was buried with his head aligned north, in the small cemetery on the north side of the San Pedro River. These Cherokees had settled their encampment near Tombstone, assembled as squatters along the river near its junction with the Babocomari River. Half a mile south of the hamlet called Fairbank, and ten miles north of Tombstone, the area was formerly home to the Sobaipuri Pimas in the seventeenth century.

Soaring Eagle prayed that the ancestors accepted the spirit of Dakota before he said, "Dakota has gone to join his comrades in the great hunting grounds beyond the sunset. The Sun, the darkness, and the winds are all listening. God is looking down on us all."

A sullen face Sequoia watched the shaman lead the eulogy. But more than anything else, she sobbed as her thoughts wandered. She remembered the womanhood ceremony she'd partaken in prior to her sixteenth birthday, two years after she'd reached puberty, to solidify her readiness to marry. The ceremony was the most important event in a Cherokee woman's life. Even she remembered

the white buckskin dress embroidered with elaborate beadwork she had worn. Closing her eyes briefly, she could hear the drums beating, the chanting, and the singing.

The memory came and went in a flash, leaving her with a profound loneliness, knowing Dakota was gone forever. That was how she felt as the shaman placed a white rock on top of the grave where Dakota's head was located.

The ritual had reached its conclusion, and Chenoa embraced her daughter Sequoia in an emotional hug as the rain pelted down on them. The 39-year-old widow, Chenoa, was strikingly beautiful, with waist-length black hair tucked away in a twist under her calfskin cape. The mesmerizing light brown eyes, and the light copper complexion were very much like her daughter's. Standing next to them were the parents of Dakota, and his nine-year-old sister Ada.

While the rain continued incessantly, Soaring Eagle walked over and gave Dakota's mother a string of beads to ease her grief. Dakota's family were expected to observe a week-long mourning period, allowing them to grieve, and then to re-integrate themselves into the community.

Later that evening, the rain had dissipated, and the black sky was filled with stars. A lazy curl of gray smoke rose from the fire that Chief Nahele kindled. He was deep in thought, eyes downcast, his mouth set in a frown. The scent of burning cedar logs and a mixture of seasoned deer meat and corn meal wrapped in cornhusks cooking carried in the wind.

Although Sequoia's appetite wasn't there, the meal to honor Dakota smelled delicious. She was reluctant to reject the kindness of her mother, who handed her a wooden plate full of food. Quietly, she ate her dinner. At times, her eyes roamed the campfire and the sky.

No one was talking after the meal. Sequoia's mother was cleaning wood dishes. Some of the men were sitting, mostly staring at the campfire flames, and smoking on pipes. Soaring Eagle was drinking a tea made from a special weed with Dakota's parents. And Sequoia was huddled near one of the fires where five Cherokee warriors were chanting and stomp dancing slowly in a circle.

The warriors were dressed in buckskin breechcloths wrapped between their legs and tied around their waists. All wore their greased hair parted in the middle, thick braids hanging in front. They stomped gently, took small steps, and made shuffling movements. Watching them, if anything, Sequoia thought about Dakota even more. Like most of the men in the tribe, Dakota was raised to be a warrior. And he had become quite good at it.

But their love of horses had brought them together. She most admired his sensitivity to the animals. They took care of the horses together. In the winter, they'd put blankets on the horses' backs to warm them from the chill desert air. And they often went riding together.

Thoughts began to swirl in her head, mostly uncertain ones, as she retired to her teepee. Dry tears because she couldn't exactly imagine what her future would hold, but of one thing she was certain — she wouldn't marry. Could she

find a purpose to her seemingly empty existence? There was a desire in her to help her people caught in the middle of the conflict between the hostile Apache bands and the settlers in the territory. She hadn't a clue yet what to do with the rest of her life. For now, there was no other choice for her but to face the fact that she would be living the rest of her life as a spinster. And she would have to find purpose and happiness in that.

Somewhere outside, Chief Nahele blew on a wooden flute, sending a melodic tune in the air. Sequoia lay on a sheepskin blanket trying to go to sleep. Though she felt a huge piece of her life had just ended, something in the soft, musical tones penetrating through the buckskin walls of her teepee put her mind at ease.

## *Chapter 4*

**E**ARLY THE NEXT MORNING, SEQUOIA WAS BY A campfire with her mother, cleaning up after breakfast. Through the activity she thought up and rejected reasons Dakota might have been killed, her mind still in turmoil. She had a lot of questions, but no answers as to why this had to happen. Only earlier Chief Nahele had explained to her that rarely was a white man punished for killing an Indian. What made the whole thing so much worse was that, if an Indian killed a white man, he was arrested, tried, and imprisoned or executed. Absorbed in these thoughts, she was barely aware of her surroundings.

Her current state was to be expected. She snapped out of her thoughts when her mother turned to face her and embraced her. Chenoa wanted to comfort her — anything to ease her suffering. Afterward, she managed to give her mother a weak smile.

*I don't know how I'd cope without her*, Sequoia thought as she watched her mother walk away. It was just the two of them now that she wouldn't be marrying into Dakota's family. Her father had died two years earlier.

When she heard the sound of horses' hooves, she turned to see Chief Nahele and two riders leaving the encampment. Seeing them made her want to take off on her horse.

Feeling gloomy, Sequoia retreated to her teepee for a nap. In her period of mourning, she couldn't think of anything better to do, other than mope around and sleep.

Thirty minutes later, she lay in a muttering, restless half sleep. With the death of Dakota, she felt the injustice of it deeply. Particularly, it was evident that her people couldn't seek justice for crimes against them. The Indians were denied rights and possibilities of assimilation in Arizona. They were in a precarious situation, for they were tribes, or roving bands of people, not subject to U.S. jurisdiction. With the Civil Rights Act of 1866, Indians not taxed were excluded from birthright citizenship. And later, with the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, adopted in 1868, Indians who maintained their tribal ties, were excluded from the same equal protections under the law that white citizens enjoyed.

Now, she couldn't fight the impulse to get on her horse and ride like the wind with no particular destination in mind. Quickly, she fastened her cape around her shoulders, emerged from the teepee and stretched her arms high. The cool breeze whipped her hair about her face, all the while

noticing the clear blue Arizona sky only held a single fluffy cloud.

Moments later, she made her way to where her horse was kept. The makeshift corral, whose fencing was a mixture of wood and underbrush brought from the side of the river, was piled up to form a barrier. Automatically, she draped her arms around his neck. The muscular, brown stallion with a small patch of white on his nose and a circle of it around his right front hoof neighed from the sudden affection.

“Were you missing me?” she whispered tenderly as her hands caressed the horse’s head with long, slow strokes.

Seemingly understanding what she’d said, he nodded his head cockily.

She hugged her horse’s neck. “Yogesh. Let’s go for a ride.”

After untying the horse’s reins, she swung up on his bare back in one graceful motion and rode off at a gallop. She kicked Yogesh gently, urging him onward.

Around half an hour later, she turned her horse south along the San Pedro River, which was in full flow. As the sun climbed higher in the sky, she steered her horse ahead.

Sequoia dismounted and while Yogesh grazed along the bank, she sat by a chaparral bush and stared out at the rippling water. It was a good place to sit and think. She focused on the reflections on the water, distorted by the bubbles and pinches the bugs made on its surface.

She let herself slip into a void where her mind wandered, thinking back over these past four months, living

close to Tombstone. The town occupied by over ten thousand people, most of them having to do with silver mining, was vastly increasing. This was something she and her mother hadn't anticipated upon their arrival. In her pitiful state, she wondered how long they would be stuck on this dreadful frontier.

She'd been born on a settlement in Oklahoma 150 miles northwest of Tahlequah, a town and the capital of the tribal government of the Cherokee Nation.

In 1838, her ancestors had been herded from their homelands in the Allegheny Mountains to a settlement in northeastern Oklahoma. This "Trail of Tears" was a forced march by order of United States President Andrew Jackson as a punishment for aiding the British during The American Revolutionary War. Thirty-five years later, various white interests such as railroad executives, plus white squatters encroaching on the settlement, had pushed the Cherokees into deeper territories in Oklahoma.

In 1878, her settlement, located thirty-five miles south of Arkansas City, Kansas, in Oklahoma at the junction of the Arkansas and Salt Fork Rivers, set aside some of their land for the Ponca Indians, who had been forced out of their homeland in northeastern Nebraska. Living conditions were already grim, riddled with dingy teepees, crude shacks and leaky log shanties. In November, came an outbreak of malaria among the Poncas. Conditions deteriorated. Seven months after that, Chief Nahele's brother, Kalanu, and his family managed to emigrate to the



Sierra Madre Occidental mountainous region in Mexico. It was easy to see his brother wanted a home, where his wife and children could wander freely, and where there was clean water and plenty of game, mainly deer and antelope. Her mother, Chenoa, felt like she was in a prison camp and began to long for a better life than on the settlement. Chenoa, had become close to Chief Nahele. As a result, this past year, when he asked her to migrate west with him and a band of Cherokee warriors to Mexico to reunite with his brother, she agreed.

An hour and a half had passed, and her horse had had plenty of water and rest. Yogesh's eyes were riveted on her as she raised her hand and stroked his neck.

A beat after, she mounted her horse, pulled the reins back, and gently kicked his sides. His mane lifted in the wind, while she stared straight ahead into the distance. The place she felt the most free was on her horse, riding across the desert.

Sequoia spoke to her horse gently, crooning words of comfort. "My brave, warrior horse. Run to our home. Run with your strong legs, blow strong breaths."

The soft wind carried her voice. While she loved her horse, she knew he was a complex creature whose behavior could be unpredictable. Interacting with him was her way of maintaining a trusting bond with him.

## *Chapter 5*

**A**MONG THE INDIAN TRIBES ACROSS THE continent that had been displaced by greedy land-grabbing Anglo-American settlers were the Apache. Even though they sought peace, the Apaches were faced with betrayal over and over again. Consequently, every act of treachery that the Apaches received at the hands of the Anglo-American settlers, Mexican people and or the U.S. government was met with vengeance. This war was led by the Chiricahua bands, who aggressively defended their homeland that had been considered theirs for hundreds of years before silver miners arrived and established the city of Tombstone.

A raiding party of eight rust-colored skin Apaches had traveled from Sonora, Mexico. They had on buckskin shirts and red bandannas on their heads. As was their habit, red stripes were painted over their noses and under their eyes.

Just before the crack of dawn, they had taken cover on the northeastern slope of the Huachuca Mountains. Their eyes were fixed on an isolated ranch house nestled in the Canelo Hills. They seemed to disregard the military post Camp Huachuca that was ten miles west of their location.

These desperate Indians were on the warpath to steal horses and food. And this raiding party served as a diversion to allow the band under Geronimo to put some distance between themselves and their pursuers. So here they were, on this second day of November, moving quietly on their moccasin-clad feet. They breached a window on the east side of the ranch house and poured through to kill everyone inside. The thick adobe walls of the house muffled the sound of the Sharps carbine rifles firing at the men in their beds.

A woman, just out of bed, clad in a long nightgown, was being dragged by her hair through the front door. She screamed as the Apache pushed her to her knees. He raised a tomahawk with his hand and swung it against the woman's skull. As her body crumpled, three Apache warriors standing in front of the house whooped a couple of whoops that echoed around the desert.

An Apache chief with his black-and-gray hair twined in a pair of braids, who appeared to be in his fifties, took command. He waved his hand and shouted to his band. Following his orders to the letter, the warriors began raiding the house and a buckboard wagon off to the side of the corral. They helped themselves to food, blankets, and

supplies. As the chief waved his rifle in the air, he let out a furious victory cry, sounding satisfied.

The next thing that happened was a sleepy-eyed little boy, maybe five or six, in white pajamas, rubbing his eyes, stepped out the door of the house. His brown eyes wide, and his mouth hung open as he stared from his dead mother on the ground to the Apache chief to his mother's body again. The boy's mother's skull was split open.

"Mother!" the boy cried, and the distress in his voice struck the chief like a slap in the face.

The Apache chief turned his head and saw the boy plop down onto the ground. Clinging to his mother's body, he started weeping loudly, heavy sobs racking his body. The sound was intolerable. The chief aimed his rifle and shot the boy in the back.

It meant certain death to encounter the Apaches, who could engage in brutal tactics. Their motive for the killing of settlers was rooted in the belief that their people had been robbed of their land, humiliated, herded up like animals and forced to live on reservations.

The Apaches had stolen four horses, four pistols and belts, one rifle and ammunition, and slaughtered everyone there. Even the cattle were shot where they grazed. For the next forty-five minutes, they laid the dead bodies in a row and hacked off their scalps. The only woman killed was stripped naked, gutted, her entrails hanging loose. Mutilating corpses was a tactical hallmark of the Apaches.

As the first light of dawn broke over the horizon, the beauty of the scenery was marred by the ghostly forms of

the dead lying around. A Gila monster, its head large, with a fat tail and short legs, stirred among some flat rocks, then crawled toward the scene.

A volley of gunfire from rifle-toting Apaches suddenly filled the air. The Apache chief and three warriors raced forward on horseback, brandishing rifles, and howling. The clatter of the horse's hooves above the sigh of the wind pounded through the air. The remaining Apaches set fire to the ranch house, corral, and buckboard wagon before they fled on foot down the Huachuca Mountains.

Orange and pink streaked the sky, broken by the palls of black smoke rising from the burning structures on the ranch. At daybreak, the soldiers at Camp Huachuca started their daily routine. Expecting nothing extraordinary, officers from the 4th infantry lined up in their blue and gold uniforms in formation on the parade field. Several of them noticed the smoke plume from the ranch. A soldier in the front row holding the guidon, a small flag, saw three Apaches on horseback, galloping in the mountains.

First Lieutenant Randall Davis headed toward the mess hall for breakfast. The 29-year-old was five-nine, with blue eyes, a thin face, and a broad-shouldered form. Out of nowhere, a soldier from his unit hurried up to him.

"Sir. Mitchell Penning's ranch is on fire. And Private First Class Zimmerman saw a few Chiricahuas on horseback not far from the ranch," the soldier said, slightly out of breath.

"That's real close. Let's go," Davis said, and they turned, pivoted, and began walking in another direction.

Just before 9 a.m. Randall Davis and his cavalry unit of about a dozen galloped onto the scene of a burned-out ranch. The soldiers were armed with pistols as well as Springfield rifles. They were ready for a fight, but all they found were buzzards hovering over the dead, and a pack of coyotes running away.

“It was a perfect ambush. The Pennings hadn’t gotten off a shot,” Davis said, looking around in dismay.

Mitchell Penning’s dead body lay in a row beside the other ones. One of the hands and both feet had been chewed off by the coyotes. There was a ghastly but lifelike expression on his son’s face. And the boy’s eye-sockets glared in the sun. Slithering near the bodies was a ridge-nosed rattlesnake devouring a sparrow.

The soldiers were ordered to bury the bodies and put out the fires but had no orders to pursue the Apache raiders. It was reasonable to believe that the Indians slipped back across the Mexican border, where they usually headed when the U.S. Army was after them.

## *Chapter 6*

**T**HAT SAME WEDNESDAY, AFTER HE'D HAD HIS lunch, First Lieutenant Randall Davis was sitting on a wooden bench outside the mess hall, nursing coffee. It was half-past eleven, and he was lost in his thoughts, staring at the parade ground. He was troubled by the Apache raid of Mitchell Penning's ranch. The Penning family had been taken without warning, murdered right under his nose. It raised the question in his mind as to how could that happen so close to the post? He frowned at the revelation.

The bright sun shone down on the mouth of the Carr Canyon, a few miles south of the post. The canyon was covered with oak trees in the Huachuca Mountains, a bold range that butts up against the Arizona-Mexico border. He watched a troop of soldiers, mounted on their horses, moving out of the post to patrol the border of Mexico. They would keep a watch for Mexicans coming across to steal

cattle. And more specifically, for Apaches. It was a daily movement of troops mobilized to intercept and punish marauding Apaches.

His gaze swept the commanding view of the military installation, which covered about 44,800 acres. The location for Camp Huachuca had been selected for its proximity to fresh water from Huachuca Creek, and high point of land. From their vantage point in the eastern foothills of the Huachuca Mountains, the soldiers could observe the San Pedro, Sonoita and Santa Cruz Valleys. Their objective was to block the Apache escape routes to Mexico through these valleys.

Mostly a tent city, there had been talk about the replacement of the canvas tents with permanent buildings. Usually, building construction was done by soldiers who were milling lumber, mostly from the south and west slopes of the Huachuca Mountains. Also on hand was James Carr's Huachuca Sawmill. Located in Carr Canyon the sawmill processed large amounts of timber, mainly for construction and to the stamp mills along the San Pedro River. And last September, a meeting of a board of officers had convened to discuss making Camp Huachuca a permanent army garrison.

Lieutenant Colonel Derrick Neilsen came into view, with his loud commanding voice. He was ordering a private in his M Troop of the 6th Cavalry to carry a message to the major general.

First Lieutenant Davis' heart thumped violently in his chest as he stared at Neilsen. This was the first time he'd



seen him since last Saturday night when he had shot and killed an Indian outside the Tivoli Saloon. It hadn't settled well with him, either. So many times, he had seen this, and he bottled it up inside. The situation had gotten so bad that just being Indian was a crime. These days, the Anglo settlers would kill Indians simply for dancing, and for exercising their beliefs in a tribal ceremony. It was this treatment which made the Apaches vengeful.

"You got that, Private?" Neilsen asked with a serious face.

"Sir, yes, sir," answered the private.

"Very good," Neilsen said, and grinned broadly at him.

The private mirrored his grin, then clicked his heels sharply as he saluted him. Neilsen returned the salute happily. Then the private turned abruptly and stalked off toward a tent.

For a brief spell, Neilsen did nothing. Just stood there. He looked around. Davis all but cringed when he spotted him, sitting there, watching. After a squint, then a blink of his eyes, the lieutenant colonel gave him his most appealing smile. Davis nodded nonchalantly.

Moments passed, the tension remained. As he watched the lieutenant colonel move away, he felt his stomach take a spin as he thought back to the end of his first year of army duty at the post. He was given as a keepsake the scalp of a dead Apache warrior, who had been killed by Neilsen. Maybe it was his way of showing camaraderie. The oddball thing was the fact that Davis didn't know for certain.

In the middle of the American Civil War, Neilsen had joined the regular army on the frontier and participated in campaigns against the Apaches, Sioux, and other Indian tribes. So, what he did know was that Neilsen was revered by his peers for his strong character, proven courage on the battlefield — as well as his grit — to survive.

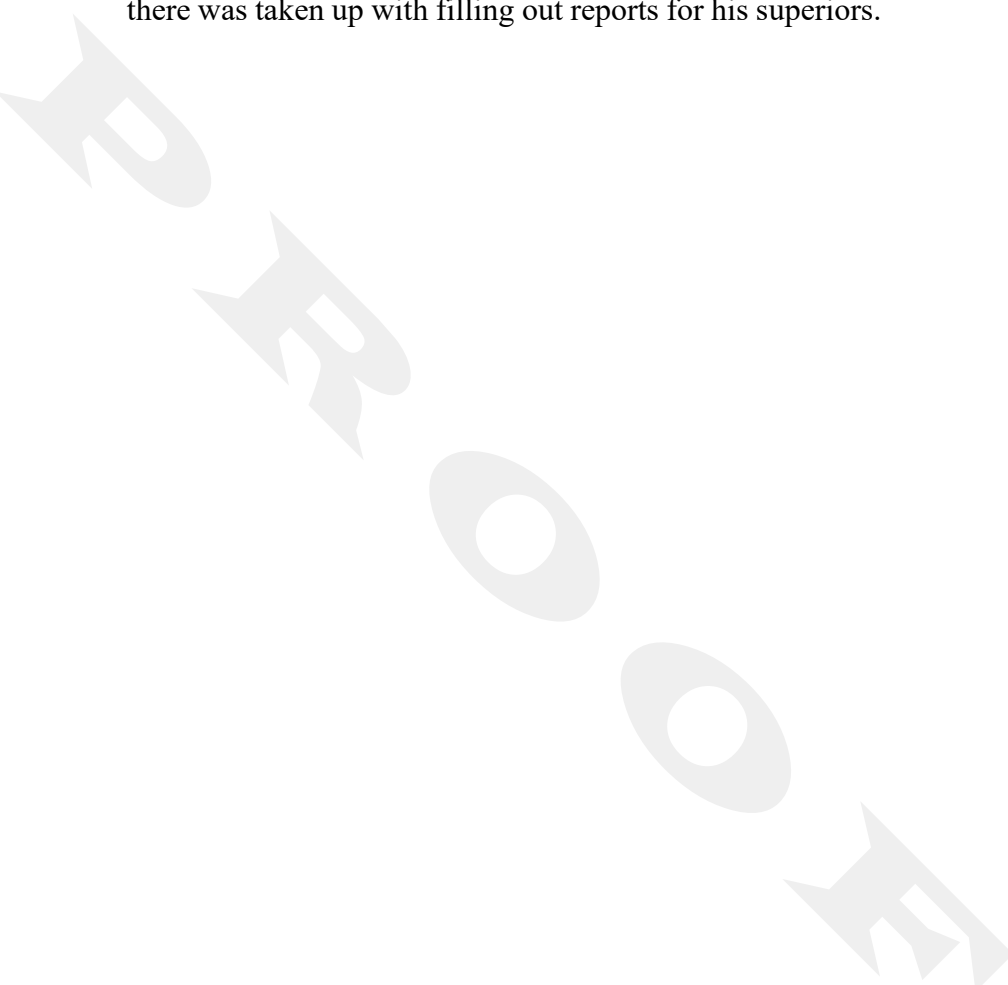
The military service in Arizona was innately anything but pleasant. When the men stationed at Camp Huachuca weren't dealing with the Apache threat, they were employed as escorts for wagons and trains, and even appointed as sheriff's deputies in Bisbee and Tombstone to keep the peace at saloons. The American frontier was dangerous for settlers and soldiers alike. Survival seemed to favor the fortunate and the brave.

At that moment, his thoughts turned to his wife, Fulana, and two toddler sons. He was one of the few officers who was stationed there with his family. With the way things were going lately, he worried much about his family, wondering whether they'd made the right decision in coming here.

Making the most of his break, he savored the last sip of his coffee and stood. *On to the infirmary*, he thought as he started walking toward his destination.

As platoon leader Davis passed on orders to the lower ranking members of his B Troop of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. More often than not, he led his troop on missions investigating the latest Apache depredations. As duly appointed assistant quartermaster, he performed a variety of duties for the regiment, such as looking after the provision of clothing

and overseeing the burying of the dead. But most of his time there was taken up with filling out reports for his superiors.



## *Chapter 7*

**T**HE INDIAN SCARE SPREAD IN TOMBSTONE. IT wasn't enough that Camp Huachuca was established in 1877 to provide adequate protection for the settlers and their travel routes in southeastern Arizona. The bottom line was that the residents of Tombstone were fearful of the Indians. They'd come to believe that Apache raiders were rarely captured, much less held for justice.

By noon that day, the report was received that Apaches had raided the ranch of Mitchell Penning, a prominent citizen, who had once owned a saloon in Tombstone. It was just another in a long line of incidents where people had been murdered and horses and or cattle, along with other goods had been stolen.

At Schieffelin Hall, a large adobe-built structure on the corner of Fremont and Fourth Streets, a meeting was in progress with thirty angry townsfolk and lawmen. They

were an impromptu militia group called the Tombstone Rangers, summoned there to hunt down the marauding Apaches. The group, which was formed early last October, predictably, included Sheriff John Behan and Mayor John Clum.

“It’s a good bet that the Apaches will return soon from Sonora to raid the valley,” John Clum said in a convincing manner.

As fate would have it, Clum was entangled with this anti-Apache coalition. Probably because he was the mayor of Tombstone.

In 1874, at the age of twenty-two, John Philip Clum, a Rutgers University educated man from New York, had been a politically appointed Indian agent at the San Carlos Apache Reservation. He had operated the reservation with a civil code of law, offering more self-rule. And he treated peaceful Indians fairly, befriended Apache chiefs and earned their respect. However, many of the Apaches residing there felt demoralized by the inconsistencies of orders from the U.S. Army, which was there to maintain law and order. Additionally, Clum wasn’t a military man and found the U.S. Army authorities difficult to work with.

In 1877, John Clum had resigned his position — a position where he’d gained strong support from the Apaches and the civilians. He acted in protest because he felt that his authority was being seized by the U.S. Army that did more harm than good to the reservation.

“They’ll slaughter all the miners and prospectors,” John Behan added.

Missouri born John Harris Behan, was appointed by Arizona's territorial Governor John Charles Fremont as the first sheriff of the newly formed Cochise County in January 1881, which was carved out of Pima County. At 37, he had a boyish face with slightly protruding brown eyes. But he wore a walrus mustache that made him look more formal, more respectable. And no matter how he combed his brown hair, it was obvious he was losing it.

"And once again run off our stock and murder more of our citizens," Burton Avery said as he walked into the room.

"Here, here," everyone said in unison.

Avery's throat caught and he struggled to hold in the emotion that welled up inside him. "I came here as soon as I heard the news about Mitchell. Being a friend to him, I'm really broken up about it."

The city council had appointed 51-year-old Avery undersheriff to Deputy Sheriff Clancy Barton, who was appointed as one of the deputy sheriffs under Sheriff John Behan.

"Mitchell was a pillar of the community," John Clum replied. "That's why we're all gathered here. We couldn't let his death go unnoticed."

"Here, here," everyone said, again in unison.

"This raid on Penning's ranch may have been carried out by the Apache Indians under Geronimo. The very ones who helped break him out of San Carlos, and just days later stole fourteen horses from the Soldiers Hole ranch of the late Frank McLaury," John Behan said strongly.

“There’s no more time for debate. Let’s head out,” Clum said in a hurried jumble.

John Pittman Rankin, the African American man standing beside John Behan, approached Clum and asked, “Will you be needing my services?”

“We won’t be needing a cook for this expedition. But thanks for coming,” Clum said as Behan appeared at his side.

“I can’t go out searching for no more than a day or two. I’m due in court Friday morning. I’ll probably be called to testify before Judge Wells Spicer,” John Behan said as Rankin turned away and started to leave with everyone else.

“That’s Ike Clanton for you. Just like him to file murder charges against the Earps and Doc Holliday,” John Clum said, and then gently patted Behan on the back as they walked together. “With what’s happened to Mitchell Penning, I’ve set aside my feelings about your motive for preventing that gunfight from happening — at least for today. After all, I’m in no position to complain. The *Tombstone Epitaph* is selling like hot cakes. The good folks of this town can’t get enough of these stories about the hearing.”

Under the leadership of Sheriff John Behan, the well-armed posse rode their horses out of Tombstone and across the barren land, seeking to capture or kill raiding Apaches. They followed what they believed was an Apache trail as far as Middlemarch Canyon in the Dragoon Mountains, north of Tombstone.

By sunset no Apaches were found, and rain had started coming down hard. It was difficult for the horses to maneuver in the soft and muddy areas. Burton Avery, and a few others gave up, turning their horses to leave.

The rain didn't let up, and in the dark of eight p.m., the rest of them fell back. The Apaches managed to elude the mostly civilian militia that had wound up traveling 60 miles in nearly eight hours. The angry mob went back to their proper places believing these dangerous Indians had scampered untouched into Mexico.

The end result was the raid on Mitchell Penning's ranch had served as a distraction to fool the settlers into thinking the marauders were with Geronimo. The sad fact was the Tombstone Rangers had followed a muddled trail. The posse of raiders had traveled nowhere near the Dragoon Mountains.

For their part, the settlers didn't respect the Apaches' claims to the land. The Indians were seen as murderers, not warriors. And in the eyes of the settlers, Geronimo was nothing short of a murderer.



## *Chapter 8*

**BURTON AVERY** HOBbled THROUGH THE DOOR of the deputy sheriff's office on Fourth Street with a bitter expression imprinted on his face. The sound of boots clumping on the floor drew Clancy Barton's attention from reading the *Tombstone Epitaph* newspaper at his oak desk. Though the silver spurs made Avery's boots look like new ones, they were scuffed and dirty. The fatigue after yesterday's long ride through the region searching for hostile Apaches was setting in. His body ached in odd places. Perhaps, a new pair of boots might make his feet feel comfortable. He hoped to visit the shoemaker's shop later in the day.

"Good morning, Burton," Barton said with an odd look toward him, then returned to reading his newspaper.

"Howdy," Avery said as he headed to his desk, scarred with numerous spur marks.

44-year-old Clancy Barton lived in a small white house on the south side of Safford Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets, with his wife and daughter. His home was not far from John Clum's house, which stood on the corner of Safford and Second Street. He was dressed in black pants, with a black vest over a white shirt. The city council had appointed him on the recommendation of City Marshal Virgil Earp. Though he handled many day to day tasks, the more serious offenses were reported to Sheriff John Behan.

With eyes squinched shut, Avery fell into his chair with a huff of exasperation. "It has been a humdinger of a morning."

"Still recovering from yesterday's ride with the Tombstone Rangers?" Barton asked, and neatly folded up the newspaper he'd been holding.

"That, and a series of rifle blasts, just at first light — pop, pop, pop," the undersheriff said, eyes wild.

"Your neighbor again?"

Burton Avery lived in an adobe house in the Babocomari Valley, on the north bank of the cottonwood lined Babocomari River. His house had been built on the site of the short-lived Camp Wallen; an army installation that had been abandoned in 1869 due to an outbreak of malaria. Less than a quarter of a mile south, stood the ranch of his closest neighbor.

"The little lady was livid. Actually, my little sweetheart, that's what I call her, got out of bed, demanding I do something. She even asked me to use my authority as

undersheriff,” Avery said, raised himself half out of his chair and sank back down into it.

“Your wife is right. That dang woman is disturbing the peace. You have to tell her to stop firing her rifle in the early hours,” the deputy sheriff told him sternly.

“I can’t do that yet. I’m trying to come up with a tactful way to tell her,” Avery whispered, then he looked around nervously, as if scared of being overheard.

“Why are you whispering?” Barton asked loudly — very, very loudly.

This brought Avery bolt upright out of his chair. “I had planned to talk to that woman. But I got sidetracked by the death of Mitchell Penning ...”

Avery paused, inhaled then exhaled, as if he needed a moment to think about what he was going to say. The deputy sheriff waited, getting more impatient by the second. He rolled his eyes at Avery and then he leaned forward to put his arms on the desk.

“While I was out riding with the Tombstone Rangers, I mentioned my predicament passingly to one of the volunteers. He told me that dang woman is the daughter of the finest milk producer in the region. You think I would have figured it out after seeing her shoot her rifle, standing near a bunch of cows on her property. Of course, on each occasion, I was barely awake. And it was barely dawn. I was looking in the murky light through the bedroom window,” the undersheriff explained.

“I don’t care who she is. The next time I hear that she’s been shooting off her rifle at some God-forsaken hour in the

morning, I'll be paying her a visit," Barton said, then stood up. "Now onto more important business. Sheriff Behan ordered me to release Willard McKenna, a second-tier Cowboy, from the county jail, where he'd been serving six months on a grand larceny charge for stealing Mexican mules. Afterward, we'll escort him to the Grand Hotel, where the Cowboys usually stay. Behan wants McKenna to know we have our eye on him because he often works both sides of the Mexican border stealing cattle."

The real problem outside of hostile Apache attacks was cattle and horse rustling. While gambling preoccupied the mine workers and locals who lived in Tombstone, bandits made their living rustling cattle in Mexico and selling them in Arizona at a lightning pace. High profits were possible due to the demand for beef from the San Carlos Apache Reservation and Camp Huachuca.

In no time at all, Undersheriff Avery and Deputy Sheriff Barton arrived at the Cochise County Jail on Sixth Street. When they entered the jailer's office through the single door connected to the tiny, wooden structure, the first thing they noticed was how cold it was. With frowns on their faces, they got Willard McKenna out of his cramped cell.

The lawmen proceeded to escort the Cowboy out the door of the county jail to a waiting horse. The 27-year-old outlaw wearing a woolen shirt, and doeskin trousers tucked into boots, slapped his battered sand-hued sombrero on his thigh and placed it sideways on his head. His woolen shirt was so bulky it was hard to tell what his build was like. He rode his horse accompanied by the lawmen, who were

rewarded with grunts and a dirty look or two from the disgruntled outlaw.

A grumbling McKenna hitched his horse to the rail in front of the Grand Hotel. Then he began pacing up and down in front of the hotel, an expression of anticipation on his cadaverous face. In the course of this, he hugged himself for warmth, rubbing his hands over his shoulders.

The atmosphere was dusty and dry, with a sky bright and cloudless. The chill in the air was uncomfortable with high winds and corresponding dirt.

“What’s the trouble, McKenna?” Avery asked, eager to get out of the cold wind.

McKenna stopped pacing, squinted his blue eyes, and peered at the lawmen sitting on their horses. “Nothing. I’m just thinking.”

“Keep your nose clean, McKenna,” Barton said, and steered his horse toward Fourth Street.

“That’s one crazy Cowboy,” Avery muttered to himself as his horse trotted behind the deputy sheriff.

## *Chapter 9*

**T**HAT FRIDAY NIGHT, AN ANXIOUS WILLARD McKenna pushed through the batwings and strutted into the Oriental Saloon, located at the corner of Allen and Fifth Streets. The outlaw was fresh out of the shower, wearing the same clothes from yesterday under a black coat with a velvet collar, now minus the sombrero. He stepped onto the Brussels carpet in the gaming room, which was furnished with reading matter and writing materials for its patrons. His eyes roamed around the room with an unreadable expression on his face. The lighting was too brilliant for his eyes to bear. Scratching the mustache above his lip, he watched a woman raise a finger to signal the barkeep for a drink to be brought over to her. She was blonde, buxom, and sitting alone in a wooden chair at a faro table.

He appeared at her side and held up his hand. "I'll take care of that, Ned."

Ned Boyle, the barkeep, looked at the woman, who nodded her approval, then took the quarter McKenna handed out.

The five-foot-nine 26-year-old wore an ankle-length cream-colored dress adorned with lace and ruffles that emphasized her obvious assets. His eyes followed the smooth, fitted lines of the fabric over her curves. The dress was pinched in at the waistline, all the better to subtly accentuate her hips.

“That was mighty nice of you,” she said with a quick beaming smile from a large mouth that revealed protruding buck teeth.

Ever so slowly, she took a sip of the champagne, savoring the sweet, crisp taste, while McKenna was staring at her mouth with an uneasy expression.

“I just won my first game, only a single hand, but the pot was sufficient. I have to admit, it feels exhilarating to beat men at cards. So, I’m toasting with champagne,” she declared, giving him a fleeting glance.

“I admire a woman who can correctly bet on the number of the cards drawn from the dealer’s box,” he said, his face completely deadpan.

Enthusiastically, she stuck out her hand. “Allow me to properly introduce myself. Shirley McNerny.”

Something she said rang familiar in a deep part of his brain. He didn’t shake her hand. Instead, he stared at her quizzically.

“Have we met before?” he asked impulsively.

Though she was notorious in these parts, it was clear that Willard McKenna had never encountered her before. Until now.

“It’s my name you recognize. You know McNerny’s Dairy. McNerny means milk. No thanks to my father,” she said in a bubbly tone and retracted her hand.

Shirley swallowed down the rest of her champagne and placed the glass haphazardly on a tray carried by a passing waitress. She wasn’t exactly ladylike. Unconventionally, she drank with the men, gambled, carried a Colt six-shooter, and practiced rifle shooting. She was one of the three women dairy farmers, collectively called the Cowgirls, providing Tombstone and neighboring districts with a precious commodity of milk.

“Yeah. I guess so,” McKenna said in a bored tone.

McKenna just couldn’t get past her buck teeth and had lost interest in her. His mind began to absorb the soothing, sweet music in the background from a piano and a violin. So, when she started rambling on about herself, he felt he had to go ... somewhere else. Anywhere else.

“A widow at that. Two years ago this month, my husband of a few days was killed by a group of Mexican rustlers on our honeymoon night,” she said, batting her eyelashes at him, admiring his boyish face that made him look like a teenager.

For a few moments she had nothing whatsoever to say. In the interim, McKenna felt uncomfortable as she sized up his grizzly bear build, though he barely stood six feet tall. In that very moment, a waitress interrupted to ask what



she'd like to drink. When she turned her head away from him, he moved over to the poker table in the corner.

Shirley said she didn't want anything. Then she looked over to her right, only to discover that he wasn't there. With a little sigh, she gave a shrug of her shoulders, thinking she never got his name.

Sitting back in her chair, she soaked up the atmosphere. She liked spending her Friday evenings around the saloon crowd, despite their rough nature. More importantly, she liked being in the presence of the notorious clientele. Tonight, like all nights, she hoped to see the likes of Wyatt Earp, and John "Doc" Holliday in action. Though she doubted it because they were in the middle of a hearing. Still, she would be thrilled to see Wyatt's brother Morgan Earp. She had fancied these men way before their gunfight outside the O.K. Corral. If these men weren't already taken up with other women, she would have gone after one of them.

"All right. Place your bets!" the faro dealer said snapping her out of her trance.

She blinked as the four men at the table put their money down around the green felt layout. But she didn't place a bet.

Without a word spoken, she got up from the table, went to the bar and ordered another champagne. From the way she was positioned, she saw "Buckskin Frank" Leslie lying on a couch beside a writing table, seemingly liquored up. His long mustache was what stood out to her. He was a

notorious jack-of-all-trades: a gambler, gunman and army Indian scout; there wasn't anything he couldn't do.

To her surprise, the man standing next to him was the man who'd bought her a drink. A faint smile curled her lips. She took a moment to make sure her dress was looking its best and her hair was pulled to one side. For a couple of dreadful minutes, her staring went unnoticed, until by chance he glanced her way. He seemed disconcerted at her, staring so directly at him, and turned away from her. A moment later, he leaned down and said something to Leslie, then walked away.

A flute of pink champagne was placed in front of her, and she smiled and nodded thank you to Ned, the barkeep. After tipping her flute back, she downed the bubbly in one quick gulp like a shot of whiskey. Almost instantaneously, she felt fuzzy. She took a deep breath, putting her hands on the counter to steady herself. Though she was tempted to order another champagne, she wouldn't.

The loud talking at the poker table, the murmuring of the crowd and the piano playing were getting to her. Suddenly it was all too much for her — cigar smoke hung in a haze over her head, as well as the strong smell of alcohol was taking its toll.

Shirley reached inside the pocket of her dress and pulled out a small, white-feathered fan. She straightened in her seat, squared her shoulders, waving the fan across her face, refreshing herself.

Now, nearing ten, she stepped out of the Oriental Saloon. The lamps in the buildings poured light into Allen

Street. Within minutes, a horse-drawn milk wagon pulled to a stop in front of the Oriental Saloon. The wagon had a sign on it. *McInerny's Dairy*.

“Hello, Daddy,” Shirley said to the driver as she clambered aboard and sat beside him on the bench seat.

At once he lifted the reins and slapped the backs of the two horses, which took off at a gallop. For what seemed like an eternity, she was rocked in the seat, as the wagon tore through Allen Street at breakneck speed.

## *Chapter 10*

**M**ILK WAS A STAPLE AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE from the earliest colonial days. This was the meal where the Victorians relaxed and dressed less formally. During this Victorian era, Tombstone was the epicenter of America's Wild West, as both were happening at the same time. Most grocers in town sold condensed milk, but those wanting fresh milk could purchase it from three dairy farms owned by the McInerny, Swafford, and Tanner families.

The McInerny Ranch was in the central strip of the Babocomari Valley, in a lovely setting among the cottonwoods along the Babocomari River. It was less than a quarter of a mile from old Camp Wallen and about fourteen miles west of Tombstone. This land, with a clear view of the Mustang Mountains in the background, was suitable for stock raising because the grass was quite abundant. Graham McInerny purchased the land a couple

of years after the Mexican family of Ignacio Elias Gonzalez had abandoned it along with their cattle due to Chiricahua Apache depredations. In 1853, a handful of years after the Mexican-American War, McNerny built a house, stable and barn for livestock.

On Saturday afternoon, Shirley McNerny was entertaining her friends Bibb Tanner and Pidge Swafford to lunch in the dining room of her large adobe house. They had been friends for the past three years. Pidge was the oldest at twenty-seven, and Bibb was the youngest at twenty-four.

The three of them together could be trouble-making gossips. And it wasn't unusual to find them out and about Tombstone mixing with the store owners, gamblers, and bartenders. Nobody dared question their habits, because these women were at the center of milk distribution in Tombstone. And they truly fit into this town associated with gunslingers, gamblers, and Cowboys.

The Cowgirls were seated around the oak dining-room table. Pot roast, broccoli, potatoes, and bread, hot from the wood-burning oven, were passed around the table. The scuffed hardwood floor showed the life and history of the twenty-eight-year-old house.

“How do you find the time to dress pretty, arrange your hair, and cook up a fancy meal?” Pidge asked in a perky voice.

Shirley beamed at her question, her rounded cheeks glowing. She was wearing a demure dress of pale blue and

lace, that for all its modest cut, clung to the curves of her body. Her blonde hair cascaded to one side.

“In-between deliveries, Daddy buys all the baking, cooking, and food supplies. And in-between milking, I do all the cooking,” Shirley answered precisely.

Pidge had hazel eyes and shoulder-length thick, gloss brown hair piled high on her head. She was wearing a light green dress, trimmed with narrow silver lace, and paired with a pearl necklace.

“And you, Pidge, look quite lovely, very flattering dress,” Bibb interjected.

“Very kind of you to say so, Bibb. Would you be a doll and pass the potatoes?” Pidge asked in a polite tone.

Wordlessly, Bibb heaped a spoonful of potatoes onto her plate and passed the dish to Pidge across the table.

“One day soon I’m going to Californy. No more milking cows for me. You’ll see. I’m going to join one of those traveling theater troupes and perform across the country,” Bibb said good-naturedly, then stuffed a forkful of potatoes into her mouth.

“That’s what you said last year,” Pidge said, her voice monotonous.

“And the year before that,” Shirley teased, nudging Pidge who was sitting next to her.

The corner of Bibb’s mouth twitched, eyes wide and disbelieving. And then Pidge and Shirley were both laughing themselves silly.

“I’ll have you know that this time I’m doing something about it. And I’m going to get my start, right here in

Tombstone. I plan to audition for a role in *H.M.S. Pinafore* at Schieffelin Hall and get cast in it. The show opens in May next year and is guaranteed to sell out. But you can reserve your seats with me, now,” Bibb said, with utter confidence.

Bibb Tanner’s confidence largely stemmed from her unshakeable belief that she flat-out had the look of an actress. She had soft, delicate features, a creamy complexion, dazzling blue eyes and long, light brown hair that fell down her back and ended a few inches above her waist. Her five-foot-six frame was slender but curvy in the right places. And in the champagne-colored lace dress she had on now, she looked elegant. Though she had a desire to perform, she believed her looks could get her anything.

“When the newspapers write about you, don’t let it go to your head. Don’t forget where you come from. And don’t forget us farm girls,” Pidge said, in a seemingly genuine tone.

“You sounded so sincere, Pidge,” said Shirley, sounding breathless.

Shirley’s shoulders sagged, and she looked like she was going to cry. She immediately started fanning herself with her hand and snorted a couple of times.

“There, there, girl. She’s not leaving us yet,” Pidge said softly, and hugged Shirley close, patting her back.

Bibb was in awe watching them in their emotional embrace. Before she could add anything else, Graham McInerny stepped into the room.

“Good afternoon, ladies,” he said in a kind manner.

Releasing her embrace, Shirley wiped her eyes on her napkin, then said, "Hello there, Daddy."

The 58-year-old father of Shirley had thick, dark blond hair, a strong chin and jaw, merry blue eyes and packed plenty of strength and stamina. He'd spent his life building the farm from scratch, but he'd also spent much time doting on his daughter. It was just him, his daughter, and two ranch hands, ever since the death of his wife in December 1869 from malarial fever. Tragically for the community at large, the mosquito-borne infectious disease, malaria, had spread beyond the confines of Camp Wallen.

When Shirley's marriage ended in tragedy, he was heartbroken for her. Nevertheless, he was very anxious to marry her off, again. So, he took time out from his busy schedule to take her to the saloons in Tombstone for a couple of hours each week in hopes of finding a man who could love her.

"I just wanted to know how you gals are getting on, before I head over to pitch fresh hay into the stalls," he said.

"The meal is exquisite," Pidge declared.

"Mhmm," Bibb mumbled through a mouthful of bread.

"Terrific. After I finish with the stalls, I'll be making a delivery. I'll be gone a few hours, so I'll catch up with you all when I get back," he said and left the room.



## *Chapter 11*

LATE THAT AFTERNOON, A MAN IN HIS EARLY twenties clad in buckskins, hurried past Graham McNerny's milk wagon as it was leaving Camp Huachuca. McNerny's Dairy was the primary supplier of milk to the army post. The main reason was his herd of seventy-four Jersey cows, a breed from the Channel Islands, an archipelago in the English Channel off the coast of Normandy, France, provided milk that contained the highest level of protein, minerals, and vitamins.

The Indian scout came running toward First Lieutenant Randall Davis and found him in the middle of a conversation with a private in his unit. He stopped to catch his breath before speaking.

"Things have been out of whack since Captain Samuel Whitside left. The only thing we can count on is our six-bed infirmary," Davis said, sounding upset.

“Excuse me, Sir,” the scout said as he drew near, “There were gunshots and then I saw seven Apache braves fleeing a charcoal camp in the Canelo Hills. Two appeared wounded. There’s a chance Geronimo’s with them.”

Two troops of the 4th Infantry and 6th Cavalry, and an Indian scout were dispatched under First Lieutenant Davis. They followed the Apaches’ trail south over the Huachuca Mountains by a steep and rocky trail, seemingly in the direction of Mexico.

It alarmed Davis that just days later the Apaches again targeted the Canelo Hills. He suspected that something was up, most likely involving Geronimo. The thought of Geronimo being out there somewhere terrified him and everyone else. It was enough to drive the army’s search for his capture.

But he felt it was futile. It was clear that they weren’t going to find him. As his horse galloped on, he had a nagging feeling in the back of his mind that Geronimo was in the fastness of the Sierra Madre of Mexico, where they couldn’t follow. As was expected of him, he was being loyal to the chain of command, bravely doing his duty.

According to some, Geronimo was a very treacherous Apache warrior. On the other hand, many of his tribe would argue that he was an excellent family man who’d been married plenty of times.

Yet, Davis was a man who attributed blame where it was solely due. In his opinion, the tense situation between the settlers and Apaches was further aggravated by a series

of unfortunate events. He was privy to the fact of the U.S. Indian Bureau's gross incompetence in managing Indian affairs. Also, he was no stranger to rumors. He had heard that in August 1881, Colonel Eugene Carr, the Commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry at Fort Lowell, and a detachment of troops from Fort Apache had been dispatched to arrest Nochedelklinne, a White Mountain Apache medicine man, for inciting an insurrection at the San Carlos Apache Reservation. The medicine man had engaged in frenzied dancing and communication with the spirits of dead warriors. He predicted the resurrection of many old warrior chiefs who would lead the tribes again, if they were able to keep the white man off Apache land. The medicine man was taken into custody and his followers swarmed the troops. The Battle of Cibecue Creek ensued between the U.S. Army and angry White Mountain Apaches. The soldiers killed Nochedelklinne. That was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Not long after, Geronimo fled the reservation.

In a perfectly listless manner, Davis sat on his horse, which followed along with the troops. Now his mind wandered to his two sons. Would they grow up knowing an untamed West, like the one he knew? A lot of the time he thought about his boys having to face the difficulties of growing up in a hostile world.

His wayward thoughts were interrupted by a voice behind him. The keen-eyed Indian scout had made a slight mouth noise, and his horse trotted in a circle. He looked back to see the scout studying the ground, full of foreboding

that he might determine if it had been disturbed by foot, or hoof traffic. The first lieutenant gestured to his troops. The men reined their horses to a complete stop.

Observing Indian trails was another problem that soldiers had to contend with. Enlisting Indian scouts in the service of the U.S. Army, from peaceful tribes and from servicemen within, was their best option. These peaceful Indians were interested in doing business with the white man, living together, and working for the common good.

Yet, decisions were often not made, and soldiers were left wondering if they were wandering aimlessly in the wrong direction. Sometimes even soldiers wondered if the Indian scout had purposely sent them on a wild-goose chase, and in reality, the Apaches had gone somewhere else. By doing this, the scout proved their loyalty to their sister Indian tribes.

“What do you think?” Davis pressed anxiously. “Are we headed in the right direction? Are the Apaches close by?”

The scout shook his head. “They aren’t in this area. It looks like they passed through here a while back. Too many hours ago.”

“This isn’t good,” a soldier said and turned his eyes toward the first lieutenant.

The look on the soldier’s face said it all to Davis. There was an exasperated look on his face as if they had been traveling in circles. That they’d lost the trail of the Apaches altogether.

Davis knew the Indian scout was right. Were they wasting their time? *Probably*, he thought. Still, he did not reply and after a moment's pause, he turned to the troops.

“Let's try that direction. If nothing turns up, we'll head back to the post,” Davis suggested, pointing with his chin.

Half an hour later it was getting dark. As Davis steered his horse among the infantrymen, the frustration on his face was apparent. A few moments later, he gave the order to return to Camp Huachuca.

They all turned back without having fired a shot. Nor had they seen any hostile Indians. It was an all too common experience.

## *Chapter 12*

**T**HREE APACHES ON TWO HORSES, ONE OF THE men wounded, were trotting along the bank of the San Pedro River with the smell of blood on them. They had separated from their band at Canelo Hills, at the time they were seen by an Indian scout.

The setting sun cast an orange light on the smooth faces of the Apache braves approaching the encampment of the Cherokee tribe. Chief Nahele was walking through the teepees of his people and happened to have glimpsed them. He presumed that they had escaped from a raid they had carried out. Sadly, this was all too common an occurrence. As the Apaches drew closer, he was about to find out.

The pathetic Indians stopped their horses in front of Chief Nahele, who was surreptitiously eyeing the warrior who had his arms wrapped around the rider's waist. His eyes moved to the rag tied around his leg soaked in blood,

an obvious gunshot wound. As a fellow Indian, the White Chief felt obligated to help him. They briefly made eye contact and exchanged a nod of understanding before Chief Nahele pointed to a place in the encampment, where they would find the tribe's shaman. Fortunately for them, Soaring Eagle, who could heal people with herbs, was familiar with treatments for gunshot wounds.

Chenoa was in front of her teepee, cooking a stew of deer meat over a fire. Sequoia, looking in that direction, saw the Apaches steering their horses toward the shaman's teepee. She made no comment as she gave her mother a small sack of corn-meal and another of beans. After another wary look at the Apaches, she went and sat on the ground beside the teepee.

Sequoia raised her eyes to the darkened sky sprinkled with hundreds of tiny stars. One part of her wanted the Apaches to leave their encampment and yet, deep inside, she sympathized with them. When silver was discovered in Tombstone's hills, the Apache Indians were driven off the land that had belonged to them for centuries. While many Apaches agreed to live on reservations, not all were willing to live with restrictions. The Cherokees faced the same problems arising from forced removal from their homeland, which had been a general disruption of their culture. As the Indian population was shrinking in the region, unwanted white settlers were multiplying. It had been an ongoing struggle and there didn't seem to be a solution.

Thoughts of Dakota came creeping into her mind. She recalled his memory with a heart full of gratitude that she had at least known the wonder of love. How different her life would have been if she had married him.

She couldn't help feeling bitter. Her heart beat harder, wondering if she would ever go back to just living normally again. Since the loss of Dakota, she couldn't find peace with herself. But when her mother summoned her to dinner, she stood up quickly, pushing all her troubled thoughts away.

The Apaches reined their horses to a halt and were greeted by the stern faced medicine man, old and wrinkled, in a buckskin coat. They dismounted and handed their reins to Chief Nahele, who would take the horses to the corral.

The wounded Apache pushed himself to his feet. But he was unable to bear weight on the wounded leg without agony. He gritted his teeth against the pain, holding his left leg, swaying slightly. One of his Apache comrades placed him on the ground, to rest a bit.

Soaring Eagle talked with them and discovered that they were Chiricahua Apache and members of Geronimo's band. They returned into Arizona from their hide-out atop a steep ridge in the Teras Mountains, a section of the Sierra Madre mountain range. That afternoon, they stumbled upon a charcoal camp in the Canelo Hills on their way to get much-needed ammunition. They were riding by on their horses. when they were fired upon by four white men with no provocation.



The wounded Apache slumped back and his eyes rolled into the back of his head. Soaring Eagle invited them into his teepee to treat him. But the wounded Apache couldn't lift himself off the ground. So, one of his comrades picked him up, lifted him over his shoulder and carried him into the teepee.

Chief Nahele drew aside the teepee flap. "I bring water."

He put the bucket of water down and left. With the water, Soaring Eagle bathed the Apache's wound then proceeded with an inspection. In a matter of minutes, he removed the bullet with a thin, short-bladed knife that was sharp and tapered to a point. The next time he looked, the wounded Apache was fast asleep, his head tucked in the crook of his shoulder.

"He will stay here and rest," Soaring Eagle said to the Apaches standing watch.

For most of the time the two, short and stocky Apache warriors had stared down at the shaman impassively. There were no words exchanged. Soaring Eagle had tried to be polite, but he could sense their suspicion of him, and it made him uncomfortable in their presence. At this point, they were asked to leave the teepee to allow Soaring Eagle to continue his work. Reluctantly, they left and conversed outside the teepee for a period of time.

Meanwhile, Soaring Eagle slapped some mossy lichen, which would help in healing, directly onto the wound. Following that, he bandaged the wound with a cloth smeared with healing herbs.

Soaring Eagle left the teepee eager to eat his dinner. He wound his way among the teepees where he found Chief Nahele already eating by the fire, sitting next to the two Apaches. Soaring Eagle filled his plate, took a seat on the ground, and listened to the conversation in progress.

There was a long, awkward period of silence before they said their names were Kayitah and Kanesewah. Then came another pause, which seemed to affect the White Chief's nerves. Chief Nahele turned to the Apaches with a disconcerted look on his face. Until Kayitah began telling a story about a horse-stealing raid. His eyes lit up as he described the event, almost as if reliving it all over again. Even more so when he brought up his raiding and fighting alongside Geronimo.

After the meal, Chief Nahele lit his pipe and relaxed. While Soaring Eagle secured the Apaches a place to sleep for the night.

## *Chapter 13*

**T**HE CAMPIRE CRACKLED IN THE LIGHT BREEZE of the morning. Off to the side, Sequoia was squatted on the ground. From a distance away, she heard the sound of horses' hooves over the splintering wood, and hissing flames. Her eyes caught sight of Chief Nahele bidding farewell to the three Apaches on their horses. Then Dakota's father walked by him with his eyes on the ground. She'd noticed his parents had kept a distance from her. Of course, as expected the memory of Dakota's death was still fresh in their memories.

As the Apaches trotted away, she felt a sense of relief. But when Chief Nahele turned and glanced at her, he saw she was busying herself making milk from almonds. She had looked away at the last moment, not wanting to appear interested. He thought nothing in particular as it was

commonplace for the women to prepare meals and farm the soil with crops of corn, beans, and tobacco.

Last June, when they had set up their living space, she planted the almond trees, creating an almond orchard in the brush off to the side of the encampment. Now the almond trees were sprawling and twisted, and in full bloom. She and her mother took turns picking the nuts, sorting out the hulls and leaves and putting them into sacks.

Now Sequoia turned her mind toward her duties. Her marble mortar had mysteriously vanished. So, she picked up a black boot and crushed the almonds beneath its heel. Then she tossed the almond residue in a pan, added a bit of water and brown sugar, and set it on the fire to simmer.

While she stirred the contents with a long, thin metal spoon, she began to think about what she could do for her people. She had been named after the chief Sequoyah, who created a written language for the Cherokees based on syllables. And she quite believed, too, she could make a difference. With marriage not in the cards, she could at least have a purpose. What came to her mind was something along the lines of conducting her own diplomatic relations with the white settlers. So, they would see the Indians in a better light. If only she could find a way to promote peace and civilization among them.

As the pan's contents transformed into milk before her eyes, an idea was beginning to take shape in her mind. She could establish a small almond-milk business and put her own labels on the jugs for sale in mercantile stores in

Tombstone. On that thought, she poured the milk into a gallon-sized, clay jug.

One thing was certain — after three years of making milk for her tribe, she had become very good at it. Often, she was complimented on the taste and freshness of the milk. And she could easily produce four gallons of almond-milk per hour.

Approaching footsteps alerted her to look over her shoulder and catch sight of Cholo carrying a burlap sack of almonds.

“Your mother suggested I bring this to you,” he said right away.

Sequoia adjusted the shawl around her shoulders and gestured to the ground. “Set it down there.”

She clamped down on her emotions as the memory of Dakota came rushing back. They’d been best friends, after all. She couldn’t help but reflect on what she had lost. It was by chance she had befriended Dakota as a child. And by another chance they had fallen in love, long before their parents arranged their marriage.

“May I?” he gestured with his hand to sit.

“Go on,” she said quickly.

A moment after Cholo got comfortable on the ground. His eyes wandered over to the fire.

“There’s not a day that goes by that I don’t miss Dakota. I rethink things all the time. There have been so many times I’ve wished we hadn’t gone to check out the O.K Corral. If I could take back that night, I would,” he said, on a serious note.

“I miss him, too. But you can’t blame yourself for what happened,” she said with sympathy.

“I felt like a coward for running away. And I left Dakota’s horse tied to a hitch rail,” he returned with a croak in his voice.

Seeing the tears in his eyes, she was choked up with emotion. Instinctively, she leaned over and hugged him.

“There’s nothing more you could have done. If you had stayed, you would have been killed too. We have to find a way to heal and move on, and promote a peaceful future for our tribe,” she said into his ear.

Cholo broke their embrace and scooted away from her. “Words, Sequoia. That’s all they are. We will never have peace with the white man in our lifetime. Our future is bleak.”

He’d been rather rash in saying that. But he was so blinded by hurt and pain that he couldn’t see anything other than his own point of view. And he was well aware of it.

“I know it’s hard but try to think positive.”

“Maybe another day,” he said, and stood up. “I’ll leave you to your duties.”

Watching him walk away, she wondered if he was right. How many more Indians would die? How many more Mexicans and white settlers would die? Even while these questions burned in her mind, she couldn’t bring herself to believe the situation was hopeless.

As she crushed more almonds and threw the residue in the pan, she wanted to forge a bond with the settlers.

Granted, perhaps she was naive to think something like selling milk could make such a difference, but she wanted to try.

With that settled, a plan was hatched, and the next day she would peddle her milk around Tombstone. So, she was thinking, maybe she could trade the almond milk for goods in the store rather than for currency.

“Sequoia? Is the milk ready?” her mother questioned from the distance.

Roused from her thoughts, she looked up. “Yes, mother, coming.”

Quickly, she poured the milk into a clay jug. Next, she stood from the ground, dusted her dress off with her hands. As she took the two jugs in her arms, she felt a sense of optimism for the first time in days.

## *Chapter 14*

**R**ESTLESS AFTER A LONG MORNING OF CHORES, Pidge Swafford was itching to go into town for a few hours. On this pleasant autumn Monday, she wanted to window shop and be around other people to talk about the latest happenings. Her spare ranch hand, Jake McKenna, could take her in the carriage. So, she could be back in the barn to do the second milking this evening between 6:30 and 7:30. This was on her mind as she began to clear up the kitchen, after having had lunch with her parents.

June Swafford spoke, her aged voice a croak. “Deary.”

Pidge dropped the dishes in the sink and turned around. “Yes, Mother.”

“Your father has gone out with his milk wagon to make a delivery. I’ll just be in the living room reading my book until he returns,” she said with fake sweetness and planted a soft kiss on her daughter’s cheek.



Holding up the voluminous train of her dress, June turned and exited the room with a tilt of her chin. The phony, bland sweetness of Pidge and her mother could get on anybody's nerves. For the most part, they were only concerned with how others saw them. They tended to have the same attitude: fickle, and uptight. Their attitude was deeply entrenched into shaping themselves into the image of a proper lady by Victorian moral standards.

Her parents had made a delightful home comfortably on the west bank of the San Pedro River. The sprawling, two-story adobe ranch house was surrounded and shaded from the sun by stately cottonwood trees. The Swafford Ranch was approximately eleven miles west of Tombstone. The barn had been built on seventy-five acres that were devoted to grain, specifically barley, which the cattle pastured on. It was a dairy farm, mostly planted in hay and grain, really, but a modestly profitable one. And though most people would think the place was dull, she felt that this was where she belonged.

Half a mile away was the little town of Lewis Springs, where you would find Ike Clanton's ranch. Three and a half miles south of Charleston, the fortress-like large house with foot-thick adobe walls stood on a hill, among a grove of cottonwoods. The San Pedro River brawled at the foot of the hill. It was headquarters to the outlaws in the area and served as a sort of clearing-house for stolen cattle from Mexico, brought down the San Pedro River by the rustlers.

The flow of stolen cattle posed no threat to Pidge whatsoever. Luckily her father, Wally, was friendly with Ike Clanton. And her ranch hand Jake McKenna, had a brother who was a full-fledged, red-sashed Cowboy.

As a second-generation dairy farmer, Wally Swafford, worked hard to maintain a herd of ninety-seven Holstein cattle. This breed of black-and-white cows, originally brought from the Netherlands, produced low-fat, watery milk. So, there was a steady supply of milk that was bottled and distributed at sixty cents a gallon or twenty cents per quart to the grocers in town every week. Other uses for raw cow's milk included making cheese and butter.

Pidge finished cleaning the dishes, and then dried her hands on her white apron before removing the garment. After that, she peered out the kitchen window and studied the cobalt blue sky for a few moments. It was a nice day for being outdoors. Her gaze roved the ranch. The wide brown land was awe-inspiring to her.

Her eyes fell on nothing directly. In that short moment, all her thoughts lay concentrated on needing a change of scenery. On some days, like today, from managing the stock to managing the ranch hands, and other farm duties had left her feeling wiped out.

The sound of footsteps in the hallway snapped her gaze from the window to the opened kitchen door. She then watched Jake McKenna walk by the room.

Immediately she called out, "Jake, could you step in here, please?"

As soon as Jake entered the kitchen she told him her plans. Not more than a couple of minutes later, she went to change out of her white dress with lace ties at the shoulders into a prim pink dress with white piping around its square neckline. Then she sprinted through the living room, breezing a promise to her mother to be back soon before stepping out the door.

The big barn doors opened, and a carriage rolled outside. Jake was wearing a brown woolen coat over an off-white linen shirt, brown trousers, and boots. He proceeded to hitch the carriage to two chestnut horses, aware that Pidge stood close by, watching.

Without a word he opened the carriage door with a squeak. She looked down her nose at him, as if waiting for him to say something.

There was a millisecond's hesitation before he swept his arm in a wide arc. "Your chariot awaits, my lady."

Her eyes narrowed at the remark. She shook her head with a slight huff as she climbed inside. Quite single, it was no surprise her haughty character put men off from tangling up with her. As he closed the door behind her and climbed aboard, she wriggled in her seat, attempting to make herself comfortable.

The horse-drawn carriage took off at once along a wagon trail that snaked westward. In roughly an hour, the carriage rattled into Tombstone, the horse's hooves clip-clopping on the street. She clutched the edge of the seat as the carriage lumbered through the streets, coming to a stop at the northwest corner of Allen and Sixth Streets.

Inside Pidge was fidgeting with gloves until she recognized Jake's heavy footsteps approaching. Within mere seconds, the door of the carriage was thrown open with a bang. As she stepped out, she opened her parasol to shield her face from the glaring sun. She took in a breath and held it for a long moment. The cool weather air substituted nicely for the normally arid climate.

The 25-year-old, lean and rangy ranch hand closed the door, climbed onto the driver's seat, and grabbed the reins of the horses. He waved goodbye just as Pidge pivoted around without so much as a glance in his direction. She was absorbed in her own world — she wouldn't look back. Rather, she started strolling down Sixth Street, window shopping as she went.

## *Chapter 15*

**O**N THIS 7<sup>th</sup> DAY IN NOVEMBER, SEQUOIA HAD ridden her horse to Tombstone, for the second time since she'd been in the area. Her first stop had been to see Allen Street, the spot where Dakota's body had been found. Based on Cholo's description of the alley between two buildings where the confrontation had taken place, she had seen that, too. It had been bothering her, wouldn't let her rest. And it was important in an odd way, to give her some kind of closure, so she could move on.

Strolling through the streets, she had been mesmerized by all there was to see. The town was full of life with many restaurants, saloons, mercantile stores, hotels, banks, and cigar stores. This was not at all what she had expected when her tribe planted themselves in the vicinity temporarily.

Thus far, luck hadn't been on her side. The shopkeepers in the two mercantile stores she'd visited hadn't been

unkind to her, but they were not interested in her almond milk. It had been disappointing, of course, but she wasn't ready to give up. She had to try one more time.

Even though there were still a few good hours of light left, the day was fading. And she was tired of walking around the city for nearly three hours. Still, she pushed on. As she crossed Allen Street again, she ignored the two women gawking at her from a shop doorway. People didn't often see an Indian woman walking alone in town. Proudly, she carried the jug of milk, and began to think of all the things she could trade it for. She decided on a new pair of deerskin moccasins or a blanket.

With these happy thoughts, she rounded the corner on Allen and headed east on Sixth Street toward McKean & Knight, a grocery and mercantile store. The wind picked up, dust swirled into the air, and she hurried to the entrance.

From the moment she'd entered the store, she couldn't help but feel an overwhelming awe. Most impressive was the full line of groceries and provisions such as fruits, butter, eggs, cheese, and potatoes.

When the shopkeeper behind the counter glanced her way, Sequoia started with a brief introduction, in which she explained the almond milk's popularity among her tribe. And while she talked, she couldn't help but notice the selection of fine teas and coffees, as well as the jars of maple syrup behind the counter.

Just by chance, Pidge Swafford had stopped at the corner of Sixth and Allen Streets and was peering inside through the glass window of the store. With the windchill

factor making it seem far colder, she wanted to warm up for a bit. She didn't mean to eavesdrop, but she heard part of the conversation when she walked in. Right away, she sized up Sequoia with one lengthy, penetrating glance, taking in her embroidered moccasins, wool shawl over her plain calico dress, and her hair hanging limp and lustrous on her shoulders.

Ducking into the adjacent aisle, Pidge listened in astonishment as Sequoia went into a little discourse about good-tasting almond milk. Deep down, she was infuriated at the sight of an Indian daring to do business in town.

Pidge was a bigot like her father, who felt threatened by the Indians, who did not support the government and killed many of the settlers. Wally Swafford believed it was the white race on one side, raising families, building churches and schools, and who were the sovereign people of the United States. They were beliefs her father had instilled in her from an early age.

After a moment of awkward silence, the shopkeeper adjusted his glasses, pushing them back up his nose. "I tell you what, I'll give you fifty cents for that jug."

"Could I have the yellow wool blanket over there instead?" she asked, pointing to a shelf of neatly stacked blankets.

"Help yourself. Come back in two weeks to find out if someone bought it. And if they did, I might consider acquiring more jugs of almond milk from you."

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart," Sequoia said, handed him the jug and grabbed the blanket.

“The name’s Theodore Reich. It’s been a pleasure doing business with you,” he said with a smile, his eyes taking in her beauty.

“So nice to meet you Theodore ‘Rich.’ She repeated his last name as he had pronounced it. “And I’m Sequoia.”

With a sense of pride she turned and walked out of the store, as if her whole life was filled with newfound joy.

Consumed in thought, Pidge waited until the Indian girl was gone before she turned away from the aisle, two words echoing in her mind. Almond milk? Was she behind the times? Right then and there she knew what was too apparent. And she wasn’t liking it.

“Say, Miss Swafford, that’s a pretty dress you have on there,” Reich said, startling her.

Eyes narrowed, Pidge studied him with knitted brows, ignored his comment, and huffed with irritation. “Almond milk — and from a young Indian girl, no less. That isn’t sanitary.”

She didn’t try to hide the bitterness in her voice. What was worse was that she wanted to knock the clay jug off the counter with her elbow and smash it to the floor. Inching toward trouble, but then again, maybe it was just her habit that if she didn’t run into trouble, she made her own.

The middle-aged shopkeeper with neatly trimmed hair was stunned and greeted this with grim silence. He considered Pidge Swafford to be one of Tombstone’s more prominent citizens. Not sure how to handle the situation, he lowered his eyes to the counter, stalling for time to think. Nervously, he stuck his thumbs in his black suspenders that



held up his brown wool pants. He pulled them off his brown shirt as if they were chains and let them snap back.

“I must attend to many pressing matters,” Reich said, finally breaking the silence, then asked, barely glancing over at her, “Is there something I can help you with?”

Pidge waved him off with a frantic thrash of her gloved hand as if he were a fly buzzing too close. Then she turned away with a defiant snap of her head. Her anger was fueled by jealousy. Imagine that. Competition from an Indian. The thought made her cringe.

It was approaching three o’clock in the afternoon when she left the store. As she turned in the direction of Fremont Street, she caught a glimpse of Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday being escorted by Sheriff John Behan. They were all familiar to her. She’d seen them before a couple of times at the Oriental Saloon. They were walking toward the Cochise County Jail. She assumed their arrest had something to do with the Spicer hearing that had been sensationalized in local newspapers.

“I’ll be sure to read tomorrow’s *Tombstone Epitaph*,” she whispered to herself.

The distraction took her mind from the Indian girl as she started walking up Fremont Street to Fifth. She passed a few men striding along in a hurry to get out of the cold. At this point, the cold air didn’t bother her as she strode toward the designated spot where her carriage would be waiting.

The moment Jake saw her, he dismounted the gleaming black carriage parked outside Dunbar’s Corral livery

stable on Fifth Street near Fremont Street. He stood on the weathered sidewalk planks holding the carriage door open for her.

Without so much as a look or a word, Pidge stomped past him and entered the carriage in a huff. He slammed the door, and moments later the carriage took off, traveling at a cracking pace.

She looked out her window and listened to the howling wind. Her thoughts returned to the girl, who had said her name loud enough for her to hear. Only, she couldn't remember a strange Indian name like that. She sighed, a dissatisfied look on her face as she knew a plan needed to be set in motion. This was going to be the topic of discussion this Saturday at lunch with her Cowgirl cohorts. Maybe together they could stop this Indian girl from muscling in on their milk profits.

## *Chapter 16*

**A** SQUAD OF MEXICAN SOLDIERS HAD BEEN searching for members of Geronimo's band. In the past month or so, these Apaches had raided a dozen ranches near Nacori Grande, a village in Sonora, stealing horses and cattle. The Mexicans were out for blood, a bit of good old-fashioned revenge.

The soldiers had traveled south from the garrison at Fronteras, a fort situated in the northeastern part of the Mexican state of Sonora. They were doubling their efforts to track down the hostile bands of Apaches since the establishment of Camp Huachuca on the other side of the border.

Yesterday before dark, they stopped when they heard the distant whinnying of horses. Using field glasses, one of the soldiers spotted two Apache riders crossing the junction of the San Bernardino and Bavispe Rivers in northern

Sonora. It was Kayitah and Kanesewah. They were returning to their camp. The horses were burdened with sacks of wood to cook their food and to ward off the chill of the approaching night.

It had begun snowing just as the soldiers followed them to a steep ridge in the rugged Teras Mountains, a part of the Sierra Madre Mountains, just south of Batepito. There stood fourteen brush-covered wickiups of a Chiricahua Apache camp, comprised mainly of women and children and protected by almost a dozen warriors. There hadn't been any sign of the Bedonkohe Apache Geronimo, who wasn't strictly a Chiricahua. Thereby the assumption was he was roaming around with other Apaches, maybe in the vicinity. Outside of that, the snowfall had prevented the soldiers from attacking the Apaches. So, they secreted themselves in the mountains to spend the night.

This Friday morning, just before sunrise, came the yipping of coyotes. The soldiers had their eyes on the Apache camp. The twenty something Mexican men, with unshaven faces and dressed in dirt-soiled uniforms, were patient.

At the first rays of sunlight, the Apaches were absorbed in their breakfast ritual, while some slept in their wickiups. The soldiers had plenty of pistols and rifles trained on them, about to strike. They moved as silently as possible as the rising sun began to melt the light layer of snow on the ground.

A middle-aged Apache woman, sitting on the ground near patches of snow, was rocking back and forth against

the cold. She had finely chiseled cheekbones, dark brown eyes, and thick, black hair that was braided down her back. Casually she turned her head to investigate noises on the camp perimeter. She was the first to be hit by a fusillade of bullets and died immediately.

The Mexican cavalymen charged the camp on their horses, shooting Indians left and right. They'd caught them completely off guard. Rapid orders were shouted in Spanish. The short, stocky general told his men to kill all the women and children and leave no survivors.

During the mayhem, an old woman awoke in a wickiup to the sound of a blood curdling scream. She sprang from her bed, grabbed a big knife, and pulled back the flap which served as a door. She stepped outside into the swirl of dust and snow that flew up from the soldiers' horses' hooves. A mounted soldier saw the woman charging toward him. It was a gallant action, but the soldier drew his pistol and fired as fast as he could. The woman was struck and fell to the ground. Less than a minute later, she died from her chest wound.

Here and there women and children were running in all directions while Kanesewah was trying to protect three unarmed warriors. In the process he was shot multiple times and died almost instantly. Whereas Kayitah jumped on his horse and attempted to ride away. The sound of bullets tore through the air, flying by his body — random but deadly. A sharp-eyed Mexican aimed his pistol and fired at him. The bullet hit the horse in the butt, and as it started to slip, Kayitah went tumbling to the ground.

More shots came his way. So, Kayitah tried to get up. But he couldn't do it. He was hit by a hail of bullets, then fell on his face, dead. Thick blood spurted out of the two holes in his back to the satisfaction of the soldiers who had shot at him.

Under orders, four soldiers dismounted and went from wickiup to wickiup killing anyone who remained. They passed by many Indians' lifeless bodies on the ground before them.

The sun declined over the Teras Mountains. Shadows pushed out toward the west, just as a wind arose about the soldiers, who had grown tired and edgy. Most were thinking about their stomachs. It was just their luck that as quickly as the fight had erupted, it subsided. In less than an hour, the platoon had killed all the Indians there to the general's satisfaction. Among the nineteen Apaches killed were five warriors, one chief, and several women and children.

Two soldiers came off their horses and put out the fire. Then they just sat down and began to help themselves to the food before them. The stone-faced general squinted his dark, deep-set eyes at them. He started with a single harsh look, but he subsided into a wicked grin.

The sun moved again, and the trees were acquiring shadows. Over and beyond the trees, dust was rising into the air. Some distance away, the general could see that Apache warriors were coming up the ridge. It was a mere fluke that some of the Apache warriors had not been at the camp when the attack had occurred. They had traveled east

into the mountains to hunt and gather supplies. That was why the camp was virtually defenseless.

There appeared to be six of them, riding their horses up the high ridgelines of the Teras Mountains. The general thought it was best to leave rather than engage them in another battle. As far as he was concerned, he'd already won the battle.

The cavalry galloped away from the scene of the killing before the rearguard of Apache warriors arrived. They directed their horses north to find a place to eat, rest, celebrate with tequila, and camp for the night.

Soon enough, the Apache warriors rode into their camp and began the sad task of sifting through the remains of the incident. It smelled of a personal vendetta coming from the Mexicans. But at this early hour, its retribution seemed a long way off.

## *Chapter 17*

**I**T WAS EXTREMELY COLD IN TOMBSTONE THAT afternoon. But that didn't stop Bibb Tanner from trying out for *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The Dramatic Club was holding open auditions at Schieffelin Hall for new performers. The Gilbert and Sullivan production (which had been in the works since July 1881) was scheduled to open in the Spring of 1882.

Sitting in the carriage, Bibb was anxious about her first ever audition. Not only that, today, November 11 was her birthday. She was now twenty-five years old and longed more than ever for the opportunity to perform.

The horses whinnied and the carriage stopped in front of Schieffelin Hall. Her ranch hand, a tall, middle-aged fatherly type, Mexican immigrant, with a full head of silver-black hair and alert dark eyes, hopped down from his seat and came around to open the door. A breeze rustled around



her as she stepped out. She pulled her white wool coat tighter, trying to shut out the cutting wind.

“Thank you, Casimiro. Don’t forget I’m hitching a ride back home with Shirley McNerny in her carriage,” she said in a raised voice as he climbed into the seat on top of the carriage.

For a brief passage of time, Bibb watched as the carriage rattled down the street. At the corner, Casimiro Cavallo steered the horses, turning the carriage, which disappeared from view.

Before she opened the door to go inside, a grizzled, scar-faced, fortyish man leaned up against the wall near the entrance, smoking a cigarette, was whistling at her. The high-ceilinged lobby was filled with six other people, a mix of men and women between the ages of twenty-one and forty-five, waiting to audition.

“Welcome. I’m William Cuddy, the manager of the company,” he greeted her with a smile.

His voice was low and husky. He asked her to put her name on a sign-in sheet. Her face flushed with eagerness as she wrote her name down. His eyes scanned her from top to bottom, pausing before he told her to read for the part of Cousin Hebe. He handed her three pages from the script of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and then explained she just needed to sing a few lines. Unprepared to read anything, much less sing, she moved to a quiet corner and perused the pages to get a sense of her scene.

Cuddy returned earlier than she had expected and signaled with a nod. “Bibb Tanner. Follow me, please.”

He checked off her name on the sign-in sheet and escorted her to the center of the stage. Transfixed in a daze of wonder, she noticed a slim, fair-haired man seated at a piano, flicking through sheet music at the side of the stage. Waiting for her cue to begin, she cast her eyes at the three troupe members, sitting in the second row. Here she was, ready to audition, breathing hard, the footlights shining up illuminating her chin.

A troupe member, in a bow-tie, frock coat and matching trousers, got up from his seat in the audience. He stopped in front of the stage. His stare made her nervous. He was in his late forties, with brown hair that had just a touch of gray at the temples.

“Good afternoon, Miss Tanner. I’ll be directing the show,” he said, rather dryly.

He asked her to tell him a little bit about herself, which she did. Then he asked her to read the lines.

“I’ll give it my best,” she replied with a smile.

Her voice was soft, and he felt every little sound across his nerves. A woman seated in the audience read the lines of the other characters in the scene. Bibb put emphasis on the words, and the director could tell she really wanted the part. Nonetheless, he stopped her mid-sentence.

“Could you speak louder, please?”

Her eyes locked on the director’s. She flubbed her next line. But she kept going, determined to make up for it until he stopped her again. He was studying her like something in a specimen jar. Her face grew stiff from smiling, while her insides began to quake. Then he directed her to sing.

After a quick look at the pianist, who smiled at her reassuringly, her nerves began to settle. The opening chords of the song were played. She sang the first verse, in a tone that was barely audible over the piano. Her lack of confidence showed. It was then that she questioned whether she had sang the lyrics correctly. She could carry a tune, but her voice wasn't strong. It trembled, wavering in places.

"Raise your voice, please!" the director interrupted.

This time she lifted her chin and belted out the next two verses until the director told her he'd heard enough.

"Thank you for your time, Miss Tanner," he said.

As she left the auditorium, she heard William Cuddy call out, "Annie Brown. Come with me, please."

Curiosity pricking her, Shirley McNerny, who had stepped into the lobby only minutes before, walked over to her to get the scoop on what happened. Bibb smiled politely as she wished her a happy birthday and handed her a wrapped present. Feeling emotionally exhausted, Bibb plunged into her embrace in one wild rush.

Ignoring the cold, they slowly walked with their arms around each other's shoulders to the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Bibb told her she had an awful feeling that she had failed the tryout. Apart from anything else, there was no way she was going to be cast. Very emphatically, Shirley told her to not be too hard on herself and to give herself credit for having the courage to try. Lastly, she suggested they ask Pidge Swafford what she thinks about it at tomorrow's luncheon at her house.

Pidge's absence didn't bother Bibb. Supposedly, she had duties on the ranch that she'd made a commitment to, but Bibb knew better. She knew how Pidge was consumed with her own arrogance.

Over lunch at the Maison Doree restaurant inside the hotel, she told Shirley she had decided to put her dreams of an acting career on hold. And that she wasn't jumping the gun. The thought made her sad. But she needed to think long and hard about her future.

## *Chapter 18*

### **GUNS WERE EVERYWHERE IN THE WILD WEST.**

To be clear, gun control laws were everywhere as well. In fact, the iconic gunfight outside the O.K. Corral between the Clanton-McLaury gang and John Henry Holliday and the Earp brothers had erupted as a result of a feud over the enforcement of Tombstone's Ordinance No. 9. But this didn't mean anything to Shirley McNerny. Neither did she know that her closest neighbor was a Tombstone lawman. Regardless, her dairy farm was well outside the city limits of Tombstone.

On this 12<sup>th</sup> day of November, just as the sun was rising, Shirley was about to start target-shooting at the rear of her farm. In the saddlebag hanging over her shoulder were two well-filled cartridge belts. To her right sat a small burlap sack full of tin cans. Six cans were lined up on the top rung

of the wooden fence that ran between the house and the barn.

For a few awkward moments, she was cradling her Winchester .44 caliber rifle like a safety blanket. She liked the feel of it against her body. The rifle was a good one which would fire seventeen rounds before reloading. That alone gave her far more firepower than she needed. Because she'd never shot at anything but cans, and the snakes and tarantulas that crept up on the cattle under her watch.

For her sixteenth birthday, her father had given her the rifle that he used for hunting, as he would have given it to the son he never had. But more than that, he wanted her to be able to protect herself. He had heard stories about the savage Apaches and how they killed and scalped people. Yet in all these years, the ranch hadn't been bothered by Apaches.

Although she was fairly attractive in a rough sort of way, her buck teeth were not becoming to her. No doubt, she was a raw Cowgirl, colorful, gun-toting, boot-wearing woman of the frontier. But she and her Cowgirl mates were a far cry from the "Cowboys," who were known outlaws, not only robbing stagecoaches, but also rustling livestock from ranches. And with all the cattle on her ranch, she was quite concerned with the constant threat of cattle rustling in the region. Moreover, with the unusually high turnover of sheriffs in Tombstone, it came down to the ranchers to protect themselves. Thankfully, to this day, her farm hadn't been a victim of rustling. She could hold her head up high

and proudly say that all of her precious cows and horses were accounted for.

Shirley lifted one eyelid and squinted against the bright sun of a new Arizona day. Then she raised the rifle, held it against her shoulder, and aimed with one eye closed. She placed her finger on the trigger and bang! The rifle went off. The bullet sliced through the can, but it didn't fall over.

She aimed at another can and fired. The tin can flew into the air and reflected sunlight as it dropped to the ground. Immediately after, she fired five more times, hitting the cans with all shots, watching them fall to the ground. Once more she set up a target of cans.

It was the little things, like target practice, that helped to relieve the stress of the day-to-day tasks of the farm. There was a lot involved in the taking care of livestock, and milking. Cows had to be milked twice every day, which started just before dawn, rain, or shine. The second milking was at sunset. At least, the two ranch hands did the grunt work, such as scrubbing down the barn floor, and removing cow manure and burying it in the soil. Everyone put in long hours.

Her father, Graham, made the day's deliveries single-handed. Each day, he was up at five in the morning and back by mid-afternoon. He had prided himself on being easy-going and friendly, when in fact he came across as best avoided outside the context of business. So, the talk around town was that he was grumpy. This was mostly because he didn't have time to gamble, which around here made him the odd man out.

The thrill quickly passed. Rifle clenched in her hands, she eased around the fence, stooped, and picked up the bullet-ridden cans. Then she called out to the young Mexican who was heading around the barn. He nodded his head and walked over to where she stood.

Her eyes softened as she turned the cans over to him for disposal. She felt nothing but pity for him. Seventeen-year-old Jaime Ciro had been orphaned when her father took a chance and hired him as a ranch hand four months ago. The poor boy had seen his parents killed and burned by Apaches.

“Muchos gracias, Jaime,” she said in a passable accent.

He barely nodded and took off. She shrugged at his response and slung the rifle over her back, leaving the saddlebag over a shoulder. Dusting off her hands on her ruffled skirt, she trotted haphazardly in her black boots to the stable to check on the horses.

Upon entering, the horses started moving around in their stalls. With one exception, however, she couldn't help but notice the only white horse was asleep with one hind leg cocked. *That was Sleepy for you*, she thought, and glanced at him with a half smirk on her face. That was what she called him. Sleepy. He was named after a dwarf from the Brothers Grimm fairy tale *Snow White*. The old horse's sleep cycle was disrupted; he slept in the daytime and was usually awake all night.

She stopped at a closet, opened the door, reached down, picked up the feed bag. Slowly, she sloped toward the first stall with a casual stride. The horses welcomed her visit,



nudging her for the caresses they had come to expect from her hand. She whispered their names with affection as she brushed their manes with her fingers and fed them. In these little moments she found pleasure in their company, and it helped the day go by faster.

The passage of time had crept up on her. She finished up quickly because she needed to get to the house. After all, it was Saturday. For the lunch for her Cowgirl friends to be ready, she had to start the preparations pretty early.

## *Chapter 19*

**A**ROUND ELEVEN A.M., BIBB TANNER'S SLOW moving, horse-drawn carriage was coming down the trail leading to Shirley McNerny's ranch house. The white carriage was drawn by a pair of beautiful brown horses with silky, floating hair, their bodies glistening in the sun.

At the sound of the soft thud of horses' hooves and carriage wheels, Shirley and Pidge came out of the house to greet her. Somehow, they ended up in a heated debate. Since arriving thirty minutes ago, Pidge had spent a good deal of time complaining to Shirley about her eavesdropping on an Indian girl selling milk at a store in Tombstone. The women were so busy with their discussion, they didn't notice Bibb step out of the carriage until the horses neighed and jostled one another.

Shirley put her hands on her hips and ceased to talk while Pidge turned her face toward the sound of the horses.

“Whoa, girls,” Bibb said as they looked in her direction.

Neither of them replied. Shirley had a quirky look as she relaxed her arms at her side. Pidge rubbed her hands fast to warm herself, obviously starting to feel the chill.

Bibb waved to Casimiro Cavallo in the driver’s seat as the carriage pulled away. It was whimsical to watch Bibb adjust her green wool coat with faux fur trim on the cuffs, lapels, and turned up collar to protect her classic cream dress from the dust the horses stirred on the path.

Pidge furrowed an eyebrow just as Bibb started to walk toward them. Of the three women, Pidge had the brains. But her venomous tongue often got in the way. So, she wasn’t the Cowgirl anyone would want to encounter.

“What’s all the fuss?” Bibb asked in a conspiratorial whisper.

“Took you long enough to get here,” Pidge snapped.

“Actually, I’m right on time. That’s not my fault that you got here early,” Bibb said matter-of-factly.

“Never mind what I said. We’ve got a serious problem with these Indian folks,” Pidge scolded, folding her arms tight across herself.

“Well, of course the Apache threat isn’t a hoax. What took you so long to notice?” Bibb asked with more sarcasm than she’d intended.

“Bibb dear, what Pidge meant to say was that some Indian girl is peddling almond milk to the stores in town,” Shirley interrupted.

As if from nowhere, Jaime Ciro suddenly was walking past them toward the barn. But only Shirley noticed.

Oddly, Shirley's eyes flicked toward him for a moment. "What on earth is he doing? I hope he's going to clean the barn."

Pidge whipped her head around to see him so fast that her hair, in an elaborate updo, shook loose, with a few strands falling on her face.

"What is almond milk?" Bibb asked cluelessly.

"For God's sake, Bibb. Milk made from almonds. You know nuts!" Pidge said, far more loudly and irately than she'd meant to.

Abruptly, Jaime stopped at the entrance to the barn, and in the instant that he did, he turned his head to look at them. Shirley waved at him and smiled, like all was fine.

"Hola, Jaime. Hablando con mis chicas. Just girl talk," Shirley shouted to him.

"Just girls talking," Pidge echoed to be sure he'd heard correctly.

A brief smile touched his lips masking the truth that he was often uncomfortable with the way she spoke Spanish to him. She had one of those voices that just sounded patronizing. As he turned his head forward, he stepped inside the barn and out of sight. He made a sour face, glad Shirley couldn't see his expression.

Mulling over the idea, Bibb rambled on, almost to herself. "I'm surprised to know you can make milk from nuts. That is so revolutionary — so innovative! Maybe, I'll give it a try. You have to roll with the times, Pidge."

Straight off the bat, Shirley started laughing, while Pidge looked at her with contempt. A cool breeze pushed

past them, and Shirley shivered in her brown dress. Now she too was wrapping her arms across her chest.

“I’m freezing. Let’s go inside. The lunch is getting cold,” Shirley said, and started for the door.

Pidge and Bibb looked at each other oddly for half a minute before they followed her into the house. Then they made themselves at home, taking seats around the oak dining-room table.

Once they began eating, Bibb had sworn she wouldn’t let Pidge rattle her. But less than fifteen minutes into their lunch, Bibb was losing her patience.

“She’s an Indian. Chances are she’s not going to make a lot of money,” Bibb said with restraint but emphasis.

Shirley heard Pidge gasp at her side and expected her to blow up, but she only rolled her eyes. Inside, Pidge was fuming slightly, but simply busied herself straightening her pale pink chiffon dress.

“I agree with what you said. I don’t see how one Indian girl can affect our milk businesses,” Shirley told Bibb.

While contemplating a response, Pidge put down her spoon, and sat back, unable to mask her annoyance at them.

In the silent interim, Bibb picked up her knife and began buttering a thick slice of bread. And Shirley poured herself a cup of tea from the little silver pot.

“Your Spanish has improved. Shirley, how did you do it?” Bibb asked, changing the conversation.

As Shirley set her teacup down, she blushed but didn’t get a chance to reply before Pidge started talking.

“No offense, Bibb. I’m not surprised by your reaction,” Pidge said to her, then turned to Shirley. “You are my partner in crime. I thought you would take my side in this. I felt sure that you would see the seriousness of the situation. Just don’t say later that I didn’t try to warn you,” Pidge said, and took a spoonful of French onion soup.

Confusion swept over Shirley as she asked, “Well, what do you want us to do about it?”

“This Indian girl is moving in on our customers. I mean, since when do Indians have the right to engage in business activities in these parts? We need to devise a plan to shut down her operations,” Pidge explained, in a haughty way.

Bibb scooted her chair closer to Pidge, scuffing the already well-scuffed hardwood floor. Then she leaned forward with a look that told Pidge she’d had a revelation.

“Perhaps you have a point. We should all be concerned about anyone meddling in our milk distribution business. I’m interested in knowing more about this Indian,” Bibb said, then helped herself to a mouthful of Irish stew.

“Count me in, too, but we must tread very carefully. I’m hesitant to cause trouble. I don’t want Apaches coming after me,” Shirley said, and downed the last of her tea.

Now Bibb looked at Shirley like she’d had a revelation and slouched in her direction. “I guess you have a point, too. We don’t know what this Indian girl is capable —”

Hastily Pidge interrupted her in mid-sentence, two red spots blazing in her white cheeks. “You’re getting ahead of yourself, Bibb. But if it comes down to that, I’ll tap into my Cowboy connections and show her a thing or two.”

For a moment she stared at Pidge, her rudely interrupted mouth still open, then quickly asked. “What’s her name and where can we find her?”

“I don’t remember her name. But I’ll point her out next time I see her when we’re in town,” Pidge said, and started gulping down her soup in large spoonfuls.

“Just great. All Indians look alike. It’ll take forever to find her,” said Bibb, shaking her head.

“We shouldn’t have any trouble finding a sixteen-year-old-looking Indian girl peddling her almond milk,” Pidge corrected her.

“We’re going into Tombstone?” Shirley asked in a surprised tone.

“If you’re lucky, you’ll see Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday and Sheriff Behan, just like I did last Monday,” Pidge said in a nonchalant manner.

“Tell us every little detail you’ve been keeping all to yourself the whole time you’ve been here,” Shirley demanded with an insistent note in her voice.

A smile graced Bibb’s face. She was thankful that the conversation had returned to more comfortable ground. And luckily for her, the conversation stayed light through the remainder of their afternoon together. Even Pidge wished her a happy belated birthday and gave her a present. And since Shirley hadn’t brought up yesterday’s audition, she decided not to mention it.

## *Chapter 20*

**I**T WAS A CHILLY TUESDAY MORNING, BRIGHT with sunlight. Randall Davis and his troop had eaten their rations an hour earlier to lighten their loads and were now riding their horses along a trail leading to Camp Huachuca. They were returning from a mission where they had guarded a train of canvas-covered wagons carrying food, supplies, and livestock to Tombstone.

First Lieutenant Davis led his troop in another direction. This route would pass near the Whetstone Mountains, southwest of Tombstone and north of the Huachuca Mountains. It wasn't so much of a short-cut, but pragmatic to their duties of patrolling the area. And at the pace they were going, they would arrive at the installation after nightfall.

It was late in the afternoon when the troop were about two miles north of the long-abandoned Camp Wallen.



Davis and his troop of eighteen men were alerted by the smell of smoldering meat and burning wood. There, in the distance, was a band of Apaches sky-lined on a path between the Paleozoic rocks of the Whetstone Mountains with a herd of ponies and cattle. They were a fierce-looking group with warpaint, most wearing fringed buckskin and armed with carbines.

As soon as Davis saw a savage raise his head, he stopped his horse. An Apache warrior, hunkered down on the far side of a boulder, had raised up and saw the soldiers riding headlong for the mouth of the trail in their direction. Despite the ongoing presence of military patrols in the region, the Apaches couldn't predict when and where they'd show up.

As a defensive measure, Davis signaled his troop to a halt and ordered them to raise their weapons. With that action, quickly the encounter had become misconstrued by the Apaches. Their minds were gripped with fear that they were about to be attacked.

All at once, the small band of Apache warriors came off their horses and ran for cover. The ponies took off running with the warriors, but the cattle didn't budge, looking more like statues than living animals. And three of their horses remained, looking confused. The Apaches ran in such haste that in a matter of seconds they were positioned behind boulders and rock outcroppings. Now they watched and waited.

The first lieutenant, not knowing what was up, motioned to his men, who then climbed down from their

mounts, grasping their Springfield rifles. The soldiers took cover as best they could. Their horses were clustered in a ragged line along the side of the Whetstone Mountains by two horse-holders.

They waited in silence for what seemed like an endless time. As more time passed, Davis and the men under his charge were anxious. Although, they had the advantage, outnumbering the Apaches by two to one.

One Apache abandoned his cover and eased slowly down the ridge of the mountain. The Indian came forward and stood now in plain sight, as if he, too, had grown restless. And that was when Davis saw him, just a glimpse as the Apache threw back his head and gave the Apache war cry.

In one quick motion, one of the Apaches raised his rifle from the crook of his arm and fired a shot that grazed a soldier's arm, barely scraping the skin as it whizzed by him. After that, chaos ensued. Davis ordered his troop to fire back, sending a barrage of bullets through the air. The slow-moving cattle rumbled away from the awful commotion.

It went back and forth like that until one of the Indians gave a war whoop of defiance from a high rock — an act that was welcomed with a bullet from a soldier's rifle that instantly killed him. Whereupon both sides ceased their firing.

An uncanny silence followed. This only made the mood among the soldiers darker, so much so that you couldn't even hear anyone breathe.

At this stage Davis assumed the eight Apaches were planning to take off, especially now that their livestock had run off frantically. After thinking further on the situation, obviously there had been a misunderstanding. If it was at all possible he wished to avoid any more bloodshed. He didn't see that he had any option other than to let them escape. Realistically, he countered that there was no choice but for the troop to remain in place, even if and when the Indians scattered in all directions. No orders were given to fire again.

Sure enough, two Apache warriors provided covering fire, while three Apaches rushed to their horses and galloped away in a hurry. The sound of stomping hooves replaced the gunshots that soon dissipated. The five remaining Apaches threaded their way on foot through the towering rocks.

First Lieutenant Randall Davis, along with the soldiers under his command, remained under cover for several minutes after the Apaches had gone. A little apprehensive, thinking it might be a trick, Davis sent an Indian scout to ascertain the facts. When the scout signaled to Davis that he and his men were safe to come out from cover, they found that all that remained were the ashes of a campfire and a couple carcasses of butchered cattle.

*It was a close call*, Davis thought, as they were back on their horses. As they continued on the trail to Camp Huachuca, he was relieved that no further fighting had occurred. Normally, the soldiers could have overpowered the Apaches in an instant, but he had also taken into

consideration that his men had been tired from their work leading wagons into Tombstone.

There was still danger for the troop. The Apaches would be out for blood. These were troubled times and blame was being passed around like hot coals, responsible or not. It was days like this that Davis knew the Apache threat was still a long way from being resolved.

## *Chapter 21*

**O**N NOVEMBER 28, 1881, ON A COLD MONDAY afternoon, the Cowgirls had just about given up searching the stores in Tombstone for the Indian girl. Just a few days ago, the Cowgirls had celebrated Thanksgiving, but they were not interested in breaking bread with this Indian. This was their third outing in two weeks, and Shirley McInerny finally decided to throw in the towel.

When they walked out of McKean & Knight, Shirley had a questionable look on her face. “We’ve searched this place twice. Does this girl even exist?”

The way Shirley ranted on and looked at Pidge when she’d asked that question made her feel like a fool. But Pidge didn’t get a chance to respond. The Indian girl was suddenly in front of her, strolling toward them. The Indian girl was walking up the boardwalk on the other side of Sixth Street with a jug cradled in her arms.

“Turn your frown upside down, Shirley. Two o’clock to my right,” Pidge said with a diabolical gleam in her eyes and stopped walking.

Shirley had stopped walking as well, and watched with some interest, as did Bibb, who for a brief moment felt a sense of compassion for the pleasant-looking girl.

“Come on, Bibb, snap out of it,” Pidge groaned and left.

“Where?” Bibb asked in a low voice, her head turning in all directions.

“Where do you think we’re going?” Shirley answered for Pidge as she followed her toward the Indian girl.

It was something Shirley often did. She liked to imitate Pidge’s voice and mimicked her personality so well. If they didn’t look different, Pidge conservatively dressed with her hair in a neat bun and Shirley simply dressed with her hair loose, you would not be able to tell one from the other. One thing was for certain — Shirley was Pidge’s minion cohort.

“What we’re doing right now. This isn’t a good idea,” Bibb said in a timid voice, her head cast down.

“Stop your whining, Bibb,” snarled Pidge, then called out to the Indian girl. “Hold on there, Miss.”

Stopping in her tracks, Sequoia jerked a startled look to the women coming toward her. Though she felt nervous inside, she smiled softly to them with the knowledge of her innocence shining bright as the low winter sun above.

“Hello,” Sequoia replied, looking timidly around her.

“I couldn’t help but notice you carrying that jug. Are you the girl that sells almond milk?” Pidge asked, feigning interest.

With a bright smile Sequoia replied, “Why, yes.”

“What’s your name?” Shirley interjected with a smirk as if she had one up on her.

“Sequoia. What are your names?” she asked in a kind voice.

“I’m Shirley McInerny. And next to me are Pidge Swafford and Bibb Tanner.”

“It’s nice to meet all of you. Would you like to trade for this jug of almond milk?” Sequoia asked naively, as she lifted up the jug.

“That’s downright brazen. Do you recognize our names?” Pidge asked Sequoia, then turned to Shirley and Bibb. “What do you think, girls? Are we interested in almond milk?”

“No!” Shirley growled, marching up to Sequoia and getting in her face. “Why would we buy almond milk when our dairy farms are the leading milk distributors in Tombstone? Good healthy milk from cows, not nuts.”

*How cruel was that?* Bibb asked in her thoughts.

Bibb’s heart wrenched at the sight of this weak Indian. Kind of ashamed by it all, she cast her eyes down, then shook her head for no. She was sort of playing along. But she didn’t feel good about it.

Sequoia didn’t say anything and furrowed her brows as she tried to sort out the situation. To say she was intimidated would have been an understatement.

“Well, there’s your answer. We’re not interested in anything Indians have to trade,” Pidge said as she crowded

her backward until she stepped off the wooden sidewalk and onto dusty Sixth Street.

To no surprise, Shirley burst out laughing at what she had said. When Pidge gave her an impatient look, she made a kind of snorting sound, which was her trying to muffle the laughter. Pidge elbowed Shirley in the ribs to silence her. In the midst of all that, Sequoia turned, the wind whipping tears from her eyes as she started walking away.

“Wait just a minute. Before you go, hand me that jug of almond milk. I have a proper place to put it,” Pidge instigated, speaking loudly.

Still, Sequoia kept walking with her eyes turned down humbly, paying no mind to what she was saying.

“Hey, we’re talking to you, you Indian girl!” Shirley hollered out.

Bibb saw that Shirley’s raised voice had attracted the attention of a shopkeeper sweeping dirt from the wood-plank sidewalk in front of the Soma Winery at Sixth Street on the north side of Allen Street. She was the only one who noticed he was looking their way. Feeling embarrassed, she opened a parasol to shade her sympathetic eyes, which turned to watch the wind swirling dust in spidery gyrations down Sixth Street.

For a fleeting moment, Sequoia glanced back at them sharply and continued walking without a reply. Surprising everyone, Pidge hurried over to Sequoia, holding up her off-white dress with rose velvet piping, visible through her open black wool coat, so she wouldn’t trip. Then she tried to grab the jug from Sequoia’s arms.



Bibb tilted her parasol away, and cast a stunned look at Shirley, who looked uneasy while the-tug-of-war was going on. Then Bibb shifted her gaze to Sequoia, who started moving in a circle. Feeling dizzy, Pidge lost her grip on the jug and fell backward, butt first into the round, iron horse trough full to the brim with brackish water in front of the Tombstone jail. The jug fell to the ground with a thud, shattering on impact and spraying milk on Sequoia's fringed buckskin skirt and moccasins.

Automatically, Sequoia laughed briefly at the sight of a soaking wet Pidge, then her eyes fell on the broken jug lying on the ground. Bibb found the sight amusing, too and had to restrain herself from laughing out loud. She turned away and tucked her parasol under her arm.

“Are you girls just going to stand there? Don't let that Indian get away!” Pidge yelled as she struggled to get to her feet.

Frantically, Bibb rushed over to Pidge, reached under her arms, and pulled her out of the iron tub. In heated anger, Shirley started walking toward Sequoia.

The drenched Pidge moved her wet hair from her face, looked Sequoia up and down with deliberate scorn, and screamed, “Get her, Shirley!”

In a frenzy of panic, Sequoia headed for the three horses tied to the hitch rack in front of a nearby building. She had to get away from these women, as far as possible. Clumsily, she removed the bridle reins of a white mare with a leather saddle on her back from the hitch rack. And the horse just so happened to belong to Pidge. Without any hesitation, she

climbed onto the horse's back and reined the horse away from the hitch rack.

"Shirley stop her. She's got Maybelline!" Pidge shouted with a flabbergasted look on her face.

The commotion caused Pidge's horse to spook and bolt forward, blocking Shirley's path. She twisted, reaching for the reins in Sequoia's hands. The horse snorted and turned, her butt bumping into Shirley's back, knocking her to the ground. In the next second the horse took off as if it had been jabbed with a lance, leaving a trail of dust behind.

Steaming mad, eyes wild, Pidge had watched it all in horror. Meanwhile, Bibb had begun to wring the water from Pidge's coat and dress.

"This is outrageous! That Indian girl made a fool of us and stole my horse. Let's go to the sheriff's office," Pidge complained, her breath emerged in wispy white puffs, and she shivered.

Dazed and confused, Shirley was sprawled in the dirt. Her lace-trimmed lilac dress was covered in dirt, and dark gray wool coat had ripped loose at the armpits. She lifted her dust-covered face from the ground. Sequoia's brown shawl flew through the air, wrapping itself around Shirley's head, blinding her.

"Her name was Sequoia," Bibb said, as if mesmerized.

Pidge just looked at her, as if saying, *Could you be any dumber?*

Bibb cast her eyes down submissively. She thought Pidge had gotten what she deserved. But she had done her best not to let her true feelings be known.

## Chapter 22

**T**HE RUSH OF WARM AIR THAT GREETED PIDGE Swafford as she pushed through the door into the deputy sheriff's office was a relief. Even if there was sun, it was chilly in the daytime and bitterly cold at night, it being November and all. It didn't help that she was soaking wet and shivering.

At the sound of boots scuffing the floor, Deputy Sheriff Clancy Barton looked up from his reading. He quickly cast a glance at his undersheriff Burton Avery, who was dozing in his chair at his desk. From day to day Avery saw to the visitors to decide what should be brought to his attention. He sighed, folded up his *Tombstone Epitaph* newspaper and slammed it down on the desk.

Avery startled out of his nap, almost falling from his chair as he opened his eyes to the sight of three women standing in front of his desk.

“Are you going to say something or just stare at us,” Pidge asked with a questioning look, her dress and coat dripping water onto the floor, a pool around her sturdy lace-up boots.

Ignoring what she’d asked, Avery bolted out of his chair and sized Shirley up — big eyes bulging out of their sockets. “You’re that lady that’s been shooting off her rifle in the early morning hours.”

“How do you know what I do in my spare time?” Shirley asked in a defensive tone.

“I live in a house in the Babocomari Valley near your farm. My wife doesn’t take kindly to the sound of a rifle firing so early in the morning. She’s been hounding me to ask you to stop. Since you’re here, you saved me a trip,” he told Shirley.

“Yeah, well, okay,” Shirley said in a meek voice.

Pidge raised her eyebrows at him. “That’s not why we’re here!”

“How may I help you women?” Avery asked, smiling broadly.

“I demand to speak to the sheriff in charge here. I have a complaint to lodge,” Pidge said in a quivering voice.

The undersheriff stepped back from them, suddenly speechless, twitching his handlebar mustache. From his desk on the other side of the room, the deputy sheriff figured he should intervene. Barton pushed the newspaper on his desk aside, and strolled over to the women.

In a gesture of kindness, Shirley, cradling Sequoia's shawl in her arms, placed it over Pidge's shoulders, to keep her warm. And in turn, Pidge gave her a scathing look. She opened her mouth to protest, but before she could say anything to Shirley, Barton distracted her by talking.

"Welcome ladies. I'm Deputy Sheriff Clancy Barton of the good town of Tombstone. What brings you here?"

The Cowgirls moved their heads at the same time and gazed at him. They sized him up. Dressed in a fine, dark brown pin-striped suit with a deputy sheriff star pinned to his lapel and a revolver holstered on his hip, his eyes were filled with nothing beyond professional interest.

"An Apache just stole my horse!" Pidge said, breaking the silence.

"Come on over to my desk and you can file a report," Barton said with a slight nod of his head.

Irritatingly, Pidge flung the shawl to the floor and followed him. She folded her arms around her chest as she watched him take a seat behind the desk. Then she perched on the corner of his desk, looking down at him, and calmly explained the events of the past few hours.

Other than Avery, nobody seemed to notice that Bibb had slumped into a chair across from Clancy Barton's desk. She kept quiet, obviously trying to remove herself from the situation. When she caught the undersheriff eyeing her, she averted her gaze. Perhaps, too, her beige dress printed with tiny pink and yellow flowers, bodice and waist snug-fitting, looked rather dainty paired with her white wool coat. Here and there, he flashed her a smile as

he didn't appear to care if she caught him looking. So, she felt moved to bat her eyelashes in his direction.

"This shawl belongs to the Apache girl who stole her horse," Shirley interrupted, holding the shawl out.

He called over Avery, who in turn snatched the shawl out of Shirley's hand.

"What am I going to do with this?" Avery asked, quizzically.

"Bag it as evidence and store it somewhere. It may help us identify this Apache," Barton said, in a common-sense voice.

"Good point," Avery said goofily as he carried the shawl to his desk.

The undersheriff was quick about wrapping the shawl in brown paper, but very neat — like he was wrapping a present. Subsequently, he opened a desk drawer and put it away, shutting the drawer.

Pidge continued, her statement matter-of-fact, but delivered with emotion to make her story seem more convincing. "My horse is like a member of the family. The name's Maybelline. She's a beautiful white mare in her prime."

Shirley rushed up to her and comforted her with a hug. "There, there. It's alright Pidge."

Seeing them like that, Bibb rolled her eyes, knowing Pidge was being overdramatic. About everything. Barton noticed Bibb did it sarcastically. But when Bibb saw him looking at her, she shrugged off the look and gave him a confused look as if she were clueless. Still, there wasn't

any way the deputy sheriff could shrug off the suspicious thoughts that were fogging up his mind.

After the longer than normal hug, they separated. Now Shirley's dress was wet, as well. And dirt was on Pidge's dress. They were both a mess.

Deputy Sheriff Barton read over the report and then frowned. "Let me get this straight. An Apache named Sequoia pushed you into a water trough, and took off with your horse for no apparent reason?"

"Yes. That's exactly what happened," Pidge answered with conviction.

Next, he turned to Shirley. "And you claim you were pushed to the ground by Sequoia as she made her way to Pidge's horse."

"That's correct," Shirley said simply.

And now the deputy sheriff turned his eyes to Bibb, who was staring off into space and completely oblivious to what was going on around her. "What about you, miss? Do you have anything to add that Miss Swafford did not address?"

"She sure does. She is a witness to the offence," Pidge answered on her behalf.

Barton looked at Pidge with irritation. The problem was that her story seemed so far-fetched. It baffled his mind. Something in his gut told him there was something vital that she had deliberately left out. The only way they could know her name was to know who she was. They would have had to have talked to Sequoia. There had to be a reason she stole the horse because it was unusual for women to steal horses. Either way, he was going to get to the bottom of it.

“My name is Bibb Tanner,” she said, catching the deputy sheriff’s attention. “I’m also a dairy farmer, providing milk to the city of Tombstone. Things happened the way Pidge and Shirley told you they happened.”

Feeling guilty, Bibb sank lower and lower in the chair. She wasn’t happy with herself for backing them up. While at the same time she couldn’t be loyal to some Indian she didn’t know personally.

“Very well then, ladies. I’ll try and get your horse back, Miss Swafford,” Barton reassured them, and looked away, silently telling them the meeting was over.

Undersheriff Avery was quick to notice and stood from his chair. “Let me escort you all to the door.”

A vague look of surprise came over Pidge’s face, who was doing her best to mask the fact that her shoulder blades were itching under her tightly laced corset. And the eagerness with which Avery had said that surprised even him. Hence, Shirley shot him a questioning glance. All the same, Bibb stood up, ready to leave, the handle of her small, striped parasol protruding from her coat pocket like a sore thumb.



## *Chapter 23*

**DURING THE WHOLE TIME THAT THE COWGIRLS** had been at Deputy Sheriff Barton's office, Sequoia had reached the hitching post in back of the Can-Can restaurant on Allen Street in Hop Town, where her horse was tied. To add to the mix in Tombstone, over three hundred Chinese immigrants occupied this area between Second and Third Streets, comprising one square block of dividing back alleys. Hop was a slang word for opium, as this section called Hop Town was the main supplier of the drug to the women of the red light district. It was there too, that the Asians ran gambling houses and laundromats.

Sequoia had dismounted and nudged Pidge's horse in a direction toward Sixth Street. But Maybelline wouldn't budge. The mare just stared at her, ears pricked.

"Go. Get out of here," she had said.

Finally, she had slapped Maybelline on the butt, and the horse grunted and moved away. She started with a gallop, stopping again to look back in puzzlement. Frustratingly, Sequoia shooed her with her hand. So, the horse turned and ambled away down Allen Street.

Presently, Sequoia rode her horse toward the Cherokee encampment, all her fears rushing toward her like an Arizona dust storm. Mostly she wondered what the penalty was for stealing a horse. She could only hope the horse had enough sense to find its way back to its owner. The only thing she did know was that she needed her mother's strength right now.

Her thoughts were still a jumbled mess as she reined in, dismounted and tethered Yogesh. He snickered, and she raised her hand and gently touched his shoulder. She then cooed softly to the stallion.

Warily, she scuttled off to find her mother, weaving her way through the teepees. Movement caught her eye and she skidded to a stop as she saw her mother carrying a roll of blankets.

"Mother. It's just awful," Sequoia cried out, rushing toward her.

Chenoa saw her, stepped inside the teepee, put away the blankets and exited quickly. "What is it, my dear?"

"These women, they ... they ..." Sequoia couldn't finish the sentence.

Her motherly instinct kicked in — hard — and Chenoa sprang forward and clasped her in her arms. Sequoia let her

mother embrace her, and then withdrawing herself stood silently before her with tears falling from her eyes.

“What women? What’s happened?” Chenoa demanded in a concerned voice.

In a burst of emotion, Sequoia told her about the day’s events. Her voice was shaky as she conveyed the situation. So traumatized, as she spoke, she kept her eyes on a nearby teepee, as though her mother wasn’t standing there.

“These bullying women were after me not only because I was Indian, but because I was selling milk different than milk produced from cows. They claimed to be dairy farmers and told me their names. But I can’t remember them. Things were happening so fast that I didn’t have time to think,” she finished with an angry shake of her head.

“They believe you are Apache. They think you have no rights to trade. The settlers are afraid of us Indians. And afraid of Geronimo, who is somewhere out there. Now we are all being treated unfairly for all the cruelty and mistreatment done to the settlers by the Apaches,” Chenoa said, then turned, her back facing her daughter. “Still, you took a horse that wasn’t yours. That is my greatest worry.”

It was a dilemma, and one that had taken Chenoa completely by surprise. It was at times like these that she questioned her life. But at least she now had other worries to compete with her concern about her daughter dealing with the loss of her beloved Dakota.

“What am I going to do? Those women know my name and my face. They could report me for taking the horse at any time,” Sequoia said, shaking from the whipping wind.

“I will go tell Chief Nahele what happened. Stay in the teepee until I return,” Chenoa said, and hurried away.

A thousand emotions were running through Chenoa’s mind. She took a couple of deep breaths as she walked to where she hoped to find Chief Nahele. From the time her husband had died, he’d been her refuge, her comfort. So much had happened during the past few years, so many extraordinary events had come to pass, that somehow she felt she had grown to depend on Chief Nahele’s strength.

Her head tilted, lost in thought. One evening back in Oklahoma, her husband Kanadi had ridden his horse out alone in a fruitless attempt to find some cattle that had strayed away. When he hadn’t returned at a reasonable hour, she had gotten worried. A little later on, she was even more worried when his horse wandered back into the settlement on its own. So, she sent warriors out to look for him. Another hour passed, and the warriors brought him back, unconscious. Evidently, he’d fallen, or been thrown from his horse, and his head came in contact with a rock. It was simply an accident.

The pain stuck with her for a long time after Kanadi died. She cried every time she was alone. At least, she didn’t cry in front of Sequoia because she had wanted to be strong for her daughter. At some point, she had sought counsel from Chief Nahele. One thing led to another, and she developed quite an endearing relationship with him.

Since losing her father, things hadn’t been easy for Sequoia either. It seemed she was more vulnerable. That was until Dakota had asked her to marry him. The timing

couldn't have been any better. A strong male to care for her was what her daughter was missing in her life. But their marriage wasn't to be. Now her daughter was facing another problem, which was perhaps even bigger.

As Chenoa went around some teepees, she saw Chief Nahele conversing with Soaring Eagle. Her worries were immediately shoved aside, replaced with a sense of hope.

## *Chapter 24*

**F**ROM THE STARRY LOOK IN HIS EYES IT WAS obvious Undersheriff Burton Avery was smitten with Bibb Tanner. He was still staring out the window of the deputy's sheriff's office long after the women had disappeared around a corner. Grinning a little to himself, he just stood there fixated, looking mesmerized as if in a trance.

“That Bibb sure is a looker,” he finally said as he turned away from the window.

Seated at his desk, Deputy Sheriff Barton rolled his eyes at the comment. Truth be told, he was an unhappily married man who had no time for romance, especially not with his wife. It seemed so long ago that he'd been in love with his wife, that he'd fallen into a routine of work, occasional drink, and chores at home. With a little girl at home, he often shied away from unmasculine activities.

“Is that all you’ve got to say?” Barton asked with a tone of impatience.

The wrinkles on Avery’s weathered face stretched into a smile. “I’m married, but I’m not dead.”

Looking toward him and still brandishing an impatient look on his face, Barton stood up and reached for his coat and Stetson. “Never mind. I’m going to look at the so-called crime scene. Just stay put and tend to your duties. I won’t be gone long.”

The deputy sheriff left the office, walking toward Sixth Street. The minute he got there, he stopped at the rack where Pidge’s horse had been tied, and after visited the watering trough. Casually he bent over the trough, inspecting it and noticing the water on the ground all around it. But his eyes caught sight of a broken, unglazed clay jug with a milk-like substance around it on the street.

As he stood there, thinking of the incident that had occurred, he heard the sound of a horse galloping behind him. He turned his head, squinting into the wind, and saw a lone horse, bearing a saddle, approaching at no mean pace. The white mare with a patch of brown above her nose flicked her tail several times and began moving her head from side to side as if looking for someone. Could that be Pidge Swafford’s horse? he questioned himself.

Cautiously, he walked over to the horse, which pinned her ears back, pawed the ground, and took a few nervous steps back. He talked softly to the horse, calming her.

“Are you lost, girl?” he asked and patted her on the forehead.

The horse heaved up a heavy a sigh, apparently thirsty. He led the horse to the watering trough. The horse drank deeply and snuffled and blew onto the water.

“Maybelline, is that you?” he asked the horse.

The mare slowly lifted its head from drinking the water to turn and stare at him. As if in acknowledgement of his words, she nodded her head up and down vigorously and let out a snort.

Since the horse had been found and the mysterious Apache girl nowhere to be seen, there were more questions and fewer answers. For about a minute, he entertained the possibility the horse might never have been stolen. He searched his brain for a possible reason that might sink to the core of the matter and prevent it from seeming like a squabble between women, but he found none. Still, he couldn't ignore the fact that the serious charge of stealing a horse had been made against an Apache. What were the chances he would find that Indian?

There was no time to dawdle. The first thing he would have to do was return the horse to Pidge Swafford. The sooner he did that, the sooner he might be able to permanently table the complaint. By all accounts it appeared to be a misunderstanding. Which meant it was a no harm no foul kind of situation and he didn't have to worry about it.

Outside the deputy's sheriff's office, he tied the horse's reins to the hitching rail. He came through the door to find Avery mopping up the trail of water Pidge Swafford's wet clothes had left on the floor.



Avery glanced out the window and saw the horse outside. “Is that the horse that was stolen from Miss Swafford?”

“I’m pretty certain it is. Not exactly sure how she came trotting down Sixth Street, probably out of instinct. What became of the horse thief remains a mystery,” Barton told him.

“Oh, that’s just swell! I hope that Bibb comes with Pidge to collect it, which ...,” Avery said enthusiastically.

Almost off the bat, the undersheriff shook off the thought, and a disappointed look came on his face.

“Go on. You were saying?”

“That is, unless you plan on delivering the horse to Miss Pidge yourself,” Avery said with his ears pricked.

“You are right. I’ll be taking this horse back to Miss Swafford. In fact, I’m leaving now,” Barton said and doffed his Stetson with a nod at him.

“Aw, shucks,” Avery said and went to put the mop away.

Over two hours had passed by the time Deputy Sheriff Barton was approaching the Swafford Ranch. The whole time, he had ridden his horse at a moderate pace, allowing Maybelline to jog behind on a lead rope.

In the still afternoon air, Pidge Swafford clearly heard the approach of the galloping horses from inside her house. She peeked out the living room window. Even in the distance, she recognized the animal. After slipping on her coat over her white dress lined with peach lace, she

walked out the front door and waited outside to greet the deputy sheriff.

“Maybelline! My baby is home!” she yelled in delight.

The dark stallion Barton sat atop, gleaming lightly with its coat in the sun’s rays, bobbed his head. Then he trotted up to meet the woman running toward him. He was a big horse, deep chested and long-legged. While Maybelline snorted and stomped at the sight of Pidge. The deputy sheriff noticed her appearance was far different. She had cleaned herself up and changed into a fresh dress, which was visible through her open red wool coat. Her thick hair was styled up on top of her head.

“Greetings, Miss Swafford,” Barton said with a curt nod from atop his huge stallion.

Pidge was already patting Maybelline’s forehead and running her fingers through her mane, consoling her. “Rest your fears. Your home now.”

He got off his stallion and casually pried one of her hands open, laid the reins to Maybelline in her palm.

“How did you find her?” she asked and checked the saddle on her horse.

For a few beats he stared at her suspiciously before coldly motioning for her to move aside and, in one swift move, he got on his horse. His body and the horse’s seemed to blend as one, since his pin-striped trousers and the horse’s coat were both dark brown.

“I’ll tell you quick,” he remarked, “because I’d like to get back to town before dark sets in. While I was checking out the scene of the incident on Sixth Street, your precious

Maybelline came trotting over. She looked more like a lost horse, not a stolen one.”

Clancy Barton smiled cunningly. He had especially emphasized that last line — which was a test to see her reaction. But it seemed she ignored what he’d said. Not only did he notice, but he was also irritated that she was still fussing over her horse, petting her excessively. The horse’s ears pricked up each time Pidge spoke her name.

“Thank you for bringing her back. Perhaps that Apache abandoned her. Or for all we know, Maybelline might have thrown the Apache girl from the saddle in some sort of fright. As luck would have it, good ole Maybelline was wise enough to return to the last place she’d been,” she said, turning to face him, a stern look in her eye.

Now it appeared as though she’d heard him. She cocked an ear toward him, her eyebrow kinked.

“Well, can we consider the matter resolved, then?” he asked, his words slightly hesitant, eyes half-squinting in the fading sunlight.

“This matter can’t be resolved until you find that Apache and punish her for stealing my horse,” she said, giving him a look, he could only interpret was meant to turn him to stone.

“Whatever you say, Miss Swafford. The next time you’re in Tombstone, try to keep an eye on your horse,” he said gruffly, tipped his Stetson in farewell, yanked the reins, and rode off.

## *Chapter 25*

**T**HE SUNLIGHT WAS BEGINNING TO FADE AS Chief Nahele rode his horse into camp. After learning what had happened from Chenoa, he had gone to Tombstone to do a little snooping around. He was hoping he would overhear what people were saying around town about the incident. There were few people on the streets. And he was reluctant to say anything to anyone. Ultimately, he came up empty-handed. But what he did find were the shattered remains of the almond milk-jug on Sixth Street.

Right now, his head was too full of thoughts about the incident that had occurred between Sequoia and some women in town. If arrested, Sequoia could be jailed or hanged. But in fact, few arrests had been made on charges of horse theft in Tombstone's history. Still, he worried.

Chenoa had the fire going. She sank to her knees onto a buckskin mat, cutting up potatoes and carrots she tossed into the iron kettle slung over the fire ring. A dozen feet

away, Sequoia was sitting cross-legged outside a teepee watching her and felt lost. It was cold, and she had her deerskin poncho huddled around her shoulders. She felt like she had caused her people unnecessary trouble, eyes puffy from crying. Chenoa looked toward the teepee. Seeing her daughter's distress made her feel every bit of her anguish and she couldn't help but empathize with her.

A red-tailed hawk circled lazily overhead; his wings spread wide. He banked sharply and soared past Chenoa's head, screeching as it went, startling her into alertness. She gasped, ducked involuntarily. The bird floated gracefully using the updraft of the wind current to gain height and disappeared into the falling darkness.

Chief Nahele suddenly appeared at her side, almost making her jump. "Greetings Chenoa."

"What news do you bring?" she asked and wiped her fingers on her buckskin skirt.

"I have nothing to report," he said in a sullen tone. "I was not able to find out if the horse trotted back to its owner before the theft could be reported."

She spared a swift look, nodded her head in Sequoia's direction and lowered her voice conspiratorially. "What am I to tell Sequoia?"

Chief Nahele drew her aside, speaking in a low voice. "I've come to a decision. It's unfortunate, but she can't go into Tombstone anymore. She'll have to be confined to the encampment for an indefinite period of time. We need to allow time for the incident to be forgotten by the parties involved."

Her eyes drifted nowhere in particular. "I don't like it, but I understand. What's even worse is that she suffer the same fate as that of a common horse thief. I think the Apaches and Geronimo are right about fleeing to Mexico for peaceful living. By now they've created a sanctuary for themselves somewhere between Chihuahua and the Sierra Madre Occidental western mountain range. I wish we could go to Mexico right now."

He stared blankly into the flames of the fire. "It may be of little comfort to you to remember that your daughter isn't Apache. These women know her name, but they'll be looking for an Apache girl. In light of this, there is a good chance the incident will pass by and soon be forgotten. Then and only then, will be the right time for us to travel to Mexico."

"I hope so, for Sequoia's sake. First the senseless murder of Dakota, and now this. I can't stand to see her crying like this," she said, looking directly in his eyes.

"I agree, but there's nothing more I can do at this time. Tell Sequoia to be patient," he said, his voice on the edge of a whisper.

"I'll tell her," she said with a sad sigh.

Chief Nahele gave her a sympathetic look as he watched her walk over to Sequoia. He was the embodiment of peace, strength, and wisdom, making decisions for his people. More than anything, he wished there was something he could do for them. This stemmed from the fact that he had developed strong feelings for Chenoa during their time in Arizona.

There came a sudden chilly wind, which shook him out of his reverie. He narrowed his eyes as he turned and left with one thought on his mind. He could only hope he was right in assuming that the incident involving Sequoia and those women would soon be nothing more than a distant memory.

After a few words, Chenoa took her daughter by the hand and led her to sit beside her near the fire. For the next twenty minutes she told her about the conversation she'd just had with the White Chief. Sequoia wasn't happy with his decision, but she would comply, nonetheless.

Later on that evening, after eating a small portion of her meal, Sequoia excused herself and went in the direction of her teepee. After all that had happened that day, her appetite just wasn't there.

"Sequoia, wait up."

It was Cholo, trotting up behind her. In the dark, all she could see were his eyes, looking at her and glittering like a wolf. She stopped walking and gave him her undivided attention.

"I heard about what happened earlier," he said. "With those women in Tombstone. First Dakota, and now you. Are you managing all right?"

"I'm moseying along as best I can," she said, in a timid voice that he hadn't heard before.

She was gazing at him with eyes that were now clouded in doubt. Seeing her that way made him deeply upset. In that moment, he wondered if leaving Oklahoma had been a mistake. His emotions were overwhelming him: a seething

mixture of rage, frustration, and revenge. He felt like he needed to run off somewhere far away where he would be able to shake off all those thoughts.

“Come and find me if you need any help,” he said with emotion, then turned and hurried away.

With a look of confusion on her face she watched the darkness absorb him until all that was left of him was the faint sound of his footsteps.



## *Chapter 26*

**I**N HAFFORD'S SALOON, ON THE CORNER OF Fourth and Allen Streets, sat Clancy Barton alone with his thoughts. It was 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, November 29 and the deputy sheriff was off duty. He was sulking, there was no doubt about it. Earlier that day, Justice Wells Spicer ordered the release of the Earp brothers and Doc Holliday, absolving them of all blame. Spicer claimed the evidence provided by the prosecution at the hearing wasn't enough to support a murder charge. Because of this verdict, Ike Clanton was upset, and Tombstone was in jeopardy of Cowboy retribution. Alongside all that, the alleged horse theft perpetrated by an Apache was still fresh on his mind. He hadn't seen Pidge Swafford since yesterday, but he knew she wasn't going to let it go.

“What can I get for you?” the barkeep asked, drawing him from his thoughts.

“Coffee. That’s my usual poison, Wendell,” Barton said with a little spark in his voice.

Wendell, dressed sharply in a white dress shirt under a dark gray vest and trousers, passed him a tin mug of steaming coffee. He stared at the lawman for a little longer, and then turned and wiped his hands on the white rag he pulled off his shoulder. Once again, he turned back to cast a glance at the deputy sheriff as he started to wipe the inside of a shot glass with the rag.

“Today’s verdict is obviously on your mind,” Wendell said casually.

With a displeased look, Barton just nodded at him.

“Maybe I can take your mind off of it for a little while. Do you remember that night in October, when a courier galloped down a Tombstone street shouting ‘Geronimo is coming!’ and the mines sounded their alarm whistles?” Wendell asked, chuckling to himself.

“Yes, I do. At the time I was in my house. Why did you bring that up?” Barton asked with a raised eyebrow and a sip from the mug.

Outside, on Allen Street, the solid iron-rimmed wheels of an ore wagon, hauling loads of silver ore to the stamp mills on the San Pedro River, creaked by. Behind the wagon came a buckboard, which was empty apart from eight large, wooden crates of wine in the back, rumbling down the dirt street. The shopkeeper of the Soma Winery was at the helm. The buckboard rolled to a halt near two saddled horses tied to the hitch rail in front of the saloon. He jumped from his seat, draped his horse’s reins over the rail, stomped his

boots on the wooden sidewalk out front, and entered the saloon.

The barkeeper started to talk, but then nodded in the direction of a man who was walking toward him, so he mumbled as he came out from behind the bar. "I'll get back to you."

A short time later, the barkeeper returned with the shopkeeper and set a couple of crates of wine down in front of the bar. With the men shuttling back and forth, bringing in the rest of the crates, Barton felt he'd been left hanging. He sipped his coffee while waiting for what Wendell was going to say next.

Within moments of the shopkeeper taking a seat at the bar, the barkeep slapped the white rag he had in his hand over his shoulder and continued his conversation with the deputy sheriff. "I was wondering if you had any new information on our conflict with the Apaches. What's the chance of catching Geronimo?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but part of the conflict has been instigated by us settlers," the shopkeeper added, not giving Barton a chance to respond.

"Can you elaborate on that, Hank?" Wendell asked.

Hank exchanged an awkward glance with the deputy sheriff before he answered. "Why, just yesterday I saw a couple of women harassing some unfortunate Indian on Sixth Street."

With sudden certainty, Barton knew he'd seen the altercation between Pidge Swafford and the Apache, known

as Sequoia. But rather than press Hank, he got more comfortable on the stool, ready to hear it all.

“Tell us more about it,” Barton said, as he took the last sip from his coffee mug and set it down on the counter.

“Well, I was sweeping at the time. Two women were bickering loudly. One of the women grabbed hold of a jug in this Indian girl’s arms. Before you knew it, they were in a tug-of-war over the jug. One thing progressed to another, and the woman fell into a watering trough. Soon afterward another woman went after the Indian, who then mounted a white horse and rode away. With all that commotion going on, you would think other people would have shown up to see that, but it was cold and windy,” he said, and loosened up his black wool coat as the bartender slid him a drink.

Now Barton knew it. There was a long silence as he pondered how to respond to him. His gut instinct had been right. Pidge Swafford had lied to him. This could be trouble. So he needed to be careful how he handled it.

“Have you mentioned this to anyone else?” Barton asked lightly.

“No. Just you two. It escaped my mind until the mention of the Apaches. Don’t get me wrong. I don’t sympathize with the Apaches, who have done some bad things over the years. But that bullying behavior by those women rather instigates the Apaches more and more to dislike us, which could lead to more trouble,” Hank said, and took a swig of his sarsaparilla.

“You surely have a point. In an effort to ease the tensions, I’d prefer you not mention this to anyone else. It’s

best that this minor squabble among the women be all but forgotten,” Barton said in an official-sounding drone.

“Advice from a lawman. How can I refuse? I will give you my word not to speak about it again,” he said in a whimsical tone and set down his glass, sliding off the stool. “I’ll be going now, Wendell — I’ve got more deliveries to make.”

The barkeep nodded, and with one last glance at Hank, he scooped the empty glass. “See you next week.”

The deputy sheriff needed to sort out his thoughts, get some perspective on the whole incident. It sure did make him mad, knowing there had been an altercation of some kind, one that perhaps had to do with the broken jug he’d seen on the street. Why? He couldn’t understand it! His only inclination was to bury the matter. Still, he had to wonder what if anything Pidge Swafford was going to do next.

“Would you like another coffee?” Wendell asked.

“No. I think I’ll just take one of those cigars, before I go” Barton said as he stood to leave.

## *Chapter 27*

**O**N THE AFTERNOON OF THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, a couple of days since Magistrate Spicer's verdict, a bunch of Cowboys were hurraing the town. They rode their horses through the streets, firing their Henry rifles in the air, and shot out the windows of many businesses. Predictably, the Cowboy faction was infuriated by the verdict.

It seemed as if, in the blink of an eye, Tombstone had turned into an even more dangerous place than it had been already.

An hour or so later, First Lieutenant Randall Davis and his troop were sent to Tombstone to suppress the Cowboy rebellion and restore order. The soldiers were making their way through the crowds of miners thronging the streets. Out on patrol, Davis expected this to be just one more peacekeeping mission. Quite suddenly he noticed that the

usual gridlock of ore wagons seen grinding their way to the stamp mills between Charleston and Contention City for processing were absent. Surely that had to be a direct result of the menacing actions of the Cowboys.

A cool desert breeze blew through the streets as the temperature was decreasing. Shadows closed in on the soldiers as the sun was shifting into the golden hues of late afternoon.

The Alhambra Saloon on Allen Street was carrying on a brisk business. Willard McKenna and a number of other men were drinking at the bar. A short, slender man sporting a white button-down dress shirt, bow tie, and handlebar mustache was behind the bar.

“Gimme another whiskey,” McKenna quietly said.

The barkeep put a shot of forty-rod whiskey in front of him. A morose McKenna knocked back his third shot since he'd gotten there. The air, filled with cigar and cigarette smoke and the pungent scents of beer and whiskey lingering in a haze, was causing his blue eyes to mist over. He placed the empty glass on the meticulously clean countertop and dabbed at the corner of his eyes with a white handkerchief.

From the corner of his eye he peered across the room, first at the two oil paintings of thoroughbred horses on the wall, then at the faro table in a dark corner of the saloon. A dozen men, who looked like hardrock miners, were positioned around the table. A steely-eyed, unshaved, middle-aged man with reddish-blond hair and mustache and wearing a gray frock coat was running the table.

McKenna had no interest in gambling and was growing increasingly drunk. The longer he stayed drunk, the more moody he got. Not a moment too soon, he turned to greet the three Cowboys who'd joined him at the bar.

It wasn't long after that he was all charged up inside and began whooping it up, laughing and carrying on with his mates. But things turned ugly when he started ranting about Spicer's judicial decision closing the preliminary hearing, inciting his roistering Cowboy companions.

"That Wyatt Earp is a marked man," McKenna said hoarsely, but with a hint of amusement.

And now, almost chaotically, he rose up from his chair and stood slightly unsteadily in his boots. He slipped his hand under the black coat he was wearing over his beige woolen shirt tucked into a pair of doeskin trousers. With blinding speed, he unholstered his pearl handled six-shooter, aimed at the saloon's rear corner and pretended to fire.

"Now hand that gun over, McKenna. You know the rules," the barkeeper said firmly, then looked around the room. "Anyone else with a gun, hand it over or leave."

Then, for no apparent reason, McKenna, pointed his gun overhead, and fired a shot into the ceiling. The boom of the gun seemed to erupt around him, especially in the close confines of the low-ceilinged barroom. That one shot was all it took to silence the crowd, who all jumped at the noise, and turned to see what was going on.



The barkeep put his hand on top of his head, scrunched up his fear-filled eyes and ducked down behind the bar. “What the hell you doing, McKenna?”

As drunk as he was, McKenna didn’t reply back. Smoke from the six-shooter still in his hand floated slowly toward the ceiling. He let out a breath, gazing up laughing as he tried to line up another shot.

So when the mood struck them, his Cowboy buddies, did what they had grown accustomed to doing. Their six-shooters up, they squeezed off shots in the space of a heartbeat. The slugs plowed into the ceiling.

There came the scrape of chairs and the scuff of leather boots on the wooden floor. People were scurrying through the batwings, out of the saloon. But a couple of curious onlookers left gambling to get a better view, effectively blocking the barkeeper as they huddled around the bar.

The crack of gunshots had echoed through Allen Street, where the soldiers were walking. The troop scrambled to investigate this breach of peace and tracked down the source to the Alhambra Saloon. They moved in a single file, hurrying past the four horses tied to a mesquite tree, pushing their way through the creaking batwings.

In the dimness of the saloon, First Lieutenant Davis looked all around wide-eyed and bewildered. Within half a minute, his eyes landed on McKenna and his Cowboy cohorts, six-shooters in their hands.

“Lower your guns and hand them over to us,” Davis demanded, standing in the middle of his troop.

The chandelier overhead swayed, casting shadowed waves of light. There was a beat of silence as the men stared at each other. The first lieutenant kept his rifle trained on McKenna while they regarded each other in a standoff.

To everyone's surprise, McKenna responded after he shook his whiskey fuddled head a bit. "You got no call to talk to me that way, soldier. Nobody takes my gun."

His Cowboy friends laughed in agreement. McKenna, too, burst into laughter and then menaced the crowd with his sinister gaze, erratically pointing his gun in every direction. Rather insolent, really. Unwilling to back down, he didn't realize the trouble he'd made for himself. How close he was to being shot dead by the soldiers.

"Get out of here, soldiers, all of you," a drunken voice shouted from the bar.

"You have no business here," yelled another voice.

The atmosphere was becoming more hostile, and it was getting to Davis. He could feel the sweat running down his face as he held his rifle. He wondered if the Cowboys would come to their senses — which he hoped would be any moment now.

Davis shouted his orders. "My men and I are here to keep the peace. You must comply and turn over your weapons."

No luck, nothing but dirty looks at the soldiers. The Cowboys had gone too far. With the tense situation, Davis was losing his patience, and he realized that he would have to change his tactics. So, one short, soldier snuck behind McKenna and hit him in the head with the back of his rifle.

The crazed Cowboy cried out, went down. Then five soldiers tackled the three Cowboys and knocked the guns out of their hands, got them down. In the middle of all that was happening, the lights suddenly went out. Almost instantly, they were lit again, and the soldiers promptly took all of the Cowboys into custody.

The tempo and conversation went back to normal now that the soldiers had left the saloon with the Cowboys. The barkeep was busy trying to uncork a whiskey bottle, but it was impossible in that moment. His hands were shaking so hard he couldn't close his fingers around the cork. The right side of his mustache twitching, his nerves had yet to settle.

## *Chapter 28*

**A** SHOOK-UP WILLARD MCKENNA, ALONG WITH his Cowboy conspirators, were quickly carted off to the deputy sheriff's office on Fourth Street, where Clancy Barton sat with his feet on the desk smoking a cigar. Just as Barton brought his feet down and placed the cigar in an ashtray, Undersheriff Avery sprung out of his chair and greeted First Lieutenant Davis. While the Cowboys cast Avery evil stares.

As he approached, Barton looked at the man Davis had by the arm. "Willard McKenna! Back so soon?"

Ignoring the comment, McKenna swept a cold gaze over at the lawman in front of him. Another moment passed in grave silence, allowing the deputy sheriff's comment to filter through. Then the Cowboy turned his head away, clenched his jaw and hunched his shoulders, unhappy with the situation he found himself in.

Barton listened calmly as Davis explained why he had arrested the Cowboys before handing them off. Right afterward, the first lieutenant and the five soldiers in his company excused themselves to leave to join up with the rest of their troop. The soldiers stepped outside just as dusk was settling over Tombstone.

“Jail has become a second home to you. McKenna, why don’t you get your act together?” Barton asked in a sharp tone.

“Leave me be. My head hurts like hell,” the Cowboy said sluggishly.

“One of them soldiers bashed him in the head with his rifle butt. It just isn’t right,” one of the Cowboys complained in disgust.

“If it bothers you so much, tell the magistrate tomorrow morning!” Barton said sarcastically.

“I will. And he will release me at once,” McKenna said, with an air of confidence, turning to him, “You’ll see.”

“I don’t think it’s that easy,” the undersheriff said doubtfully.

“Never mind what he’s saying, Burton. He’s still drunk. Let’s get this over with. The night shift officers are due to arrive in half an hour,” the deputy sheriff advised with a grunt.

McKenna and his mates were charged with being drunk and disorderly, committing a nuisance and for discharging firearms. They would spend that night in jail, which was not much of a deterrent. But this was the way things were done in Tombstone. Because this was the kind of by-the-book

law enforcement that the members of the city council expected from Clancy Barton. The council wanted even minor transgressions committed by the Cowboys punished with arrests and fines.

Cursing all the way, McKenna and the other Cowboys, were escorted by Undersheriff Avery and Deputy Sheriff Barton to the cold confines of the Cochise County Jail on Sixth Street, where they were all placed inside a small cell. As a necessary precaution, two armed guards were stationed outside in case the Cowboys had planned a jailbreak.

Two hours later, the matter took another twist. Entirely unexpectedly, when Jake McKenna learned that his brother had been arrested, he emerged from his bunkhouse and found Wally Swafford in his house, sitting by the fireplace after dinner. Jake pleaded with him to convince the magistrate to release his brother.

In a rare coincidence, Pidge was between the kitchen and living room where, without meaning to, she overheard parts of the conversation. She barged in and spoke her mind. She, too, insisted to her father that he try to get the charges dismissed.

The night in Tombstone passed quietly, but early that next morning, Wally Swafford went to the sheriff's office on Fifth Street. The conversation with Sheriff John Behan was brief. Swafford declared he would not stand for it, asking Behan to vouch for Willard McKenna. Therein, he declared that his brother, Jake, hadn't been in trouble with the law and was an upstanding and moral fellow employed

by him. Lastly, he accused the soldiers of instigating the incident at the Alhambra Saloon.

With careful thought, Behan agreed that the court should sentence McKenna more leniently. However, he didn't disclose to Swafford the real reason he would intervene on his behalf. It was just that the sheriff feared retaliation from the Cowboys, suspecting they planned to raid the town if the legal ruling had gone against McKenna.

A little later that same morning, Willard McKenna stirred uneasily as he was awakened to the sound of iron doors grating on the floor and clanging. William Soule, the jailer and deputy sheriff under John Behan, stood reclining against the open cell door.

By the time he swung his legs down from the cot and put his feet on the floor, Soule announced, "McKenna, you've got an appointment with the magistrate."

Later, in court, a sore and achy McKenna found himself standing before justice of the peace Andrew Jackson Felter explaining why he had been arrested. He was read the charges against him, whereupon he pleaded not guilty. This plea genuinely surprised and quite puzzled the magistrate.

"I say again, I hadn't done nothing wrong, except I was sheepishly drunk. Soldiers barged in the saloon. For no good reason, one of them hit me on the head with his rifle butt. This is a clear misunderstanding. I was sent here for nothing," McKenna added in his defense, rambling away.

Finally, Sheriff John Behan, dressed in his best dark suit and one of his new white shirts, his coat and his Derby hat in his hand, was allowed to speak on McKenna's behalf. It

was rapidly pointed out that the owner of the Alhambra Saloon had not pressed charges against McKenna. This reinforced the notion that the shooting was unintentional.

The magistrate cast his eyes on the sheriff and remained quiet for a while. When he dismissed the charges against him for insufficient evidence, that left Deputy Sheriff Barton and Undersheriff Avery with egg on their faces. Before McKenna was released from jail on his own recognizance, the justice warned him that he didn't want to see him in his courtroom again.

On his way out of the courtroom, McKenna cast a half-devil grin at Barton and Avery. No one said a word as McKenna gave a nod of thanks to Sheriff Behan, but it made a profound impression on all those present.

In short, McKenna's three Cowboy mates were not let off easily. Under the same magistrate, the men were fined fifteen dollars and court costs before being released from custody. By doing that, Felter presumed the soft treatment given to McKenna would, nevertheless, soon be forgotten.



## *Chapter 29*

**B**ENEATH THE WARMTH OF THE SUN, IN FRONT of her teepee, Sequoia sat upon the ground, her chin between her drawn-up knees. Her keen eyes scanned the terrain, while her thoughts wandered. She felt alone in her emotions at having had been confined to the encampment for the past days.

On this cool Monday afternoon, she felt antsy with nothing to do. She had performed all of her morning duties, lunch was long over, and she had prepared some clay jugs of almond milk for the tribe.

Her eyes settled on the three leftover jugs of almond milk in front of her. What was she to do with them? Feelings of outrage overcame her. Suffering with her eyes, she wanted to shatter them. It was hard to look back on that day in Tombstone and try to reconstruct it. How she wished she'd never encountered those women.

“Who do those women think they are?” she asked herself, under furrowed brows.

It hurt her that she couldn't go into Tombstone anymore; somewhere inside she wanted to go there on her horse, but on the outside she was too scared. Because she entertained the possibility that there might be more trouble with the settlers. That was something she wanted to avoid at all cost.

Why did things turn out the way they did? All she had wanted was to open a dialogue with the settlers by trading goods. The more she thought about it, the more she was bothered by the way her plan had been crushed.

*Perhaps she was headstrong*, she thought, as she felt the desire to do something. And it came to her, just like that. If she couldn't do business with the settlers, then, she would trade with all the Indian tribes in the region. Perhaps even with the Apaches. *Why not?* she thought.

Besides the Apaches, there were a number of Indian groups that inhabited this area. There was an influx of Papago Indians and their Pima cousins, and Yaquis, too, all mostly friendly. Already she knew there was a need for peaceful relations with the other Indians if her tribe was to prosper.

After some quick thinking, she decided to head to the nearest Papago Indian camp east of here. The Papagos were a peaceful and agricultural people with maize, beans, and cotton being their principal crops. So, they had plenty to trade with.

It wasn't like she was going against the wishes of Chief Nahele, or her mother. She hadn't been prohibited from selling or trading her almond milk. If all went according to plan, she would return before anyone had the chance to miss her. The White Chief, Cholo and two other warriors had gone out on a hunting and gathering mission. She suspected they would return by nightfall. So, she should leave right away.

*Was that Dakota's little sister?* she asked herself. The little girl, who had somehow made herself inconspicuous behind a teepee, poked her head out for a sideways peek at her. Now all she could see was one of her two braids of black hair. It had to be Ada because she was the only child in the tribe. How long had she been spying on her? Perhaps she should go talk to her.

Ada giggled loud enough for her to hear. But before Sequoia could stand up, Dakota's mother appeared and took her daughter by the hand. Before Ada was led away, she pinned Sequoia with her gaze. So she waved to the little girl, whose mother wouldn't look her way. It was just unfortunate that Dakota's family was avoiding contact with her.

Feeling slightly nervous, she tugged in a breath and stood up. She wouldn't wait for the return of her mother, who had gone to the San Pedro River to do the washing. A slight frown came on her face as the guilt of that decision raced through her mind. She covered her head with the woolen shawl around her shoulders, disguising herself. What Indian did not have more than one shawl? Next,

she scooped up the three jugs, and loaded them in a sack.

As she snuck past the cluster of tents, she saw Soaring Eagle sitting on the ground with his back toward her. He was in deep meditation, his eyes closed, and head slightly tilted down. Although, she was neither scared nor nervous, she was relieved he didn't know she was there.

With a slap of the reins from atop her horse, she was off, leaving a plume of dust in the air. A sense of peace swept over her, riding bareback on her horse, and she smiled at it. Once more, she felt free, at one with nature. Despite the risk she was taking in leaving the confines of the encampment, this was where she wanted to be.

About five minutes later, she was directing Yogesh toward the San Pedro River, a route that she loved to ride. And that was the only way she knew how to get to the Papago camp.

After reaching the river, her head darted left and right. With a sharp intake of breath, she ducked her head down in the horse's mane, even though her mother wasn't looking in her direction at all. Just further down the river, Chenoa was slapping clothes on rocks, shaking them and wringing them out. Seemingly preoccupied, she suspected her mother hadn't seen her.

On her horse, she hurried to ride to the village of the Papago Indians, leaving a dust cloud behind her to linger in the cool air. For a period of time she kept a steady pace, following the trail along the river where the earth smelled damp and of rotting things.

Remarkably, she wasn't having second thoughts about her decision. Searching inside herself for the answer, she was driven with the desire to have some purpose.

## *Chapter 30*

**E**VERYTHING WENT SPLENDIDLY FOR THE NEXT forty-five minutes or so, until a sound came rushing in. At first, she wasn't sure what she'd heard. She rode closer. Tried to ignore the ever-present sound of the stamp mills of the Tombstone Mill and Mining Company and Corbin Mill on the east side of the San Pedro River pulverizing rock containing traces of silver ore which was faintly audible in the distance.

With a gaze at the river, she yanked the reins and wheeled around onto a path at the edge of a ranch at Howell Spring, a spot a mile northeast of Charleston. The high mooing of cows rose up ahead of her. In panic, her horse gave a high-pitched neigh.

“Shh, Yogesh!” whispered Sequoia.

Something was going on. Squinting her eyes, she peered in the direction of the ranch. She saw the feathers of

a full headdress of an Apache chief swaying in the wind amid the cows that were running toward the open plain. Smoke was beginning to rise lazily from a ranch house. It was in that instant she realized that her plans were going up in smoke, too. As if things couldn't get any worse for her, evidently she stumbled upon an Apache raid in progress. Bad luck to have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, again. Her carefree look was replaced with a frown. There was no way she could go forward even if she wanted to. She would have to turn around and go back home.

Holding her reins high as she turned her horse around a rock in the trail, she heard a loud neigh. Her horse reared up, almost throwing her. Her leg muscles screamed in protest, but she knew she had to hold on tight. When Yogesh's front hooves came back down to earth, she saw a man on a white stallion galloping away from the ranch.

"Indians! Indians!" shouted the man, as he wheeled his horse sharply around.

For a fraction of a second, she froze. And much as she tried not to, that image sent her thoughts right back to that day, exactly one week ago today, when she, too, was riding on a white horse, trying to escape.

Gunshots came next. The sound snapped her out of her daze. The white stallion whinnied loudly in pain, apparently hit by a bullet. The wounded horse fell over and died. The rider's right leg, trapped under the horse, had been smashed. It didn't matter. Three more gunshots pierced the air. It was then that a bullet hit him in the head, killing him instantly.

A look of mortal fear took over her face. Everything was happening so quickly Sequoia almost couldn't breathe, much less think.

A young woman poked her head out of the barn. Her eyes fell on the dead man on the ground. At once, she sprinted headlong toward the trail at the edge of the ranch, where Sequoia was sitting on her horse. Her upswept hair was coming loose from a bun and curling on the nape of her neck, the hem of her long dress dragging through the dirt. Three Apaches were running after her. For a quick moment, the woman looked over her shoulder and saw the determination of the pursuing Apaches. Fierce black eyes met hers, seemingly promising death. It was at that fateful moment her head jerked back, a bullet drilled into her brain. She lived long enough for her eyes to widen in shock and disbelief before she crumpled to the ground.

From where Sequoia was, she had a good view of the ranch. Could anyone see her? She was afraid, desperately afraid, and she needed to get out of there, fast and quietly without attracting attention to herself. But it just wasn't the right time, and her mind was in a whirl.

Before Sequoia could get her thoughts together, she saw an older woman rush out the door of the ranch house to escape the engulfing flames. She was so distraught that she wasn't paying attention and ran right into the arms of an Apache. The warrior grabbed her by her long braid of blonde hair and dragged her several feet before throwing her to the ground. He stood astride her, yelled and raised his



tomahawk for a fatal blow, his painted face a mask of pure fury.

In a matter of moments, a covered wagon, drawn by two Scottish-bred, dark brown Clydesdales with white feet and a stripe on their faces, came out of the barn. Two Apaches were in the driver's box. One Apache was in the back of the open wagon struggling to overpower a petite woman with disarranged hair, her torn dress showed her half-naked body — and losing. And then the woman let loose a high-pitched scream. A death scream. The Apache warrior threw her dead body from the back of the wagon with such force the body thudded on the ground and rolled, twice, before stopping. The wagon rattled raucously, bouncing and banging, the horses' hooves making a clangorous sound on the ground as it went past.

Panic-stricken, Sequoia couldn't watch anymore. She hesitated, naturally, but only for a few seconds, wondering if her horse could continue without stopping for water. How much longer could she afford to wait?

Came the sound of feet stepping among the rocks. She looked left to find two Apache warriors. They were standing in bold silhouette against the golden pallor of the sun, every detail outlined — the single eagle's feather in their hair, buckskin pants tucked in their high boot-moccasins, and a rifle rested in the crook of their arms.

Her eyes met one of the Apaches, whose ice-cold eyes pierced into her as if he were looking into her soul. No doubt her life was in danger. Yogesh, who was also feeling the tension of the moment, flicked his ears at them.

Not a second too soon, she dropped the sack containing the jugs of almond milk to the ground to lighten the load on her horse. She was in such a welter of emotions as she jerked her head toward the trail and turned her horse around. By then one of the Apaches raised his rifle and took aim. Things became a blur in that next heartbeat as she slapped the reins down hard on Yogesh's back, startling him into a fast trot. There was an almighty crack as the rifle went off, and the sound of a bullet whizzing past her head.

The two Indians yelled at each other before running after her. Only they stopped beside the burlap sack on the ground. By this time Sequoia was out of their field of vision, and they couldn't fire at her.

One of the Apaches set down his rifle and inspected the sack's contents. Two jugs had broken into shards, leaking milk and soaking the bag. He pulled out the intact jug, shook it, uncorked it, and took a whiff of the contents inside.

The other Apache brave lowered his rifle with a look of disappointment. Disgruntled, he wanted to go after Sequoia and kill her. His comrade stopped him, nudged him with his shoulder, and lifted the jug up for him to smell. He was still steaming mad, but after a thought or two, he leaned his rifle against his leg, and complied. The taste agreed with him. He took several more gulps, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and then passed the jug back.

Shortly thereafter, the two Apaches dropped the jug to the ground with a thud and hurried back to the ranch. They mounted two horses, neck-reined them away from the ranch

and galloped across the trail in pursuit of Sequoia. If they couldn't kill her, they wanted to know where she'd gone. What was even more important was they wanted to know where she came from.

Not ten minutes into her ride, Sequoia guided her horse to a secluded spot on the San Pedro River where he could drink easily while she considered all that had happened. As she released the reins to let him reach down to drink, she let out a sigh of relief thinking she was out of harm's way at last. Little did she suspect that the Apaches were hot on her trail, following her horse's hoofprints. But she was edgy and kept the break short.

As she rode back to the encampment, she couldn't stop the tears. Not only was she upset that her plans were spoiled, but she was upset too, because she would have to tell Chief Nahele what had happened. Though she never sought it out, trouble managed to find her. She could swear the world was out to get her. So she felt. So she believed.

The cool afternoon wind streamed through her hair, which she'd left loose instead of braiding it as she usually did. The sun streaked her hair with gold highlights, as the wind tossed it in her face. Irritated, every now and then, she pushed some strands behind her ears. Riding her horse just meant nothing to her at the moment.

Too much had happened that she didn't think about those people who had been killed at that ranch, right before her eyes. In the state she was in, there didn't seem to be a point. Even she was too emotionally wrung out to realize how lucky she was to be alive.

## *Chapter 31*

**T**HE WHOLE TIME THE TWO APACHES HAD followed Sequoia at what they thought was a safe distance, leaving her oblivious that they had been following her. They'd even hidden their own tracks in the hoofprints of her horse. After all, she was simply a woman. A woman who had witnessed first-hand what happened to settlers in the hands of hostile Apaches. They knew she would report the savagery she'd seen them commit. The fact was, they were even more upset that she had outtrode them. A woman, no less.

Once Sequoia entered the Cherokee encampment, the Apaches tethered their horses behind some rocks to hide. They would wait until dark and take her by surprise.

In under a minute, Sequoia slid off her horse and secured him in the corral before she sprinted across the

camp to find her mother. As Chenoa came out of the teepee Sequoia rushed up to her, flung her arms around her.

“My dear, where have you been? I couldn’t find you and I thought something terrible must have happened to you,” Chenoa inquired, hugging her tighter.

Half making sense, she blabbered: “Something terrible almost did! I never made it to the Papago camp. I had to leave the jugs of almond milk behind.”

When her mother released her from their embrace, she looked at her daughter silently for a moment, then asked, “What are you talking about? Slow down and tell me what happened from the beginning.”

The wind picked up and Sequoia huddled into her shawl. “Early this afternoon I had three extra jugs of almond milk. I couldn’t let them go to waste. At the same time, I hated feeling useless. In a measure of desperation, I made a rash decision to try and trade them with the Papagos for something of value. I can assure you I went nowhere near Tombstone.”

“You left without telling me. Or telling anyone where you were going. Why did you do that? Don’t you trust me?” Chenoa demanded softly, closing the space between them and looking into her sad eyes.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know what I was thinking. I haven’t even told you the worst part!” she said, turning away to wipe her eyes.

“Continue with what you have to say, Sequoia.”

She turned back to her mother, raised her chin and tried to keep her voice steady. “About seven miles into my

journey there was some commotion among the livestock on a nearby farm. I stopped, and saw a herd of shaggy cattle, running amok, and smoke coming from a ranch house. There were many Apaches, who killed everyone there. Two of them spotted me watching from my hiding place on the trail. I took off riding, and they came after me shooting. Why do the Apaches do such things?"

Chenoa thought carefully about her next words. "These are troubled times between us and the settlers. The Apaches have been dispossessed, too; their lands have been taken away. While I sympathize with their suffering, I am very saddened to hear that they are killing people. Most important, I thank the spirits that you weren't harmed."

Darkness was settling on them as Sequoia nodded to her, then looked down at the ground, wincing inwardly. "I think I'm all talked out — for the moment, anyway."

"I understand. But those Apaches may have followed you here. We must tell Chief Nahele, who only returned shortly ago," her mother said, with a worried tone.

They had found Chief Nahele at the edge of the encampment deeply engrossed in a conversation with Soaring Eagle. It wasn't surprising that they were upset when they learned of what had happened earlier that day. Despite being exhausted, Sequoia repeated the story she had told her mother. She carried on, telling the men how she had seen the smoke, how she'd witnessed the raid, and she'd been chased by two Apaches.

That night, five armed Cherokee warriors were stationed at strategic points around the perimeter of the

camp. Given the threat of an Apache attack, that was to be expected. Additionally, Cholo would guard Sequoia's teepee. The ever-cautious tribe was up in arms and had taken precautions to allow a strong defense should an ambush erupt. And they were smart to do so.

In the dead of darkness, the two Apaches crept toward the Cherokee encampment for a closer look. A night breeze blew past, and one of them shivered. As they gazed upon the maze of teepees which all looked alike, they didn't know where to start looking for the girl. They circled the perimeter carefully from every side, trying to decide where to enter.

But none of that mattered now. These stubborn Apaches found their plans foiled. They'd been seen by one of the Cherokees who gave a war cry out of his belly and lungs and vocal chords. Echoes of the cry rang through the desert stillness. In only a couple of seconds four Cherokee warriors armed with rifles scrambled to the scene. Outnumbered and outgunned, the Apaches felt more spooked than anything else, but realized they were at a disadvantage. Before shots could be fired among them, the two Apaches raced to their horses and mounted quickly, riding out. Chief Nahele took one last look, heard the horse's hooves, certain in his gut, that they wouldn't be coming back for Sequoia.

Just as the sun was starting to rise the following morning, Sequoia awoke from a troubled sleep peppered with dreams about being in Oklahoma again and being with Dakota. *It wasn't strange at all*, she thought, as she rose up

from the blanket. Her dreams took place during the time in her life when she was happy and had no particular problems.

Only later, when Sequoia heard from her mother that Apaches had tried to penetrate the camp in the wee hours of the morning, was she unnerved. Had she put her tribe at risk as well as herself by venturing out on her own? It seemed like every time she tried to sell her almond milk, something bad happened. It was like she was cursed.

Unable to concentrate, she slipped away during the breakfast preparation and returned to her teepee. In a split second, she came outside holding a dreamcatcher. The twine web, like a lacy spider-web, encircled by a small, wooden hoop, with beads and feathers hanging from it, was used to protect people, often from nightmares or any harm that might be in the air. She raised it up to the glowing sun and prayed that her troubles would be caught in the dreamcatcher's web and destroyed by the sun's rays.

Ten minutes later, she was on her way back to assist in the chores. And, as she walked, she wondered if the shaman could perform a ritual to bring good luck and better fortune in her life. She planned on having an in-depth discussion with him the moment she saw him.



## *Chapter 32*

LATER THAT SAME TUESDAY MORNING OF December 6, 1881, at Camp Huachuca, Major General Joseph Aronstein briefed First Lieutenant Randall Davis on the Apache attack on the farm at Howell Spring the day before. Pointedly, he ordered Davis to lead his troop to survey the damage done to the ranch. And for the next few days, they were to safeguard the stamp mills of Tombstone Mill and Mining Company and Corbin Mill at the small village of Charleston, on the banks of the San Pedro River. Most especially, they were to keep an eye out for marauding bands of Apaches and respond with deadly force.

Aronstein was having none of this. “No one upholds the recent massacre. The line must be drawn clearly which must be strictly guarded. We must get word to the Apaches that the army won’t tolerate stealing, killing, or any other depredations by Geronimo’s band of Chiricahua Apache

Indians. We're not alone in this struggle. Just the same, the Mexican forces have their hands full with the Apaches. But let me stop there. I'm getting sick and tired giving the same old speech. Now is the time for action. I want to send Indian scouts ahead, "Buckskin Frank" Leslie included. I know it's a long shot, but let's try to get Leslie in on this. In view of his past experience, he could be of great value to us. Or maybe I'm just grasping at straws here, thinking this could turn to our advantage."

From the major general occasional harsh words were to be expected. He was the kind of officer who liked to give speeches. Looks apart, despite being of average height and thin, one thing about him, he was as tough as they come. Listening to him talk, Davis had remained thoughtful, but silent on the issue, fearing retribution against the Apaches would be a travesty.

Davis and the major general stood on the wooden floor for a few minutes longer in the tent, making small talk. Then Davis excused himself to inform his troop they would be leaving at 5:00 a.m. the next morning.

After a quick lunch, Davis needed rest for what lay ahead. On the way to his quarters, he passed a few soldiers raking the ground outside the six-bed hospital. The military often created work that involved improving the appearance of the grounds. Additionally, several men were assigned to work in the construction of living quarters and barracks out of the huge pine trees plucked from the south and west slopes of the Huachuca Mountains.

At six o'clock that night, Randall Davis had just enjoyed a pleasant dinner with his wife and two sons. And now he was sitting in a wooden rocker by the fireplace mantel, doing what he did frequently, in fact every night that he was home when his boys were sleeping.

His eyes closed, and he listened to the strong wind that whistled off the Huachuca Mountains. The wind not only intensified the cold temperature outside, but easily penetrated the walls of the adobe shanty blowing in through the chimney. On nights like this, he was grateful for the fireplace. Winter in the mountains could be cold, and already there was snow on their tops. And it was just his luck that the quarters had been made available to him. Though they were usually for the highest-ranking officers such as Major General Aronstein. He, his wife Carla, and newborn baby girl lived in the shanty next to him.

His eyes opened as his thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of his wife, who strolled past him carrying extra blankets for the bed. He briefly glanced her way, a smile curving on his lips.

Just a few months after he'd been stationed at Camp Huachuca, his wife and two sons had joined him. Fulana was young, pretty, and friendly, and, one of the handful of other Army wives at the post. Accustomed as she was to the beautiful Georgia countryside of Jeffersonville, where she was born and raised, she settled slowly into the life of being the wife of a soldier. She adapted well and developed a certain understanding that came with living on a military

installation, which provided an intimate view of a soldier's life.

Lately, he had wondered if she'd made the right decision in joining him here on the rugged Arizona frontier. But he'd known better than to confide this to her. Knowing his wife the way he did, he was sure that he wouldn't be able to convince her to return to Jeffersonville to raise their children. They were both headstrong and self-willed. It was what brought them together in the first place.

They were safe for now. And as an earnest God-fearing man, he hoped, he prayed, that wouldn't change.

His thoughts drifted to tomorrow as he knew he would have to be up soon. In part, he was feeling the impact of the Howell Spring massacre. He was tired of the senseless killing. He'd only recently gotten his head around the Penning Ranch massacre possibly committed by Geronimo's braves. Wherever a person stood on the Indian problem on the frontier, one fact was undeniable: The Apaches had unleashed a cycle of violence that seemed to have no end.

Regardless, he quickly shoved aside that notion. Because there was more to the root of the Apaches' behavior. He hated the thought that the Apaches had been victimized just as much as the settlers had. It seemed apparent that the reservations were established to segregate the Indians from the white settlers. It was like the Indians couldn't roam freely, couldn't be anywhere else without ending up in trouble or being killed.

*We just needed to find a way to coexist peacefully*, he thought. He longed to raise his children in a better world beyond the one he knew, sixteen years since the end of the American Civil War.

Even though it was almost four years ago, it seemed like yesterday that Ed Schieffelin, a prospector and Indian scout for the cavalry at Camp Huachuca, discovered a rich vein of silver in the hills in what was then Apache country and named the town Tombstone. And it was the permanent character of his post which gave a feeling of security to the miners and adventurers pouring into Tombstone.

At last he made a concentrated attempt to clear his mind of all its circular thoughts. He was about to nod off when Fulana suddenly appeared in the doorway. With long, blonde hair that she wore partially up, the 26-year-old dutiful housewife was wearing a simple linen dress. As he drifted off to sleep, she raced off. Not more than a minute later, she returned with a blanket, and covered him with it. Then she retired to the bedroom.

### *Chapter 33*

**I**T SEEMED AS IF PIDGE SWAFFORD'S MIND WAS not quite all in it when she walked through the door of her house. It was as if there was real anger in her, as if the house were an enemy. She was still fuming about the incident with Sequoia. That had happened more than a week ago.

Earlier, she had dragged herself through her daily routine. Normally, she loved the solitude of the land and liked wandering around the farm. She liked being around the livestock and to feed the horses herself. Often, she watched Jake, the ranch hand, calling and moving cattle. Today, the feeling just hadn't been there.

Now she was pacing around her kitchen, casting frustrated glances out the window. Thoughts of vengeance consumed her. Surely there had to be something she could do — something to get back at the Indian girl — that would restore her dignity. Thinking about what to do next, but most of all, as she looked outside, she was thinking that

maybe she should go into town and have a talk with the deputy sheriff. When she'd last seen him, she sensed he was reluctant to pursue the matter. Still, she needed to know what legal options were available to her. With tomorrow being Saturday, she wanted to have something to tell the girls over lunch.

But first she was going to talk to Jake McKenna. She felt his connection to the Cowboy element could prove useful. Plus, he owed her. She was going to remind him that his brother Willard had escaped jail time for shooting up the Alhambra Saloon thanks to her father's help. At least she would have the Cowboys to fall back on. She thought that if anyone could find Sequoia, they could.

"A cowgirl always has use for a cowboy," said Pidge, a saucy expression on her face as her gaze settled on Jake, watching him walk toward the barn.

After another moment, she turned away from the window. She left the kitchen and hurried outside after him, lifting her dress slightly so as to keep from tripping. At the end of their conversation, she asked him to saddle her horse while she got changed.

Twenty minutes later, she showed up at the stable. She sported a pair of brown boots that matched her thick brown wool coat trimmed with gold braid over a blue gingham dress. Up she flung herself and gathered the dress up around her. Then Maybelline plunged down the trail.

By three in the afternoon, the sound of a galloping horse gave Deputy Sheriff Barton a jolt. Glancing toward the window, he saw a swirl of dust spewing high into the air,

which marked the arrival of Pidge Swafford. He shook his head, a slight frown on his face upon seeing her come into view riding hard.

Pidge reined the mare to a stop and swung out of the saddle. When she wrapped the reins around the wooden hitching rail in front of the deputy's sheriff's office, Maybelline didn't fight the restriction. Then she dipped underneath the hitching rail and walked toward the office.

Opening the door, she cast a furtive glance at Undersheriff Avery, a few feet away with his back turned toward her. A clean-shaven Clancy Barton, dressed in a gray-checked suit with white shirt and bow tie, looked at her and nodded. She took that as a welcome, made her way over and stood in front of his desk.

"We need to talk," she said off the bat.

Before the deputy sheriff could speak, Avery said. "Well, howdy there Miss Swafford."

She and Barton looked at him funnily. Avery silenced up and scurried to sit in the chair behind his desk.

"How can I help you?" Barton asked in a serious voice.

"Do you have news on the whereabouts of Sequoia?"

"Not a word," he said with a frustrated sigh. "As I recall, you have your horse back. So, I assumed you had moved on from the matter."

"Moved on?" she asked, fixing him with a silent stare of disapproval.

He simply nodded in return.

"I thought you'd be sympathetic to my situation. But listen here —."



She didn't finish her sentence because he stood up and interrupted her. "No, you listen here. I'm inclined to believe that you provoked that Indian girl into taking your horse. You'd best forget about it and go home."

Besides the way he looked at her, there was a hint in his voice that suggested he knew what had happened between her and Sequoia. What she didn't know was what he'd learned from the shopkeeper of the Soma Winery. For now, he was keeping that to himself.

She didn't get it and carried on barking. "My word is good, and there are many in Tombstone who know that. Lest you forget, me and my family are loyal taxpaying citizens. I want justice to the letter of the law. Therefore, I have no other recourse but to put up a reward of \$1000 for the arrest, trial and conviction of Sequoia."

"That's a truckload of money for the apprehension of a poor, lowly Indian girl. Considering the state you're in, there's something I have to ask. Did this Indian steal your horse or your pride?" he asked with arched brows.

The question obviously took her off guard. Her face got redder and redder. And she shot him an acidic glare. In the next moment of silence, it became clear that she was going to simply ignore the question.

"Just do your job," she said with an effort to restrain herself as she placed her hands on her hips.

Leaning forward, hands on his desk, his temper rising. "Which is?"

"Post reward notices with a sketch of an Apache girl at the post office and elsewhere in the city. Tell the local

newspapers to run a story about Sequoia as a horse thief and outlaw,” she scoffed and threw her arms up in the air.

Their eyes locked as he leaned forward. Closer to her. Pidge observed the vacancy of his stare and the vaguely frustrated look on his face, the kind that hinted he wasn't interested in doing that. She felt as if she was dealing with an idiot, losing her patience. In the first place, she was regretting that she had reported the incident to him. She told herself she should have gone to Sheriff John Behan, who understood how this town worked. But at that time he had had his hands full with the Spicer Hearing and cattle rustling activities.

Barton turned his head and caught Avery looking at them with an alarmed expression on his face. The undersheriff quickly shrugged his shoulders and his expression relaxed before he turned his head away.

He moved his hands from the desk and pulled himself to his full height. “Whatever you say, ma’am. I’ll get on it. Is there anything else?”

“No. That’ll be all,” she said, her voice resonant and pranced out of the office.

The deputy sheriff drew a long breath and exhaled slowly, as if gathering himself. He walked to the window and watched her mount her horse in a huff and ride away. There was no doubt in his mind that something foul had transpired between Miss Swafford and the Indian girl, Sequoia, just as Hank, the shopkeeper had told him. Something that involved a tug-of-war with a jug. Adding an ironic twist to the already bizarre situation, she had put

up a reward for Sequoia's capture and conviction. She had surprised him when she pulled out a thousand dollars cash from the pocket of her coat. So, she had obviously prepared for this. To him it looked like pure meanness on her part.

"That's some woman right there," Avery said walking up behind him.

"She sure is," Barton mumbled, still mesmerized by what had just happened as his head turned to look at the cash on his desk.

## *Chapter 34*

**I**T WAS THE END OF THIS FOURTEENTH DAY OF December, and Bibb Tanner moved stiffly through the routine of milking the last cow. Presently, in the barn, she hunched inside a white, wool coat, freezing as she sat down on a wooden milking stool. Already her hands were reddening with the cold. The cow twitched her tail and stamped her left hind hoof.

“Come on Hazel. Don’t give me trouble,” she said to the cow.

Bibb had a soft spot for the cows in her charge. Even for Hazel, who was a stubborn, old reddish-brown cow that didn’t like to be milked. It was for that reason she was the last to be milked.

Hazel cast big brown eyes down toward her and stomped her hoof on the straw floor. “Moo.”

A frown tugged at her brows, but she ignored the cow's irritability. She simply focused on the task of filling the bucket with milk. Her fingers ached as she squeezed and pulled until a stream of milk hit the tin bucket with a sharp ping. While the milk flowed, she was pleased that the cow kept patiently still.

She dragged the bucket away and stood with her hands in her coat pockets. This particular Wednesday had been a hard one because it had been snowing on and off. Her efforts with the animals had taken an emotional toll because the animals were distressed, making them harder to maintain in the cold weather.

As she let the exhaustion roll over her, she closed her eyes for a moment until the silence was broken by a moo. Looking over her shoulder, she could see one of the cows was just chattering louder than the squawking chickens in the nearby coop.

To escape the noise, she walked to the end of the barn and leaned against the corner, where she could watch the snow falling. Her eyes fell on the two-foot-high bank of a dry creek bed in front of the house. Daydreaming, she wondered what was beyond the Dragoon Mountains. The world seemed so big to her, and so full of opportunities.

So much had changed in her life from who she was a decade ago. At that time, she was a teenager and loved spending time with the horses and cows. She delighted at the prospect of milking the cows alongside her mother. A year or so later, her older brother, Russell had abandoned them to seek his fortune in the gold-mining business in

California in the 1870s. Soon after, she too was longing for a change.

Her mundane life faded into the background of her mind as thoughts of her future as a performer surfaced. If her brother hadn't run off, she would already be an actress. And she hadn't given up on this dream just yet. She'd grown some since her last audition, and she'd been practicing hard by reading aloud dialogue from books in her spare time at home. When the timing was right, she was going to audition again for some other show. What fueled that dream at the age of sixteen was when her mother took her to see a traveling theater troupe in Tucson, where they had lived at the time.

Of course, Pidge Swafford thought she was crazy, and laughed every time she mentioned it. Shirley McNerny was supportive in her way but treated it like a phase she was going through. They weren't interested in performing like she was. But she was convinced one day she would prove them wrong.

When and if she did leave Tombstone, Pidge and Shirley were people she certainly wouldn't miss. This had been building up for a long time in her mind. Over the recent months, there were times she'd felt like she was friends with the two meanest women in the world. That both Pidge and Shirley were spoiled rotten. Even she believed that Pidge had gone too far in her altercation with Sequoia. As far as she was concerned, the reward money she had put on her was an unfair bounty. Fortunately, she didn't have the same attitude as them.

Though, she had to admit to herself that when she'd first met them, their antics were amusing and had brought a lot of excitement to her otherwise ordinary existence. But these days, she felt like she'd outgrown them.

Her stomach began aching for dinner and drew her from her thoughts. She started walking toward her two-story ranch house northeast of Chiricahua Road, nine miles east of Tombstone, and near the water source of Antelope Springs. As she passed by the stable, she cast a quick glance at her ranch hand, Casimiro Cavallo, who was pitching fresh hay into the horses' stalls. Among his duties was to scrub the milk buckets and muck out the horse stalls.

She hesitated at the door of the ranch house and glanced over her shoulder. A couple of yards beyond on the opposite side of the house was a bunkhouse where the ranch hands slept, ate, and entertained themselves in their off hours. She wondered if Casimiro would be turning in soon. Above, the sky was swirling with clouds, and the snow was still falling. After a quick sweep of the area, she ducked inside, letting the door slam shut.

In the living room she found her father, Lester, napping, slouched down into a rocker with his feet stretched out. She moved quietly across the room to him, doing her best not to wake him. He sure looked tired after a long day of carting milk around town.

In 1877, Lester Tanner gave up his homestead in Tucson, Arizona and moved the family to a larger ranch on 160-acres of oak tree-peppered land at the foot of the Dragoon Mountains. Just a few short years later, he had

made a name for himself in Tombstone as a dairy farmer and Guernsey cattle breeder.

She kissed her father's forehead before retiring to the kitchen to help her mother, Anna Catherine, prepare dinner.



## *Chapter 35*

**I**T WAS APPROACHING TWO A.M. ON SATURDAY morning of this seventeenth day of December, when there suddenly came the loud neighing of a horse from the stable on the McNerny Ranch. Whereupon, Shirley awoke in her bed. Knowing it was her old horse, Sleepy, fidgeting for attention, she rolled over on her side and buried her face in her pillows. Her assumption was that the horse had been spooked by the sight of a black tarantula crawling from stall to stall, which had happened on a number of occasions.

Another loud neigh, this one more unsettling, and she was turning to lie on her back. Normally, she wouldn't pay him no mind. But ultimately, she came to the realization that the sounds he was making were not the usual neighs, succession of grunts or idle kick at a stall wall she often heard in the dead of night.

Proceeding with caution she climbed out of the bed, still sleepily. As quietly as possible, she went to the closet and

pulled her fully loaded Winchester rifle from the scabbard. She wouldn't have it any other way.

First she had to check on her father. After slinging the rifle over her shoulder, she started down the hallway. The bedroom door was open just a crack, and inside the room, Graham was fast asleep on the bed.

Just when she was about to wake him, a series of loud grunts echoed from the stable. Still her father didn't stir. Sleepy the horse sounded completely frantic. Some of the other horses made sounds too. Something was definitely going on, and she needed to know what it was.

Quickly deciding, she took off toward the living room, where she heard footsteps outside the window. Her gut feeling was it had to be an Apache raid.

The next thing she knew, the doorknob was being rattled so furiously that the door was shaking a bit, but it remained closed. She tensed and held her breath. Terror gleaming in her eyes, she pointed the rifle at the door.

After an agonizing moment, there was a splintering of wood as the door was kicked in with one blow. Seeming hesitant, an Apache warrior stood panting in the doorway and glanced her way. His gaze dropped to her body, but in the darkness, he couldn't make out the rifle in her hands. Her worn white nightgown was fairly glowing, and covered her from neck to feet, but arousal and amusement flickered in his cold eyes.

Sensing how close she was to grave danger, she felt prickles on the back of her head but didn't freeze. On impulse, she fired, the bullet tearing into the chest of the

Apache and hurling his body backward. He didn't die immediately. In the span of a few seconds, while she was standing there terrified, he gave a war whoop, before he collapsed, dead.

The explosion of the rifle had woken Graham McNerny out of a deep sleep and made his ears ring. Armed with a six-gun, he was in a frantic state. His heart was pumping a mile a minute as he crept into the living room. He saw Shirley whirl around from the window, her eyes wide with terror. His pulse was throbbing in his throat at the sight of the Apache warrior slumped on the floor in the doorway.

The trouble was that a small party of Apaches gave their own resounding war whoop as they charged toward the house. Shirley snapped her head back to the window. She could see the Apaches were approaching fast. It was cold and windy and there was a light rain, which had washed away the remaining patches of snow from Wednesday.

"How many do you see out there?" Graham asked her in a whisper.

A frazzled-looking Shirley looked over her shoulder at him and splayed her open hand, indicating five Apaches were outside.

If she lived through this, she reckoned, she'd give Sleepy the horse a big hug. After all, she had the old horse to thank for alerting her to the hostile Apaches' presence.

There was a sudden flurry of shooting. Her father rushed to join her at the window. Equally to their surprise they saw Jaime Ciro had been firing his six-gun at a distance behind the Apaches. He fired that pistol until the

barrel glowed and he ran out of bullets, cutting down three of them.

The last two Apaches turned to look over their shoulders at their attacker. They stopped running and turned around to face Jaime. At about the same moment, Shirley ran to the door. Standing over the dead Apache, she pointed her rifle. When the Apaches started to raise their rifles to fire at Jaime, she pulled the trigger and shot them both dead.

Out of the stable came three Apaches on their horses, riding fast, yelling and whooping. They were the last of the band who had come to raid the McInerny Ranch. Despite the darkness and the rain, Shirley could see that Sleepy wasn't among the horses the Apaches had stolen. She felt an instant's gratification due to her fondness of the old horse.

Jaime started toward the house. But before he could reach it, Graham came hurrying to meet him. Never mind the cold and the rain. He embraced Jaime and thanked him from the depths of his heart. And he thanked God Almighty that he'd given Shirley that rifle when she was sixteen years old. He had always known that one day an Apache raid would happen on his ranch. And he was glad she had been prepared for it.

But the scene was alive before Graham in vivid color with the smelly dead bodies off to the side. He glanced over and looked closely at the bodies. Raindrops streaked down their painted faces. For just a while longer, he and his ranch hand conversed and then started to bury the bodies of the

Apaches. They had a lot to clean up before they could go back to sleep.

Exhausted by it all, Shirley retired to her bedroom for some much-needed sleep. She had a busy day ahead of her. Her Cowgirl mates were coming over for lunch. Boy, did she have a story to tell! And she couldn't wait to see their reaction.

## *Chapter 36*

**I**T WAS JUST DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS AND tensions were mounting at Camp Huachuca. First Lieutenant Randall Davis, sharply dressed in a blue and gold uniform, was standing at attention inside the main tent. The briefing was fragmentary, in which he was given orders to lead his men to patrol the U.S.-Mexican border and concentrate their efforts there. He stared off into space, thinking for a moment, then attempted to resume listening to Major General Joseph Aronstein's closing comments about the Apache leader Geronimo eluding capture.

"The mission to find Geronimo has gone on longer than planned, absorbing much of the army's resources," the major general continued.

In the back of Davis' mind he understood the major general's apprehension. Things seemed ominous in the persistent trouble caused by marauding Apaches. After a

raid, they would scatter out, and meet again, days later at a prearranged location. Another obstacle to the Indian scouts was Geronimo's band avoided being tracked by hopping away on rocks in the desert or doubling back on their trail.

An hour later, First Lieutenant Davis left the briefing to prepare his men for the mission. He almost bumped into Lieutenant Colonel Neilsen, who stood just outside the tent's entrance. Davis stopped to notice that his eyes were fixed intently on a piece of paper in his hands. He allowed a minute to pass in silence before curiosity got the better of him.

"Lieutenant Colonel," he said, with a smart salute, "What's that you're reading?"

"This is my golden opportunity to make a little side money." Neilsen said with a gleam in his eye and a slick smile. "While waiting here to deliver a message to the major general, I took the liberty of studying the face on this reward notice. Take a look at this. Have you seen her anywhere?"

He gave the poster to Davis, who looked at it and stretched an eyebrow almost out of joint. The face on the Wanted poster was a hand-drawn sketch and might have been any Indian. The description was that of a young, black-haired Apache woman with dark eyes, whose name was Sequoia. She was wanted for horse theft. The "Wanted Dead or Alive" prize — \$1000 — was on the high side, and it said, "Immediately Contact The Nearest Sheriff's Office."

Now, Davis wished he could take back the question. With a feeling of disdain, he held up the reward poster he had given him.

After clearing his throat, Davis said, "I haven't seen any Indian that fits that description. As for her stealing the horse, it's ridiculous. A woman horse thief? It seems absurd. This is a pitiful attempt to obtain bounty money and make the Indians more hostile to us than they are at present. I want no part in it."

Taking back the reward notice, Neilsen folded it up, stuffed it into his pants pocket and laughed, a low chuckle. "The only thing that is ridiculous is your reaction. Of course I'd expect you to say that. It's common knowledge that you're soft on Indians. I hear things ... fierce things like intentionally letting cornered Apaches escape."

That did it. The spark turned dark. Davis blinked in surprise at his words, then glared at him. It took every ounce of restraint he had not to level the lieutenant colonel with a right cross to the jaw. It became glaringly apparent that Neilsen liked to instigate trouble. Other than his glare, Davis held his feelings deep inside, and kept a plain expression that wasn't off-putting.

"One thing I've observed is that the Apaches are as afraid of us as we are of them ...," Davis said, but he didn't finish.

It took only a look from Neilsen, still with that smirk on his face, to silence him from saying more. Davis thought it was a waste of time to continue.



Unbeknownst to them both, another set of ears had overheard a part of the conversation between them. Major General Aronstein had stood at the tent's entrance, listening. He took the momentary silence as an opportunity to step outside the tent to scold them.

"Enough! I don't appreciate standing in there listening to you two argue. I am sure I do not need to remind you both that you are on duty to your country," Aronstein's voice echoed through the grounds.

In what seemed like a split second they quickly stood at attention and spoke in unison. "Sir. Yes, sir."

"Lieutenant Davis, what are you still doing here? You should be briefing your troop on the important mission we discussed earlier," the major general added.

"Sir, I was on my way to do that," Davis replied.

For the next ten seconds, the major general gave them a hard look. The 54-year-old, very Anglo-looking with blue eyes and a ruddy complexion, mature officer, wasn't having any of it. After he felt a sufficient amount of time had passed, he loosened up and waved for Neilsen to come into the tent.

The brief encounter with Aronstein had shaken Davis up, as had the realization that soldiers in his troop were saying things behind his back. How else could Neilsen know about his decision a while back to allow Apaches in the Whetstone Mountains, where they'd holed up, escape? It irritated him that Neilsen was only too happy to point it out to him.

On that unsettling thought, he started to walk away.

Now his mind turned to this notorious female Indian outlaw Sequoia, who emerged out of nowhere to be charged with horse theft. Despite his outward adversity against the thought of more hostile actions toward the Indians, secretly his curiosity was sparked. Was he the only one who noticed that her name wasn't Apache at all? He couldn't imagine that Neilsen or anyone else would find her. It was hard enough trying to find Geronimo.

## *Chapter 37*

***I**N THE DISTANCE, SHE APPEARED LIKE THE GIRL on the Wanted posters, thought the old woman as her friends walked on and entered Schieffelin Hall.*

The whole community was on alert because outlaws were stealing horses and cattle virtually at will. Posters had been tacked up in Tombstone, and in the surrounding countryside on trees along the roads in and out of town.

The old woman shielded her eyes from the sun's glare with her hand and squinted, noting not a trace of clouds in the clear blue sky. She lost sight of her for a moment, but there she was, walking toward Third Street. When the ore wagon had cleared her line of sight, something inside told her it was the outlaw. But what could she do about it?

She took a breath, pulling cold air into her lungs, trying to calm her scattered thoughts. It was only five o'clock and she had a little time to kill before tonight's benefit at Schieffelin Hall. She was among the ladies of the

congregation of the new Episcopal church in town for the Christmas season fair.

Crossing Fourth Street, she ducked into the Bank Exchange Saloon, near the corner of Fremont Street. Inside, she glanced at the men around the billiard table. Startled by her presence, the man with the cue stick blinked and scratched his shot, scattering the balls, and nicking his thumb.

“Damn it,” the man said as he massaged his thumb with his other hand.

The other men at the billiard table, burst out laughing, whooping it up.

“Shut up! It’s not funny,” the man whimpered, shook his hand, then sucked on his throbbing thumb for a few seconds.

Intrusively, the old woman slipped into the conversation and told them what she’d seen, and to come outside and see for themselves. Only one man followed her, unwillingly at first and then with grim resignation.

“There she is, walking toward Second Street. That’s Sequoia,” the old woman insisted, one eye on the man, the other on the Indian girl.

The man, leaned up against the door with his shoulder, glimpsed the Indian girl. His eyes then fell to the Wanted poster pinned to the wall of the saloon. Instantaneously, his eyebrows furrowed into an exaggerated look of surprise on his plain face.

“\$1000! That just goes to show you, they put a larger reward for the capture of horse thieves than for murderers.

Around here, a horse is worth more than a man,” the man declared, awestruck.

Upon further scrutiny, he realized the old woman was right. In the drawing, Sequoia’s eyes were just two oval slits with colored circles drawn inside them. Still, he clung to the impression that there was no mistaking the woman from the Wanted poster.

He looked over at the old woman and nodded. Reward money did this to even the nicest people. It was a gambling town and profit was the primary reason they had come there in the first place.

A chattering crowd had gathered outside the saloon at this point. The old woman pointed down the street. All of them peeped at the Indian girl who was about to disappear around the corner.

“So are you going to go after her?” she persisted, making sure her voice carried.

“Five days until Christmas. I could really do with that money now!” said one of the men in the crowd.

“She’s getting away!” voices shouted behind the old woman.

“I saw her first,” cried a panic-stricken voice.

Four men took off running down the street. The old woman sighed and started fanning herself with her hand. Her eyes glazed — she tottered — falling into a faint. That level of commotion was too much for the sixty-seven-year-old woman formally dressed in a hat and a light dress underneath her floor-length, wool coat.

Just as a man was about to close the door of the Bank Exchange Saloon, he stepped back to intercept her. He caught her up in his arms just as her legs were giving way.

“Miss, are you okay?” asked the wiry, dark-haired man with an overhanging brow.

Slightly unsettled by the presence of this strange, quietly spoken man, she pulled away and composed herself. Trying to maintain an impassive attitude, she waved her hand dismissively and went across the street to rejoin her friends inside Schieffelin Hall.

A breeze came along Fourth Street, the air disrupted by the storm of men who’d thundered by the deputy sheriff’s office. It was almost the end of his shift and Undersheriff Avery had been standing by the window when he saw the men, whooping crazily like Indians.

“It’s Sequoia. Don’t let her get away,” a man yelled, his voice hoarse with rage.

“Did you hear that?” Avery asked, turning his head to look at the deputy sheriff over his shoulder. “They found Sequoia.”

Barton looked up from reading today’s edition of the *Tombstone Epitaph*, the relaxed expression on his face turning into one of shock. “I hope they don’t kill her.”

“I hope not, either. I don’t want her to die or get hurt,” Avery said in a melancholy way.

“Our shifts don’t end till six. So, you just keep watching and tell me if you see them coming this way to collect the reward of \$1000,” Barton said, shifted in the chair behind his desk, and returned to his reading.

The Indian girl stopped beside a covered wagon parked on Second Street in front of a feed and grain store. Two Indian men came out of the store, each carrying bags of feed on their shoulders.

“What’s your name, girl?” a man with a deep voice asked, out of breath.

The girl’s brow creased, as if she didn’t understand the question. The Indian men seemed momentarily taken aback before they threw the bags in the back of the wagon and then looked at them with a fierce expression.

“Well, what is your name?” one of the other men demanded with a wild expression on his face.

“Anya is my name,” she replied with an unblinking, faraway look in her eyes.

“You sure it isn’t Sequoia?” the same man asked, his eyes narrowed slits.

“My name’s Anya!” she insisted, in a loud voice.

One of the Indian men stepped forward and blocked the men’s path. “She’s telling you the truth. I am her father. We are Papago Indians. The name you said was Cherokee.”

Up close, the shape of her nose and the cut of her chin were someone to compare her critically to the sketch on the reward notice. Despite that the pudgy Indian girl seemed younger, a heated moment passed between the men as they gazed with hatred into each other’s eyes.

“We don’t want any trouble. We’re only here to buy feed for our animals, Now, why don’t you step aside, and we’ll be on our way?” the other Indian man told them.

“That old woman should have her eyes checked,” one man said before he turned and trudged off.

In spite of their fury and frustration, the rest of the men started to follow him back to the Bank Exchange Saloon. While the Papago Indians boarded their wagon and took off, eager to get out of town.

Except in the eyes and hearts of the diehards who believed they could find the elusive Indian outlaw; this first sighting had been a false alarm. In the days that would follow, an avalanche of false sightings of Sequoia in every corner of Tombstone would occur.



## *Chapter 38*

**I**N THE HALF-LIGHT OF DAWN, ON FRIDAY, CHIEF Nahele left the warmth of his teepee and stepped out into the early morning chill. Fresh air and a walk, that was what he needed. He hadn't slept much; he'd spent most of the night tossing and turning over this Sequoia situation. Galvanized by the disturbing news of the Wanted posters out on Sequoia all over Tombstone, he aimlessly circled the teepee, tugging at the white buffalo hide blanket draped over his shoulders. His forehead was dominated by the fixed arch of his eyebrows, a deep frown on his brow.

He walked a little more, wandering in no particular direction, but he finally made up his mind. Sometime today Sequoia had to leave their encampment. He feared to wait another day.

It was sad because things were starting to take off with the trading of several jugs of her almond milk for buffalo hides and other goods with the Indians in the region. This

was a long-held dream of hers that was finally being realized. Over the past two weeks, she had delivered almost daily jugs to the Yaqui and Papago Indians. She'd found that it helped take her mind off the loss of Dakota and the altercation with the women in Tombstone when she busied herself.

There was something else. As the White Chief of the tribe, he was the one who was going to lead them to a sanctuary in Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains. But things had taken a turn for the worse for Sequoia. And that could delay their journey to Mexico somewhat.

Chief Nahele shook these troublesome thoughts away. It was still early in the morning and there was nobody about on foot. The San Pedro River was calling him. He favored a spot by the river for reflection and quiet time with the Great Spirit. It was the sole place where he could escape into solitude. So he decided to head over there. He needed spiritual guidance now.

Inside the teepee, he got fully dressed mighty fast. Clad in a buffalo-skin overcoat, he hurried over to his brown horse with two white feet and mounted. He guided his horse onto a narrow path that led toward the river. When he got within fifteen feet of the water, he dismounted and tied his horse to a mesquite tree. He took branches from that same tree and built a small fire in a circle of stones he'd gathered from the ground. Using a thin stick he placed in the fire, he lit his long peace pipe. Then he put the fire out.

The early morning sun peeked from behind the clouds and warmed his face, as he sat at the river's edge. With a

serene look on his face, he puffed on his pipe sending rings of white smoke into the air. His eyes tore from the smoke, and he gazed out over the muddy river. The water flowed briskly.

Chief Nahele called to the Great Spirit to determine his fate. "I am in your hands."

In addition, he prayed to the Great Spirit for strength and courage to continue leading his people. He listened to the rustling trees whisper, waiting for an answer. He bowed his head in silence and stayed in that position for the entire day, hoping his spirit guide would come to him.

The sky dulled and took on a gray-orange hue as dusk pulled in. As he looked up to see storm clouds gathering in the west and moving like a spirit across the sky, he felt as if his soul was being pulled in two directions. His thoughts kept returning to the danger surrounding Sequoia.

The wind changed and the river grew dark and choppy. Rain could be expected later that day or the next day, along with high winds.

Two white-tailed hawks soared above the water. Did the Great Spirit answer his plea? But yes, perhaps yes. This was a sign, he knew. As the hawks circled, more hawks threaded in from the distant horizon to join them. He needed to be spirit-conscious, as he believed the gathering birds were showing him how to form a solution.

"What message do you bring me?" he asked the hawks telepathically.

The breeze from the river seemed to whisper the voices of the Grandfathers. “Gather your people, who yearn to be free. Make haste! Go to the land where this is possible.”

The wind was blowing around him. He pointed his pipe stem at the clouds and prayed. Now it was just a matter of time. He would soon lead his tribe to Mexico.

It was just before dinner when Chief Nahele reached the encampment on his horse. The instant he saw Chenoa, leaving her teepee, he hurried up to her and pulled her aside. He genuinely felt bad about the whole situation. But he came straight to the point without beating around the bush.

He sucked in a deep tired breath and finished by saying, “It would be best if Sequoia wasn’t around, should anyone come looking for her.”

“So you’re saying we should make her disappear?” she questioned sadly.

After asking that, Chenoa’s body hunched into itself, her eyes distant. Her emotional reaction was exactly what he had been expecting.

“Temporarily,” he replied. “Not permanently. Maybe a few weeks. I don’t know yet. She can lay low for a while. The thing to do is let the hoopla surrounding Sequoia die down a bit.”

The plan sounded reasonable, but still Chenoa didn’t feel good about it. Late last night she’d told him about learning from Sequoia about the Wanted posters that were put out on her and had been tacked up around Tombstone. Yesterday afternoon, some Papago Indians had told Sequoia, for which she was amazed and shocked. She’d

spent hours consoling Sequoia and giving her advice before seeking him out to share the news.

“By then we’ll be in Mexico,” she said, eyes watery.

“Correct. This will all be over before you know it,” he said in a reassuring tone.

Her sad eyes said it all. Quite naturally, she was deeply upset, but she did not have the luxury of a choice in the matter. Would Sequoia’s life ever be normal again? she wondered as she turned away and headed in the direction where her daughter was.

After a quiet dinner of venison and roasted mescal hearts, Chief Nahele stared into the blazing campfire. He tried to keep his mind blank but found his scattered thoughts returning to Chenoa’s reaction. He picked up his flute and began to play. And play he did, way into the night. That helped to clear his mind.

## Chapter 39

**I**N THREE DAYS' TIME THERE HAD BEEN sightings of Sequoia everywhere — boarding a Southern Pacific train in Benson with another sighting of her riding a horse down the streets of Tombstone. The whole town was talking of nothing else. But all of those sightings had turned out to be inaccurate. In the course of all that Sequoia became a True Outlaw.

John Clum, who couldn't pass up a chance like this, chose to publish the story of a fake sighting of Sequoia in yesterday's, (Friday's) edition of the *Tombstone Epitaph*. What he didn't expect was that ten liars subsequently came to his office on Fremont Street, saying that they had also seen Sequoia. It was eating on Clum pretty good, and everyone was having fun with it at his expense.

Sequoia had had her moment in the sun. With today being Christmas Eve, the frenzy over her was expected to

die down, as was the case for most outlaws. But proof of that was yet to be seen around town.

The creak of springs filled the air as a horse-drawn carriage pulled to a stop at the northwest corner of Sixth and Allen Streets. Fulana Davis and her two sons climbed out. Looking up, she waved away the soldier in uniform sitting in the driver's seat, holding the reins of the horses.

A steady wind blew, forcing Fulana Davis to put her hand on her hat to keep it in place as she walked. With her left hand, she instinctively sought the frail hand of her two-year-old son, Angus, in order to clasp it in hers. Byron, though only one year older than Angus, walked by his mother's side.

When they walked into McKean & Knight, a quarreling voice pierced the air. Fulana placed her arm in front of the two boys like a protective barrier. Expecting them to run from her, she was surprised to see them look up, wary but unafraid.

"You'll do exactly what I tell you!" a woman's voice scolded.

There was a lengthy pause, and then a man's angry voice said, "You may be a prominent citizen, but you don't run this town. I'm not obligated to do more than sell your milk in my store."

The room felt like it was closing in on them as Byron gave his mother a worried look. Fulana sighed uneasily as she took a few steps forward, to get a better view. The boys huddled closer to her in plain sight, making their eavesdropping obvious.

The woman, in a long dress and bonnet, wheeled about with an alacrity that shocked them. She continued to berate the man behind the counter, dressed in a white, collarless dress shirt under suspenders that held up his black trousers.

The woman huffed and puffed and went on, in a louder and wilder tone: “Mr. Reich, I know she’s been in here before. If she comes here again, peddling her milk, you must notify the sheriff. She is a wanted woman! She stole my horse. That’s why I put the reward on her.”

Fulana’s eyes shot up. She remembered her husband, Randall, had told her over dinner that there was an Indian girl wanted for horse theft in Tombstone. Definitely. She would tell her husband about this first thing when she got home.

Theodore Reich looked at Pidge, exasperated, and tried to steer the conversation in a different direction. “That Wanted poster has been pasted firmly to the window of the store. There’s nothing more I can do, Miss Swafford. After all, tomorrow is Christmas Day. Don’t you have any plans?”

His eyes twitched behind his circular glasses as he shrank backwards. Truly, Pidge Swafford didn’t like the exchange between them. Obviously she wouldn’t even be here if Shirley hadn’t canceled their luncheon. Apparently, the McInerny’s had plans for Christmas Eve that didn’t include the Cowgirls.

She glanced at the folded newspaper on the counter while she gathered her thoughts. Her eyes caught it. It was yesterday’s edition of the *Tombstone Epitaph*. She was



looking very intently at the article about the fake sighting of Sequoia. The shopkeeper had been reading it. Her gaze fastened on him, searching for mockery, but found none. Put very simply, he was oblivious to it all and ignored her sharp study.

Close to fuming, she slipped the newspaper under her arm. “Yes, I have some last minute Christmas shopping to do. I’ll be reading this while I look around.”

“Be my guest,” he said with a resigned sigh.

Upon hearing that, Fulana Davis turned to her boys. “Let’s go to that aisle and search for the cereal you like.”

The sound of boys chattering interrupted Pidge’s reading of the article on Sequoia. Noisily, she folded up the paper, slid it under her arm. After sighing, she looked down the aisle to watch Fulana Davis’ two sons, garbed in blue velvet knee-length breeches and matching coats. It just so happened that Fulana was in the adjacent aisle. For a change of pace, Pidge seized the moment to promote her business.

“Hello boys. If you’d like something really good to have with your cereal, you can find the Swafford brand of milk here,” she said in a jovial way.

A frightened Angus stared at her, utterly speechless, whereas Byron said rather enthusiastically. “I like that milk.”

“Well, I am Pidge Swafford, the owner of Swafford’s Dairy. Nothing pleases me more than to see the smile on the face of a satisfied customer,” she said, with a degree of pride.

All this time Fulana had been standing at the top of the aisle, listening.

As she approached, Pidge jumped in before she could say something. "You must be the boys' mother."

"Hello," was all Fulana said, and then turned to her boys. "Why don't you two go to the counter? I'm sure Mr. Reich has some candy for you."

"Thanks, mom," Byron said grabbing his brother's hand and pulling him toward the counter.

"Being the owner of a family business, I understand the responsibilities involved in raising children," Pidge said, with an air of casualness.

"I'm sure you do. Well, I need to shop for my Christmas dinner," Fulana said quickly, brushing past her, heading toward the opposite side of the store.

Evidently unimpressed, she put as much distance between herself and Pidge Swafford as possible. Fulana had moved so quickly that her finely striped, yellow-and-white dress, visible through her black wool coat that flared out to end below the knee in a wide band of white fur, swayed around her legs. Pidge still stood where she had left her, looking dumbfounded. Mere seconds later, the bell above the door jingled as she exited the store.

The Davis boys chewed on their candy bars, making lip-smacking noises, and watching Reich, who went over to peer out the window. Fulana came up behind the boys. When she looked at Reich, she noticed his eyes were fixed on Pidge Swafford.

Before Reich turned around he gave a ‘whatever’ expression to himself, then went behind the counter.

“They didn’t give you any trouble, did they?” Fulana asked playfully.

“Not at all Mrs. Davis. Byron and,” he paused, and she realized he’d forgotten the name of her other son.

“Angus,” she threw in quickly.

“Angus,” he repeated, “are shining examples of well-behaved children.”

“Thanks for saying that,” she grinned and placed her items on the counter.

After some seconds passed in hesitation, he got some paper bags from under the counter. “Not that I mean to pry, but I couldn’t help but hear you talking to Pidge Swafford. Are you acquainted with her?”

“No, in fact, she is a perfect stranger to me. This is the first time I’ve met her,” Fulana said without any interest.

“I thought perhaps you knew her, or of her, because she has a certain reputation,” he let that hang, then added softly, “For her milk. Of course. That’s what I was suggesting.”

“Indeed, I’m sure that’s what you meant to say,” she said with a sympathetic smile, grabbed the two bags, and then turned to her boys. “Our carriage is waiting.”

“It was my pleasure to serve you. Come back again anytime,” Reich said as they walked out the door.

## *Chapter 40*

**F**OR NEARLY THIRTY MINUTES, SEQUOIA HAD been rubbing two pieces of wood together, relentlessly trying to make a fire. But she'd grown tired and fell back, off her knees onto her butt. Well, the fire would have to wait. She just hoped she wouldn't catch her death of cold.

Reminiscing, she looked toward the sky just as a cold breeze swept past her, blowing in spurts of fury. Yesterday morning Chief Nahele had sent her to live in isolation camped along the San Pedro River's edge. She was a couple of miles shy of the Cherokee encampment and a good four miles from Charleston. He had promised that three warriors would protect her from any harm, on watch twenty-four hours a day. That she could handle, but not being able to ride her horse wherever she could, nor deliver her almond milk to the local Indian tribes, even if temporary, was truly disturbing to her. Life hadn't been fair to her. Perhaps the

solitude of the environment was just what she needed to get her thoughts straight.

With her arms crossed over her chest, she took a gander at Yogesh, her horse. His head was turned away, his attention focused on the sounds of foot traffic. He grunted, eyed the trees dubiously and flicked an ear.

Her pulse jumped. She turned her head and scanned the trees across the river. There was the faintest stirring of a breeze through the stretch of trees. The motion caused a rippling effect through the top half of the groves of cottonwood and willow trees. When she looked down to the ground, she saw movement in the brush. Out of the brush came a trio of Apache warriors. She gazed wonderingly at the powerful looking Apache man walking behind them, who stood out to her. The more she looked at him, the more she questioned herself.

Hazy thoughts trickled through her mind. Could it be Geronimo? And then again it might not. It was rumored among the Indians that Geronimo, and his renegade Apaches, were camped in the lower Carcay Mountains in northwestern Chihuahua, Mexico. The crags of these mountains was a stronghold of Juh of the Nednhi band of Chiricahuas, a friend and brother-in-law of Geronimo. So ... it couldn't be him, right?

Now she saw the Apaches turn and look in her direction, and she crouched behind her teepee. For a gut-wrenching instant, she thought they'd seen her. But when she peeked a glance at the Apaches, she saw they'd moved further

along the bank of the river. Either they hadn't seen her or they didn't care she was there.

She looked back toward her horse. A Cherokee warrior had come and sat beside him on the ground with his back toward her. Two Cherokee warriors had gone hunting and left only one guard behind. Help was only a holler away, but she couldn't speak. She didn't want to bring attention to herself.

When she turned her head, she saw the Apaches were farther down the river. They disappeared into the brush, but she just kept wondering why one of them made her think of Geronimo. More important, even though she'd never seen him before, there was something familiar about him that she attributed to Geronimo. For a while she wondered if she just wanted it to be him.

As she returned to build a fire, she knew that the Geronimo sighting had been a false alarm. Such a sighting indicated how quickly what she suspected could manifest into reality. It hadn't fazed her at first, but it seemed logical that she had also succumbed to the atmosphere of fear of the notorious Apache in the Tombstone region.

That admission shocked her, and as she filed it in the back of her mind her own situation came back to her. She had more in common with Geronimo than she imagined. Besides being Indian, they were both outlaws in the eyes of the white settlers. They were living in hiding. And they were both being hunted.

The next couple of hours passed uneventfully. The three warriors were seated in a half circle on the ground, their

legs folded under them in front of her teepee. Sequoia was sitting on the ground beside the fire, warming herself before the embers. She felt chills ripple through her and put more wood on the fire, causing it to crackle. Shivering, she held her hands out to the fire and rubbed them together, the heat soothing her hands. A sudden rush of wind caused the fire to spark and hiss like a live thing. She stared longingly at the fire, huddled under her shawl, falling into a nap.

Half asleep she didn't hear the horse until it galloped right past her. A slight tremor of the ground and a faint clatter of hooves caused her to look up. Her mother dismounted as quickly as her shivering body would allow. Chenoa secured her horse's reins to the same tree as Yogesh, who neighed and bobbed his head in her direction.

"Sequoia," Chenoa called to her in a soothing voice, smiling weakly, "I brought you this blanket. Let this be my Christmas Day offering."

"Thanks, mother," she said, stood from the ground, took the blanket from her, and set it inside the teepee.

When she turned back to her, she noticed her mother's eyes were showing tears at the corners. "Is something wrong?"

"I'm worried about you. About us. I met Chief Nahele by his teepee this morning, and we spoke at length. He's been planning our trip to Mexico. And he thinks it's best that you don't come with us. You may be discovered just the same. Now he wants you to return to Oklahoma," Chenoa said in a troubled voice.

"Oklahoma!" was all she could say.

Sequoia opened her mouth to argue, then snapped her mouth shut. Relatively quickly she had realized it would do her no good. So, she just shrugged in a nonchalant manner. It was as if she should have no say in her life. She felt as if her world was shattering.

Seeing the disappointment etched on her face, Chenoa continued, “Everything changed for me when you told me you had a bounty on you. One thousand dollars to the person who brings you in. Dead or alive. All I want to do now is protect you from harm and to ensure your survival. I know my brother, Shiloh, and his family at the settlement in Oklahoma will look after you.”

Upset as she was, and not wanting to hear any more about her leaving, she changed the subject. “Maybe I shouldn’t tell you what happened today?”

“Well, what is it? More trouble?” prompted Chenoa.

“No, I believe members of Geronimo’s band passed by here,” she said directly.

“You saw Apaches?” her mother asked, her mouth slack with shock.

“They didn’t see me. Nothing came of it,” she assured her mother.

“This time,” Chenoa said, feeling anxious. “What about next time? The sooner you leave, the sooner I’ll feel better.”

They stood there embraced in a hug for about five minutes, before Chenoa turned to walk away. A muscular brave who looked about twenty-one years old, walked past them, patrolling the campsite. Confidence glinted in the warrior’s eyes as he nodded to her. The piercing look in his



eyes was as sharp as an arrow point. His strong persona made her feel that Sequoia would be safe under his watch.

Chenoa swung up onto her brown mare, waved a goodbye, and Sequoia waved back. And long after her mother had ridden off, she stood staring in the direction in which she'd gone. Very badly, she longed to be with her mother at the encampment but knew it wouldn't happen. She couldn't seem to look away, but the longer she stared, it hurt to keep looking.

## *Chapter 41*

**A**T TWO O'CLOCK ON MONDAY AFTERNOON, Willard McKenna stepped off the stirrup and swung off his horse. He stroked his mustache, blinked and rubbed his eyes. It was obvious he was just waking up. He had had a late start after drinking heavily with some Cowboy buddies at the Bank Exchange Saloon last night. That was his way of celebrating Christmas. Yanking his horse around in a half-circle, he boarded his horse in the O.K. Corral. Although sober, he felt queasy as he pushed up his sand-hued sombrero and strode toward the two Cowboys hanging out there.

The fast-spinning wheels of the ore wagons and horses' hooves kicked up dust clouds with every step up and down Allen Street. The wind blew strongly from the north carrying the dust right off the street and into the walkways of the city. Amidst all the swirling dust, the O.K. Corral

looked different. Exactly two months ago, the most notorious gunfight in the history of the American West had occurred there.

In the corral the Cowboys were watching a wild colt that was bucking and kicking. They were amused by the behavior of the colt and neither glanced McKenna's way although he knew they were conscious of his presence. Their eyes were glued to a gaunt-faced man with intense protruding eyes, who a minute after mounting the colt ended up being tossed out of the saddle. The man landed on his belly on the ground, and they nearly busted their guts laughing.

An instant later, their fun was interrupted when McKenna, grinning prodigiously, beckoned them to follow him to the Grand Hotel. The two men walked alongside him down Allen Street passing Fourth Street.

"What's this meeting about, Whiskers?" the tallest of the Cowboys asked in a high-pitched voice.

Among his peers, McKenna went by the name Whiskers, because of the thin, curly mustache above his lip. Despite his youthful features, there was something in his eyes that was completely at odds with his appearance. He stared people directly in the eyes, often intimidating them. Exaggerating his strength was his way of expressing maturity. Yet, the defiant Cowboy with an unpredictable disposition, held his own among the men, especially with several shots of whiskey under his belt.

"Quit your yapping, Jed. I'll tell you when we get there," McKenna answered in a sharp tone, buttoning up his

black coat against the chill wind, his expression glum. “My head hurts. Feels like my body was run over by a horse.”

Despite the way McKenna had spoken to him, of all the Cowboys, he got along with Jed Rogers the best. Silhouetted against the sun, thirty-three-year old Rogers looked like a tall Viking in a long black coat. He wore a black, high-crowned Stetson to cover the cowlick of hair over his forehead.

“You’ve got a hangover,” the shortest of the Cowboys said.

McKenna had no response as they hustled through the entrance and into the lobby equipped with three elegant chandeliers. The boot-stomping men didn’t go unnoticed by the clerk. The usually affable Jack Altman, standing outside the office, gave half a grin as they checked in their pistols. That was when the shorter man excused himself to the bathroom.

“Don’t be too long, Trey,” Jed fairly roared to him as he walked away.

The two remaining Cowboys wasted no time hurrying up the broad staircase with a heavy walnut banister. As soon as they were upstairs in the main hall, they turned to the left, and burst through the door of their special room. It was fitted with walnut furniture and the walls were decorated with elaborate wallpaper with costly oil paintings hung upon it.

A weary-eyed McKenna moved quickly to the window to check the view outside while Rogers sprawled out on a king size bed. The shutters were kept closed, minus one slat,

which had been removed to allow an eye to peek out or a gun barrel to slip through. Across the street was the Cosmopolitan Hotel, where the Earps' resided, and he was able to watch their comings and goings.

His thoughts were clouded with pain pounding against his skull. His headache wasn't any better. Peering through the shutter slats, he remembered the day he was released from court. He knew he had Sheriff John Behan to thank for it. It was here at the Grand Hotel that Behan had befriended many of the Cowboys. Upon arriving in Tombstone, John Behan had taken a job as a bartender at the Grand Hotel's Grotto Saloon, which was off the lobby to one side, before becoming sheriff. But the favor came at a price — in exchange, he was asked by his brother, Jake to go after the Indian outlaw Sequoia. He didn't like having any conditions put on him, but he couldn't bear to turn down an opportunity to make some money.

"We have had nothing but trouble from the Indians around here," McKenna blurted out.

Rogers stopped grinding his teeth long enough to say, "You'll get no argument from me."

"I seek to capture that outlaw Sequoia who is on all those Wanted posters around town and collect that one thousand dollars. That's what I aimed to tell you about," McKenna snarled and tossed his sombrero back off his head, letting it hang from his neck by its chin thong.

"If I help you, will you divide the money equally between us?" Rogers asked, his eyebrow lifted as he pushed up his Stetson.

“Equally?” McKenna asked, gazing at him as he pondered his words. “Um, okay. There’s no use in arguing about how the reward money is to be divvied up. But it’s subject to change, though.”

Knowing he had successfully riled him up, McKenna’s grin took on a devious slant. The conversation continued along these lines for ten minutes or so before a plot was formed to find Sequoia.

“Now that that’s out of the way, let’s go have a few drinks. I think it may help my headache,” McKenna said, and headed for the door.

The two Cowboys stormed into the saloon of the Grand Hotel, where they found Trey already enjoying a drink. A sideburned man in his thirties, with a nervous twitch in his voice, Trey Barker was slumped in his chair, in a stupor. The saloon was a large, square room with tables and chairs opposite a long, straight bar with small wings on one side. McKenna calmly gestured to Rogers to stay quiet about their plans, as he didn’t want to split the reward money three ways. But Trey was too drunk to even notice.

Rays of the fading sunlight cast reflections of the early-evening sky against the windows of the hotel. By the time full darkness had settled over the town, the Cowboys had had their share of drinks.

## *Chapter 42*

**I**T WAS A CLEAR AND CLOUDLESS WEDNESDAY morning of December 28 in Tombstone. The door to the deputy sheriff's office burst open and McKenna and Rogers rushed in, both with frenzied looks on their faces. Obsessing for the past two days, they'd woken up in the Grand Hotel, their minds filled with questions only the deputy sheriff could answer.

Moving like lightning Avery rose from the chair behind his desk. "Can't stay away, can you, McKenna?"

The Cowboys felt the weight of Avery's eyes falling on their red sashes tied around the waistband of their trousers, which he could see through their open coats.

McKenna ignored it and swiped a Wanted poster from the stack on the side of the undersheriff's desk. "Look, I'm not here to start any trouble. My bad reputation has been unfairly exaggerated. I'm on a mission to find Sequoia, that Indian outlaw. Me and my buddy, Jed, want

to make our community a better place to live. We're glad to be doing our part to rid society of the criminal element."

With a flourish, Rogers took the Wanted poster from his hands, held it up and pointed with his other hand at the sketch of Sequoia. "We are determined to find her."

The undersheriff wasn't buying his words. "You say this is about your reputation? Really? Why are you here, McKenna?"

"We're here because we want to know if the reward money will be split evenly between the men who capture Sequoia," Rogers quickly answered, not giving McKenna time to respond, and stuffed the poster in his coat pocket.

Deputy Sheriff Barton stood up from his chair, came around his desk and leaned against the front of it, partially sitting. He loudly cleared his throat but didn't say anything. Avery turned his attention to him. Barton just nodded and looked at him in a way that meant that he would take over from there. When Avery looked at the wild-eyed expression on the faces of the Cowboys, he hesitated to say anything.

More seconds passed. The deputy sheriff cleared his throat again and crossed his arms.

Rather than wait any longer, Barton said, "No doubt the reward money is your primary motivation. It's no more than I should have expected from your kind."

"What do you mean 'your kind'?" McKenna asked in a gruff voice.

The deputy sheriff didn't bother answering him and spoke to Avery instead. "Will you escort them to my desk?"



As Avery walked them over, his handlebar mustache started twitching at the sight of the cowlick of hair over Rogers' forehead. Rogers noticed and in turn stared at his twitching mustache. Then Avery noticed him staring, and he looked at him blankly, his mustache ceasing to twitch.

"And here I thought you knew a thing or two about how to collect reward money. You are both part of Clanton's gang, after all. In any case, let me explain how the reward money is to be paid," Barton said as soon as they were standing beside him.

By now Avery had gone to stand by the window and stare down the street.

After Barton explained the process, he asked, "Everybody in Tombstone is trying to find Sequoia. What makes you think you can find her?"

"I got to talking to the bartender in the Bank Exchange Saloon. One thing led to another, and we got to talking about Sequoia. And the bartender said that one of his customers told him the name Sequoia is Cherokee. That means she's not Apache. And that should make it easier to find her," McKenna said with a smug look on his face.

"We will capture her and bring her here to collect the reward sooner than you think," Rogers gave the deputy sheriff an I-told-you-so look.

After a sigh, Barton added: "Just remember you two aren't the only ones who want to capture Sequoia. There's been more than enough sightings of her, causing anxiety among the town's residents. The last report placed her in the Santa Catalina Mountains near Tucson. Needless to say,

so far every sighting of her has turned out to be false. No one seems to know who this Indian girl may be or knows anything about her current whereabouts.”

Frenzy had gripped Tombstone and until Sequoia was caught, it would continue. Barton attributed the multiple sightings of Sequoia to two sources: greedy rustlers and drunks. These false alarm sightings had given her an enigmatic persona, much like the Scarlet Pimpernel. It wasn't so much that Sequoia was a bad person. The deputy sheriff believed she was probably a good person who had made a bad mistake when she took a horse that wasn't hers. And the known facts surrounding Sequoia's life were murky. All he had to go on was the word of Pidge Swafford, her two friends and the shopkeeper from the Soma Winery.

McKenna grumbled for a moment, then looked one last time at the deputy sheriff in agonized indecision. Clearly he wanted to say something — argue with him, probably — but he hardly knew what it was he wanted to say. So he looked at Rogers, eyes glaring, before he pulled him by the arm and walked him toward the door. Defiantly the Cowboys flounced out the door, almost pushing Avery over as they left.

“Good luck finding Sequoia,” Avery said as the door closed behind them.

“I'll tell you what, though, this whole Sequoia thing has got my mind ticking. What really worries me is that people don't seem interested in finding Geronimo anymore, and more interested in finding this elusive Indian. It's like people have forgotten the real threat. In the process, they've

made this girl out to be something more than what she is,” Barton said as he walked around his desk and lowered himself into his chair.

“I am inclined to agree with you. I think this whole thing has been blown out of proportion. Because she is just a girl. Still, I’d hate to be in her situation,” Avery said, looking over his shoulder.

Sequoia was becoming a legend among Indian legends all in a blink of time. Just like that, the cattle-rustling Cowboys and the lawmen were now sideshows to the main attraction of Sequoia. Some folks around town had even started calling her “a female Geronimo.”

### *Chapter 43*

**T**HAT AFTERNOON, THE SUN ROSE HIGH IN THE sky above the San Pedro River where three Apache women were bathing together stark naked. The weak sun slightly visible above the horizon barely warmed them as they splashed about, wading carefree in the water. It was cool, in the fifties, a peaceful scene — blue sky, and a few puffy clouds spreading gracefully.

Two Apache warriors were positioned near the cottonwood-jammed river, watching out for them. That was until Willard McKenna and Jed Rogers found fresh tracks of their horses leading to the river. Their interest was sparked. In a spontaneous decision, the rustlers turned their horses, detouring from their destination.

The Cowboys had headed up the trail by the San Pedro River toward the Mexican state of Sonora after they had stopped at the Clanton Ranch and were given orders. In Mexico, they were to round up strays of cattle and bring

them back across the border to the Clanton ranch for rebranding. Then they were to drive the cattle to the San Simon Valley, east of Galeyville, where they would be sold to illegal slaughterhouses.

Before the Apache warriors knew it, they were on them. The Cowboys caught them by surprise, went at them at full speed, slitting their throats with knives. Some of the blood even splattered on their clothes, all this within a matter of seconds.

As they turned to their horses tied to a tree, somewhat further away, the Cowboys heard faint sounds of splashing and voices coming from the river. As the men approached some trees, the sound of gurgling water came across clearly. They peered around the trees and saw an unexpected sight. Three Indian women were swimming in the nude. Rogers stared all googly-eyed at them, seemingly oblivious to the fresh drops of blood on his linsey-woolsey shirt under his long black coat. While McKenna smiled in a benignly condescending way as if to say he was amused by the distraction.

Funny how women could do that to men. Distract them.

For an ample amount of time, they were watching them. But then they got to thinking — which was a mistake because they were run-of-the-mill Cowboys. They figured one of them was Sequoia. Like a Cherokee living among Apaches.

Hiding behind a tree, McKenna poked his sombrero off his forehead and studied the area around. As far as his eyes could travel there were no other Indians in sight. He

relaxed, satisfied that they were alone, and slapped the sombrero back on his head.

“One little, two little, three little Indians. Four little, five little, six little Indians,” McKenna sang softly, grinning naughtily.

All of the sudden, one of the tied-up horses started moving about uneasily. This prompted one of the women to suspect the presence of a predator, such as a coyote. When she looked toward the east, she saw two figures with six-shooters coming toward her.

Just before the Cowboys reached the women they saw four Apache warriors ride to the bank of the river and converse with the women. The woman who’d seen them was grim with apprehension, pointing in their direction. She had apparently warned the warriors about the Cowboys approaching because all of them turned their heads and looked at them.

His heart fluttered, as he stopped abruptly and put out his arm to stop Rogers. Ignoring the fear inside him, McKenna glared at them with a look that could kill.

“Darn Apaches,” Rogers muttered.

Maybe they could put bullets into the Apaches before they fired their rifles. The Cowboys were willing to try.

Instinct moved through McKenna, who was fast, raising the six-shooter and firing, but not fast enough — the bullet blasted upward. One of the Apaches heard the bullet sizzle past his ear. At the same instant, another Apache fired his rifle sending a bullet directly into the chest of Jed Rogers, who never got off a round, killing him on the spot.

A devastated McKenna grimaced and looked away, traumatized by the horror of it. He had no alternative but to dash off. Just as quickly, though, two of the Apaches on horseback gave a whoop and rode right at him. They were determined to get him, for no doubt these were fierce warriors.

Keeping a hand on his sombrero to hold it firmly in place as he ran, McKenna sped along the trail. And luckily he had had a head start on his pursuers and was able to mount his horse before they caught up with him. Bullets flew around him, but he rode on, one hand holding his sombrero and the other on the reins. The only ace in the hole he had was that he knew his stallion's capabilities. It wasn't but a few moments later that he outrode the pursuing Apaches, who in turn relented, turned their horses around and headed for the river.

Soon thereafter, McKenna was back on the trail toward the Sonora. Riding his horse hard and fast. His mood was sour. His one and only best friend was dead. Grief, despair, shock, so many emotions were coursing through him that he was having trouble controlling them.

A tear ran down McKenna's cheek. Now revenge was all he could think of. And he would have it. He wanted blood for blood. The Indians were going to pay the price for killing Jed Rogers. To attempt capturing Sequoia was out of the question. He was going to see her dead if it was the last thing he ever did.

As difficult as it was, he pushed these thoughts away, and tried to focus on the ride ahead of him. He realized, too,

that Clanton was counting on him to do this thing, which indicated that he believed he was capable. Which he thought, if he did his job well and carefully, it would put him in a good position in the ranks of the Cowboys.



## *Chapter 44*

**F**RIDAY MORNING'S SUNRISE TEASED THE horizon before Chief Nahele's eyes as he stepped outside his teepee. The sky above grew to a deep, pulsing blue. It was then that he decided it was time. The cementation ceremony, that hadn't been practiced in the recent years, was necessary. He thought it would boost the morale of the tribe and restore harmony to Sequoia's life.

It had been tradition for the ceremony to occur shortly after the appearance of the first new moon of autumn. This year the moon's appearance in the sky happened in mid-October.

A little later on that same morning of December 30, Chief Nahele assembled the tribe and announced that he would conduct the cementation ceremony. Which would take place when darkness set in. The White Chief further explained that the ceremony would strengthen their faith in

each other and should make them better prepared to face the future ahead. The tribe would be traveling to Mexico soon, and Sequoia would soon return to Oklahoma. In addition, he wanted Sequoia present, because the ceremony would help her find the closure and peace that she needed to move forward. And the ceremony was to be simple, followed by two days of fasting.

For the rest of the day, Sequoia along with everyone else in the tribe had been preparing for the ceremony. When they gathered for lunch, they consumed larger portions of food to prepare for the fast ahead. Most of all, Sequoia was happy to be with her mother on the encampment again — even if it was only for one day.

That night, as soon as it was dark, everyone took their designated places around a burning campfire. Out front stood the White Chief beside the shaman, who would assist in the duties.

Chief Nahele, in his full headdress made of sacred white eagle feathers and white buffalo-skin overcoat, puffed serenely on his long, white stone peace pipe at each of the cardinal directions of North, East, South and West. A full complement of spirits, including the guiding spirits and the Great Spirit, were believed to dwell in the Upper World at each of the four cardinal points. The Upper World (the sky was a place of order and harmony where the dead went and was made of solid rock. The Cherokees' universe included This World (the earth, and the Under World (a place of chaos below the ground and below the water.

“The spirits are with us now,” Chief Nahele said as he turned to face Soaring Eagle.

Once the smoke of the peace pipe had ascended, Soaring Eagle recited a ritualistic chant before he spoke a series of prayers. Furiously two warriors began to beat the drums, starting at a high volume and steadily decreasing as the moments passed.

The White Chief addressed everyone there. All of them watched, listened, huddled in their winter clothes against the chill weather. Only when he mentioned Sequoia’s name did she snap out of her daze. She had been looking into the fire, praying for the ability to forgive and not listening to a word he had been saying. Straightaway she looked up at his face, which was illuminated by the glow of the flames. He nodded to her, an indication for her to start.

After a nod to him, Sequoia held her head up high and gave her account of the altercation she had had with the women in Tombstone. Despite it all, her words were full of hope. Relief washed over her as she spoke her words of forgiveness.

Sequoia continued with deliberation: “I pray to the Great Spirit who made us all that these women find peace in their hearts to forget my encounter with them. And that the settlers in this region look at me, for the kind person that I am.”

As Sequoia spoke, Chenoa prayed that she would find peace within herself. She thought back to the romantic and dreamer her daughter once was, the kind of girl who believed in a better future. She had witnessed Sequoia’s

mood change. And it saddened her that the trouble in her daughter's life had taken such a toll on her.

In a final act, Sequoia moved closer to the fire, that raged, its wispy smoke going up to the pitch black of the sky. For one brief moment, her eyes were lifted to the multitude of stars that were clearly on display. In conclusion, she vowed to never bring the incident up again.

A proud White Chief ritualistically passed his peace pipe back and forth among the tribe. He could see in the faces of his tribe that the cementation ceremony had been a success — not that there'd been any doubt.

Cholo wasted no time approaching. "Sequoia."

Unwittingly, Sequoia turned away from the fire and tossed her mother a look — only to find she was looking at the White Chief. Chenoa was engaged in conversation with Chief Nahele and didn't even notice when Cholo passed by her.

Her face tingled as she looked at Cholo, the fire casting a warm glow on his face. Although she was a little taken aback, seeing him brought back memories, good and bad, of Dakota and his moral support.

"How are you, Cholo?"

"I'm scared that this will be the last time I see you. And I want our goodbye to be easy, but I don't feel that it is easy to say goodbye to you," he said with great emotion, folding his muscular arms across his chest.

"I was scared of that too. I wish I could go to Mexico with all of you," she said, sympathetically.

They talked a while longer and then it was silent for a second, and she embraced him, with special affection. Her cheek touched the strands of his black hair that had escaped from the brown scarf wrapped around his head and twisted in the breeze. As she buried her face in the shoulder of his bearskin coat, she thought that if happiness existed, then it could be found in this moment. It was a moment that she didn't want to end.

Thereafter, Sequoia hugged her mother goodbye and got back on her horse. Glimpses of her past, passed before her mind's eye as she followed the three warriors on horseback up the trail toward their secluded campsite. Though she had felt peace in her heart after partaking in the ceremony, the empty feeling had come back to her insides, worse than ever.

Everyone had turned in but Chief Nahele, who wasn't ready to settle down for the night. He was sitting on a large boulder at the edge of the encampment with the wind blowing all around him. In the bitter cold, huddling into his coat, he pulled out his flute and played a soft melody.

## *Chapter 45*

**T**HE COWBOYS DIDN'T TAKE KINDLY TO ONE OF their own being killed. Willard McKenna had hurried his horse from the San Simon Valley, only briefly stopping to water his horse in the watering spot Croton Springs. He rode on to Clanton's Ranch — where a bunch of Cowboys were — and had told them about the slaying of Jed Rogers out by the San Pedro River. The Cowboys were moved to take action against this flagrant attack. Payback was in the air and on their tongues. With no show of haste, a posse of six was formed.

Trouble had been brewing for days. Around 11:30 P.M., that same day of December 28 that Jed Rogers had been murdered, three Cowboys fired on Virgil Earp with double-barreled shotguns on Allen Street in Tombstone. The city marshal had survived the ambush, but as a result, his arm was paralyzed.

In the predawn hours of December 31, McKenna and his posse of Cowboys had traveled twenty-six miles south of the border into Mexico when they discovered the tracks of an Apache woman and her pony. They circled around to the trail and cautiously moved their horses through the brush, following the moccasin prints she'd left. Unlike most Apaches, who tried to conceal their tracks as much as possible by switching off at right angles on stony ground that left no imprints, the woman had made no effort to disguise her tread. Under an iron-gray sky, mountains loomed on their left. Apparently, she was headed in a northeasterly direction to the Pinito Mountains.

They had ridden a mile, when McKenna thought he had heard faint voices from beyond the screen of brush and trees. He signaled a halt and reined in, so that he could hear better. It was so quiet he could hear a hawk winging across the sky. He pulled his sombrero down to shield his eyes from the wind and scanned the terrain for some sign of Apaches. Nothing moved, nothing was seen, and nothing was heard. Maybe he imagined it. He frowned, trying to figure out what was going on. Even though he hadn't heard anything, his pulse quickened at the thought of the Apache camp being a short distance ahead.

Fifty yards farther, McKenna and the Cowboys came to a clearing where the camp stood. Quite clearly. Nestled in the brush, McKenna could see several brush-covered wickiups. He reached over to palm the gun from the belt on his hip.

Although outnumbered by two to one, nods of understanding came from all of the Cowboys. With a shared sense of determination, they trotted forward, spreading out into a circle of riders from which no one could escape.

As McKenna and the rest of the posse drew closer, they leaned over their horses' necks, armed with six-shooters and Henry rifles. The Apaches didn't seem to have noticed them.

Seething with anger toward the Apaches, McKenna decided his first order of business was to get rid of the Apache woman walking alongside her pony. At present they had come within striking distance of her. They remained just close enough that they could see her black hair hung down, framing her round face. McKenna understood the enemy was in front of him, and what he was going to have to do.

The first shot ripped through her clothing, made of horse-blanket, piercing her body, bleeding out as she hit the ground. McKenna glanced at the crumpled body of the woman. She was obviously very dead.

"Kill them all!" McKenna shouted, his hand tight on his pearl handled six-shooter. "Leave none of them alive!"

In the same moment that the pale light of dawn spread over the sky, the Cowboys charged into the camp, yelling and shooting, catching the Apaches off guard. The staccato sound of gunfire ripped the silence, along with the constant shrill screaming of women running from their wickiups. In a mad rush, the Apaches scattered, taking cover behind whatever was available.



In a fury, McKenna rode toward an Apache warrior who was firing at the Cowboys. The rifle butt thudded into the Indian's shoulder each time a bullet was fired. Bullets ripped past him on both sides mere inches away. When he was very close, he pulled the trigger on his six-shooter, quick as a flash. The Apache was sent tumbling to the ground. Thirsting for the blood of Indians, he wouldn't quit. A bare second later, he worked the trigger, sending a fatal bullet into the Apache's heart.

"That's for my buddy, Jed," he said with a wide smile pulled at the corners of his mouth.

The little wind wafted the sulfurous gun-smoke upward toward McKenna. He strained his powder-stung eyes through the acrid smoke cloud as he rode toward an Apache warrior running toward several horses milling around. He figured the horses had been spooked by all the shooting and had wandered off a ways, leaving the Apaches afoot.

Not even blinking, McKenna fired at him and missed. A stallion took the slug, faltered, and went down, thrashing and whinnying. Panic surged through the Apache warrior, who snuck in among the horses, using them as shields.

It was only until the fleeing Apache attempted to mount a horse that McKenna had a clear shot. He fired off a round with renewed enthusiasm and was rewarded when the Apache clutched at the wound in his belly. In what felt like slow motion, he saw the Indian collapse, plunging to a hard landing on the ground in front of a wickiup.

In this long moment of gunfire, McKenna felt cool and acutely aware of everything at once. He saw the other

Cowboys firing their weapons at the women. That was when it hit him, bull's-eye, right in the middle of his forehead, where his burly eyebrows met. He thought one of them might be Sequoia. That next moment, he signaled the Cowboys to stop firing and waited for the crack of the firearms to slack off in response.

He yelled out to the women. "Sequoia, show yourself now! I guarantee you won't be harmed!"

When no response came back, McKenna told the Cowboys to resume firing and turned his horse in another direction. An older, gray-haired woman with an ashen-faced expression, was the first to get shot, and had died quickly. Six more Apache women were targeted and killed where they huddled for safety in the cold, trying to hide behind the largest of the wickiups.

The attack had lasted only twenty-five minutes. A total of fourteen Apaches had been killed, with no losses on their side.

As the sun began to dip toward the western horizon, and the air wasn't quite as cold as it had been earlier, some of the Cowboys started to set fire to the wickiups. The rest were prepared to ride to Tombstone. Disregarding the fact that they were surrounded by a bloody carnage of human corpses and four dead horses, hunger gnawed at McKenna's belly.

"Hurry it up, boys. I'm hungry and I'd like to go," McKenna said in an irritable voice.

The only Indian alive had been tied by McKenna to his horse's tail. Climbing back on his horse, he gathered his

reins and stayed motionless for a minute in a kind of reverie. He caught his breath, dragging the morning air into his lungs. Then he replaced the empty loads in his six-shooter with full ones and holstered it.

At long last, McKenna raised his gun over his head and fired a shot in the air. He pulled the reins hard and his horse took off at a gallop, dragging behind the Apache tangled up in the rope until he died. While dust billowed up from the powerful hooves of the Cowboys' horses, McKenna had kept an eye out behind for any signs of pursuit but didn't spot any more Apaches. It was just a precaution because he knew from experience that Indians could blend into the landscape easily. One or more of them could be on you in a heartbeat, and you wouldn't even notice them.

The Cowboys were cold-blooded killers, living up to a reputation that preceded them. By 10:30 a.m. they were eating breakfast in the restaurant of the Grand Hotel. A murmur of chuckles ran around the table where they sat. McKenna didn't speak, chewing on eggs and toast. He was eating so fast he belched and had to restrain himself from laughing, as if he were in fear of choking. He swallowed and smiled. The day's events played through his mind. Today had worked out even better than he'd planned.

## *Chapter 46*

**T**HERE WAS A ROWDY BUNCH IN THE ORIENTAL Saloon, just before six thirty on this last day of 1881. The brilliant lighting cast soft shadows across the walls in the rooms swarming with people — mostly miners with money to blow on whiskey and gambling. Twice the barkeeper had to tell them to quiet down or leave the gaming tables.

As Shirley McNerny sat at her usual faro table, she thought that, even if Tombstone slowed down, this was exactly where she wanted to be. Never mind that she had played two hands and lost both times. The night was young, and she figured eventually her luck would turn.

The Cowgirl was only half paying attention to what she was doing. She was drinking a flute of pink champagne and looking around at the roughnecks. This would be her third and last drink of the evening. Picking up her flute, she took

a long draught and finished it off, enjoying the warmth as the drink flowed through her.

Rising to her feet, she felt the room spinning round and she sat down again. Normally she liked to keep her wits about her when there were men around. Frankly, she didn't want to wake up the next morning in a man's bed she didn't recognize. But this time the drinks had gone to her head.

She adjusted her shoulders, smoothed her dress and patted her hair, trying to slow her rushing mind. It only just occurred to her that she hadn't eaten much today. Hadn't had dinner yet. For lunch she just had tomato soup and crackers because the regular Saturday smorgasbord luncheon with her Cowgirl friends had been cancelled.

Her slightly off-balance reaction didn't go unnoticed by a man standing beside the bar with a drink in one of his hands. After draining his glass of whiskey, he clenched a wooden toothpick in one side of his mouth. Close-cropped salt-and-pepper hair framed a drawn face that showed clear signs of strain. He appeared at the faro table and took the only empty chair, where her coat hung.

"You don't quit do you?" the man asked around the toothpick working around in his mouth.

Reeking of liquor and overconfidence, the man, dressed simply in a black coat over a white shirt, black pants and boots, scooted a little closer to her. She acted like she didn't notice and dismissed him with a downward contemptuous curl of her lip. She could tell that he'd drunk far more than was good for him, from the sloppy way his words slurred. Clearly, he wasn't the man she was

looking for. Part of the reason she'd attracted undesirables was the way she was dressed. Her low-cut, white dress with ruffled sleeves revealed the tops of her breasts.

In spite of this, she leaned forward, lips moist, cleavage prominent. "Mister, I don't know you, but no, I don't give up. I came here to play cards and have a rooting, tooting time. And that's exactly what I'm doing."

Granting that he thought her buck teeth was the sort of teeth normally seen only in a horse, he moved even closer to her. At this distance he was able to grab her wrist.

"The name's Donny. Rest assured, I'm not a Cowboy. I'm a miner," he declared with a chuckle, smiling at her.

A vein pulsed in her forehead, apparently riled by this. She didn't stir but fastened her eyes on the barkeep dressed in a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves and a black bow tie at a starched, high collar that was too tight. It was Ned Boyle. She couldn't get his attention. He was behind the bar, preoccupied with polishing glasses.

Shirley drew in a deep breath and turned to face her tormenter. "Take your hand off me before you regret it!"

"What will you do if I don't?" he asked, his voice whining.

To her astonishment, he wouldn't loosen his grip on her wrist no matter how hard she pulled. Engrossed in their game, none of the three faro players at the table cared to get involved in their squabble. The two of them struggled for a minute longer until his toothpick dropped to the carpeted floor. A smirk crossed his face as he was amused by it all. His head tilted back, and he barked out a laugh. To further

amuse himself, he pinched the side of her butt with his free hand.

This time he had gone too far. By habit Shirley was a righty, but she reached with her left hand under her dress and drew her Colt .45 strapped to her thigh. Upon the rare occasions she had been mistaken for one of the working women of the red light district, she'd kept the six-shot revolver with an ivory handle under her skirts.

Her haughty stare had frozen him to the bone. In the space of a blink, she jerked her wrist free, darted backward, and climbed on the faro table fearlessly, scattering chips and cards and bills and coins. The stunned faro players watched every move she made, the Colt .45 pointed at Donny the whole time.

Donny was playing dumb trying to mask his guilt and cocked a questioning brow at her. "Lady?"

"I should shoot your hand off!" she shouted at him.

All eyes turned to see what was going on. Shirley was frazzled and frustrated. Everyone in the room, that had grown quiet and strained, could tell she was out of sorts. She jerked her head toward the bar and flinched when she saw Ned Boyle staring at her with wide eyes and his eyebrows raised.

Boyle gave her a sad shake of his head before approaching her. "Shirley McNerny, I'm surprised to see you like this. This is not a great way to end the year. If you hand over that gun, I'll help you off the table."

"But he started it. He wouldn't let me alone," she cried out, pointing at Donny.

“Don’t pay no mind to that coyote looking woman,” Donny said, drawing laughter from the onlookers.

“It’s okay, Shirley; you can hand me the gun,” Boyle told her.

“Enough is enough, lady! Get down from there. I’m in the middle of a game,” one of the card players at the table said sharply to Shirley.

With a great deal of reluctance, she realized that she had no other recourse but to give Boyle her gun. Donny’s face hardened and his brown eyes glinted coldly at her. He stayed like that while he fumbled in the pocket of his pants, fished out a wooden toothpick and clamped it between his teeth. Then he stood from his chair, turned and disappeared off somewhere.

Her body was trembling all over and it was clear that she was still in panic mode, but she strove to keep her voice calm. “I’m simply a woman in distress, protecting myself from the vulture element here. And, I can let myself down.”

As the customers returned to their drinking and gambling, she followed Boyle to the bar, carrying her coat over one arm. Mystified she watched him put the gun away.

“Shirley, I’m going to escort you out of here. Let this incident be a warning — to check in your fancy Colt revolver the moment you enter the saloon,” he said, and came around the counter.

“Why are you keeping my Colt .45 here?”

“You’re not behaving rationally. You can pick it up the next time you’re here. If you have a problem with that, you can take it up with Wyatt Earp the next time he’s here,” he



said and took her by the arm, marched her to the batwings and shoved her through them.

“On New Year’s, of all days,” she muttered rapidly, under her breath, standing outside the saloon in the dark.

The evening breeze felt good on her face, and she breathed in the air to gather her wits. Her eyes took in Allen Street. As she slipped on her dark blue wool coat, she suddenly remembered that it was on this very street that Virgil Earp had been shot up a few nights ago. The thought saddened her.

Then, finally, after some thinking, she decided to join her father and Pidge Swafford’s family for dinner at the Maison Doree, the fanciest restaurant in Tombstone located in the Cosmopolitan Hotel. It was for the hoity-toity crowd among the local luminaries and prominent citizens, but it wasn’t like she had anywhere else to go. At least the food there was the best. According to Pidge, there was oyster patties, ham in champagne sauce and English plum pudding on the satin printed menu for New Year’s Eve.

Chewing nervously on the inside of her lower lip, she stared at the three unsightly Cowboys, talking loudly and strutting down the wooden sidewalk toward her. The red sashes around their waists glinted in the streetlamps’ light. She adjusted her dress under her coat, so her breasts were no longer in danger of falling out, and checked both ways before crossing the street to avoid them. Her coordination was dampened by booze, but she hurried her step, mumbling occasionally to herself.

## *Chapter 47*

**O**N THEIR WAY TO THE ORIENTAL SALOON, THE three boisterous Cowboys, just missed running into Shirley McInerny. Willard McKenna and his buddies pushed their way through the batwings into the saloon's smoky interior, cheerful and noisy. The air permeated with the sounds of piano music, conversation and laughter, stagnant with the smell of spilt liquor and tobacco smoke. The buoyant tinkle of piano music grew faster and louder, competing with the slap of cards on green-felt-topped tables.

All of it was music to McKenna's ears as he realized that he was back in his element. He was eager to play poker and eager to drink whiskey. And he was a startling sight, dressed for the occasion. He had on a brown woolen shirt tucked into a pair of brown tweed pants under a black coat with a velvet collar. By his polished appearance one would never suspect the unpleasant deed he'd committed earlier

that morning. Most would label it murder. He called it necessary.

Tilting the brim of his sombrero low over his eyes, he strolled toward the bar, adjusting his gun belt, and bumped into Donny. McKenna shoved his sombrero off his forehead and for a confused moment, fumbled with it in silence. He wondered who this was in front of him, while Donny tried to maintain his balance and figure out what had happened. Donny's face just inches away from his own, McKenna could smell the stink of whiskey on his breath.

"You want to watch where you're going!" McKenna snapped at him.

Noticing he was a bit off, and a red-sashed Cowboy, the drunken miner had a nervous look on his face.

"Sorry. Won't happen again," Donny said with a curt nod and hurried off, eyes down.

With an arrogant air, McKenna led the way, ignoring the chuckles from his Cowboy buddies behind him. Ned Boyle turned his head and saw McKenna walking toward him. He recognized the gunslinger from past dealings and felt his heart beat quicker. On nights like this he wished Wyatt Earp was here.

Once at the bar, McKenna gave him a sideways glance. Boyle's eyes clouded. There was a look of suspicion in them. Just for the fun of it, he sized Boyle up — small man, five feet four inches, but fit — probably couldn't handle himself against the Cowboys.

“Here’s my gun,” McKenna said, icy calm descending upon him as he pulled his heavy six-shooter from his belt and gave it a toss on the counter.

“Certainly,” Boyle replied meekly and grabbed the gun.

“Anyone else with a gun, check it in now!” McKenna called over his shoulder to his Cowboy friends.

Moments after securing the guns from the other two, Boyle grinned and poured a shot from a bottle into a clean glass. McKenna tossed back the drink in three seconds, plunked the glass on the counter with a bang, and the sound echoed through the saloon. He nodded in appreciation, slid a dime on the counter, and Boyle scooped it up without comment. Then McKenna looked over his shoulder at the Cowboys, who kept their eyes fixed on the back-bar mirror and remained mute.

“How about two more whiskey shots for my buddies?” McKenna asked and pounded the counter with his fist.

“Thanks, Whiskers,” one of them said and clapped him on the shoulder.

Ned, the barkeep set the glasses in front of them, then moved on to deal with a pair of rowdy miners at the far side of the counter. While McKenna, who had an insatiable desire to drink and rabble-rouse, proceeded to sit at the bar, entertaining his companions with merry talk.

“Tomorrow morning I’m to drive a herd of cattle north into Guadalupe Canyon, across the New Mexico-Arizona border, and sell them along the route. It’s an obscene amount of money for a day’s work. There’s one catch, though: you’ll have to cut the night short if you want to

join me to share in the profits,” McKenna said with a serious expression.

“We’re in,” the two men answered without hesitating.

“Poker, anyone?” McKenna asked as he shot a glance at the poker table.

The Cowboys split up for the rest of the evening, arranging themselves at different card tables. McKenna dropped into an empty chair at the poker table. The three men at the table looked at him expectantly. He sized them up quick as professional gamblers. But he wasn’t intimidated in the least. Quite the reverse, he played a half a dozen hands of poker, cautiously, not too recklessly. Although he was ahead by a few dollars, he threw in his last hand when a saloon girl walked by with a tray over her head that held glasses of beer and whiskey and smiled at him. And that was all the distraction he needed.

What caught his attention was her fancy scarlet dress and the sparkling diamond earrings in her ears. The girl’s features were delicate, framed by a long fall of glossy raven-black hair that hung past her shoulders. All in all, he figured no more than twenty-five years old. He ordered a drink from her, which he then proceeded to chat her up while he got tipsy on his second whiskey.

The clock struck twelve. A wild crash of hurrahs followed. Everybody in the saloon ushered in 1882 with joy and merriment.

During the course of the night, the saloon girl had kept finding reasons to come over to where McKenna had been

sitting in a chair in front of the poker table. But now she was tired-looking, and her shift was over.

“I’d like to give you a proper farewell,” McKenna offered, and half rose from his chair, then sank back into it again with heavy relief.

“Another time, maybe,” the Mexican girl said in a Spanish accent. “Next Saturday, I’ll be at the Tivoli Saloon. I alternate working at both of the saloons.”

“I didn’t get your name!” he hollered after her.

“Carmelina,” she said with a goodbye wave.

Feeling the effects of the alcohol, McKenna was too drunk to go after her. He closed his eyes and scratched his mustache as he thought.

It was nearing one o’clock in the morning when he and his Cowboy comrades settled into their rooms at the Grand Hotel on Allen Street.

## *Chapter 48*

**I**N THE LATE MORNING, A LARGE HERD OF COWS were being driven down Allen Street to sell to a butcher shop and all interested residents of Tombstone. Nobody could get past them, nor see through them. Where did the cattle come from? Who was driving them? Those were the questions on Willard McKenna's mind as he stood outside the Grand Hotel.

On this brisk winter Monday, January 2, he was tired, recovering from yesterday's cattle drive into a trail running through Arizona and into New Mexico. He cracked his neck and watched the last cow walk by.

Now that they were out of the way, he was about to start walking when something made him look to the left. He saw a girl who so closely resembled the Indian girl from the Wanted poster that it was startling. He had to blink his eyes to make sure that he saw straight, and then stared as hard as

he could. It wasn't until that very moment that he was certain he was looking at Sequoia.

There was only one thought on his mind: He had to go after her. There was no time to round up his Cowboy mates. But in all actuality, he didn't want to share the reward money.

A halfhearted wind wheezed through Allen Street where a seventeen-year-old Yaqui Indian girl was walking. The fact that she was a dead ringer for Sequoia was a complete coincidence. Not only did she look like her, but she kept taking sips from a gallon-sized, unglazed clay jug. As McKenna took in the sight of her, he realized the jug fit the description Pidge Swafford had given of the jug she had seen up close. To help identify Sequoia in the future, Pidge had disclosed, that she was selling jugs of almond milk, only to his brother, Jake, who in turn told him. Other than knowing she was Cherokee, that was the edge he had over others bent on finding Sequoia.

It couldn't be a more perfect false alarm sighting.

In reality, earlier that morning her family had visited Sequoia at her campsite and traded corn and sweet potatoes for four jugs of almond milk. In recent weeks, word about Sequoia's almond milk had spread among the tribes from district to district, and even beyond. From there, her father drove their wagon to Benson for a meeting about a job with the railroad, before arriving in Tombstone.

Her family and tribe had emigrated from the port city of Guaymas in Sonora, Mexico to southeastern Arizona in the late 1800s to avoid persecution by Mexican troops. She



lived in the largest Yaqui village in Pascua, located approximately 15 miles southwest of Tucson and 80 miles west of Tombstone. Her village was a hamlet consisting of sixty-five huts constructed of mud-chinked cactus sticks, rusty sheet iron, and other materials.

His six-shooter, fully loaded, in his belt at his side, McKenna was bent on killing her. Hidden out of sight, he followed and watched the Sequoia look-alike walking along the wooden sidewalk through a crowd that was oblivious to who she might be. She passed Hafford's Saloon on her left, stopped at the corner of Allen Street, and was about to cross the street.

"Sequoia, that is you isn't?" McKenna called out to her as he stopped directly across the street from her.

The barber, at the Barron's Barber Shop, located on Allen Street across from the northeast corner of Hafford's Saloon, looked up at the voice. The man he'd been shaving smacked him on the leg with the back of his hand.

"Pay attention, will you?" the man demanded, looking at the steel blade inches from his face.

"It's just that I heard him say Sequoia," the barber said to the man in the chair outside, then he pointed to the poster pasted to the window of the shop. "And that's the name of that outlaw on that Wanted poster."

The Yaqui Indian girl looked sincerely puzzled. But the more McKenna stared at her, the more he convinced himself that it was Sequoia. Slowly and deliberately, he took a reflexive step back and moved his hand toward his gun belt. She saw the silver flash of his gun as his hand

moved under his black coat. Sucking in a deep breath, she reacted quickly, dropping the jug of almond milk on the ground and running.

“Don’t go running off! I just want to talk to you,” he yelled out loudly into the street.

The chase was on. As he ran, he kept a hand on his sombrero to stop it from blowing off his head and squinted against the wind and dust.

After five minutes of running in circles, dodging between startled pedestrians, she was exhausted, never having run so fast in her life. The streets of Tombstone were heavy with foot traffic and filled with onlookers, watching with disbelief. As it was, the pursuit of her had turned into a spectacle. Anxiously, she looked over her shoulder to see if the man was behind her. He was and had his gun in one hand.

Desperate thoughts swarmed through her mind: Could she find a place to hide? Could she somehow get back to her family? Finally, after trying to think of other possibilities, she decided that hiding for a while certainly seemed like the most viable option. She ran toward an alley mouth on the north side of the street.

Angling across Fourth Street, she thrust her way into the alley behind the Can-Can restaurant. Ducking low behind a stack of crates, she wrinkled her nose at the faint odor of fish. The smell was getting to her. Sticky fish oil had seeped onto her heavy shawl over her shoulders from one of the splintered wooden crates. Now she smelled like fish.

Four Chinese men with pigtailed, speaking in Mandarin, caught her attention. They were standing next to the opened back door of the restaurant. As discreetly as possible, she crept past the Chinese men quick as she could. It was early enough that the restaurant was mostly empty. Only a few customers cast odd looks in her direction.

From the window at the front of the restaurant, she couldn't see anything going on. Her face pensive as she worried about what was happening out there. Where was the man who'd been chasing her?

Her father and her brothers appeared on the boardwalk. She felt a wave of happiness sweep through her. They were heading toward their spring wagon parked in front of the Dexter Livery and Feed Stable on Allen Street where she was supposed to meet them. She ran out the door of the restaurant to join them.

In the meantime, McKenna had been leaning against the wall of Hafford's Saloon. He was breathing heavily, desperately trying to regain his breath and thinking where Sequoia might be hiding.

By craning slightly, he saw some Indians walking in single file across the street. He studied the backs of their heads as they filed by, one by one. Until he saw her.

Moving stealthily and with deadly intent, McKenna rushed up to them and spoke directly to the girl. "Didn't you hear me calling out to you, Sequoia?"

Turning around to the voice, the Yaqui Indian girl's face was frozen in dread. She huddled close to her father, who had stopped walking, his two sons at his side.

McKenna stepped closer to the elder Indian to look down into his frightened eyes, letting the man have a good look into his own eyes.

“What do you want with my daughter?” the Yaqui elder tried to sound sure of himself, but a small crack in his voice betrayed his lack of confidence.

His eyes darting between the elder and the girl, McKenna brandished his six-shooter. After exchanging a worried look between them, the four Yaqui Indians raced down the street in different directions.

For an instant, McKenna waited, cradling the gun in his hands. And then he started to run toward the Yaqui Indian girl on the side of the street. Running heavily, as if some unknown force was driving him toward this moment, he lifted his gun, and squeezed off a shot.

The bullet entered the back of her neck, piercing her skull right where it met the brain stem, and exited the front of her neck. She sprang forward in a lunge, her legs buckling under her as she fell sidelong on the dirt. It only took a few minutes for her to bleed to death on the dusty ground. As if in response, the wind whistled past her unnaturally still body, tossing her long black hair into her lifeless black eyes.

Not much later, McKenna walked briskly on Fourth Street, leading a horse with the Yaqui Indian girl’s body slung over the saddle. Blood had dripped down the saddle and dried from the effects of the wind. He was intent on collecting the reward for killing the outlaw Sequoia.

## *Chapter 49*

**BURSTING THROUGH THE DOOR, UNDERSHERIFF** Avery stopped, drew a couple of breaths and wiped his forehead with a white handkerchief. He found the deputy sheriff at the gun rack on the office's right wall behind his desk. Barton used a key to lock the heavy padlock that was fastened through a thick metal chain that ran through the trigger guards of the rifles.

"They say she's dead!" Avery exclaimed, breathing erratically, his chest heaving, trying to catch his breath.

"Who is dead?" he asked in a crisp, uninterested voice.

"The outlaw Sequoia. They say she was killed by a Cowboy," Avery said, then blew out a breath.

"Which Cowboy?" Barton asked, approaching the window.

"They say it was the one that Sheriff Behan helped," the undersheriff said, his breathing returning to normal.

“Who are they?” the deputy sheriff asked with a bit of irritation.

“Most of the townsfolk out there,” Avery said, slipped his black coat off and hung it in the supply closet.

“Of course I’m sad to hear she’s dead. But now I can finally close the case on her,” said Barton, his thoughts preoccupied, staring out the window, trying to see what was going on in the street.

The deputy sheriff noticed that a crowd was gathered around a man walking on the side of the street, leading a horse with a dead body slung over the saddle. That wasn’t unusual in Tombstone, but it was something you couldn’t do without attracting attention.

“And Miss Swafford will be off your back too,” Avery said, an amused glint in his eye.

“All right, you’ve convinced me that there’s a reason to celebrate,” Barton said, and then pointed out the window. “I guess that’s the man who killed her coming this way.”

There was a smile on Avery’s thin lips as he turned his attention out the window. “It looks like Willard McKenna.”

“Gosh darn it, it is him. Of all the Cowboys, I’m getting tired of that two-bit rustler already,” the deputy sheriff said, and shook his head in frustration.

It was going on twelve-thirty when McKenna walked his horse to the front of the deputy sheriff’s office. The crowd around him was consumed with talk of how the notorious frontier outlaw Sequoia had been killed. Surely this was some kind of entertainment. Ignoring them, McKenna drew a knife from his saddle bag, cut the rope

securing the body, dragged the body off his horse and watched as it crumpled onto the wooden sidewalk. The body had only one embroidered moccasin and a brown wool shawl was twisted around the waist of her buckskin dress. The crowd stood in silence, mouths open, heads shaking in whispered disbelief. A moment of stillness fell upon them. There was only the breeze that came whistling down the street.

Another moment went by, and then McKenna hitched his horse to the wooden rail in front. Struggling forward, the Cowboy pushed past people, who saw the wide-eyed look on the lawmen's faces through the window. Perhaps sensing the show was over, at that point, most of the onlookers began to disperse.

"Deputy Sheriff, did you hear? Sequoia is dead," McKenna declared as he barged through the door. "And I'm the one who shot her dead."

"I'm quite aware of that," Barton responded with a sarcastic edge, his arms folded across his chest.

"We know," Avery supplemented, snorted derisively, nodded over at Barton. "We saw everything from the window. It's a dang shame you killed her."

"No choice. She wouldn't come willingly. I've come to collect the one thousand dollar reward-money. Just like I told you I would," McKenna proudly said, and pointed at the Wanted poster on the wall by the door.

Knowing the Cowboys the way Barton did, the only time you'd find them in his office was when they were being arrested for one thing or another. Now before him

stood Willard McKenna, and he didn't feel too obligated to pony up the reward. To this day, he had little respect for the Cowboys, who were constantly in trouble. He couldn't see past the fact that they were cold, greedy, law-breaking men.

"You're very sure of yourself. But don't get ahead of yourself. I'd better go have a look at the body first," Barton said, pulled on his gray wool coat over his white shirt and gray trousers and stepped outside the door.

Looking around, McKenna awkwardly rubbed his mustache with his hand, gently twisting the neatly trimmed hair. The angst in his face, he was growing impatient, now glaring at Avery. He gave the undersheriff a cynical sneer before he pushed the door and walked out towards Barton, who was examining the body of the Indian girl.

There was a swift, small silence before the deputy sheriff gave McKenna a disbelieving look. "I never thought I'd ever see Sequoia in the flesh, let alone dead. But, as a lawman, it's my job to question. What makes you think this is Sequoia?"

"I called out the name Sequoia, and she ran. When I was close to her, I said her name and her father asked me what I wanted with his daughter," the Cowboy said, with a cocky leer.

"Did it occur to you they might have been scared?" Barton asked in a direct tone.

"I am certain she is Sequoia. She's known for selling jugs of almond milk. I saw her with a jug in her hands. She dropped it on the street near Hafford's Saloon before she took off running from me," McKenna insisted with a sigh.



What McKenna had said struck a chord with him. The tug-of-war with the jug! He'd found a shattered jug on the ground near the location Pidge Swafford kept her horse on the day it was allegedly stolen. At that time, he didn't understand its significance. Early on, he had accepted that Sequoia was a threat to the Cowgirl dairy farmers in some way. In all likelihood it was because she was peddling milk around town. But for now, he filed this revelation in the back of his mind for later consideration.

"Take me to see it," Barton said, and then poked his head inside the office. "Keep your eye on that body till I get back."

Grudgingly, McKenna walked him to the corner of Allen and Fourth Streets and pointed to the remains of the jug. Crouching down, Barton recognized the pieces of the clay jug immediately. The lawman was awestruck by the fact that it was identical to the one he'd seen before.

Hovering over him, McKenna removed his sombrero for a moment and ran his hand through his thick, wavy hair. He closely watched the lawman's reaction as he inspected the milk-like substance on the ground.

"Well, what do you think, deputy sheriff?" McKenna asked impulsively, shifting back and forth in his boots.

In a leisurely manner Barton raised himself up to his full height. "I believe you nailed Sequoia."

None of them said a word as they traipsed back to the deputy sheriff's office. Once inside Barton went directly to the small safe where he had locked up the money Pidge Swafford had given him. McKenna took the thousand

dollars with greediness and could not quite contain his smirk of satisfaction. He couldn't be any happier to find himself one thousand dollars richer. It was best for him to leave immediately. At the door, he tipped his sombrero in farewell, which got a snicker from Avery. Then the Cowboy sashayed out of the office, wiggling his butt for the world to see.

## *Chapter 50*

**T**HE YAQUI ELDER HAD BEEN SEARCHING THE surrounding streets for almost an hour. As he turned a corner onto another street, he looked around. Where was his daughter? He couldn't even find the man with a gun that had chased them. But he could blame that on the fact that he couldn't remember what he looked like. As distraught as he was about his missing daughter, it was a definite possibility that his mind had blocked it out. After prodding his memory some more, he could vaguely remember the man's eyes, and that he was wearing a sombrero.

When they'd fled, the oldest of his sons ran to their spring wagon and loaded a sack of supplies in the back. Then he took off to find them, quickly finding his brother. Both in their early twenties, their young minds couldn't process things fast enough. They too had no recollection of

the man who had pulled a gun on them. At present, they were trying to find their father and their sister.

The question to be answered now was whether or not the man had harmed his daughter? Swallowing back the boulder-size lump in his throat, he had no way of knowing. He did not know why the man had targeted his daughter from amongst all the other people in this city. All he could hope for was that she was still hiding somewhere.

*Perhaps her brothers had found Ynez*, he thought, though it was highly unlikely. Ten minutes ago, he had seen his sons walking up a street, most likely looking for him, but he didn't notify them of his presence. He was confident they could handle themselves in town until he found them again.

His steps were slower than earlier. All along the street, people were passing by. There was still no sign of his daughter. Frustration welled up. He ran a trembling hand over his face. His bulky buffalo coat, wool shirt, and pants couldn't shield him from the cold chill of unhappiness spreading over him. On the remote chance that his daughter was lost, she would be frightened. Every minute that went by made him worry all the more.

Part of him wanted to ask for help and lumber down to the nearest sheriff's office. But another part, the reasoning part knew no help would come. The mere fact that he was Indian was all the reason the law wouldn't work for him. In the West, life was brutish for most Indians usually treated as people of lesser worth than the white settlers.

The Yaqui Indians hadn't put two and two together on this. They had failed to notice the Wanted posters about Sequoia pasted on streetlamps on some of the streets. Even Sequoia's death had sparked wild speculation among the people while the Yaquis had been conducting a search.

The Yaqui elder stopped at the street corner. He heard the rumble of a wagon somewhere behind him. On instinct, he turned around. Noticing him, the driver, a stocky Mexican wearing a wide-brimmed sombrero and black pants tucked in boots, threw him a menacing glare. The Mexican flicked the reins, and the mule pulled the canvas-covered wagon to the end of the street.

It was customary for Indians to be looked at that way. It was something he'd long since become familiar with. Sighing in resignation, he wondered about his sons' future. He hoped their luck would turn now. Soon they would be working for the New Mexico & Arizona Railroad. The living quarters were attractive enough as well as functional. The rail cars for their workers were outfitted with sleeping bunks and stoves. They would also have access to a commissary and a water tank car.

Lost deeper in his thoughts, he stood there rigidly, staring out over the street long after the wagon had disappeared out of town. The cold wind blew past him, carrying with it all the noise the town created. But his mind tuned out the clattering of the horses' hooves alongside the chattering of people. Feeling desperate and angry, the thought crossed his mind that if he didn't find his daughter soon, he might not find her at all. His gut clenched at the

thought as that horrible reality pulsed through him. And yet, even as he thought it, he couldn't imagine it.

From just across the way, two men wearing gun-belts dashed out of the swinging doors that led into the Oriental Saloon. They were arguing loudly about something on Allen Street, and people turned to look. Jaw tightening, the Yaqui Indian strained to watch them, feeling pinpricks of anxiety across his skin. Their behavior offended his sense of the natural order of things. He began to back away from the men, even though they were on the opposite side of the street.

He tilted his head and squinted at the sky. Gray clouds were forming above the Sheepshead Dome, a large granite formation of the Dragoon Mountains, about twelve miles away. For a good ten seconds, he prayed to the Great Spirit above, asking Him to keep his daughter safe, hoping that he would find her.

Now he set off in another direction, searching for his little girl. The problem facing him at this point was that it was getting late.

Another hour later, the Yaqui elder continued walking along, heart thudding in his chest. Turning onto Sixth Street, he spotted his two sons and stopped cold. Just a half block ahead, they saw him, too, and then caught up to him on the wooden sidewalk.

"Oh Father, we've searched and searched for you!" the youngest son exclaimed then asked, "Where is Ynez?"

"I haven't been able to find her. Let's check the wagon," the Yaqui elder said.

Two men, chattering animatedly to each other, approached. Their hard-eyed gazes settled on them, raking their eyes over them, top to bottom, as they pushed their way between them. Something about the way the men looked at them set off a voice in the Yaqui elder's head, telling him it was time to give up.

As they started walking, the Yaqui elder sadly added, "If she's not there, we'll leave without her."

The oldest son regarded him steadily. "Father?"

"There's nothing more we can do," the Yaqui elder said.

As they rounded the corner onto the busy thoroughfare of Allen Street, they headed toward their wagon parked in front of the Dexter Livery and Feed Stable.

From the seat atop the spring wagon, the Yaqui elder inhaled deeply. A swift glance into the back of the wagon told him that his sons were both seated on the right side. Something made him glance at the street ahead, thinking his daughter had shown up. He was dead wrong. Had he made the right decision? Was he giving up too soon?

His daughter was gone. There was no denying that he had made every effort to find her. But he was worn-out, emotionally and physically. At the very least, he wanted to rest, to clear his mind.

Mixed sadness and unease made his fingers clumsy as he took up the reins. With his heart beating hard, he drove off.

## *Chapter 51*

NEARLY THREE HOURS HAD GONE BY, AND THE lifeless body of Ynez, the Yaqui Indian girl, lay prostrate right outside the deputy sheriff's office. Anyone wanting to walk along the boardwalk past the deputy sheriff's office would have to either step over the body or make a detour onto the street.

The circling buzzards bothered Clancy Barton. They were out in full force to pick the carcass clean. To make matters worse, maggots had burrowed into the rotting flesh of her neck wound.

The deputy sheriff left the window, put on his coat and threw on his wide-brimmed, pearl-gray Stetson. "Burton, I'm going to the undertaker's office to find out what's delaying him. We can't leave the body here stinking up the street. Keep an eye on things while I'm gone."



The most surprising thing of all was that the news of Sequoia's death had spread quickly through town by word of mouth, and then spread to the Indians in the vicinity. Chenoa had pleaded with Chief Nahele to find out whether her daughter was dead or alive. He climbed on his horse and went to the campsite, but he couldn't find her, nor the warriors guarding her. So, he rode down the trail toward Tombstone.

Now that Chief Nahele was in town he tied his horse to a hitch rail. Strolling around, he heard from a passerby that Sequoia's so-called dead body was on display in front of the deputy sheriff's office.

Fury tightening his chest, he crossed the street, crept onto the worn wooden floor, and started walking toward the office. Once there, he gave Fourth Street a long, slow perusal. A few passersby stared at him but didn't approach. More than likely, because the outlaw was so well known, they had assumed he had nothing else to do but stare at her dead body.

A knot formed in his stomach as he wondered whether it was Sequoia. It was a gruesome sight. The body was facing front, but her head was turned, and she was staring at him. She looked shocked, perhaps horrified by the powerful impact the bullet had made going out through her neck. It was hard to make out her features from the smear of dried blood caked around her neck and mouth and spreading in a black stain in her hair. But the resemblance was uncanny. And it wasn't just that her hair was similar to

Sequoia's in that it was long, or that the clothing was identical.

Kneeling next to the body, he examined it closely, and he felt an overwhelming relief. At this close proximity, he could tell for sure it wasn't her. Sequoia was maybe an inch taller, and a few pounds lighter.

The abrupt sound of the door to the deputy sheriff's office opening caused Chief Nahele's heart to leap in his chest. He instantly rose to his feet. All he could see was a shadowed figure coming toward him, the sun behind him.

"It was a Cowboy who killed her," Undersheriff Avery said, coming into view dressed in a navy wool suit.

"Who are you?" Avery asked, when he failed to respond to his comment.

"Chief Nahele," he replied with a calm that startled him.

As he spoke he didn't look at the undersheriff but kept his eyes fixed on the stiff corpse of the Yaqui Indian girl. As he bowed his head in silent prayer, he kept responding in single words to his questions.

"Is she Apache?" he asked, nodding toward the body.

"No," the White Chief responded in a definite tone.

"Did you know her?" Avery asked, and then held his breath against the stench.

A nerve under Chief Nahele's left eye twitched. "Yes."

"How so?" he asked, released a breath and stepped backward.

"I am the White Chief of the Cherokees. I preside over the tribe that Sequoia belonged to," he said, seemingly unbothered by the smell of the decomposing body.

A moment of silence elapsed as Chief Nahele wasn't sure he'd convinced him. The undersheriff stared at him briefly, then slowly nodded in agreement.

Ignoring the smell, Avery scooted a bit closer to him. "I'm sorry for your loss."

Another bout of silence fell between them. Again, Avery had to turn away from the strong smell radiating from the dead body and stepped backward.

"Say, mister, would you stick around?" Avery asked but saw the worry in his eyes. "Not for very long, of course, I'm expecting the deputy sheriff back any moment. It would be great if you could tell him what you told me. It's important because you are the first person to recognize Sequoia, to confirm her identity."

Chief Nahele felt very pleased with himself. He had successfully convinced him that the body of the dead Yaqui Indian girl was Sequoia. This was precisely what he had hoped to achieve, intending to bring an end to her legend.

"I must return to my tribe, and quickly," Chief Nahele said with an indifferent shrug.

"Aw shucks, I guess the deputy sheriff will just have to take my word for it. That you were here and what you said," Avery said, sounding disappointed and swung his arms across his chest, starting to feel the cold.

The Indian leader hesitated, unsure of what to say, as he took a quick glance at the undersheriff out of the corner of his eye. In the end, Chief Nahele didn't say anything before he walked away. As Avery put his hand on the door handle,

he thought how the Indians were aloof and not fundamentally friendly.

Later when the sun was setting, two burly men laid a stretcher beside the body of the Yaqui Indian girl on the boardwalk in front of the deputy sheriff's office. They carefully lifted her body and placed it on the stretcher. One of the men covered her with a blanket and pulled it up over her face. Then they carried the stretcher over to the undertaker's office.

Nobody suspected that Willard McKenna had killed the wrong Indian girl. It seemed the good folks of Tombstone had easily accepted her death. What they couldn't achieve with Geronimo they could now achieve with Sequoia being dead. Besides that, no one came forward to claim the Yaqui Indian girl's body. And Chief Nahele was the only Indian to see the body before it was taken away for burial. That was the story, and everything was wrapped up neat like a Christmas present with a bow on top.

## *Chapter 52*

**WITH THE COMING DARKNESS** SEQUOIA WAS returning from the San Pedro River where she had been washing clothes. Trotting along behind her horse were the warriors. They were watching her through lowered eyelids as she slowed Yogesh to a walk until she came to the campsite. Reining up, she dismounted while the warriors went about their business.

In front of her teepee stood a grim-looking Chenoa, locked in her thoughts. She wore a heavy shawl over her shoulders and her hair was pulled back into a neat braid. Her back was turned, her gaze lost somewhere in the distance. She didn't notice the horse's hooves, closer, as her grief overflowed.

Just a little while ago, Chenoa had tried her best to keep busy so she would not have time to think about her daughter but failed miserably. A terrible sense of foreboding had

descended upon her, and all her fears seemed justified. She was tired of waiting for Chief Nahele to return. So, she had hopped on her horse and took off toward the campsite.

Carrying a sack of clothes, Sequoia cast her eyes on her mother, who seemed not to notice. "Mama."

Unfazed, Chenoa didn't quite grasp that she had spoken to her. Standing behind her, Sequoia set the sack on the ground.

"Mama, what are you doing here?" she asked, and put her hand on her trembling shoulder.

Chenoa jumped and turned around quickly. She had so badly wanted Sequoia to be alive. And here she was, standing before her. Alive! Swept by a wave of emotion, she realized that it was real. Looking at her face, she was in awe.

For another moment Chenoa blinked owlshly at her, then pulled her into a hug, her arms holding her tight. "Oh, my child."

"What brings you here at this hour? Has something happened?" she asked, feeling smothered and pulled away.

"There's talk in Tombstone. People are muttering about your being shot and killed by one of those red-sashed Cowboys. Chief Nahele went into town to find out more. I was so worried, couldn't stay still, got on my horse and rode here as quickly as I could. When I couldn't find you, I believed it to be true," Chenoa said in a trembling voice.

"Those townsfolk have nothing better to do than gossip. I was washing clothes in the river," Sequoia said, lifted the sack and put it inside the teepee.

The sound of a horse's rapid hoof caught their ears, just as Sequoia stepped out of the teepee. It was Chief Nahele. There they noticed him driving a buckboard wagon. The buckboard had a canvas tent stretched over iron hoops, affording a lot of room inside. A cold breeze blew out of the west, just as he pulled back on the reins over the back of the single horse that was attached to it to stop in front of them. Somewhere in the distance came the screech of a hawk.

"Chenoa. Sequoia," he said, speaking louder against the noise of the wind, and nodded to them.

"What did you find out in town?" Chenoa asked beneath a gust of dusty night wind.

"An Indian girl had been killed. She was young, with long black hair and an innocent face much like Sequoia's. They say she is Sequoia. All the folks in town believed it, too. To further convince them, I told the lawman that the dead Indian girl was Sequoia," Chief Nahele informed them, still seated on the driver's bench.

Even as they spoke, another gust of wind bellowed and fell, stirring dust around them. Sequoia and her mother looked at each other in a vacant kind of way, and then at him, and then at each other, again, as if what he'd said had caught them unawares.

The White Chief carried on, saying, "Sequoia wanted to escape, and the Indian girl's death has gifted her the opportunity. Above all we can use this opportunity to our advantage."

“What are you proposing to do?” Chenoa asked in a tried voice.

“Sequoia will leave immediately!” he announced quite unexpectedly. “Two warriors will transport her to Oklahoma.”

In spite of the seriousness in his manner, Chenoa had to ask. “Can’t Sequoia stay here with us a little longer?”

“I want to stay. No one knows that I’m alive. Which means I can roam around freely,” Sequoia said, her voice sounding even more nervous than she looked.

Chief Nahele blinked in surprise. He looked at Sequoia, realizing as he should have realized all along that she had her mother’s hard-headedness.

“You can’t be seen. Someone will try to kill you if they know you’re alive. You’re better off letting everyone think you are dead. It’s the best way to keep you safe,” he said to Sequoia.

Chenoa thought it through and realized he was right. “I have to agree with you, Chief Nahele.”

Seeing there was no point in arguing with the White Chief, Sequoia nodded as understanding struck. Chenoa said nothing else, as she couldn’t rid her mind of the thought that she wasn’t going to see her daughter again.

A feeling of doubt came over Sequoia as she walked to her horse. She gave Yogesh’s neck a long hug for what she knew would be the last time. Sentimentally overwhelmed by her horse’s last look at her, she retreated to her teepee and bundled her meager possessions into the blanket she had traded the shopkeeper in Tombstone for.



The three warriors were beckoned over then. Chief Nahele climbed down from the covered buckboard wagon, selected two of them, and informed them of their mission. The warriors understood that arduous trip to the Indian Territory near Tahlequah was expected to last about six weeks. One of the warriors stayed at his side, while the other two went to pack their things in the back of the buckboard.

Next they hitched another horse to the wagon. Then the two warriors went and sat down in the driver's bench.

As Chenoa said a tearful goodbye to her daughter, she had never felt so alone. In sheer misery, she swung herself up onto her mare. She spun her horse in a circle and trotted over to the warrior seated atop his reddish-brown horse holding the lead rope of the extra stallion.

Chief Nahele, who sat on Yogesh, turned the horse toward the trail leading to their encampment. Half a minute later, he looked back and saw the four-wheeled buckboard, drawn by two horses, taking off in a fast trot and sending up a cloud of dust.

They rode away on their horses in silence, in the night, with only the light from the stars guiding them.

The constant motion of the buckboard was already getting to Sequoia. It was a bumpy ride. Bundled in a blanket, she lay hidden in the wagon bed, trying to catch some sleep. But she learned quickly that the buckboard wasn't built for comfort.

She shifted her position so that she was lying on her side but was unable to get comfortable. Just out of curiosity she

peered out through a slit in the canvas. Even in the dark, she could make out the shadow of the Sheepshead Dome formation of the Dragoon Mountains in the distance. A wave of sorrow came over her, making her suddenly yearn to stay. Despite all she'd been through, she would miss the beauty of Tombstone. The city that sat upon a mesa between the Dragoon Mountains and the Huachuca Mountains at an elevation of about 4500 feet was too mesmerizing to look away from, much less forget.

## *Chapter 53*

**O**N WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4, 1882, TWO DAYS after the Yaqui Indian girl had been killed and identified as Sequoia, Clancy Barton sat at his desk brooding because of his unrest surrounding yesterday's election. His face was so distressed that Burton Avery dared not speak to him for most of the day.

The People's Independent Ticket had won. All were opponents of the Earp faction. So, with this vote, the Earps had lost their political clout in Tombstone.

This morning, the newly elected City Marshal Dave Neagle had requested from the city council, that had four newly elected members, to approve the names of Irishmen he wanted for the police force. All were approved. Disappointingly, Clancy Barton and Burton Avery's names had not been on that list. In the aftermath, with the city council in a rebellious mood, they proposed that Barton and

Avery tender their resignations immediately. It made sense since Barton and Avery's appointments were influenced by former City Marshal Virgil Earp.

The news came hard to Clancy Barton. He felt he and Avery were professional lawmen who should have kept their jobs. And he felt that Dave Neagle, a Republican and former deputy sheriff appointed by John Behan, becoming the city marshal was a setback for the law. Additionally, he wasn't too keen on John Carr, another Republican and blacksmith, being elected as mayor.

Being the good sport that he was, he harbored no bad feelings toward anybody. He looked back on his tenure as deputy sheriff with a sense of pride. Most of his time had been spent by serving warrants, collecting fines, and providing security in the courtroom during trials. Overall he had felt more like a city clerk than a crime fighter.

At the end of the day, here he was clearing out his desk. There were two copies of the *Tombstone Epitaph* lying on his desk. The headline on the front-page of yesterday's edition read, the killing of the outlaw known as Sequoia. Today's edition had a front-page article praising the election results.

Barton seemed to find his eyes drawn irresistibly down and found himself staring at the newspapers. He closed his eyes momentarily, trying to talk himself out of it. *There is no need to dwell on it.*

*Maybe he was just a glutton for punishment,* he thought as he picked up today's edition. For Barton, Sequoia had

become a fading memory. His eyes narrowed, his lips compressed into a straight line as he read.

There was a moment of vibrating silence before he rolled his eyes heavenward and slapped the newspaper back down on the desk. He leaned back into his chair, looking at the ceiling and bit down on his lip.

Avery inhaled deeply through his nose and exhaled through his mouth as he pulled on the black coat that he kept in the supply closet, then closed the door behind him. An uneasy feeling settling into his gut, he stalked to the window to look outside. He snorted, making Barton glance at him, but when he saw the dismal look on his face he didn't say anything.

The outgoing lawman took one last look at the street. It felt strange to be leaving. Between all this and other emotions inside of him, what had most impressed him about his role as undersheriff was the advantage an officer of the law engaged in his duty had over ordinary lawbreakers.

But, in his early fifties, retirement was on his mind, too. He knew his wife would welcome the opportunity of spending more time with him. Having him around the house was actually necessary to keep things running smoothly, keeping her in a good mood. And he would busy himself with building a horse ranch. It had always been a lifelong dream of his. First, he needed to rebuild the barn. Without question, he needed to hire a ranch hand since he planned to stay on with the Tombstone Rangers. He understood that it would take a lot of hard work, but he wasn't afraid to get

his hands dirty. He loved the outdoors lifestyle and often sought out opportunities to have hands-on contact.

Despite that the night shift officers had yet to arrive, the ex-deputy sheriff figured he had better be on his way if he wanted to make it home in time for dinner with his family. But this wasn't the end for Clancy Barton. Jobs came and went for him. It wasn't in his makeup to walk away from Tombstone, the place he truly felt he belonged.

On Monday, Barton was to report to the Wells Fargo office on Allen Street. He was starting a position as a special agent on stage lines that carried Wells Fargo cash boxes at a salary of \$100 a month. In a way, he had to be a detective of sorts and had the authority to arrest persons guilty of committing acts against the company's cargo of bullion and cash boxes. In the last week before the election, he applied for the position of an armed guard or shotgun messenger with the company, so he'd have something to fall back on. Within days, he was offered the position of a special agent because of his law enforcement experience.

"We haven't seen the last of each other. Mark my words, I'll see you around town," Barton said, wiggled out of his chair, stood, and plopped his pearl-gray Stetson on his head.

No matter how sincere he'd looked or how confident he'd sounded, Barton didn't feel at all confident. But Avery couldn't tell one way or another and stared blankly at him for a few moments.

"We'll get together on one of your days off," Avery assured him with a bright gleam.

A strong resolve welled up inside Barton as he slung the bag that held his possessions over one shoulder. He pushed the door open for them, and Avery stumbled after him. Last of all, he locked the door, and righted his Stetson.

As Barton stood sentinel in front of the deputy sheriff's office, a cold wind blew past them. He pulled up the collar of his gray wool coat. Avery side glanced around and moved a shoulder to deflect the wind, like a barricade, between himself and him.

The ex-sheriffs didn't talk as they walked side by side until they came to Safford Street. At the street corner they halted a moment, exchanging glances. The two said their goodbyes and parted ways. As they went their separate ways the pale light in the sky decreased, and the shadows in the street were growing longer with the fading sun low on the horizon.

## *Chapter 54*

**BY MID-MORNING SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, ALL** that talk around Tombstone about the death of Sequoia had dissipated. But clearly that wasn't the case for the Cowgirls. More specifically, for Pidge Swafford it was her main interest. For reasons only she could understand, she regarded the killing of Sequoia as a triumph. She felt satisfied, felt a sense of closure.

As it was almost lunch time, Pidge sat in her carriage, upright. Her hair was pulled back in a loose bun, and she was dressed in her finest white dress with gold embroidery and a white cloak. Jake McKenna steered the horses around uneven ground as they bumped along toward the McNerny Ranch.

Perkily smiling with her buck teeth, filled with eager anticipation, Shirley was peering out the narrow living room window of her house. Dust was rising in the air. A



flicker of motion caught her eye and she saw the dim outline of the carriage coming at full speed toward the ranch. When the carriage stopped in front of the house, Shirley flew out of the door without her coat. The air was chillingly cold, and she quickened her step, her hands lifting her beaded and sequined steel gray dress to keep from tripping. Never mind the weather, she thought she would burst with happiness as she greeted Pidge with a quick hug.

There was a rustling behind them, and Pidge looked. Graham McInerny was standing in the doorway, in a simple suit of dark green cloth, wearing an expression of polite interest. He gave Pidge half a smile and then turned around and went inside. He moved quickly past the entrance to the dining room to the kitchen, where he sat at a small table and began to eat in silence.

There was one Cowgirl who didn't share their sentiments. Bibb Tanner sat rigidly in her seat at the dining-room table, wearing a daffodil yellow dress, trimmed with tiny seed pearls embroidered in a circular pattern on the bodice and above the hem. She hadn't seen Graham McInerny walk by because she was staring at the flower centerpiece. For the first time in as long as she could remember — she was tormented by thoughts. She'd felt ill at ease from the moment she'd walked in the door, like she didn't belong here. Shirley had been gracious enough, but that didn't stop her from wanting to turn around and leave.

The killing of Sequoia nagged at her, plaguing her conscience. She seemed to see things differently now that she was dead. All along she'd hoped the law wouldn't catch

Sequoia. She thought what Pidge had done to her was vicious. Nothing could justify that kind of bigotry. Still, she tried to shake the feeling from her mind.

Laughing together, they walked into the house, Shirley hurrying to the kitchen, checking on the goose and her father, and Pidge strolling into the dining room.

There she was, Pidge, standing by the oak table. Her eyes fell upon the array of covered dishes, and cake atop the table. The aroma of something delicious, reached Pidge's nose, and her stomach growled. She couldn't wait to dig in, pulled out a chair and sat down.

"It's all so lovely," Pidge said, admiring the table's flower arrangement, and when Bibb didn't respond, she gestured with a wave of her hand. "Dear, dear! Why are you so quiet?"

Following careful consideration, Bibb didn't let on her feelings about everything she thought. "I was just thinking to myself. Nothing to be alarmed about."

Shirley walked into the room, where she lowered a silver tray with a silver teapot, and china cups and saucers to the table, and then sat down in a chair.

The dishes were passed around the table. The Cowgirls helped themselves freely to the roasted goose with chestnut stuffing, and white potatoes. In no time flat, the talk turned to the outlaw Sequoia. It was beyond Pidge's control, as though she was overcome with an exhilarating feeling of victory. She had gotten what she wanted, and part of the fun was the perpetual right to boast about it.

“What a great way to start the new year,” Pidge said, with a giggle, and then lifted her glass in a toast.

“I couldn’t agree more,” Shirley said, clinked her glass with Pidge’s, took a small taste of her wine and laughed.

To have them going on and on about Sequoia’s death — it irked Bibb. Sometimes Pidge’s lack of empathy could grate. You’d think they’d gone mad the way they were carrying on, ignoring Bibb as if she wasn’t there.

By dessert time, Pidge had noticed Bibb’s lack of participation in the discussion that was normally three-sided. Pidge cleared her throat to get Shirley’s attention, then smirked and rolled her eyes in Bibb’s direction. Shirley understood what she was suggesting and felt sorry for Bibb.

“She’s been like that since she got here. Apparently, she’s just not in a festive mood,” Shirley murmured, taking a bite of her cake.

To begin with, Bibb didn’t like Pidge’s expression, and she swallowed the last of her plum pudding before she spoke the boldest words she’d dared to utter. “Maybe I don’t like people talking about me as if I’m not here.”

As usual, Pidge offered her opinion. “I’m quite certain that you don’t agree with anything we’ve been saying this afternoon. Because I suspect, from the beginning, you’ve been sympathizing with that lowly Indian girl. Not that I care one way or another.”

Bewildered by it all, Shirley set down her tea cup with a very unladylike clatter. But she dared not interrupt the

feud that was taking place, obviously not wanting to take sides.

Slamming her spoon down, she boomed out, "Pidge, you're all too right. At the very beginning, I felt "that lowly Indian girl," as you put it, wasn't worth our time. And definitely not worth causing her to die."

Unperturbed by Bibb's cutting glance, Pidge patted her mouth with a napkin before answering. "The terrible truth is that Sequoia was just some lowly Indian. And like most of the Apaches, she was destined to die, most likely in an Indian raid. But thanks to me, Sequoia became a famous outlaw, something more than what she would have been. And I'm positive her name will live on."

Bibb's throat tightened against an abrupt realization, feeling that she had nothing to lose by anything she said. "I don't know why I come here to have lunch with you two."

Her comment really hit Shirley hard. A deep anguish weighed her down like a sack of stones. Not only because she felt like she was losing her friend, but because she couldn't stop it from happening.

Pidge bit out through clenched teeth, "I don't know why, either."

As much as Bibb understood her ways, it was pointless to continue arguing. She was aware that Pidge's mood had taken a turn for the worse. Lips clamped tight, Bibb said no more, showing no emotion when Shirley sneaked a sideways glance at her. Her silent body language of her motions signaled a message she couldn't put into words. Shirley tried to ignore it but couldn't.

For a long time they were silent. Misery arose inside Pidge, leaving her tongue-tied. Her conversation with Bibb had left her with a mix of emotions. It was like she had always known. She'd been afraid to admit that she was willing to sacrifice what was left of their friendship.

The first to leave was Bibb; she was cordial to them, but the distance between them couldn't be resolved. As her carriage rode away, she was suddenly certain of two things: she wouldn't be attending any more luncheons at the McInerny Ranch, and something was going to happen soon.

The look on her face softened when she took a gander out the window and saw the Babocomari Valley sprinkled with cottonwoods. The view was so peaceful. Her mind began to churn again, and she began to think about what she wanted to do with her life.

## *Chapter 55*

**T**HAT SATURDAY NIGHT, WILLARD MCKENNA was still buzzing with excitement over his killing of the outlaw Sequoia. He had come with Trey Barker to the Tivoli Saloon to carry on his celebrating. All he wanted to do was blow the one thousand dollars reward money on women, liquor, and gambling. And see Carmelina, too.

There, sitting at a poker table at the far end of the saloon, was Lieutenant Colonel Derrick Neilsen, dressed in a dark blue suit, white shirt and bowler. A saloon girl passed, staring at him with intense curiosity. It was Carmelina. She carried a tray of drinks and delivered them to the five men seated at the table.

The Cowboys went directly to the bar. The barkeep, his hand around a bottle of whiskey, set down two glasses and poured. McKenna took off his new sombrero, which exactly matched his new calfskin boots. He took his glass

and swallowed it down in one gulp. Throwing a casual glance around the room, the energy of the whole gambling scene made him grin. The glance reached the far gaming table, where Carmelina was standing with a hand on her hip. She was wearing a red-and-white-striped knee-length taffeta dress with tiny straps over the shoulders. So beautiful, her body an hourglass with legs that went on forever. Sometimes it hurt him just to look at her and know she wasn't his. But he wanted to change that.

*What's this?* he thought, when he saw Lieutenant Colonel Neilsen conversing with her, and appeared to be quite blatantly flirting. Even he'd interlocked his arm with hers. On seeing this, McKenna sat in silence, his expression freezing to stone. He had no idea who Neilsen was. All he knew was that he didn't like the looks of him.

Slipping out of his chair, McKenna took a step forward, but Barker grabbed him by the arm and pulled him to the target gallery.

"Are you going to shoot or what?" Barker asked with a quizzical frown.

That twitch in his voice disrupted McKenna's thoughts. He turned to him and stared, unsure of what to say, his eyes with a faraway look. Barker swiped a hand across his forehead and let out a tight breath, growing more impatient with each second that passed.

"Did you hear me?" Barker asked between gritted teeth. With a nod, he lifted the gun. "Yeah! Move over."

Then, in an obnoxious way, McKenna pointed his gun at Lieutenant Colonel Neilsen. He was in a two-hand shooting stance, wanting to shoot him in the kneecap.

Barker's mouth twisted into a snarl as he stepped in front of him. "Whiskers, what's gotten into you?"

"I found a better target," McKenna returned with a smirking laugh.

"You save it for later. Like ... outside? Which is where we're going. That's if you don't pull yourself together," Barker scolded in a patronizing tone.

When McKenna arched a brow his way, he shot him the evil eye. McKenna arched his other brow. All he got for an answer was another evil eye — which ended abruptly when McKenna handed him the gun and stomped off in a foul temper. More than a little bewildered, Barker followed.

McKenna's emotions were so raw that he walked right over to the lieutenant colonel. He didn't hesitate: he reared back and threw the first punch, just hard enough to knock Neilsen off his chair. His bowler hat flew off his head and landed on a card table.

"That'll teach you to meddle with another man's girl," McKenna said, almost raising his fist to hit him again.

Eager to put an end to this, Neilsen lunged forward, pushing McKenna heavily against the wall, momentarily knocking the wind out of him. For an instant he was nose to nose with McKenna and was about to strike him again. Neilsen was too into this, forgetting all about his bowler. Then Barker snatched McKenna by the back of his new charcoal frock coat with silver buttons and pulled him back.



“Boy! You just messed with a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army,” he said in a drunken slur.

The words went right over his head. There wasn't a lot McKenna wanted to say to any soldier. The memory of his last encounter with soldiers still preyed on his mind. It had cost him a night in jail.

“That don't mean nothing to me,” McKenna said with a sharp resonance.

Seeing that things were starting to get out of hand, Carmelina intervened, her voice softer, in an attempt to calm the atmosphere.

“There's no need to fight over me. There's plenty of me to go around,” she said, her consonants made more sibilant by her Spanish accent.

“I'm not one to share,” McKenna said, his fierce eyes staring right through hers.

Shouts erupted in the saloon. All of the tension in the room seemed focused on McKenna. The barkeeper hitched up his canvas apron tied around his ample middle, then looked at McKenna. Looked at Neilsen. Looked again at McKenna. He glanced to both sides of the room, maybe for help, but no one was moving.

Seeing there was no assistance forthcoming, he took a Winchester Model 1876 rifle from under the counter. Before more fists could fly, the barkeep dashed from behind the bar and got between them, rifle in hand. He was unable to hide the bedazzled expression on his mustached face.

“Now, ease up, McKenna. I don’t need you Cowboys coming in the saloon looking for trouble, then shooting up the place,” the barkeep said grimly.

McKenna stiffened, then slowly lowered his head. But not for long. A grin played at his lips.

“Let’s go outside and finish this right now in a duel, Lieutenant Colonel,” McKenna said with the look of a man who had waited his whole life to say that.

“Yes, let’s do that. I’m a quick shot, cavalry man. And you’re going to regret this,” Neilsen said, overly confident.

After McKenna and Neilsen had gotten their guns from the barkeep and shoved them into their belts, they left the saloon with a little entourage in tow. The batwing doors opened and swung shut. The sound of piano music and boisterous voices drifted on the chill air.

Allen Street was packed with cheering spectators. There was no more exchange of words between McKenna and Neilsen as they stared at each other. The only illumination was the soft glowing streetlamps around them.

“Pace yourselves apart for a proper duel! By the rules,” someone shouted.

“Give us a proper show!” another voice yelled.

The two men stood back to back, and each stepped off ten paces, turned, faced each other and went for their guns. Before Neilsen could clear leather, McKenna had squeezed the trigger. Boom! The smoke from the barrel of his six-shooter billowed in an acrid cloud.

An impact, but time for Neilsen to aim and fire. His shot went wide and missed. Being drunk hadn’t helped.

The crowd fell into a chilling silence, stunned by the speed with which he had shot the lieutenant colonel. Anyone who had seen the look of intensity stamped on McKenna's face would have laid odds that Derrick Neilsen was a dead-man. And rightfully so. The shot was a direct hit. Perhaps McKenna had the advantage. The holster on his leather gun belt was reversed so that the butt of his six-shooter protruded out and up, which made it easier to grab.

Neilsen looked down at a thumb-sized hole over his sternum, dead-center with the third button from the top of his shirt. He put his hand to his wound and bright blood filled his cupped palm. His eyes rolled up in their sockets. With a great sigh, he collapsed to the ground.

"That settles it," McKenna said, smiled, and tucked his thumbs under his gun belt.

Someone called out for a doctor. But it was too late. Neilsen was dead. And Barker picked his way through the milling crowd to McKenna's side to congratulate him and hand him his sombrero before scurrying off.

Without a second thought, McKenna strode over to the Tivoli Saloon and shouldered through the batwings to collect his reward: Carmelina. He transferred his gaze to her and found her brown eyes studying him in cool curiosity. When he gave her a slow, dark smile, she sauntered over.

Smugly, Willard McKenna walked out of the saloon, accompanied by Carmelina. In his left hand he twirled his sombrero. They were walking toward the Grand Hotel, where they'd planned to spend the evening.

## *Chapter 56*

**F**IRST LIEUTENANT DAVIS' ATTENTION SHIFTED to the sound of the wind blowing through Camp Huachuca, filtering in through the crack between the tent's panels. It served as a minor distraction from the thoughts weighing heavily on his conscience.

Why was life on the frontier difficult and dangerous? This Monday morning the death of Derrick Neilsen and the Indian outlaw Sequoia, who died just five days before the lieutenant colonel, hung about him. He was sitting on a three-legged wooden stool in the middle of the tent, drinking coffee, staggered by the thought that their lives had ended tragically. The truth was, he never really liked Neilsen, but he did feel sorry for the way he died. As it turned out, he'd left no family behind to mourn him. To his knowledge, Neilsen was a career officer, who just never got around to getting married.

Private First Class Jordi Zimmerman marched in and saluted, interrupting his train of thought. “Sir.”

“What is it, Private Zimmerman?” Davis asked, without looking up.

The PFC, his posture stiff and straight, got right to the point. “This paper is for you.”

Davis answered with the merest of nods and took it out of his hand.

The private, a six-foot-one Texan in his early-twenties with sandy-fair hair and blue eyes, turned on his heel and left the tent.

The first lieutenant stared blankly for a second or two, then unfolded and studied the letter of commendation. Reading carefully, Davis discovered that he was being transferred immediately to Fort Custer, Montana, located on the banks of the Bighorn River, a tributary of the Yellowstone River. From what he knew about Fort Custer, Lieutenant Colonel George P. Buell established the post in 1877, a year after the Battle of the Little Bighorn under General George A. Custer. Just east of the city of Hardin, the post served as an operational base to watch over the Cheyenne and Crow Indians, mostly engaged in horse-stealing raids. He had been promoted to Captain for his extensive service against the Apaches and named to command Troop D of the 1st Cavalry.

*Fair enough*, Davis thought. He leisurely swirled and alternately sipped at his coffee before putting the paper down next to him on a table covered with maps and documents. The decision to transfer him was like music to

his ears and something he had expected. In part this was due to the unfortunate passing of Lieutenant Colonel Derrick Neilsen. With a smile, he began to think that his new assignment would be a good change of pace. Well aware of the possible dangers, he still felt relieved to be leaving the Arizona frontier.

For a momentary respite from his thinking, he drank the last of his coffee in one big gulp. In his solitude, he paused, realizing suddenly, wondering if he'd grown old too fast. Since he'd become a father, he was different in many ways. His children had changed him, given him more compassion, more maturity.

In his youth, he'd felt a pressing need to be reckless and daring. He didn't like schoolwork and didn't like doing chores at home. The angst built up like an emptiness that kept growing inside of him. He had to get himself under control, think rationally. So, he joined up with the army to lend a sensible structure to his life. It took time for him to adapt to the rules of the army, but he grew into it.

He stood up, grasped the transfer orders, and exited with only a last inscrutable look about the small, airy tent.

After lunch, Davis met with Major General Joseph Aronstein. The major general was standing in the corner of the tent, resting one hand on a table while he spoke briefly about his formal orders. Distantly, as he stood at attention, he wondered what Aronstein would say about his new rank.

“From what I understand, you'll be leading troops, patrolling along the Yellowstone River to intercept Indians

and retrieve stolen horses. It's nothing you haven't done already," the major general said assuredly.

"I'm looking forward to it very much," Davis answered quickly.

To his mild surprise, Aronstein chuckled before he said, "Congratulations, Lieutenant! Or shall I say Captain?"

"Captain would be right," Davis said in a cool tone.

"It's a well-earned promotion. You deserve it. Time and again, you've successfully performed the duties assigned to you. Fort Custer is lucky to be getting you. Troops need someone like you, who has command authority," the major general said with authority, nodding his head for good measure.

"Thank you, Sir. It's been an honor serving with you," Davis replied, with a degree of emotion.

"I'll be honest, Randall. I'll miss you. With Derrick Neilsen gone. And now, with you leaving for Montana. It'll be different around here," Aronstein said, sentimentally, shaking his head.

What Aronstein said had touched him. It had made him think about what mattered the most was the relationships that you forged along the way; the people you could trust. He just kept smiling at the major general, trying not to cry. His chest tightened as his throat hurt from holding back the tears.

"Give my best to Fulana," Aronstein said, extending his hand.

“I will. And the same to your wife, Carla. Godspeed, Joseph,” Davis said, nodded him at ease, and shook his hand.

They saluted each other with respect right before the major general dismissed him. He thought about the packing he needed to do as he hastened to his adobe house on Officers’ Row, opposite the flagpole at the edge of the parade field. And he was going to have a long talk about this with his wife. Maybe she would welcome the break, a rare respite from her household responsibilities.



## *Chapter 57*

**BIBB TANNER FELT THE LAST RAYS OF THE SUN** blazing down on her as she stepped from the carriage onto the wooden sidewalk. She waved off the driver, Casimiro Cavallo, then closed the door herself. As the carriage departed, she inhaled the smells of the city and felt a wave of calm pass over her.

All week she'd been stressed about her falling out with Pidge Swafford, and Shirley McNerny's indifference. Yesterday evening, she decided to spend Friday night at the Oriental Saloon.

She pushed through the swinging batwing doors of the saloon. Her dangling sparkling earrings swayed as she walked past the bar. She wore a low-cut white dress that hugged her slender but curvy figure. Her light brown hair was pinned up on her head so that the ends fanned out like a peacock's tail. Of course she was beautiful. There was a

freshness about her that the atmosphere couldn't eliminate. And that's what had the few men sitting there staring at her, tipping their hats to her and smiling.

Without being consciously aware of it, her eyes drifted to the female faro dealer at the nearest card table. She shuffled the cards and placed the full deck in a small, wooden box in front of her. She then drew a pair of cards, faceup, from a narrow slot in the box.

A well-dressed man walked past her without a look in her direction. Something about his mere presence made her watch him take a seat at the bar. On a whim she went over and sat in the chair next to him. His face was expressionless when he ordered a gin sling. He didn't say a word to her, in fact he didn't acknowledge her at all.

Finally, he gave her a casual glance as she ordered a glass of champagne. But that was just the beginning. He kept sending her intrigued glances, watching her sip her drink. It was like he couldn't take his eyes off her. This, she was used to.

"I'm not interested," he said out of the blue.

Alarmed by his comment, she suddenly laughed so hard her drink sprayed out of her mouth and landed on the counter.

After wiping her mouth with a napkin, she folded her hands before her and peered into his eyes. "Whatever do you mean?"

"Aren't you one of those saloon girls?" he asked in a dry tone.

It took her a moment to focus on what he had said. She stared at him for several seconds, wondering if he truly believed that; then she decided she couldn't care less.

"No, I'm not! That's bloody bold of you to say," she replied firmly.

"My sincere apologies. If I may be frank, I was warned about women who frequent saloons. That some of them work for the saloon to satisfy the men numbed by whiskey, aiming to part them from their money," he said in a genuine voice.

"Where are you from — and how long have you been in town?" she asked, her elbow pressed to the polished rail of the bar.

"It's that obvious, huh?" he asked, as she nodded in response. "Six hours ago, I arrived on a Southern Pacific Railroad train in Benson. There I took a Wells Fargo stagecoach to Tombstone."

"That's not long enough to know what women actually do in this town," she said, gave him the once-over in a very obvious way and added, "What are you doing here anyway? Are you a reporter?"

"Looks like we're both wrong," he said, then asked. "Sorry, I didn't get your name, Miss?"

"Bibb Tanner," she said, her blue eyes sparkling as she stuck out her hand.

"Justin Klamm, at your service," he said, took her hand, and kissed it. "I'm here on assignment. I'm the director of the Star Novelty Troupe on a tour of Arizona.

They are performing later tonight, and for the next two nights, at the Bird Cage.”

An odd silence followed, her eyes on him, as if he had more to say. He didn't. One brow raised in amusement, he was silent.

Her face broke into a curious grin. Was someone trying to make fun of her? She twisted her head around to look for the Cowgirls. *No doubt standing smirking somewhere nearby*, she thought. Nothing. She then turned her eyes back to Justin Klamm, who had a baffled look on his face.

“Was it something I said?” he asked.

Bibb thought about how to phrase her response for another moment. “Are you pulling my leg?”

“About what?” he asked, tossing back the last of his gin sling.

She tugged thoughtfully at one earlobe. “Are you really a director?”

“I sure am,” he said with bright enthusiasm.

“Next you're going to tell me you're headed to California,” she said, took the last sip of her champagne and slammed the empty flute onto the counter.

“You got that right! San Francisco, in fact, the home of my repertory company,” he said matter-of-factly.

“I'm just a cowgirl. I live on a 160-acre dairy ranch homestead just outside town, at the foot of the Dragoon Mountains. But I have a growing interest in acting. Recently, I tried out for a role in a local production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*,” Bibb said, and slumped in her chair.

He wanted to paint her portrait. She was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, a little voice in the back of his mind whispered.

"If I may be candid with you, you do have the look of an actress about you. Since we've been talking, I've been thinking that with your charismatic personality, you are a good fit for a part in our show, *The Countryman's Visit*. The actress playing the part is leaving the show after Tombstone. I just so happen to be seeking a replacement," he said, giving her an admiring look.

Coupled with a strikingly handsome but trustable face, it had never occurred to her to doubt him. Completely bonkers, really, she couldn't resist looking into his brown puppy-dog eyes. Now, based on what he said, she could tell he felt the same about her.

"Really? How could I audition?"

"No audition is required. You have the right attitude. And you seem to have a passion for it. If you're a quick study and learn your lines fast, the part is yours!" he said with the utmost sincerity.

Her brain was a little tipsy. And her eyes landed on the poker table as she thought about what he had said.

With a twinkle in her eyes, she said, "We have been sitting here talking to each other for a while. If you want we can go to the poker table."

Klamm pulled a pocket watch from the pocket of his long, black coat. He looked at it, then at her and back at his pocket watch. It was almost eight o'clock. The show would be starting soon.

In an abrupt manner, Bibb got up from the chair at the counter as if itching to go somewhere else. She was certain she had seen Shirley McNerny, decked out in her finest pleated blue silk dress trimmed with white lace, walking in her direction.

Without her noticing he stood from his chair and patted her shoulder. “How about I escort you to the Bird Cage? You’ll have a chance to familiarize yourself with the show and the part you’ll be playing.”

They stared unabashedly at each other, and in that moment a flash of understanding passed between them. He had made the decision for her, the one she wanted, and with it a newfound sense of self-confidence took hold of her. She whipped on the brown wool coat she’d slung over the back of the chair earlier. He held out his elbow to her and she linked her arm around his.

“Lead the way,” she said, hiding her face with her hand, so discreetly, and walked past Shirley McNerny as if she were invisible.

*Was that Bibb?* Shirley thought, as she stood there watching her. She had her mouth open but didn’t speak. There was no way she could know for certain. It bothered her a lot that one part of her was missing Bibb. As she sat down at a faro table, she sensed Bibb wasn’t attending her luncheon tomorrow — or ever again.

As they walked on the boardwalk, Bibb started telling Klamm the true story of her one and only encounter with the famous outlaw Sequoia. Because Pidge Swafford was right when she said that Sequoia’s name would live on.

## *Chapter 58*

**DERRICK NEILSEN'S REPLACEMENT WASTED NO** time on this cold morning of January 16. On this first day of duty, David Newell was familiarizing himself with Camp Huachuca, starting with a briefing. Major General Joseph Aronstein was bringing him up to speed on the long-lingering problems with the Apaches, bloody as any frontier conflict.

Inside a tent, the eager, single lieutenant colonel appeared in his full dress, blue and gold uniform, his rifle immaculately polished, and stood at rigid attention face-to-face before his superior. He was hoping to convey his enthusiasm for his new assignment, alongside that he was interested in rising in the ranks. But you had to admire his gumption knowing he was willing to serve on the frontier, despite not knowing what calamity might come.

The major general could see all of this in his face. He could sense the sheer desire running rampant through the 31-year-old lieutenant colonel, standing 5'11" tall, with a fair complexion, and brown hair and eyes. But he really wanted to hear him say the words.

"So tell me, why is it that you've requested this assignment?" Aronstein asked in an official voice.

"Sir. I requested the transfer from my post in Oklahoma because I wanted to do my part in fighting this Indian threat to the folks of the frontier," Newell said in an enthusiastic voice.

"According to your superiors at Fort Gibson, you have worked well with your fellow officers in the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, and you have performed your duties in an exemplary and soldierlike manner. I was pleased to learn this. Surely it must have been an honor to serve at that important military post that was once occupied by Union troops, and was crucial to the Civil War effort," Aronstein said.

Fort Gibson, in Indian Territory – Oklahoma, and near the city of Muskogee, sat on the left bank of the Neosho River near its confluence with the Verdigris and Arkansas Rivers. It served as the headquarters of the southwestern frontier. Among the most notable to serve at the post was Jefferson Davis, the first and only president of the Confederate States of America.

The briefing covered, how in a remarkably short space of time, the wave of hostility between the Apaches and the settlers had transformed into a guerrilla war. To date, the conflict with the Apaches, particularly the Chiricahuas,



was becoming one of the longest and most expensive Indian war in the United States. With no luck, the soldiers of Camp Huachuca had combed treacherous terrain and trails to the border of Mexico in the search for Geronimo.

“Maybe it’s wishful thinking on my part, but the way I see it is, the only possible end to this conflict is if Geronimo is captured or surrenders himself. But even after that, there’s no guarantee tensions will subside,” Aronstein reiterated.

His scalp prickled as he stood there listening. Newell hadn’t exactly been forthcoming about his real reason for requesting a transfer to Camp Huachuca. Not even to his parents did he confide his true feelings. The girl from Tulsa he had intended to marry, had broken off her engagement to him. On top of that, she had taken up with a soldier in his regiment. His heart was broken, and he couldn’t allow his personal feelings to affect his work. His focus needed to be on his duties, not on romance. So, he’d thought it was best to leave Fort Gibson.

In Arizona, his troubles were behind him. This was a fresh start for him. But every time he thought back on it, he blamed himself. So much of his energy was expended on his duty as an officer. He didn’t have enough to go around. Inevitably, it had affected his relationship with his so-called sweetheart.

For the majority, Aronstein had done all the talking, and was ending on an encouraging note. “I’m glad you’re here. Your determination and tenacity is admirable. You’re dismissed.”

“Yes, sir,” Newell saluted him, spun smartly on his heel, and left the tent.

Later, at lunch in the mess hall, Newell talked with the soldiers in his M Troop of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry about the day-to-day issues that they face in Arizona. Other than skirmishes with Apaches, he learned that minor scrapes with rustlers and Mexican bandits targeting stagecoaches were all too common. It seemed, he was content to sit there indefinitely, conversing and eating. That was until a report came in from the major general. A band of renegade Apaches had been tracked down a trail leading into the Mule Mountains, a low range of hills, toward the city of Bisbee by the Tombstone Rangers. Midway along the trail, at the foot of the Copper Queen Mine, lay an overturned covered wagon that had obviously been looted for its cargo of guns and cases of ammunition.

His lunch was cut short. He and his troop were ordered to go after the raiding Apaches.

On the whole, the presence of a military installation was necessary. Tombstone was riding on the prosperity of the mining business. In the past couple of years, the outlying mines had produced millions of dollars’ worth of silver. For that matter, security was an issue.

Perhaps just as important, the stable economy had not only brought an influx of people into Tombstone but had created a sense of permanence. No one was any wiser to think the precious metals would dry up. Common sense would tell you, given the town’s growth and the enormous increase in the production of precious metals, demand

would outweigh the supply. Perceptibly, one might even consider this mineral-rich region to be susceptible to natural disasters, prone to earthquakes and flooding. Yet, all of this was far from people's minds in the winter of 1882. Setting aside these notions, Tombstone was the most exciting place to be in the Wild West.

## *Chapter 59*

**F**OR MOST OF THIS TUESDAY MORNING, CHIEF Nahele dismantled the teepees no longer in use, and packed them on two horses. He also gathered the firewood, fetched the water, and perused the supplies. It helped that everyone was doing their part, and for that he was grateful. The day after tomorrow the tribe was leaving for Mexico.

“The horses have been rounded up, watered, fed and put in the corral,” Soaring Eagle said, approaching from behind him.

The White Chief didn’t hear him, so he tapped him on the shoulder. He did a slow turn around, with blank eyes staring at the shaman, who wore a buckskin coat over a buckskin shirt and white canvas trousers.

“The horses are secure in the corral, and fed,” Soaring Eagle reiterated to him.

Snapping out of his trance, Chief Nahele zeroed in on what he'd said. "Indeed, thanks for the update."

"I'll be organizing my herbs and supplies in my teepee, should you need me," the shaman said, and turned around to leave.

"Wait one moment," Chief Nahele said, stopping him. "Did you tell Cholo that he'll be riding his horse up front next to me?"

"Yes, I did. Just before breakfast this morning."

"Something else. We'll load the wagon early tomorrow morning rather than tonight," said the White Chief.

"It's all the same to me," Soaring Eagle said, turned and walked away.

Standing in the center of the camp, he gazed the site, or what was left of it. Everything seemed so surreal. With a sigh that smacked only slightly of frustration, he folded his arms across his chest. He was acutely aware of the weight of responsibilities and uncertainties that built up pressure in him. There was still much that needed to get done, but he decided he could spare a short break.

His thoughts were chaotic. Most of them were just the shimmering surface of a deeper concern. There was no way he could know what was in store in this difficult and dangerous road ahead. The looming threat of the Apaches, pierced his mind. Would they encounter them? A lot could happen between the frontier and Mexico. He was feeling uncertain as to what was going to happen to his people. He didn't want to think this way. However, try as he might, he couldn't stop.

That wasn't the only problem. His chief concern was for his brother, who he hadn't seen in two and a half years. He wasn't sure that he had even made it there in one piece. Would he find Kalanu? Were the members of his tribe still alive? All these questions were running through his head. Suffice to say he was in an anxious state.

Maybe it was time to ride his horse to the San Pedro River. There he would pray to the Great Spirit for strength. He knew how the Great Spirit loved the river. As did he. As other men loved the desert, so he loved the rivers and lakes.

There and then, Chief Nahele pushed the thoughts away as he climbed aboard his brown horse and took off toward the river. The weather was too cold. Under the brisk wind, he hunched into his buffalo-skin overcoat, seeking warmth. The force of the wind brought tears to his eyes, for which he quickly rubbed away with a free hand.

As he moved his horse along the river trail, he still couldn't shake the uneasy feeling of uncertainty about the coming journey running through his mind. It was an unexpected distraction that disrupted his train of thought. On the other side of the river, he saw a pack of coyotes begin to yip at the sight of him. Some growled menacingly and narrowed their eyes. Just as well. He wasn't intimidated at all. Rather, he reined his horse to a halt and sat looking at them.

"Go on, get out of here," he said, firmly to them.

The coyotes seemed frightened by his voice. They retreated into the brush and howled, before scurrying off with their tails tucked between their legs.

After tying his horse to a mesquite tree, he stood, staring out at the river, momentarily, gathering himself. There was a loud fluttering of wings. Feeling the back of his neck creeping, an eagle flew out from the trees, soaring past his ear and then along the river.

Once he sat down at the edge of the riverbank, he built a small fire from the branches he tore from the mesquite tree. He pulled out his long peace pipe from the pocket of his coat. After dipping a stick into the fire to light the pipe, he put the fire out, then crossed his legs and tried to get comfortable.

Glancing at the sky, he began to puff out white smoke into the air. The smoke disappeared hurriedly into the wind.

Chief Nahele called to the Great Spirit. “My future is in your guidance.”

Time went on, he bowed his head and closed his eyes. The peaceful setting served well to help him calm his thoughts. He felt at one with the earth. Like the shaman, he also sought comfort with meditation.

His stomach growled. He hadn't eaten much for breakfast, and just realized how hungry he was. His mind turned to Chenoa. And not just because lately she'd been preparing most of the meals for the tribe. He was deeply concerned about her. Outside of a few words at breakfast, he hadn't spoken much with her today. To be specific, he wondered how she was holding up, knowing they were leaving so soon. It was something she had wanted just as much as him. Yet, something didn't settle well with him

knowing how much she was missing her daughter. Obviously, this couldn't be prevented.

Above him the sky filled with dark clouds. The wind picked up, colder somehow. As he stood from the ground he gazed the sky. It seemed as if it would rain or snow. This seemed like the right time to climb aboard his horse and return to the encampment.

Just when the horse took off at a gallop, it started snowing. It was just flurries, but it dampened his mood for the rest of the way to the encampment.



## *Chapter 60*

**T**HE DREAM HAD FELT SO REAL TO CHENOA. AS the events unfolded, she felt as if she was outside her body, watching herself. As the sun began to break through the early-morning mist, she awoke in the middle of the dream.

Her eyes popped open. She was breathing quickly and made a concerted effort to breathe in a relaxed manner. The teepee quivered, flapping slightly in the light breeze. She reached out and drew her fur blanket up under her chin. Then she rolled over onto her left side and snuggled into the blanket.

Fragments of the dream returned to her mind. The most vivid memory was her in attendance for her daughter's wedding. She stood off to the side, watching Sequoia marry Dakota, the man she loved, standing hand in hand.

Then the dream changed.

Dakota's father and mother were standing there, staring at her. They raised their arms in the air, pointing in her direction. Before she could react, before she could do anything, Dakota's mother opened her mouth to scream. That was all she could remember.

As she rolled over onto her back, a tear slipped out of each eye. The tension was there, terrorizing her mind. She wished Dakota hadn't died like that. And that Sequoia had married him. But the worst of it was the suffering her daughter had endured by becoming an outlaw by no fault of her own.

Maybe she was feeling sentimental. Tomorrow morning the tribe was leaving for the Sierra Madre Occidental mountainous region in Mexico. To get to those mountains, they would have to go through Copper Canyon.

Everything would be perfectly fine. Or would it?

Was that what she wanted?

Chenoa got herself ready and left. She wove through the teepees toward the center of the encampment. Busying herself with building a fire and preparing the breakfast for the tribe would steer her mind away from areas where she had no wish for it to dwell. She was quick to notice that the sprinkle of light snow that had fallen yesterday afternoon had melted. It was pleasantly sunny, but exceptionally cold.

"Good morning, Chenoa," Chief Nahele said as he served himself some pozole, a cornmeal mush, from the black iron kettle over the low flames.

"Good morning to you as well," she heard herself murmur.

She tried to remain blasé, but he could see right through her calm demeanor. He stood there, stock-still, as if trying to assimilate what was in her mind, sensing her apprehension about leaving. That was not what she wanted at all. Was it his place as tribe leader to decide if she was coming?

For the duration of breakfast Chenoa sat off to the side by herself. As did Chief Nahele. Frustration nipped at him. They had only one covered wagon. He hadn't even dared to consider that they could manage without it. His feelings for Chenoa were intertwined with his duty to his tribe.

To that end, Chief Nahele called over two warriors, both young and sturdy. He told them to prepare the wagon for the trip to Oklahoma. They were going to take Chenoa to the settlement in Indian Territory. It would be a one-way trip for them.

Chief Nahele stood nearby overseeing the two warriors. He took a gander at Chenoa walking to her teepee. The sunlight behind her silhouetted her body, and hair that cascaded about her shoulders, which were covered in a woolen shawl over her white buckskin dress. She seemed only more beautiful to him. And he knew that image would burn in his mind for the rest of his life. Mind you, he felt good with his decision. Their tribe was now reduced to seven members, all of which could travel easily to Mexico on horseback. Wasn't that what love was about?

Quite distinctly Chenoa heard horses whinnying. She craned her neck around to see her own horse and Yogesh, Sequoia's beloved horse, secured to the covered wagon.

Two warriors were loading it. She looked at Chief Nahele and just knew.

A sob escaped her, her moccasined feet beating a rhythm on the ground as she hurried to him to thank him. Saying goodbye to him was difficult. How could she look him in the eyes, knowing it would be for the last time? She didn't have words, so she hugged him instead, holding him close. But their moment was short lived. Cholo, Soaring Eagle and the warriors came over to say their goodbyes.

Sooner than Chenoa had anticipated, she found herself sitting in the back near a few of her belongings, looking out the open end of the covered wagon. Dakota's father and mother suddenly appeared in her view, without so much as a nod or a goodbye. And what was more, they just stared at her, oddly mimicking the stark expressions of their faces she'd seen in her dream. She felt nothing but compassion for them. It saddened her to see how much Dakota's parents were hurting.

Starting to turn away, the White Chief couldn't stop himself from looking back to watch the wagon bounce along the trail. He felt a profound sense of loss that Chenoa was out of his life. With all his heart, he wished that time would slow down. If only he could be with her once more. It had taken him too long to recognize that the energy between them had shifted from friends to something more.

Dakota's little sister ran over to her parents. Chenoa saw Ada tugging on her mother's shawl and going ignored. The little girl pointed at the wagon and waved goodbye to her. It was the last image she took in before the wagon

rounded a corner, turning into a dust cloud created by the wind.

Now, Chenoa was thinking that Sequoia was perhaps one-quarter of the way through her journey to Oklahoma. Still, she was shaken by a startling conflict in the emotions tearing at her senses. All these months, she'd wasted in Arizona, and for what? Here she was, returning to the one place she swore she'd never come back to.

She closed her eyes to rest, and leaned back for a nap, telling herself she shouldn't have left Oklahoma in the first place. The soothing consolation to herself was knowing that in about a little over a month's time, she would be with her daughter and brother Shiloh, and his family. With that happy thought in mind, she sighed and drifted into sleep.

## *Epilogue*

*1917. Wauhillau, Oklahoma*

AFTER SEQUOIA HAD TAKEN IN A MOVIE THAT afternoon, she returned to her home. The silent film had left an impression on her, made her think of her life so long ago. In the recent years, she had become particularly fond of silent films, mostly because she enjoyed this sophisticated medium capable of telling stories in a unique way.

In the course of the film, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, which starred Mary Pickford, she had seen a familiar face on-screen.

None other than one of the Cowgirls from Tombstone.

Those women's faces had been etched in her memory then. What they'd done had changed her life forever. Time had changed the actress, who was nearly sixty years old, but

not enough that she shouldn't have known her. The credits rolled just slowly enough for her to get her name: Bibb Tanner.

Considering she'd only heard it spoken once before. It hit her in the gut, and it jogged her memory. Certainly that was one of the Cowgirl's names.

Her name had been in the newspapers. Cynicism reared its head as she recalled the information printed in *The Tahlequah Arrow* newspaper article she'd read about Bibb Tanner. To be precise, the article featured a review of the film *The Birth of a Nation*. She was a popular actress, particularly well known for her parts in films directed by D.W. Griffith and had made her name in the stage.

Now, sitting alone in the living room of her house, fifty-four-year-old Sequoia thought back on her past. She lived alone, and never married. Sadly, her mother, Chenoa had died five years ago. Her one-story, three-room log house, which she'd shared with her late mother, had been built by her uncle Shiloh. Only seven years ago, they all moved to Wauhilla, a settlement community in Indian Territory, in Adair County, sixteen miles southeast of Tahlequah. Shiloh hauled lumber from Spavinaw, a city about fifty miles away, to build their log houses.

Her home was a good distance from the settlement where she'd actually been born. Before their time in Arizona, her tribe had lived on the settlement along the fork in the Arkansas and Salt Fork Rivers that became known as the city of White Eagle in 1896. The name honors the

Poncas' hereditary chief White Eagle, who in 1877 had helped choose the new tribal homeland in Oklahoma.

With her eyes shut, she leaned back in her chair. Thoughts of her mother came to mind. Her expression was emotional as she thought back to the day after her nineteenth birthday. The covered wagon was chugging along the road, and she recognized it at once belonging to Chief Nahele. Wanting to know who was inside, she ran towards it. She thought she was going to faint when Chenoa spilled out the back of the wagon. She gave her mother the longest hug ever. And they'd both cried tears of joy.

After that tearful reunion with her mother, and their other relatives, she had gone right back to making almond milk without a blink. It wasn't but a few years later that she had a flair for making almond pudding. It was the one thing that had defined her.

This day had become a day of remembrance. And it was all because she had seen the face of Bibb Tanner. The thought just stuck there. A few tears meandered down her cheeks. She wiped the sleeve of her shirt across her face, shifting into a more comfortable position in her chair. Confused, overwhelmed by it all, she withdrew into herself, her gaze distant.

Part of her never got over the disappointment of having to leave Arizona the way she had. It was such a harrowing time. For a while, she had thought she was going to lose it. That was until Chief Nahele performed the cementation ceremony. It helped her cope with the fear she'd felt. Every now and then, she missed the White Chief. But not as much



as her mother had. And she had yet to confirm whether Chief Nahele made it safely to Mexico.

As an Indian, she endured a precarious existence, often filled with senseless discrimination. She remembered the first time she experienced that feeling of discrimination in Arizona. The loss of her beloved Dakota shook up her whole life. And she wouldn't let herself forget that day in Tombstone when those Cowgirls accosted her. She certainly wished one of them hadn't asked her what her name was. It would have prevented them from turning her into an outlaw. But back then, she was naïve and had no understanding of the world in which she lived.

By far the most notorious Indian outlaw who had lived in Oklahoma was Apache leader Geronimo, no less. Up until his death in 1909, he had turned to a life of farming on the Kiowa-Comanche Reservation, which was under the supervision of Fort Sill. The reservation was part of the army post, located near the juncture of Medicine Bluff and Cache creeks flowing at the base of the Wichita Mountains, about four miles north of the city of Lawton. In 1886, Geronimo had surrendered to General Nelson A. Miles in Skeleton Canyon, Arizona. General Miles had used Fort Huachuca, a permanent installation that was renamed, as his advance headquarters and supply base for the pursuit and capture of Geronimo.

To herself, Sequoia was a survivor, not a victim. After all these years, she wasn't bitter, rather she was happy to have lived a long life.

With that on her mind, she got up and made her way through to the kitchen to prepare dinner. Maybe something to eat and drink would do her good. Yes, she was alone. But her uncle's two children, who were now well grown with children of their own, had accepted her into their lives. They were part of her extended family. Most of them lived nearby, and she planned to spend her golden years with them.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANN GREYSON is a multi-award-winning author who writes primarily science fiction and horror fiction genre novels. The reader can always expect her to infuse comedy into her heart-wrenching, binge-worthy novels, which are packed with memorable characters, drawing inspirations from her acting and dance background.

In 2015, Ann portrayed Sequoia in *Cowgirls & Indians*, a commercial promoting almond milk, which inspired the story of the novel of the same name. She acts in many cinematic book trailers advertising her books: *Birdwatcher*, *Gotham Kitty*, *The Lonely Vampire* and *Never-DEAD*, all of which have exploded into multimedia franchises. Among the short TV programs she acts in include the SpaceWoman and Super CRAZY Fan series for which she is the creator. Additionally, she sings and acts in the music videos: *Shine*,

*O Christmas Tree, House of the Rising Sun, Motherless Child, and Buffalo Gals.*

Ann Greyson has an Associate of Arts degree in English from Howard Community College. She is a member of Actors' Equity Association, SAG-AFTRA and the Alpha Alpha Sigma chapter of Phi Theta Kappa.



